

SHEDDING OUR SKIN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Command the Children of Israel to bring clear olive oil, beaten for the light, so the Menorah can burn continuously. (Shemos 27:20)

As usual, Parashas Tetzaveh is also Parashas Zachor, and is read one week before Purim. It starts off by talking about olive oil for the Menorah, and then discusses the clothing required for the Kohen Gadol. It finishes with the consecration of the priests into their office and of the altar, seemingly not very Purim-related.

Nothing is by chance in this world, and if the connection is not surface- obvious, it is below the surface, which often makes it more profound. After all, everything in Torah is inter-related, so there has to be some kind of connection on some level. Didn't Achashveros wear the clothing of the Kohen Gadol at his famous party celebrating the end of the 70 years since the destruction of the First Temple?

We're now getting ahead of ourselves, because we still have to address the issue of the Shemen Zayis, which, incidentally, is usually more of a Chanukah matter, no?

Actually, the answer is yes and no. True, the Menorah is the symbol of the Chanukah miracle and the central activity of the holiday itself, but that does not mean that it has little to do with Purim. Indeed, Purim and Chanukah are just two sides of the same coin, or should I say, kohen?

In any case, Shemen Zayis has everything to do with the sefirah called "Yesod," and the spiritual basis of our millennium, which is also symbolized by the letters Lamed-Vav. The gematria of Lamed-Vav happens to also be 36, the number of candles we light throughout the eight days of Chanukah. So, even as we approach the holiday of Purim, it is through the lens of Chanukah, whatever that means.

And, how does Amalek fit into this picture? Is Parashas Zachor just a local event, meaning that, since Amalek was the main antagonist in the Purim story that we focus on this particular enemy of the Jewish people? Or, was Purim not as significant as the previous bigger story, of which Amalek is a major player?

After all, it was only against Amalek that G-d Himself declared war against. Only Amalek is said to divide the Name of G-d, and it is his continued existence that keeps the Throne of G-d from being

complete. That's about as evil as one can get in this world of ours. Was he present during the Chanukah story as well, or did he just take a break and let the Greeks have their own shot at the Jewish people in their time?

After all, if Amalek and therefore, Haman, can be traced back to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Chullin 139b), he must be quite primordial, like Purim and Chanukah. For, G-d's question to Adam HaRishon after he ate from the tree was "Aiyekah" (meaning, "Where are you?") - a word whose gematria equals the number of Chanukah candles we light over the eight days of Chanukah: 36.

Well, it only stands to reason that what goes around comes around, and that whatever went wrong at the beginning of history is what needs to be fixed up at the end of history. And, if history is about this primordial tikun, then the Mishkan and what went on inside of it, and the clothing that the Kohen Gadol wore to officiate, must somehow represent the process of this tikun. No wonder Achashveros would not permit the re-building of the Temple, even if the infamous 70 years were up!

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d commanded the Man, saying, *"You may eat from every tree in the Garden, except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you do, you will certainly die, from that day."* (Bereishis 2:16-17)

I noticed tonight (February 25) that they found the mayor of London guilty of racial slurs. As a result, he will be suspended from his office for 30 days, although he may still receive his pay. I'm sure that English Jews will find reason to sigh with relief, seeing that justice can still be done on their behalf in London.

The mayor was unrepentant to the end, and on his behalf, a few interesting remarks were made:

... Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron issued a statement calling the decision "absurd". "This decision ... strikes at the roots of democracy. Millions of Londoners elected the mayor -- and three unelected officials remove him. An elected mayor should only be removed by the law or by the electorate. Not by an unelected body. This issue should never have come to the standards board in the first place -- it was given a thorough airing at the time. But it has been blown out of all proportion. What Londoners care about most are issues like safer streets, more buses and a cleaner environment."

Frankly, the only absurd thing, as far as I can see, is the statement itself, particularly the last part. I'd love to know if there is any truth to it: Do Londoners care more about technical improvements to their city than about their mayor speaking despairingly about another people, and even using a comparison to a nightmarish period (the Holocaust) in their history?

I sure hope not, because that is what Hitler, y"s, gambled on and won. In order to carry out his extermination of the Jewish people at his reach, he had to convince the rest of his country to go along with it. But genocide is never an easy sell to the average person on the street, so he had to package it in all kinds of propaganda that boiled down to a single message: a better life for the

German people.

Still, it wasn't easy, as the average human being is not THAT selfish. So, the Nazi campaign greatly developed the idea of a Fatherland, and insisted that anyone who was not for the Fatherland was against it, quite a nationalist sentiment that, at certain times in history, is not a hard sell. Anyone that is against the Fatherland, the Nazis later argued, are subhuman and therefore worthy of destruction.

Anyone who has seen the clips of Hitler, y"s, addressing masses of Germans in huge sports arenas, cannot help but be overwhelmed by how many of them not only supported his plan, but threw themselves completely into it! And these were Germans, who just yesterday had no problem with being neighbors with Jews. How quickly an evil leader can tap into the weakness of human beings and exploit it for an evil purpose.

And what is the scary part? We all share the same weakness.

It was not a weakness with which we were created, but one that we inherited as a result of Adam HaRishon's interaction with the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, even before he ate from it. In fact, it was THIS (touching it) that led to his actually eating from it, something he could never have done while unaffected by the tree. It was this, in a sense that gave the Ayin to Amalek, and the vulnerability to man as a result of this.

This is why the number 70, the numerical value of Ayin, is such a crucial issue in the Purim story.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Make holy garments for Aharon, your brother, for glory and for splendor. (Shemos 28:2)

Ever wonder why a snake changes its skin so often, or even at all? Well, zoologists do and they still don't know why. But Kabbalah does know: middah k'neged middah: for having caused the change of man's skin from Kesones Ohr (Aleph-Vav-Raish) to Kesones Ohr (Ayin-Vav-Raish), he was punished with a skin that must constantly and painfully be changed.

Indeed, the skin we have now is also called Mishcha d'Chivya (Clothing of the Snake) because of Adam HaRishon's and Chava's role in our eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah. Whereas man's original skin was made of light, like the Ohr HaGanuz specifically, our present skin is simply flesh, and if you look closely, it somewhat resembles snake skin. How physical can you get?

Hence, the gematria of Moshiach is that of Nachash (Snake) because Moshiach comes to complete the process of returning to our former glory and skin of light - from Kesones Ohr (Aleph-Vav-Raish). And, this is precisely what the Shemen Zayis Zach of the Menorah, and the clothing of the Kohen Gadol came to teach and facilitate. Hence, the Torah comments:

Make holy garments for Aharon, your brother, for glory and for splendor. (Shemos 28:2)

The glory and splendor being referred to, is the skin of light with which we were created, a reflection

of the Ohr HaGanuz, of which the Zohar says Shemen Zayis Zach represents. Thus, one of the places the Ohr HaGanuz was hidden, explains the B'nei Yissachar, is in the 36 candles of Chanukah. And, we wear masks and costumes on Purim to symbolize the "clothing" we wear as a function of our transformation from Clothing of Light to Clothing of Skin. Thus, not only does this parshah allude to Chanukah and its tikun right at the start, but it is followed by an allusion to Purim and its tikun as well.

Indeed, they are really two aspects of the same tikun. Our skin once resembled Shemen Zayis Zach, clear and full of light. The clothing of the Kohen Gadol resembles, in this world, the splendor and glory of Kesones Ohr with an Aleph. The Kohen Gadol is our leader in that process of teshuvah, which can only happen through a life devoted to Torah.

The consequences of not working on this process are horrific, and the reason for the situation in the world today, and especially in Eretz Yisroel.

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d told Moshe, *"Write this as a memorial in the Book, and repeat it carefully (literally, b'aznei -- in the ears) to Yehoshua. I will completely eradicate the memory of Amalek from under heaven."* (Shemos 17:14)

The gematria of Amalek is suffek (doubt). Interestingly enough, this word is very close to another word which is quite different in meaning: sippuk (contentment). The first one is spelled: Samech-Peh-Kuf, and the second one is spelled: Samech-YUD-Peh-VAV-Kuf; the Yud and the Vav are extra. Nothing creates a greater sense of lacking than doubt, the exact opposite feeling of sippuk.

The question is, what difference does the letter Yud and Vav make?

First of all, they are two letters from G-d's four-letter Ineffable Name, the first and the third. The Yud corresponds to the sefirah called Chochmah (Wisdom), whereas the Vav corresponds to the sefirah of Yesod, which corresponds to our millennium, Lamed-Vav, (36). The other two letters of the Name are the same, the letter Heh twice, one is for Binah, and the other for Malchus.

In fact, though the Name is normally written from right to left, when it represents the Sefiros, it is written from top to bottom. Then it resembles, of all things, a tree, with the final Heh (for Malchus) becoming the ground, the Vav acting as the trunk and the tree, and the other Yud and Heh acting as the top of the tree. It is Amalek's goal to sever the Yud from the Vav, so that wisdom cannot flow down to the world below, so that suffek and discontentment can rule mankind.

In fact, Yesod itself is really just the Yud attached to the word Sod, which means mystery, but which actually refers to Kabbalah. Thus, when Moshe advised Yehoshua about the ongoing battle against Amalek, he spoke b'aznei Yehoshua - in the ears of Yehoshua. However, the GR"A points out that the gematria of b'aznei is, in fact, Sod, the only true way to defeat Amalek.

The deeper the doubt, the greater the need to understand more deeply.

And when wine goes in, says the Talmud, a central part of the Purim Feast, Sod goes out, and Amalek falls. Thus, the Talmud writes:

For, anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge (da'as) of his Creator . . . has the knowledge (da'as) of the Seventy Elders; wine was given with seventy letters (Rashi: the gematria of yai'in -- wine -- is 70), and the mystery (of Torah) was given with seventy letters (sod -- mystery -- also equals 70). When wine goes in, secrets go out. (Eiruvim 65a)

Another word for yishuv hada'as (peace of mind), is sippuk. Albeit, not as in getting drunk and losing consciousness, but as in rising to a higher level of understanding, beyond the reach of the suffek of Amalek. Truth is as pristine as Shemen Zayis Zach. However, Amalek severs the Yud from the Ayin (70) that represents wisdom, and that keeps us childish, never knowing more than we have to in order to be discontent about our position in life.

This is why, in an age that promised the ultimate in a pressure-free life from all our technological success, anxiety and panic disorder is at epidemic levels more than ever before. We have the tools, but we lack the wisdom. We're so smart, and yet we live with so much doubt about ever so much. That is the direct result of Kesones Ohr with an Ayin, the Ayin of Amalek and the clothing of the Snake, but not the clothing of the Kohen Gadol.

This is the direct consequence of interacting with the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah. It makes everything so murky, resulting in all our bad traits, unlike the Shemen Zayis Zach. Living in the time period that corresponds to Yesod, is more relevant for us to know this, perhaps, more than in any other generation.

When we finally shed our snake skin, the Snake will no longer have to shed his, and Moshiach Tzidkainu, will have already been here.

Zachor - Remember!

*Have a great Shabbos, and Purim Samayach,
PW*

Text

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