

ANOTHER LESSON OR TWO

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Moshe told it to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because their spirit was broken, and because of the hardness of their work. (Shemos 6:9)

I apologize for staying with the concept of anti-Semitism a while longer. Understandably, it is not a popular topic for us Jews. We are at a critical point in history: anti-Semitism is on the rise, so many Jews seem to be oblivious, and the past speaks for itself. Now that it is late in history, and for believers in Tanach, the War of Gog and Magog looms on the horizon.

One of the greatest dangers a Jew faces is denial. If you were to input Jewish history into a computer and ask it, "Are Jews vulnerable anywhere they live in the world?", the output data would read "Yes." After all, everywhere Jews have gone, anti-Semitism has followed us. And, everywhere we went, we always thought that we would be spared "over here" of the effects of what we knew was happening "over there."

Today, "over there" is Eretz Yisroel, and "over here" is as far as one can get from the Middle-East. If there is going to be a major conflict directly involving the Jews, perhaps even against them, G-d forbid, then it is likely, many people living in the Diaspora reason, to be staged in and around Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, logic would dictate that safety lies in lands distant from the Holy Land where a Jew can hunker down until the worst is over. True, the War of Gog and Magog may affect every Jew in the world, but it's got to affect the Israeli Jews the most, the prevailing wisdom assumes.

An answer to this question comes from an unlikely source: Noach's Flood. Where did the Flood take place, on low ground where floods always occur, or on high ground? It took place up in the mountains. Indeed, that was one of the reasons why Noach had such a tough time selling the idea of teshuvah to his generation. "What?" they mocked Noach, "A flood up here in the mountains? Huh! Unlikely."

So the water came up to them. It rose fifteen amos above the highest mountain, the gematria of Yud-Heh, to make it clear that it was G-d, not Nature doing it.

"At least 3.5 million Americans are of Arab descent. Arab Americans live in all 50 states, but two thirds reside in 10 states; one third of the total live in California, New York, and Michigan. About 94% live in metropolitan areas. Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/New Jersey, Chicago and Washington,

D.C., are the top five metro areas of Arab American concentration."

"But," you will tell me, "there are three HUNDRED million Arabs surrounding tiny Eretz Yisroel. Surely, if we're talking about an Islamic threat, there is a much greater one to Jews living on Jewish soil!" In terms of sheer numbers, you'd be right. But, which would you prefer, to stand in front of a weaponless bully, or a small bandit carrying a gun?

Towards the end of World War II, just as the tide of the war was finally turning against the Germans, Rommel and his troops were poised to enter Eretz Yisroel from the south (via Egypt), in a coordinated attack with the Arab world from the east. European Jewry, at the time, was being decimated, and the Jewish Agency in Israel had already begun the process of shipping all documentation outside the country.

In the meantime, Rabbi Kahanaman laid the foundation cornerstone of the planned new Ponovez Yeshivah in B'nei Brak. Onlookers were shocked. "Does the rabbi not know of the imminent attack of the Nazis are Arabs?", the venerable rabbi was asked. "Is it not futile to raise that which will shortly be destroyed?"

Without skipping a beat, Rabbi Kahanaman answered, "The Holy One, Blessed be He, will not allow the enemy to enter His holy land."

Amazingly, he had been right. Rommel was called back to Germany, the Afrika Corps were defeated by the British at the eleventh hour, and the Arab world was left hanging. Ponovez Yeshivah went up, and remains to be a centerpiece of Torah learning in Eretz Yisroel.

Let's face it: 350,000,000 Arabs surround Eretz Yisroel, and something is keeping them at bay. It is not world pressure, and is certainly not the Israeli army, as talented as they may be. Only G-d can do that, and continues to do that, because Eretz Yisroel is His favorite land and gift to the Jewish people, unlike America, Canada, England, or South Africa.

Deny denial, and wonder aloud if the "flood waters" aren't, in fact, rising to places that we hope are safe.

SHABBOS DAY:

However, Pharaoh remained obstinate, and did not submit to them, as G-d had said. (Shemos 7:13)

Another powerful lesson from this week's parshah is the destructive power of hatred. It is amazing how hatred of another can lead to one's own self- destruction. Talk about cutting off one's nose to spite one's face! Pharaoh's hatred led to an intense desire to destroy the Jewish people and in the end, he destroyed himself.

And previously, the hatred Yosef's brothers felt for him led them to sell Yosef in order to do away with him. In the end, it blinded them to the clarity they needed to have to be able to leave Yosef as he was. Had they not sold him, he would not have become viceroy of Egypt, before whom they were

forced to ingratiate themselves for the sake of food.

L'havdil eleph havdalos, much later on in history, Hitler, y"s, sacrificed his own people in order to exterminate the Jewish people. He even purportedly acknowledged the somewhat supernatural staying power of the tiny Jewish nation, but nevertheless tried to end our streak. In the end, his supernatural hatred of G-d's people resulted in his own destruction, and the completely unnecessary loss of life of countless millions of people, in addition to the six million Jews he murdered.

Less extreme, but still self-destructive, is the hate we feel for others on a daily basis, most of it usually unfounded. It is amazing how people we don't even know yet can rub us the wrong way, just by the way they appear to act. Somehow we can sense what they are like just by looking at them and watching them, and we may not like what we see. Before we have even had a chance to build a relationship with them, they are already on our enemy list.

It doesn't necessarily mean that we are wrong about them. It may turn out that what we sense from a distance is what we'll find close up. After all, we're all idiosyncratic to some degree, and you can be rest assured that while we're giving someone else the "evil eye," someone is giving it to us as well. And just as it would bother us to know that we are being judged unfavorably, especially by people who have not taken the time to find out who we are, likewise others feel the same regarding our negative feelings towards them.

Ironically, this is one of the more insidious reasons for anti-Semitism. Like so much of what happens to the Jewish people on the "outside," it is usually a reflection of what is happening to us on the "inside." In other words, the hatred that the gentile world has towards the Jews is a reflection, on some level, of the dislike Jews have for one another.

As the Talmud states, "Every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow Jew" (Sanhedrin 27b). It is often pointed out that Achav's army was completely successful, in spite of their lack of adherence to Torah, because of their intense unity, whereas the righteous Chizkiah's army often suffered setbacks, because of their lack of unity. In our zealotry to serve G-d in the way we have learned to serve Him best, we often forget that service of G-d includes, often at the top of His list, love of His own children.

In fact, last week I heard a new (new for me, at least) take on the mishnah in Pirkei Avos, in Chapter Five, where it speaks about a "machlokes l'shem Shamayim" (an argument for the sake of Heaven). Since the best example of a disagreement that is not for the sake of Heaven is Korach and his assembly, it is logical to assume that an argument l'shem Shamayim, such as the ones between the students of Hillel and those of Shammai, is an example of a good thing. This is the reason why, as the mishnah states, it lasts.

However, a deeper explanation is that because it is l'shem Shamayim, that is, the people involved truly believe that they represent the opinion of G-d, so they will be unable to hear the other side's

opinion, thus prolonging the argument over time. According to the Ba'alei Mussar, this is what Shlomo HaMelech was warning us against when he admonished, "Don't be too righteous." Otherwise, you will put yourself above criticism, beyond reproach, and below growth.

Worst than that, a person can find himself in self-destruct mode. Once hatred seeps into a person's veins, he loses perspective, and he fights when he ought to take flight instead. And, just as it is in the case of wine, that when it goes into a person, secrets come out, so too is it in the case with hatred: when it enters the heart of a person, secrets, dark secrets emerge, usually leaving a person with tremendous regret once the anger dies down.

We have to learn to overcome our lack of love for our fellow Jews before the hatred of others forces us to.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

"Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them . . ." (Shemos 3:16)

Regarding this posuk, the Leshem Shevo v'Achlamah explains:

The main idea here is what we have said, that the Ohr HaNissi (the Light of Miracle) is the light of Atika Kadisha, and is ready to emanate on Israel regardless of how they are performing, as a function of Kavshei d'Rachmanah - G-dly Mysteries, and is from the sod of Bris Avos. However, to maintain a continuous flow of this light on Israel so that it will never stop, requires some form of action from below. In the future, at the arrival of Moshiach, which will be in its right time even if the entire generation is guilty [of Torah violation], the light will flow continuously.

However, this will only be after the four exiles and the refinement of Torah by which we live, after which time will come the great and awesome day spoken about: "Who can bear the day of his coming and who can survive when he appears? For he will be like the smelter's fire and like the launderer's soap. He will sit smelting and purifying silver; he will purify the children of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will be for G-d presenters of offerings in righteousness" (Malachi 3:2-3). All the events that will occur as a result of the refinement of Torah amongst the Jewish people from the time that it was given until now will act as the necessary inducement from below, as spoken about at length in Hakdamos v'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 6. However, at the time of the redemption from Egypt, though it had been prior to the giving of the Torah, the light of Atika Kadisha still shone for them supernaturally and above any measure, as a result of Bris Avos. Therefore, to maintain the light, action had to be taken from below, which meant strengthening themselves in faith and trust in G-d, that He would continue to do miracles for them, and this would have been sufficient to keep the flow continuous.

Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to first approach Israel in order that their faith should cause good for them through their own inspiration. Thus G-d said to him, "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them . . ." (Shemos 3:16). For, as a result of their faith they would have

merited to draw down the light of Atika Kadisha [on a permanent basis], as it says in the Mechilta: "The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt only in the merit of their faith, as it says, 'the people believed.' Likewise, the exiles will only be gathered in the merit of their faith" (Mechilta, Beshallach 6). It says something similar in Tanchuma (Beshallach 10), and Shemos Rabbah (23:5). (Sha'arei Leshem Shevo v'Achlamah, p. 403)

A little bit of faith goes a long way. A lot of faith goes even farther, and just as it was necessary to prime the pump at the time of leaving Egypt, it will be crucial as well for the Jewish people just in advance of Moshiach's arrival. Hence, the entire concept of the War of Gog and Magog is just to be a test of faith. Apparently, this is implicit in the Pesach Seder every year.

MELAVE MALKAH:

"The Jewish people did not listen to me, how will Pharaoh listen to me?" (Shemos 6:12)

The Leshem continued:

This was also the reason for the commandment regarding the Pesach in Egypt, regarding which it says, "You must eat it with your waist belted, your shoes on, and your stick in your hand. Eat it quickly . . ." (Shemos 12:1). For, their original faith, as it says: "the people believed and they listened . . ." (Shemos 4:31), and their personal preparation [of the Korban Pesach] caused the redemption. Through this [original faith] they merited all the miracles in Egypt, and as a result of the faith and preparation for the eating of the Pesach mentioned, they merited the redemption. For, the flow of blessing from Above is based upon the trust that a person places in The Holy One, Blessed is He. Thus, when it says later that they did not listen to Moshe because their spirits were broken, Moshe was afraid and he said, "The Jewish people did not listen to me, how will Pharaoh listen to me?" (Shemos 6:12). He meant to say [to G-d that], "In the beginning You told me that they would listen to my voice, and that this would be the reason for the redemption. Now, as a result of the difficult slavery, they won't accept my consolation, my words will not enter their hearts. The reason [for their redemption] is gone!" Hence, it says after, "G-d spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding the Children of Israel" (Shemos 6:13). The intention was to command them to go and speak to their hearts and encourage them as much as possible to have hope in G-d and believe in their redemption in any case. See the Holy Zohar (VaAira). From this we see that their faith and trust was the main reason for the redemption. (Sha'arei Leshem Shevo v'Achlamah, p. 403)

As we have pointed out on numerous occasions, the Final Redemption is really just the second half of the first one from Egypt. Hence, Keitz HaYamim, the End of Days, alludes to this, since the word "keitz" has the gematria of 190, the amount of years left unserved in Egyptian slavery. There are so many other sources that say the same thing.

Thus, say many commentators, whatever happens at the End-of-Days does so to act merely as a device to test our emunah. Whatever tests we face, whatever experiences we undergo, individually or nationally, they are all for the same thing, just as they were back in Moshe Rabbeinu's time. In

terms of merits regarding the World-to-Come, mitzvos are the name of the game. But, in terms of living to witness the redemption, and better than that, to be a part of it, emunah is the key, and a Jew has to always ask himself, is my present course of life the result of emunah, or the lack of it?

Happy Chodesh Shevat.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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