

MAZEL TOV, AND BETTER

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon in Egypt, *"This month will be for you the beginning of the months; it will be the first month of the year for you."* (Shemos 12:1-2)

This Shabbos is Parashas HaChodesh, and is from Parashas Bo. In this special Maftir, just in advance of Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we recount the time that G-d first gave Moshe Rabbeinu the mitzvah of Kiddush HaChodesh, the sanctification of the new month.

The life of the Jew is tied to time bound mitzvot. From the moment he arises, and he must by a certain time, the Jewish clock is ticking. He must pray by a certain time, eat by a certain time, and get ready for Shabbos and Yom Tovim by certain times. He must learn certain things by certain ages, and even marry, ideally, at a specific point in his life.

Thus, time greatly impacts the life of a Jew. Nowhere did this reality affect me more than when I was involved in the business world. I remember so many occasions sitting in on meetings with clients and other trades late in the afternoon during the winter months. The fact that the sun was setting had little or no effect on everyone there, except for me.

While the rest of the people attending the meeting acted as if they had all the time in the world, I became anxious, and eventually had to excuse myself and then race up town to catch a Minchah minyon. And, making early morning appointments downtown, I had to take into account Shacharis in the morning, with extra time on Rosh Chodesh and in Elul.

However, according to the Talmud, there is another aspect of time that affects us:

It was recorded in Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi's notebook: "He who [is born] on the first day of the week [Sunday] will be a man without one [thing] in him. What does 'without one [thing] in him' mean? Shall we say, without one virtue? Did Rav Ashi not say, 'I was born on the first day of the week!' Therefore, it must mean, [without] one vice. However, Rav Ashi said, 'I and Dimi bar Kakuzta were born on the first day of the week; I am a king and he is the head of thieves!' Rather, it means either completely virtuous or completely wicked. (What is the reason for this? Light and darkness were created on the first day.)" (Shabbos 156a)

Thus, even the day of the week has to do with who we are. When G-d made Creation, He imbued each day of the week with a unique characteristic that, apparently, gets passed over to someone

born on that day. Or, he is born on that day because he is meant to have the characteristics of that day.

Thus, the Talmud continues:

"One who is born on the second day of the week will be bad-tempered. Why? Because the waters were divided thereon. He who is born on the third day of the week will be wealthy and unchaste. Why? Because herbs were created thereon." (Ibid.)

Anger results in division, and herbs greatly multiply. In vegetation this is a good trait; for humans, it suggests promiscuity.

"He who is born on the fourth day of the week will be wise and have a good memory." Why? Because the luminaries were suspended [on that day].

One born on the fifth day of the week will do acts of loving kindness. What is the reason? Since the fishes and birds were created then." (Ibid.) As Rashi explains, they are called "lights," and Torah is called "light." Regarding the birds, they live off the kindness of G-d, finding food just about everywhere they go. Thus, the fifth day of the week is imbued with a sense of loving-kindness, and the person born on this day is affected by this trait.

As for Friday: "One born on Erev Shabbos will be a seeker. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said, 'A pursuer of mitzvos.'." (Ibid.) Explains Rashi: a pursuer of the mitzvos of Shabbos, since that is usually the central activity on Erev Shabbos.

"Someone born on Shabbos will die on Shabbos, since the great day of the Shabbos was profaned on his account. Rava bar Rav Shila said, 'And he will be called a great and holy man'." (Ibid.) For, dying on Shabbos is a holy thing, and not everyone is worthy of such a death. According to the Arizal, one who dies on Shabbos does so free of sin.

SHABBOS DAY:

Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed at the signs of Heaven, for the nations are dismayed at them' (Yirmiyahu 10:2)

However, it seems, there is more to the story than we have just seen. The Talmud continues:

Rebi Chanina said to them, "Go out and tell the son of Levi that it is not the constellation of the day, but that of the hour that is the determining influence: He who is born under the constellation of the sun will be a distinguished man: he will eat and drink of his own and his secrets will remain uncovered; if he is a thief, he will have no success." (Ibid.)

Rashi explains this as well. According to Rashi, there are seven mazalos (constellations) that "serve" the hours. According to Rebi Chanina, it is these that affect the outcome of a person's personality.

"He who is born under Venus will be wealthy and unchaste [immoral]. Why? Because fire was

created therein. He who is born under Mercury will have a good memory and be wise, since it [Mercury] is the sun's scribe. He who is born under the Moon will suffer evil, building and demolishing, demolishing and building, eating and drinking that which is not his and his secrets will remain hidden. If he is a thief, he will be successful."

For, just as the moon waxes and wanes, and has no light of his own, but only reflects the sun's light, likewise is such a person. The Talmud continues:

"He who is born under Shabtai will be a man whose plans will be frustrated. Others say: All designs against him will be frustrated. He who is born under Tzedek will be a person intent on doing the right thing. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said, 'Intent on doing mitzvos.' He who is born under Mars will be a shedder of blood. Rav Ashi said, 'Either a blood-drawer, a thief, a slaughterer, or a circumciser.' Rabbah said, 'I was born under Mars,' to which Abaye responded, 'You too inflict punishment and kill'." (Ibid.)

Well, not literally, but somehow what we tend to do, the direction in which we lean in our lives, reveals some aspect of the trait of the hour in which we were born, whether we know it or not. However, other important factors obviously play a major role in our direction in life. Or, does it?

Rebi Chanina said, "Mazel gives wisdom, gives wealth, and Israel is effected by it." Rebi Yochanan stated, "Israel is not affected by mazel." Rebi Yochanan is consistent with his view, for Rebi Yochanan said, "How do we know that Israel is not affected by mazel? Because it says, 'G-d says: Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed at the signs of Heaven, for the nations are dismayed at them' (Yirmiyahu 10:2). Thus, they are dismayed, but not Israel." Rav too holds that Israel is unaffected by mazel, for Rav Yehudah said in Rav's name, "How do we know that Israel is unaffected by mazel? Because it says, 'And He brought him outside' (Bereishis 15:5).

Avraham pleaded before The Holy One, Blessed is He, 'Master of the World! One born in my house is my heir!' He replied, 'It is not so, but he that comes from your own bowels.' He asked, 'Master of the Universe! I have looked at my constellation and found that I am not destined to have child,' [to which G-d replied,] 'Leave your astrology, for Israel is unaffected by mazel.'." (Ibid.)

Right! So, what exactly do we mean when we wish one another, "Mazel Tov!"

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Tzedakah saves from death. (Mishlei 10:2)

So, what exactly does it mean to not be affected by mazel? To be affected by mazel means that a person's life is scripted out before he is even born, and that his life is the acting out of that script. He will be DESTINED to do certain things, and to be affected by certain things. Therefore, to not be affected by mazel means to not be pinned down by destiny. But how do you do that? The Talmud explains:

Shmuel also says that Israel is unaffected by mazel. For, Shmuel and Ablat were sitting, while certain people were going to a lake. Ablat said to Shmuel, "That man is going but will not return; a snake will bite him and he will die."

"If he is a Jew," Shmuel answered, "he will go and return."

While they were sitting he went and returned. Ablat got up and threw off his [the man's] knapsack, and found a snake inside cut up into two pieces. Shmuel said to him, "What did you do?"

"Every day we pooled our bread and ate it; but today one of us had no bread, and he was ashamed. So I said to them, 'I will go and get some.' When I came to him, I pretended to take [bread] from him, so that he should not be ashamed."

"You have done a good deed," he told him.

So, Shmuel went out and taught, "Tzedakah saves from death" (Mishlei 10:2); and not just from an unnatural death, but from death itself." (Shabbos 156b)

Thus, we have now learned, mitzvos can change a person's destiny. We have learned that when G-d gave the Jewish people Torah, He actually gave us the means to rise above destiny, and to be able to benefit from good situations that might not have originally been in the cards for us, or to avoid bad ones that were.

The Talmud brings another example of this very important idea:

From Rebi Akiva too [we learn that] Israel is above mazel. For Rebi Akiva had a daughter, about whom the astrologers foretold that, on the day she enters the bridal chamber, a snake will bite her and she will die. He was very worried about this. However, on that day she took a brooch and stuck it into the wall and it happened to penetrate into the eye of a serpent. The following morning, when she took it out, the snake came with it.

"What did you do?" her father asked her.

"A poor man came to our door in the evening," she answered, "and everybody was busy at the banquet, and there was none to take care of him. So I took my portion and gave it to him."

"You have done a good deed," he said to her.

As a result, Rebi Akiva went out and taught: "Tzedakah saves from death," and not only from an unnatural death, but from death itself. (Ibid.)

We don't know what we have, or the difference what we do makes to our immediate future. The Talmud is revealing to us how even the most righteous people at the most righteous moments can be slated for death, or similar. G-d has His calculations; everything is for the good. However, nevertheless, it doesn't always have to appear that way to us.

And, even though this is true, the right mitzvah at the right moment can nudge one's personal history into a different direction, a "safer" one. How many times will we see on Yom HaDin HaGadol that at the times we thought we had saved a beggar's life he, in fact, saved ours by giving us an opportunity to give tzedakah?

MELAVE MALKAH:

Make Your way known to me. (Shemos 33:13)

When the Talmud states: There is no mazel for a Jew, it means that, even though physical life is indeed governed by the constellations - as messengers of G-d, a Jew can rise above his destiny. For, whereas the gentile world is governed by something called Hashgochah Klallis (General Providence), a Jew's life, by virtue of his acceptance and adherence to Torah, is governed by something called Hashgochah Pratis (personalized Divine Providence):

Regarding that which is written (Shabbos 156a), that there is no mazel for a Jew, it means that mazel is not the deciding factor, because each Jew personally lives according to His Providence and specific guidance,. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 62)

In other words, yes, there is a mazel for a Jew; there is a mazel for every human being. However, a Jew possesses the ability to alter his destiny, or perhaps more accurately, go above his destiny, as the following explains:

. . . Even if the mazel is for bad to happen, it can be changed for good . . . (Ibid.)

The obvious question is, how? To be able to consciously affect one's mazel suggests that one must have a tremendous amount of control over one's personal life. However, before one can understand how to affect one's mazel, one must understand what mazel is, and why it makes such a difference to one's life. Therefore, it says:

A mazel has been established for each person regarding his life and sustenance, from the time he was born until the end of his life. Each person's [mazel] is different from another [person's mazel]. All of it is based upon G-d's HIDDEN guidance, a function of Kavshei d'Rachmana (Mysteries of the Merciful One), which is not revealed to any living being. It is the basis of why good or bad can occur for a righteous person, which Moshe Rabbeinu asked to understand when he said, "Make Your way known to me" (Shemos 33:13). According Rebi Meir, his request was not fulfilled, for G-d answered him, "I will be gracious to whom I will show favor, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful" (Brochos 7a). (Ibid.)

In other words, G-d was telling Moshe Rabbeinu, even if a person appears in man's eyes not to be worthy of it, G-d may still show him favor - because of his mazel. G-d's picture and decision about a person include much more than what the person is doing at that given moment in time.

Thus, why is one person's mazel to become wealthy, and another person's to become poor, even

though he worked harder than the man who was financially successful? We don't know. However, G-d does know, and it is all part of a remarkable equation and puzzle called "G-d's Master Plan," or, "Kavshei d'Rachmana" in Talmudic terms:

The mazalos in the heavens have been established by G-d, and determine all that will happen to a person down below, and all the levels of Domaim, Tzomayach, Chiyah, and Medabehr . . . (Ibid.) That is, the Mineral World, the Vegetation World, the Animal World, and the World of Man. All of these are controlled by a particular mazel, as the Midrash states:

There isn't a blade of grass below that does not have a mazel in Heaven "hitting" it, telling it, "Grow!" (Bereishis Rabbah 10:6)

Therefore, all that happens to them, and through them, is a function of the same cause-and-effect relationship imbedded in the mazalos, even though, unlike man, they have no free-will. There is no randomness in Creation. Therefore, no matter what we perceive or how we perceive it, if it exists, it does so as a function of G-d's CONSCIOUS will. He may have created "agents" to carry out that consciousness will, but it is still the result of His will.

Thus, Creation is, if you will, the largest interactive "game" ever to have been masterminded. And, not only is it the largest game, but it is the most perfect as well. For, whereas human interactive games can only account for so many causes and designs with only so many effects for them, that Creation has taken into account every possible cause mankind will create, and has designed the perfect effect for each of them. This is in order to guarantee that the objective of Creation is achieved precisely in the manner the Creator has intended, and while at the same time, allowing us too use our free-will choices to join with G-d in bringing ourselves and Creation to fulfillment.

CHAZAK!

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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