FRIDAY NIGHT:


\[ \text{G-d appeared to him at the Oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. (Bereishis 18:1)} \]

The juxtaposition in this week's parshah which deals with one's spiritual vision, and the ending of last week's parshah with the performance of Bris Milah, affords an opportunity to discuss another aspect of Bris.

Everyone knows about the Jewish mitzvah to perform Bris Milah on an eight-day old male baby, and many know that the Torah speaks about circumcising the hearts of the Jewish people at the End-of-Days (Devarim 10:17). And, we know from Moshe Rabbeinu that lips can also be in need of some form of circumcision (Shemos 4:10), especially when you consider that Bris Milah actually means, "Covenant of the Word."

However, there is another covenant about which people may know very little: Bris Einayim (Covenant of the eyes). (Biur HaGR"A, Safra D'Tzniusa, p. 36)

What type of covenant can there be concerning the eyes? Regarding Bris Milah, the covenant is to use all of our limbs and creative powers in the service of G-d. Likewise, any covenant made with the eyes must be to use them in a holy way, to look only at those things that facilitate closeness to G-d and personal spiritual fulfillment. Is there more to this than meets the eyes at first glance?

The answer, of course, is yes. The main point of Bris Milah is to remove the orlah, the foreskin, that acts as a spiritual barrier that limits one's ability to relate to G-d through Creation. Kabbalistically, the orlah is a barrier that prevents the revelation and flow of specific lights from a very high level up in the Sefiros. And, even though nothing is physically removed from one's eyes in fulfillment of this Bris, spiritually, there is certainly a form of orlah that must go before one can properly relate to the hand of G-d in history.

Indeed, the principle fault with Noach's generation was in the way they simply could not see what was going on. There was Noach building the ark for 120 years, warning them of an impending flood, right before their very eyes. And right before their very eyes, G-d was doing funny things with the
weather to wake them up, and they still mocked Noach. Only when the Flood waters finally came
did they wake up and see that they had missed the point from day one.

Interesting how the Midrash makes a leap from the Flood to thousands of years later to the story of
Chanukah:

‘He [Noach] waited another seven days and again sent the dove’ (Bereishis 8:10): into the exile of the
Greeks who blackened the faces of the Jews: “The dove came to him in the evening and behold!
There was an olive leaf torn off in her mouth.” (Ibid. 11): had G-d not enlightened the wise to light the
candles with the oil of the olive, the "Survivors of Yehudah" would have been lost forever; “And
behold! There was an olive leaf torn off in her mouth": from the moment the leaf was torn off in her
mouth, "twenty-five" was made to dwell upon the Jewish people (the twenty-five of Kislev). (Tikunei
Zohar 13)

What’s the connection between these two passukim and this week’s parshah? Here’s the answer:

Rav Kahana said: Rav Nachman bar Munyumi elucidated in the name of Rebi Tanchum: A Chanukah
light placed higher than 20 amos (30-40 feet) is unfit . . . (Shabbos 22a)

The eye does not see higher than 20 amos, and therefore, there is no pirsumei nissa (proclamation of
the miracle). (Rashi)

SHABBOS DAY:

You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions.
(Devarim 6:5)

Another way of saying "proclaim the miracle" is "acknowledge the Hashgochah Pratis (the Divine
Providence)." And, as I have written before, the number twenty, a number represented by the letter
Chof, not only represents a physical blindness, but a spiritual one as well. Thus, the veil that covered
the entrance to the Courtyard of the Mishkan, in which the hand of G-d was openly revealed, was
twenty amos wide, indicating how difficult it is to see the hand of G-d in the world beyond the
curtain, such as, in the natural world of everyday life.

Thus, the connection between the Generation of the Flood and Chanukah: it was the lack of the
Chanukah vision, their refusal to acknowledge Hashgochah Pratis, that led to the destruction of
Noach’s generation, while it was Noach’s Chanukah vision that saved his life. As the posuk says,
“Noach found chayn - the root of Chanukah - in the eyes of G-d.” (Bereishis 6:8)

As to the cause of this lack of vision, this lack of willingness to see the hand of G-d in life, we need
only heed the words of the Shema. Indeed, the word for “your possessions” is mehodecha: Mem-
Aleph-Dalet-Chof, which can be re-arranged to spell the word adam (man), and the letter Chof. That
is, your possessions blind (Chof) you (adam) to the hand of G-d. Says the Shema: you have to rise
above the pull of your materialism and serve G-d without any obstacles.
And, being the third level of devotion to G-d mentioned in the Shema, this test applies particularly to our generation, the third and last period of 2,000 years of history. However, if ever there was an example of the pull of materialism and its spiritually blinding power, it is, fittingly, in this week’s parshah about spiritual perception, just in advance of the destruction of Sdom. It almost cost Lot his life.

It says:

He (Lot) lingered and the men (angels) grabbed his hand . . . (Bereishis 19:16)

HE LINGERED: to save his money; GRABBED HIS HAND: one of them was the messenger to save him, while his friend was to overturn Sdom. (Rashi)

Amazing! Lot knew that he was being saved by angels sent by G-d to destroy Sdom at any moment, and yet he could not tear himself away from his property, as if he’d rather be destroyed with it than be saved without it! The angel had to schlep him away against his will, and not because he personally deserved it, but because Avraham deserved that his nephew be saved. His vision was that of the Chof, a victim of “mehodecha.”

How many hundreds of millions of Lots have there been throughout history? The same attachment to materialism that blinded the generation of the Flood, blinded Avraham’s nephew as well. Had he not been Avraham’s nephew, then he would have met with the same fate as those who were destroyed in Sdom. Lot had been around to receive Bris Milah with the rest of his uncle’s house, but he failed to go the step of Bris Einayim.

If only he and the rest of the Lots of history had taken a lesson from the dove.

**SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

He waited another seven days and again sent the dove from the Ark. The dove came to him in the evening and behold! There was an olive leaf torn off in her mouth. (Bereishis 8:10-11)

TORN OFF IN HER MOUTH: The Midrash explains this to mean “food,” and interprets “in her mouth” as speaking, i.e., she said to Noach, “Rather my food be bitter as an olive but from the hand of G-d, than sweet as honey from the hand of mortal men.” (Rashi)

Materialism is sweet; that is its attraction. It brings comfort to life, the promise of which often makes men suffer to achieve it. It is a man-made Gan Aiden, to whatever extent one can attain it. And, it can often interfere with one’s relationship with G-d by virtue of the fact that it is also a great source of spiritual distraction. Once you get used to having some of it, it is hard to give up. Therefore, we fight to maintain it, even at the cost of long-term spiritual gain, and sometimes, even at the cost of life, G-d forbid.

It is the Chof over the eye of Adam; it was what made Noach’s generation blind to the vision, and deaf to the message.
Why else did they mock Noach? It was because there was only one "right" in the argument, either Noach's or their's. If they were right then they could continue on pursuing physical pleasure without any remorse. If Noach as right, it would have meant donning the sackcloth and ashes, as did the people of Nineveh in Yonah's time.

For, people who were used to living off of their own successes, it was a bitter pill to swallow. But, as they later found out, it was not as bitter a pill as the Flood turned out to be. Noach sacrificed a little materialism and lived to enjoy what he had. They sacrificed spirituality and died enjoying neither, and that is why the dove, which symbolizes the Jewish nation, came back with the olive branch in its mouth. It was a reminder to Noach and his children to teach their descendants how to avoid Divine wrath.

Thus, in a true sense, the olive branch represents the antidote to the Chof, which later became embodied in the Menorah and the Chanukah victory. With Chanukah fast approaching, it pays to remember that the bitter olive oil is also one of the sources of the Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light of Creation) when used in the Menorah for the sake of pirsumei nissa (publicizing the miracle).

If one wants to see with the vision of the Ohr HaGanuz, he has to first be willing to make the physical world secondary, as a means to a higher end. Then he can see things from a far greater Divine perspective, such as the Akeidah, as revealed at the end of the parshah. For, can there be any greater demonstration of one's willingness to forsake the physical world, than one's willingness to sacrifice his own beloved and long-awaited son?

**MELAVE MALKAH:**

Avraham looked up and noticed a ram caught in a bush by its horns. Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering in place of his son. Avraham called the place "Adon-oi Yireh," after which people said, "On G-d's mountain it will be seen." (Bereishis 22:13-14)

There are many ways to look at the Akeidah, at least in terms of what it was meant to accomplish. It was Avraham’s tenth and final test of loyalty to G-d and His truth. All of his life he had put G-d first before himself, and now he had also put G-d before his son's life.

On the one hand, this was a great sacrifice. On the other hand, there were societies that had been sacrificing children to their gods for centuries, so how was Avraham’s willingness to offer up Yitzchak such a novel form of self-sacrifice?

The answer is this: idol worship is man-made, and therefore, the willingness to sacrifice to it is man-ordained. That is, the desire to do so comes from a belief in the worshipper himself that it is what the idol wants, and that it is self-fulfilling. The idol-worshipper never actually receives a verbal or prophetic command to sacrifice a child, or any other human being for that matter; it is his own deranged inner voice that tells him to do so.

On the other hand, Avraham would never have thought to sacrifice his son as an offering on an altar
to G-d on his own volition. It was his belief that G-d did not want human sacrifices, and he found nothing fulfilling in killing another human being, let alone in such a gruesome way. Therefore, accepting and fulfilling the command to sacrifice Yitzchak went against everything Avraham believed and felt, except his desire to give everything up for G-d, if need be. Hence, the test-element in the Akeidah.

However, the truth is, the Akeidah was not primarily about sacrifice, but about vision. It was about getting to a level of vision at which nothing in the natural world ever fools a person, even for a second, into believing that anything can happen without G-d behind it. The Akeidah, with all of its many details pushed Avraham to an extremely high-level of spiritual vision, summed up by his own acknowledgement of what was achieved:

Avraham called the place "Adon-oi Yireh," after which people said, "On G- d's mountain it will be seen."

Don’t forget that Avraham had plenty of time to think about what was happening and what it meant. For three days (72 hours) he traveled with the knowledge that he had to sacrifice his beloved Yitzchak to G-d after decades of telling people that G-d doesn't want human sacrifices. Imagine the internal dialogue that must have transpired inside his head, the give- and-take as he battled with his yetzer hara to do what was right.

Just think of the rationalization that must have occurred followed by counter-rationalization, as Avraham struggled to understand what it was that G-d truly wanted for him. It is worth taking a moment to slip into Avraham's shoes to better appreciate what he went through, and to what extent he succeeded in his spiritual growth. And, succeed he did, and he put into the collective consciousness of all the generations of Jews to follow the same course, so that they too should have the same potential to see above and beyond the veil of the natural world.

However, it is we who have to decide to open our mind’s eye in order to see the truth.

Have a great Shabbos,

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Text

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