

AH, IT'S NOTHING... REALLY.

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

"G-d told Moshe in the Sinai desert, in the Appointed Tent, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after leaving Egypt!" (Bamidbar 1:1)

Yaish Ma'Ayin. They are simple words that mean everything to a Jew. They are often used to refer to the Creation process, which was "something from nothing" creation ex nihilo. However, in a deeper sense, they refer to the level of Hashgochah Pratit (Divine Providence) with which a Jew is supposed to live.

Hence, the prominence of desert in the journey to freedom. In physical terms, the desert represents "Ayin" - nothingness. In general, it is a dead spot, referred to, Kabbalistically, as the domain of the Sitra Achra. Yet, it is the place where the Jewish people came to life, where they received Torah, and where they experienced the Garden of Eden when the desert bloomed at the base of Mt. Sinai, and everywhere else they traveled throughout the course of those 40 years.

We find that Israel themselves were very surprised, as it says in Shir HaShirim Rabbah (2:8:2):

When Moshe came and told Israel that in this month you will be redeemed they told him, "Moshe Rabbeinu, how can we be redeemed? All of Egypt is steeped in our idol worship!" He answered them, "Since He wants you to be redeemed He does not look at your idol worship but instead ~skips over mountains"(Shir HaShirim 2:8).

This is because all redemptions are the result of a revelation of Arich Anpin. He explained to Israel that The Holy One, Blessed is He, was dealing with them on the level of the light of Arich Anpin called "Ayin," which works above any measure. In other words, it does not depend upon merit or demerit. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 113)

This was one of the most important lessons the Jewish people have ever learned, and one of the hardest to integrate. Yetziat Mitzrayim was the official introduction of the Jewish people to the highest level of Divine Providence that man can know, that of Arich Anpin, or Ayin. Even Pharaoh himself related to "Elokim," G-d working through Nature, camouflaging the miracle of life through the regularity and subtleties of the natural world. However, he could not fathom a level of Divine Providence so high up in the system that even merit or demerit could not affect it, a level of Hashgochah Pratit that has the right to break the rules of Creation that G-d Himself set in motion.

And he wasn't the only one:

This is what they meant by, "Is Hashem amongst us or not (ayin)?" (Shemot 17:7) As we said at the beginning based upon the Zohar! Thus, even though the Clouds of Glory surrounded them they could already begin to feel the treachery of the Sitra Achra, and they worried that the revelation of the light of Atika Kadisha would cease, as they said, "Is Hashem amongst us or Ayin?" Moshe Rabbeinu knew quite well that this came about to test them, and therefore he led them into the desert, into the place of the Sitra Achra, as it says in [the Zohar in] Parashat Tetzaveh (184a): It is the place of the Sitra Achra, etc. [and they were brought there] in order to battle against his trickery so as to break his power and strength and to smash his head and subjugate him, as we mentioned above in Section 3:5.

Had Israel constantly strengthened themselves so that their lives and hearts were given over to G-d, He would have promised them that the revelation of the great light of Atika Kadisha would not leave them even while in the desert. And they would not have had to look at the Sitra Achra and his schemes at all, because all of it was just a test. Indeed, this is specifically the kind of action from below that would have drawn down upon them the great light of Arich Anpin, continuously. Moshe Rabbeinu knew that, at that time it was dependent upon their strengthening themselves in trust in G-d, and for this the posuk faults them: "Because you did not believe in G-d and did not trust in His salvation" (Tehillim 78:22), and it adds: "Nevertheless, they sinned further and had no faith in His wonders" (Tehillim 78:32). (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 113)

We can assume that the Jewish people wanted to believe in this level of Hashgochah Pratit, for it would only have worked to their advantage. It would have saved them from all the things they feared most, including thousands of years of exile that we are still living through. Had they simply believed and lived as if they believed, that would have been enough to complete the journey from Egypt, allow Moshe Rabbeinu to become Moshiach, and begin the period of Yemosh HaMoshiach.

Indeed, the entire journey in the desert was just to concretize this lesson, to make the reality real, that the Jewish people, in this world, live in a desert! but a desert they can make bloom if they know how to believe in G-d on the level of Ayin.

SHABBAT DAY:

"You were shown to know that G-d is G-d; there is nothing but Him." (Devarim 4:35)

I wish I could fly (especially on the days that I am late for minyan), and I'm not talking about by airplane either. I'm talking angel-style. Actually, better yet, I would like to be able to perform "kevitza haderech", literally, a "shortening of the way," in which you simply will to be someplace, and within a very short time, you're there. Some of the great Kabbalists of the past could do that.

In science fiction movies they do it, and according to one article I saw not too long ago, they know, at least theoretically at this point, how to make fact match fiction. As physicists and theorists alike

come to grasp the fabric of physical reality better, it becomes increasingly easier to manipulate it, or at least to take advantage of it.

Just imagine it, and that is all we will have to do. Seeing it will be believing it. In the meantime, theory will remain theory, in spite of all the mounting evidence in favor of the reality, and we will continue to book flights to get from Point A to Point B when it is the only practical way to get there in time.

There is something inherently strong and at the same time weak about belief. On the one hand, it is a tremendous motivator that can make a person's entire life meaningful. On the other hand, when a belief is not correct, it can mislead a person causing tremendous destruction, and be the hardest thing to change. Since most people identify with their beliefs, the unraveling of the latter often feels like the undoing of the former.

We are not born with beliefs (babies think they can fly), but we grow into them. We grow up in societies that have a built-up system of beliefs, and as we continue to grow in that society, we tend to look at reality in the same manner as our teachers. If we don't know that other beliefs exist in the world, then we can easily come to accept the ones to which we are subjugated to be absolute.

Adam HaRishon grew up in the world of Ayin. He was created right into it. His world was so spiritual that it resembled Heaven almost more than Heaven does. He was so spiritual that the angels had difficulty distinguishing him from their true Master. His vision allowed him to see from one end of the world until the other end, so to convince him that miracles are more natural in G-d's world than Nature itself, was no problem at all.

However, he made a mistake, and we were sent out of the world of Ayin into the world of Yaish, a world that is much more physical and much more limiting. In Gan Aiden, if you wanted to eat, you willed it. Post Gan Aiden, when you want to eat, you will yourself to get up and find some existing form of food, perhaps at the local supermarket. And, if you want to buy it, you have to make sure you have the money.

You could stay home and will the food to come on its own. Either you will go hungry, or a miracle will happen for you and the food will come, and you'll have to pay G-d instead on the Day of Judgment for the miracle. In the world of yaish mi'yaish (something from something), nothing is for free. It is the world of Mitzrayim, and in that world, the motto is: "Me Hashem?" or "Who is Hashem" as in, if I can't see him, I can't believe in Him.

That is, in the world that the Jewish people of Moshe's time lived in, those fortunate enough to be educated in the ways of Avraham Avinu in the way of Yaish Ma'Ayin "Something from Ayin," did so surrounded by a world of yaish mi'yaish, and couldn't help but be affected by it on some level. Then how much more so did the rest of the nation that wasn't as fortunate to even be exposed to Yaish Ma'Ayin, at least on a theoretical level.

Hence, redemption from Egypt was the first class in the change of belief from Yaish Mi'Yaish to

Yaish Ma'Ayin, and therefore it was Ayin Who came for the Jewish people. This is why all the plagues required very little to have a big effect a huge effect! It wasn't just about performing miracles, it was about learning how the most amazing effects can seemingly come out of nowhere, or what seems like nowhere to the human eye.

Then, it was out into the desert, the place of Ayin. It wasn't about magic; it was about accessing the Ayin that is inside everything that exists, covered by layers of yaish. It was, and still is about learning about the true essence of physical Creation, something that mankind has come to learn the hard way after almost 6,000 years of existence, by delving deeper and deeper into the physical world until they finally discovered, that at the root of all physicality is something that is not physical at all: Energy.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

"The people complained to Moshe, 'What will we drink?' He cried out to G-d, and G-d showed him a piece of wood, and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet." (Shemot 15:24-25)

One might think that it is about invoking a higher, hidden light, to descend into our world and turn everything into gold, or rocks into water. It's not. It's not like an apartment building in which each floor is different from the other, and one above the other. It is like the earth's crust, which is layered, but each layer, as you go closer to the center of the earth, is inside all the layers above it.

Likewise, the physical world that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, is just clothing for another more spiritual world. And that world is just clothing for the world inside of it, and the three of them are clothing for the world inside of them, etc., until you get to the "center" of all them: Ohr Ain Sof (the Light of Ain Sof), the light of Ayin.

However, like all clothing, it hides the soul inside. Likewise, all the other worlds clothe and hide the light of Ayin inside the layers of yaish. However, it is all one and the same light, and in fact, the lower, more physical levels are really the product of Ohr Ain Sof, even though the latter is completely sublime and spiritual, and the former are increasingly more physical. It is really yaish ma'Ayin.

Mitzrayim, both physically and conceptually represented the most outer, physical layer in Creation. As the name implies, it was the essence of what it means to be in a physical prison, even if Jews had been free to walk about. It was the center of black magic, as that is the ultimate hiding of Ayin, because it gives the impression that miracles are possible without G-d's help, as if the forces of Creation can be manipulated by man without G-d's permission. In fact, G-d is doing it and giving the magician the false impression that he is doing it on his own, all for the sake of free-will. At the core of everything is Ayin, no matter how yaish it is. Thus, the plagues were blasting through every layer of yaish possible in Creation specifically because they happened in Egypt. In the place where Ayin is usually the "weakest", it was the strongest, revealing to the Jewish people that at the root of everything is the light of Ayin, and if you know how to access it, then you can always survive, no matter what. Not an easy sell when you see just how physical the physical world can get. Going into

the desert, the lair of the Sitra Achra, was to show the Jewish people that even he takes his orders from G-d, and that his strength lies in our giving it to him, in the form of falling for the belief that he has power of his own. Knowing this and believing it completely neutralizes him immediately, which is as easy to do as believing that we can neutralize 100,000,000 enemies storming our borders, G-d forbid, by simply believing that they have no power of their own.

Tell that to a mind that has grown up in the Western world that is only now coming to terms with the idea that the physical world is not as concrete as we thought it was. Where is Ayin inside noisy and destructive tanks? Where is Ayin inside supersonic jets, and the ready-to-kill people who fly them? Where is Ayin inside a nuclear bomb that kills thousands of people and spreads radiation? Where was Ayin inside that terrifying and cruel Egyptian taskmaster?

It was there. It had to be there, otherwise none of it could have existed. However, until a person can see it for himself, it is, at best, emunah (faith). Until G-d took us out of Egypt with great miracles and led us through the desert with even greater miracles, causing the desert to bloom, showed us that Ayin is inside all of yaish. So why settle for the "clothing" when you can have the "soul"?

MELAVE MALKAH:

"They said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt!'" (Shemot 32:4)

Which literally brings us to Shavuot. Even though we celebrate Shavuot as the holiday of the giving of the Torah, it was not really the holiday of receiving it. First of all, Moshe Rabbeinu only went up to get the Torah the next day, on the 7th of Sivan. The Torah that we were meant to receive did not come down to us until the 17th of Tammuz, 40 days later. However, thanks to the episode of the golden calf, we never actually received it. The Torah we received was the second set of tablets, 80 days later. If you want to sum up the concept of the golden calf in somewhat Kabbalistic terms, it would be, the return to yaish mi'yaish. Without Moshe Rabbeinu to guide us, the Jewish people had difficulty imagining how to pull survival out of the desert, how to live yaish ma'Ayin, and promptly built a yaish to replace the Ayin. This is what they meant by, "These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt!" as if to say, this "yaish" is the source of your yaish.

So what, then, are we actually celebrating on Shavuot? On Shavuot, we walk up to a spiritual door on which Ayin is written, so-to-speak, just on the other side of the threshold from where we stand, in the world of yaish. For some the door might be completely closed, but for others it might be slightly ajar. But, it is there for every Jew, right in front of us, reminding us that Torah is our map leading us from the world of yaish mi'yaish to the world of yaish ma'Ayin, and Eretz Yisroel is the ultimate representation of this. Thus the Torah says:

"I am G-d, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give to you the land of Canaan, to be G-d to you." (Vayikra 25:38)

For, in Eretz Yisroel, much of the yaish is missing. You either survive directly from Ayin, or you don't

survive at all.

Indeed, the Vilna Gaon explains that any poverty in Eretz Yisroel, in the King's own palace, is not due to the lack of "yaish"; it is not about the Jews of Eretz Yisroel per se. Rather, he says, it is for the sake of the Jews in the Diaspora, who while living there, have no way to physically participate in the building of Eretz Yisroel in advance of Moshiach's arrival. Therefore, to give them a chance to participate, they are called upon to offer financial assistance to their brothers in the Holy Land.

Thus, the day that all Jews come to Eretz Yisroel to actually participate in the building of Malchut Shamayim on earth, poverty in the Holy Land will cease, at least to the point that we no longer will need to look beyond the borders of Eretz Yisroel to survive. Ironically, by supporting the Jews of Eretz Yisroel, the Jews of the Diaspora are actually meriting for themselves in ways they may only be able to appreciate in Yemot HaMoshiach.

Sounds like a good fundraising ploy, and many may still think that the real reality is that G-d has abandoned His children living in His palace, while blessing His children who live in someone else's palace. In a year, when people come collecting for Shmittah farmers, they may think to themselves, "They may seem to keep Shmittah, but it doesn't seem to impress G-d," when in fact G-d is providing a chance for the Jews of the Diaspora to have a portion in this great mitzvah and Kiddush Hashem even while living away from the land.

It all comes down to which philosophy a Jew subscribes to more: yaish mi'yaish or yaish ma'Ayin, that of the second, more physical set of tablets, or that of the first. And as we have said before, if we are the final generation in advance of Moshiach's arrival, then our souls are those of the very Jews who first struggled with this issue, and their tikun becomes our tikun, the tikun of once and for all learning how to be real with the reality of Ayin.

Have a great Shabbat, and Chag Samayach,
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