

TOO FAR EAST

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak, but to the sons of his concubines, Avraham gave gifts. While still alive, he sent them away from Yitzchak to the east country. (Bereishit 25:5-6)

The question is, what did Avraham give to them, and where did he send them with these gifts? Rashi answers the first question:

Our rabbis explain that he gave them the impure name. (Rashi, Bereishit 25:6)

In other words, he gave to them knowledge of sorcery and magic arts practiced by idolaters, as many explain. However, what is complicated to accept here is that, how could Avraham, who spent all of his years trying to wean mankind away from idol worship, go and send his own descendants back in that direction? At the very least, he was acting as a stumbling block for the B'nei Keturah.

With the answer to this question, I am going to do two things at once, something I don't usually do except that in this case it is completely relevant to this week's parshah. G-d willing, over the next two weeks, I hope to publish a new book called, "The Physics of Kabbalah: Accessing the Energy of Creation", the following of which is an excerpt from the book itself. It will only be available online through my site, www.thirtysix.org.

Everyone in the world is spiritual in some way, even if they don't think so. It's just a question of what one calls "spirituality", and how one chooses to express it. In fact, corruption of the human being is always the result of a suppression of one's spiritual component, which pushes one towards what is called a "living death". Hence, the Talmudic statement that "the evil are dead even while alive".

It has been said that, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience". This is a very profound statement that embodies the essence of what we are discussing here, and we need to understand what it means before going further.

According to the first half of the statement, we are first and foremost physical beings who happen to be capable of having, on occasion, a transcendental experience. However, according to the second part, life itself is a transcendental experience that is often blocked or at least hindered by some physical component that can vary from person to person.

These opposing points of view are axiomatic of the essential struggle between the Jewish people and their spiritual opposite, Amalek. The journey from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel was the journey from an

Amalek-like point of view - the world is physically limiting, to a Yisroel-like point of view - the physical component is but a veil disguising the essential spiritual reality of Ohr Ain Sof.

Likewise, the journey of the Jew from being only a "Ya'akov" to becoming a full-fledged "Yisroel" is learning the skill of accessing the Ohr Ain Sof at will, of learning to allow the Life-Force of Creation to flow through us, resulting in higher levels of spiritual consciousness. Great rabbis like Rebi Akiva, Rebi Chanina ben Dosa, and Rebi Meir had command of this ability.

The primary method for accomplishing this holy feat is a very exact and specific usage of the Name of G-d, or more precisely Names of G-d of which there are many, as taught by Kabbalistic tradition. Success depends upon knowledge of which Name of G-d to use to accomplish a specific result, and even more important, making sure that one is a fitting vessel for the flow of such light - something that Torah, ideally, is supposed to promote. A mistake in either area can have very destructive results which is why those today who even have such knowledge are wary of using it in any practical manner.

However, on a far lesser level one can access this energy with amazing results just by becoming sensitive to it. At the very least, one can feel the energy run through him, and on a higher level, one can heal and be healed as a result of it, just by concentrating on the reality of this Life-Force. Meditation in search of this energy can, and usually does, result in a consciousness of it, and in the case of some gifted people, access to its flow.

Nevertheless, pure access and true control of the light can only be through the use of G-d's Names, and these names represent the light itself. For, just as numbers and symbols are used to describe the nature of physical forces in Creation, Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh, the Ineffable Name of G-d (in non-Temple times we do not pronounce this Name as it is spelled) together with its variations and permutations - different versions of the Names that describe different aspects of the light produced by re-arranging the original letters, describe the light on an infinite number of spiritual levels.

SHABBAT DAY:

G-d said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated between the light and the darkness. (Bereishit 1:3-4)

To access the light in any other way may mean doing so in a "back door" manner, what is referred to by tradition as b'derech tuma (in an impure way). And, whereas this may be fine for a gentile providing he does not practice any form of idol worship, it is not acceptable for a Jew who can become spiritually impaired by doing so.

However, the time will come when history as we know it will come to an end, and a whole new spiritual era will begin when there will no longer be any confusion about the essence of who we are. The yetzer hara, the evil inclination within man, and the main device of Amalek, will be removed from the world and man will learn to see reality through his mind's eye. With such a vision one can

see the aura of light given off by all aspects of Creation through which the underlying G-dliness of all that exists becomes immediately apparent.

This is why it is more than for the sake of entertainment that Western society is obsessed with the idea of humans who possess super-human powers, either for good or for evil. It is more than fascinating that man at this late stage of history is questioning the very fabric of physical reality, for all that happens in Creation is the result of spiritual potential embodied in the Sefirot. If man thinks about something, if he understands something, or if he discovers something, it was made possible and directed by the light of the sefirah that governs that particular period of history.

As to why mankind was made blind to the Ohr Ain Sof and the power it provides, we need only to consult history and see what happened to the last generation that was able to access it:

Cush fathered Nimrod, and he began to be powerful in the land. He was a great hunter before G-d, [and] thus was born the expression, "Like Nimrod, a great hunter before G-d". (Bereishit 10:8-9)

This does not seem troubling except for the fact that the "game" Nimrod trapped was angels, not animals. As Kabbalah explains, Nimrod knew how to use the names of the angels to invoke them to do his bidding. Likewise, as naïve as the Dor HaFlagah (the Generation of Dispersion) seemed, they were far from it. The Torah says:

G-d descended to see the city and the tower that the people had made. G-d said, "They are one nation with one language and they do this! Now nothing will stop them from what they set out to do. Come, let us go down and confound their language, so that one person will not be able to understand the language of the other". (Bereishit 11:5-7)

However, once again the Leshem provides a deeper insight into what angered G-d so: they used Kabbalah to try and manipulate the Sefirot to their advantage. Indeed, there was a great Kabbalistic method to their spiritual madness, and the confounding of their language really meant the end of open access to the Ohr Ain Sof.

The truth is, the hiding of this light, in essence, began far earlier in time. In fact, as the Talmud teaches, it occurred even before the creation of man:

G-d said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated between the light and the darkness. (Bereishit 1:3-4)

Rashi commenting on this verse explains that the separation even on a Pshat (the most basic) level was not what we think it was:

He saw that the wicked were unworthy of using it, and therefore He set it apart for the righteous in the Future Time (Chagigah 12a). (Rashi)

Hence, the light's other name: Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light).

However, the Talmud also teaches us that it was not completely hidden at that time either:

With the light that The Holy One, Blessed is He, created on the first day, Adam looked and was able to see from one end of the world until the other. (Chagigah 12a)

For thirty-six hours the Light served ... and Adam HaRishon saw with it from one end of the world to the other. (Yerushalmi, Brochot 8:5)

Thus, access to the light was only made partial, and as Kabbalah explains, conditional:

He made a separation in the illumination of the Light, that it should not flow or give off light except for the righteous whose actions draw it down and make it shine. However, the actions of the evil block it leaving them in darkness, and this itself was the hiding of the Light. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 133)

For G-d is completely good, and therefore, His light is completely good. It cannot be used for evil, for evil is the antithesis of this light. The power of evil is not the Ohr Ain Sof, but in distracting others away from accessing it. Thus, we find that even though the Jewish people conquered Egypt and crossed the sea without becoming physically involved in the effort, they had to appoint an actual army to physically do battle with Amalek:

Moshe, Aharon, and Chur went up to the top of the hill; when Moshe lifted up his hand Israel prevailed; when he put down his hand Amalek prevailed. (Shemot 17:10-11)

Nevertheless, the Mishnah clarifies:

Was it the hands of Moshe that made or stopped war? Rather this tells you that as long as the Jewish people looked upwards and committed their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were victorious; when they did not, they fell. (Rosh Hashanah 29a)

However, it is different for a righteous person. For, when a Tzaddik accesses the light he IS empowered. He can heal and more than this, he can manipulate reality at will. For, if his will was not that of his Master's, then he would not have permission to access the light in the first place. The fact that he can is proof that he acts in accordance with the Divine plan for Creation.

Ultimately, this is the goal of every Jew, and as the end of history approaches, the "vessels" G-d has allowed man to use to this end will become more easily accessible.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

Thus, the answer to the original question is that Avraham did not send his children from Keturah back in the direction of idol worship. On the contrary, while he had to send them away from Yitzchak, it was still his fervent desire that they remain apart from any form of idol worship, while at the same time maintaining a spiritual side.

Therefore, Avraham taught them how to access the Ohr Ain Sof, the life- giving light of Creation without using the Holy Names of G-d, something that was acceptable for them, but not for him. They

learned to meditate and to create a high level of spiritual sensitivity that could tune them into Creation, probably the basis of most eastern religions today, but not idolatrous practices. They can work, and quite well, but not nearly as effectively as the front door approach of Kabbalah through the Names of G-d that we know through tradition.

Thus, as many Jews follow the Bnei Keturah eastward in search of spirituality, they overlook their own inheritance, the path of Yitzchak, the only son of Avraham and Sarah. The reason is obvious: they have no idea that Judaism even offers such a path to holiness and spiritual perfection. After all, it is not something we advertise, or even something that the average Talmudic scholar even knows about, let alone uses.

Furthermore, unlike eastern religions that make few religious demands on the individual, Torah requires a person to become holy before accessing such secrets of Creation. Meditation might take a lot of discipline, but Kabbalah demands a loyalty to a lifestyle that emphasizes the need to be like G-d as much as is humanly possible. Otherwise, as we have said before, the light will not flow to the person.

But, it is not all or nothing. According to the level of one's spiritual growth, is the amount of light that will become accessible to the person. So, even early on in a person's growth process, he or she will start feeling the effects of the Ohr Ain Sof, though it will still take a person on a very high level time to access and enjoy.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nefesh HaChaim, Chapter 9, Part 1

The Generation of the Desert, who merited to eat from the "Table of High" - receiving bread from Heaven everyday (i.e., manna), wearing clothes that did not wear out, and never having to be involved with a livelihood, according to all opinions could only be considered to have fulfilled the will of G-d if they looked Heavenward without deviation. Their hearts had to be devoted to Torah, to the service of G-d, and to the fear of Him day and night.

[As discussed in a previous chapter, ideally there are supposed to be two approaches to life for a Jew: the work-approach, and the Kollel-approach. Historically-speaking, most need to combine the learning Torah with earning a living, but a minority are able to make the learning of Torah their full-time occupation. As the Nefesh HaChaim explained earlier, if someone who belongs to the former category tries to live according to the latter, he is likely to fail. Likewise, if someone is cut out for a life of full-time Torah learning but chooses instead to work, even only part-time, then according to the Nefesh HaChaim, he is wasting his time and potential, not to mention he is transgressing as well. However, because of the unique situation of the Jews who traveled in the desert under the guidance of Moshe Rabbeinu, living the entire time a miraculous existence, free of the everyday concerns that we live with today, all commentators agree that the Kollel-approach was the only one suitable for them.]

They could not be preoccupied with a livelihood even for a single moment, as the rabbis have said:

"Torah was only given to those who ate manna." (Mechilta, BeShallach 17).

Therefore, the Keruvim [the gold, angelic-like statues on top of the Holy Ark that could change their position miraculously] were positioned face-to-face, according to the stance reflecting strict obedience to G-d, to indicate that God sees "face-to-face" with His holy people.

However, for Shlomo's generation [almost 500 years later], the vast majority of the population had no choice but to involve themselves somewhat with earning a living in order to survive which, according to Rebi Yishmael, this is the normal situation for the masses, as it says:

Better is Torah combined with derech eretz [literally, the "way of the land"] ...Any Torah without work will not remain... (Pirkei Avot 2:2)

and any teaching in Pirke Avot is to inspire exemplary behavior.

[By the time of the First Temple, the miraculous situation the Jewish people had enjoyed while traveling in the desert for 40 years and then while settling the land. Although they enjoyed miracles on a day to day basis, they still had to produce food, clothing, etc., and take care of all of their day-to-day necessities. This became the normal situation for their generation and of all those that have followed up until this day. Therefore, the Keruvim of Shlomo HaMelech's time stood on an angle, not to express disloyalty by the Jewish people, but because that was the ideal situation for his time.]

Nevertheless, [even though they were forced to work] their thoughts did not deviate from Torah even as they worked. Thus, though the Keruvim were set up to be angled to the side, this was still considered a position reflecting obedience to G-d, still considered "as humans embrace" (Melachim 1:7; 36) in order to show the love G-d had for them, since they were, essentially, doing the will of G-d.

However, we still need to answer why both Keruvim were turned off to the side. Why did the Keruv that represented G-d not remain facing straight?

[After all, only the Jewish people changed their status, not G-d. The keruv that represented G-d should have been facing straight, though the one representing the Jewish people was set on an angle.]

The answer is based upon what we have already said, that G-d's attachment to Creation and its forces... and the way with which G-d acts towards us, is all based upon what we originate and originate from below through our actions. This determines whether we are presented with a "joyful" countenance, or a "sad" one. Thus, even the Keruv that represented G-d was turned sideways, corresponding to the Keruv that alluded to us.

[In other words, Creation is interactive. We may look to G-d for direction, but He tends to take His cue from us. Therefore, even if the angled keruv was in the ideal position for the people of Shlomo's time, the one that represented G-d had to mirror its position.]

Therefore, at the time of the Splitting of The Sea, G-d told Moshe, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell B'nei Yisroel to travel forward!" (Shemot 14:15).

What this means is that their salvation was dependant upon them: if they had enough faith and trust and traveled toward the sea with confidence and without fear, this alone would cause the sea to split before them. It would have stimulated a response from above, which would have led to the necessary miracle to split the sea.

This is the meaning of the verse:

"To a steed in Pharaoh's chariot, I have compared you, My beloved." (Shir HaShirim 1:9).

In other words, just like Pharaoh's horse represented a reversal of the natural order - normally it is the driver who leads the horse, yet with respect to Pharaoh and his army it was the horse who led the driver, as the rabbis have taught (Shemot Rabbah 23; Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:50) - so too is it with My beloved. For, even though I am called "The Rider of the Highest Heaven" [implying that you should be responding to Me] it is you who "guides" Me by way of your actions. My involvement with Creation is dependent upon your actions. This is what is written, "The One who rides Heaven with your assistance..." (Devarim 33:26)

And, the rabbis have also taught, "The service required by above". (Shabbat 116b; 131b; Yevamot 5b; Menachot 64a)

[In other words, for the sake of free-will, G-d acts as if He takes orders from us, which really means that it is our actions that determine what amount of light flows down to the lower worlds, resulting either in exile or redemption.]

*Have a great Shabbat,
PW*

Text

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