

AN ACCOUNTING ISSUE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

"Israel took all these cities, and Israel settled in all the Amorite cities, in Cheshbon and all its suburbs. For Cheshbon — it was the city of Sichon, king of the Amorite; and he had warred against the first king of Moav and took all his land from his control, until Arnon. Regarding this the poets would say: Come to Cheshbon — let it be built and established as the city of Sichon..." (Bamidbar 21:25-27)

The above section is a little unusual as far as Torah accounts go, but nothing to make one stop and scratch his head about, wondering, "What deeper explanation is there for all of this?" Nevertheless, the Talmud saw fit to provide such insight, playing on the meanings of the words from the verses:

Rav Shmuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rebi Yochanan: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'the poets (hamoshelim) would say, etc.'? (Bamidbar 21:27)

'Hamoshelim': those who rule over their evil inclinations.

'Come to Cheshbon': come, let us consider the account of the world; the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a mitzvah against the reward received for performing it, and the gain gotten by a transgression against the loss it involves.

'Let it be built and established (Ibid. 28)': If you do, you will be built in this world and you will be established in the World-to-Come.

'As the city of Sichon' (Ibid.): If a man makes himself like a foal that follows the gentle talk [of sin]; what comes next?

'For a fire has come from Cheshbon' (Ibid.): A fire will go out from those who calculate [the account of the world] and consume those who do not calculate.

'A flame from the city of Sichon (Ibid.): From the city of the righteous who are called trees.

'It consumed Ar of Mo'av': This refers to one who follows his evil inclination like a foal that follows gentle talk.

'The masters of Arnon's heights': This refers to the arrogant; as it has been said: 'Whosoever is arrogant falls into Gihennom.

'Their sovereignty' (Ibid. 30): The wicked says, 'There is no High One.'

'Cheshbon was lost' (Ibid.): The account of the world is lost.

'From Divon' (Ibid.): The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, 'Wait until judgment comes'.

'And we laid waste to Nophach' (Ibid.): Until there comes a fire which requires no fanning.

'Which reaches up to Meidvah' (Ibid.): Until it will melt their souls. Others say: Until He had accomplished what he desired [to do to the wicked]. (Bava Batra 78a)

That's a lot of important information from a very unlikely source, and the Pri Tzaddik asks why:

What is the connection between all of this and the war against Sichon? Furthermore, regarding the war against Sichon and Og, who were called two Amorite kings: Why was Moshe doubtful that he would conquer them, if they were one of the seven nations? It seems that if Sichon would have allowed the Jewish people to cross his border, they would not have conquered him at all! Furthermore, it says in the Mishnah that, according to Rebi Yosi HaGlili, someone is not obligated to bring first fruits from the east side of the Jordan, implying that it does not have the same level of holiness as Eretz Yisroel. (Pri Tzaddik, Chukat, 4)

In other words, there was a mitzvah for the Jewish people to completely conquer the Canaanites, to which Sichon and Og belonged. Logically, Moshe Rabbeinu should have assumed that he would be successful conquering them as he was meant to be against the rest of the nations of Canaan. So what concerned him at that time?

Furthermore, if they were part of the Canaanite nations, then the land they occupied, and which was subsequently conquered by the Jewish people was part of Canaan, and therefore should have had the same kedushah as the rest of Eretz Yisroel. Hence, the laws of bikurim should have applied equally to produce grown east of the Jordan as they did to produce from Eretz Yisroel proper. Why didn't they?

Because, the seven Canaanite nations corresponded to the seven impure traits (middot), which are the opposite of the seven holy traits. In the work "Divrei Emet" from the Rebi of Lublin, it says that the klipah of the kingdom of the Amorites, the third of the Canaanite nations, corresponded to the trait of Tifferet on the side of holiness, which alludes to, "You have distinguished G-d... and G-d has distinguished you..." (Devarim 26:17, 18), as it says, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, sings the praises of Israel" (Brochot 6a). Tifferet on the side of impurity, therefore, would correspond to pride... and therefore, the Amorites represented pride and honor, which incorporates jealousy and desire as well. Moshe Rabbeinu knew that it was not yet time to completely conquer that klipah... (Ibid.)

SHABBAT DAY:

"All that G-d made, this corresponds to this..." (Koheles)

The average person deals with reality on the surface level: what you see is what you get and all there is to be gotten. Even if someone believes in the soul, and knows that it is the engine driving the

body, he still tends to deal with the person on the level of the body, purely in terms of his actions. He certainly does not think in terms of cosmic traits, or how people, or entire nations can become the manifestation of a specific trait. I remember reading one day how Nebuchadnezzar, the evil king of Babylonia who destroyed the first Temple of the Jewish people, was Saddam Hussein's hero. Even though I knew Hussein hated the Jews, and given the opportunity, he would do to them today what Nebuchadnezzar did in his time. It still struck me as strange that he would be so out to lunch as to choose such an evil dictator from the past as his hero. On some level, I must have thought that Nebuchadnezzar was evil in the eyes of all men, even those who were just as evil today.

I guess what struck me as unusual was how Hussein related to his past. Most modern-day dictators and anti-Semites usually idolize themselves or more recent role models, but few ever see themselves as the continuation of an ancient leader, as Hussein did. He claimed to be the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar, and though most of the world believed that to be the raving of a dangerous lunatic, I couldn't help but wonder if he was more real with history than most people were/are.

For, whereas most people either believe or didn't believe in Nebuchadnezzar, or whether or not he actually destroyed the first Jewish Temple as portrayed in Tanach and the Talmud, Hussein harbored no doubts. Not only had the Babylonian king committed all the atrocities the Jewish people claimed that he did, but Hussein applauded his every effort and saw himself as the second act to finish the job that Act One left incomplete. Bizarre, no?

Well, yes and no. It might well have been wishful thinking on his part that his presence in history was as important as that of Nebuchadnezzar, but on the other hand, it may have been true on some level. For, though there are billions of people in the world, and trillions over the millennia until today, all of them are manifestations of the very few and quite spiritual forces upon which Creation has been founded, some good and some evil. Three to be exact, or six when one considers their opposites as well.

Though it is always nicer to start with the good traits, the negative ones, perhaps, are more easily recognizable. They are: *kinah*, *givah*, and *tivah* (jealousy, pride, and desire), respectively. Whatever evil a person perpetrates, whether against G-d, another person, or even against himself, one, if not all of them will somehow be involved, driving the person to act as he does, even if this is not so clear on the surface.

The opposite of jealousy is taking pleasure from seeing others succeed. Not only does the success of another not make you feel any sense of lack, but it does just the opposite; his success makes you feel more complete, which can only happen if you love your neighbor as you do yourself. Then your neighbor's success can feel like your own success. This was the primary trait of Avraham Avinu.

The opposite of pride is humility. All of mankind was made in the image of G-d, and for this reason, man is special. However, it is a specialness that is unique to no one in particular, but to everyone in

general, and it is one that we are born with, not one that we create. Humility is not the result of thinking that one is unimportant. Rather, it is the result of realizing that one is important, indeed made in the image of G-d, but that its importance is a gift, as is all of life.

Humility comes from realizing that we're here for a reason, and making that reason the basis of one's meaning in life. Humility means surrendering oneself to the ultimate cause, and knowing that, one truly finds out who he or she really is. A humble person knows that a false sense of pride and the abuse on G-d-given gifts only destroys one's sense of self, and blocks any attempt to sincerely enjoy life. This was Yitzchak Avinu.

Desire usually translates into materialism and an obsession to have enjoyable physical experiences. The opposite of this trait is not necessarily reduced desire, but re-directed desire, that is, a desire for spiritual pleasures. From Tehillim, we see that Dovid HaMelech was obsessed with learning Torah, and with his relationship to G-d. However, since G-d gave the Torah to help us know how to act morally in every situation in life, such an intense love can only result in G-dly behavior, which is the goal of life in this world. This was rooted in Ya'akov Avinu.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

"These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan... After he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorites, who dwell in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who dwell in Ashtarot..." (Devarim 1:1, 4)

The Pri Tzaddik further explains:

This is what it means when it says, "...After he had smitten Sichon, king of the Amorite, who dwell in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who dwell in Ashtarot..." (Devarim 1:4). Really, it should have said "dwelled", past-tense, since it says "after he had smitten", meaning that no one had survived. Therefore, what it means is that the klipah of the Amorite was not completely eradicated, and therefore it speaks in the present-tense, as if it still dwells in Cheshbon. For this reason it helps to mention that he was king of Cheshbon, as it does at the beginning of Parashat Devarim, meaning that since his klipah incorporated the three klipot mentioned before, he was the "king" of Cheshbon, the "calculation of the world", not allowing them to consider the "cheshbon" — the calculation. (Pri Tzaddik, Chukat, 4)

It all comes down to a "cheshbon hanefesh", literally, an "accounting of one's soul". Evil people may sin because it has already become part of their nature, but the average person sins out of thoughtlessness. In other words, he doesn't think enough about what he is doing, what the consequences are and what they may be. He doesn't consider how what he is doing appears in the eyes of G-d, and what it may cost him in the long run, either by capitulating to his yetzer hara to perform a sin, or to avoid doing a mitzvah.

One of the most powerful weapons in the hands of the yetzer hara is this very thoughtfulness, and

therefore one of the most constructive defenses against the yetzer hara is a cheshbon hanefesh, which compels the person to weigh out his decisions from the past in order to make better decisions in the future. When forced to consider the consequences of action or inaction, it is amazing how fast a person wakes up to the reality of his direction in life.

This klipah, this spiritual interposition that prevents a person from taking the decisions and actions of his life seriously, which has led, and continues to lead to all the wanton and immoral behavior of man throughout history, emanates from Cheshbon, the king of which was Sichon, the Amorite...

...For this reason Moshe Rabbeinu conquered him. However, his klipah remained and was not conquered completely, and it still dwells in Cheshbon, still capable of compelling people to not consider the accounting of the world, as it says: During the time of the yetzer hara, there is no memory of the yetzer tov (Nedarim 32b). (Ibid.)

Hence, what the Talmud is alluding to with its deeper explanation of the words of the poets was the real battle that Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish people began to fight. Yes, it was a physical battle against physical nations of the world, but nations that embodied certain spiritual characteristics that endanger mankind, in the past, and in the present as well.

When reading the Torah, we tend to view the battles of this week's parshah on the level of physical war, and that is all. However, from the Torah's perspective, which is G-d's perspective, it is about light versus dark, about pure versus impure, about good traits against bad ones. It is these that are at war, and they simply wear the bodies of those people who can be drawn in one direction or the other. And, whereas history may be ready for the demise of a physical nation, it may not yet merit the complete destruction of the evil trait that that nation embodied, which is why it tends to surface over-and-over-again in other nations throughout history.

MELAVE MALKAH:

"In the end, both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The elder gave birth to a son and called him "Moav". He is the father of Moav to this day." (Bereishit 19:36-37)

Regarding the nation of Moav, the Pri Tzaddik explains:

Moav was the root of the klipah of tivah (desire) as it says: Anyone who crazes after illicit relationships will in the end eat his own flesh (Bereishit Rabbah 51). The main embodiment of this klipah was Moav, which means "from my father" (Nazir 23b). (Ibid.)

In other words, a symbol of obsession with passion is incest, that became the case with Lot and his daughters, which resulted in the birth of a child named "Moav", to allude to the fact that his own father was his mother's father. Thus, he, and by extension his people, became the embodiment of this very trait.

To consider the Talmud's explanation of the words from the end of this week's parshah, and the Pri

Tzaddik's explanation of these, is to change one's approach to history, past and present. Today we see only nations, new and old ones, but for the most part, none of which seem Biblical in nature. True, everyone living today can trace their ancestry back to ancient times, but so much has changed over the millennia that, for all intents and purposes, it's as if we spontaneously generated in recent times.

Physically, yes, but spiritually, no. In every generation, there is a nation or nations that embody one or more of the three main klipot, and the positive spiritual counterparts. All we have to ask is, "Which nations best embody the passions of tivah, which is basically the drive for materialism and sensual relationships? Which nations seem overly proud, and which ones seem jealous of others?"

Or, which nations seem to be humble in nature, appreciative of the gift of life, and which nations seem to be happy with the successes of others? Which ones seem spiritual, and not so into the material? Are there any at all?

With respect to some nations, it may seem easier to answer the questions than with respect to others, but no nation exists today that does not fall into one of the positive or negative categories, and rarely does a nation possess a positive and negative trait, at least not without resulting in serious tension, and perhaps some form of civil war. It is too difficult for a single people to manage spiritual opposites and remain intact, just as it is difficult for an individual to live with spiritual hypocrisy.

All of this may seem somewhat existential, rarely coming up as an issue when discussing, for example, the prospect of job relocation to another country. However, that's just the way it appears, because in truth, where the Jewish people have lived has always determined the nature of the test of a particular exile, and knowing this helps the Jew to survive that test. Failure has usually resulted in horrific results.

However, no matter when or where the Jew lives, one thing always makes a difference in terms of survival, and that is a cheshbon hanefesh. A few minutes a day to contemplate the direction of one's life and the consequences of one's decisions can result in a lot of Olam HaBah, and, explains the Pri Tzaddik, tremendous tikun to this world as well.

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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