

JUDGEMENT ON PERCEPTIONS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

"For, the nations whose land you will possess listened to diviners of auspicious times, and diviners. However, G-d, your G-d does not make you do this. G-d, your G-d will produce a prophet from amongst your brothers from within your midst, like me. To him you must listen." (Devarim 18:14-15)

Those were the good old days, when, for the first 1,000 years since leaving Egypt, prophecy was common amongst the Jewish people. After all, the entire nation heard G-d speak at Mt. Sinai, and as Rashi points out based upon the Mechilta, "A handmaid at the sea saw that which Yechezkel ben Buzi never saw" (Rashi, Shemot 15:2).

Among other things, this meant that G-d communicated directly with the Jewish people in order to let them know what He wanted them to know, both the positive and the negative. Nevi'im—the Book of Prophets—is a collection of many of the latter.

However, when the majority of the Jewish people stopped listening to the real prophets, and instead followed after the false ones, prophecy ceased. As the Talmud points out, if the people aren't fitting, prophecy will not return even if the prophet himself is capable of receiving it (Sanhedrin 11a).

Nevertheless, even after the cessation of prophecy, the Bat Kol, the Heavenly Voice, continued. It was still a supernatural form of Divine communication, though far less authoritative (Shabbat 56b), especially since the Talmud states elsewhere that "the chacham is greater than the prophet" (Bava Batra 12a).

Today, after thousands of years and countless exiles, terrible persecution, and wide-spread assimilation, we don't even have the Bat Kol anymore. Instead, people talk about "Ruach HaKodesh", a kind of intellectual intuition that seems somewhat out of the ordinary.

Ruach HaKodesh, which literally means "Holy Spirit", but which is usually referred to as "Divine Inspiration", amounts to what is commonly called "Siyata d'Shemaya", or "Heavenly Help". Such Divine assistance can take many forms, including the addition of an extra soul in the person to help him perform a mitzvah that he otherwise might be able to achieve on his own (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 5).

Many adherents to particular groups of religious Jews often maintain that their leaders are imbued with Ruach HaKodesh. As such, they maintain, they have their finger on the pulse of Heaven, and can also perform great miracles, resulting in countless stories of such miraculous feats.

However, true as this may be, it is not a powerful enough source of information to unify the Jewish people, and to provide concrete information as to what G-d wants us to do at this late stage of history to hasten the redemption with the least amount of casualties. Not on one occasion have we been caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and though everything G-d does is for the good, and in order to expedite the Final Redemption, still, any form of Divine communiqué that can allow us to know what G-d wants us to do next as "partners" in Creation is most desirable.

Apparently, there is one more way to know what Heaven is thinking. It is certainly not the preferred method, but it can be painfully accurate. It is the mouth of the enemy, often the only way for us to know if what we are doing is right or wrong. When the nations of the world, amongst whom we have been exiled, act hospitably towards the Jewish people, then we can assume that Heaven has cut the Jewish people some slack, giving us some more time to rise to the call, whatever it may be at the time.

SHABBAT DAY:

"Let us search and try our ways, and return to G-d." (Eichah 3:40)

However, when anti-Semitism arises, it is time to pay close attention to what the nations are saying about us, for unwittingly they are telling us where we are missing the point. Just like you can learn how Bilaam intended to curse the Jewish people by how he blessed us (Sanhedrin 105b), you can learn where we are weak by what the gentile nations attack us with. For example, though analysis of the Holocaust is complicated, and to many, taboo, there are certain issues that seem prominent, for those who dare to address them and contemplate what they might have meant. One such idea that keeps recurring in connection with the Nazi, ysv"z, attempt to exterminate the Jewish nation, was that of concentration.

Why did the Germans not just kill all the Jews in their home towns? Think of the time, trouble, and expense they could have saved had they done so. If they wanted a work force, they could have saved those Jews and taken them to a smaller camp. If they wanted to perform medical experiments, they could have done the same with a smaller group. The greater number of Jews was rounded up and transported for the sake of killing them, at great cost and organization.

What might the Divine message have been in all of this? Some will answer, we can't know that now, so forget about it until such time as we can. However, the bigger question is, is it that we cannot learn anything from the Holocaust on this side of history, or do we choose not to learn anything from the Holocaust for fear of what such lessons might imply? Is pain from the past a reasonable excuse to ignore lessons that might save us from pain in the future?

As much as guilt is associated with Judaism, Judaism is not about guilt. It is certainly not about wallowing in it. Rather, Judaism is about trying to live the most productive life possible as per the Torah's mandate, realizing that everything is a function of Divine Providence, and therefore learning from what goes wrong to get back on track when Heaven tells us that we are not.

The whole reason why G-d "punishes" measure-for-measure (Sanhedrin 90a), is so that we can learn from our mistakes. As the Talmud points out, pure punishment, just like pure reward, comes at a later date in history, after this part of history is already finished (Kiddushin 39a). Then, in Gehenom, it is not a matter of learning anything anymore, just of removing the spiritual tarnish built up over the years from sinning. However, in this world, while it is still relevant to improve and make things better, punishment is yesurim, from the word "mussar", which means to teach for the sake of making spiritual improvements.

For an individual to analyze why he is undergoing suffering is part of being Jewish (Brochot 5a). To analyze why another Jew is suffering, or has suffered, is only something G-d can do, and therefore off-limits. However, to learn something from how the nation as a whole is being treated by the nations is not only permissible, it is imperative, since doing so can save so many lives.

Therefore, if the Nazis, ysv"z, were obsessed with concentrating the Jews, gathering them together to a few locations from all across Europe, we have to ask ourselves, "What holy concept is that a perversion of?" For, just as you can learn what the curse was meant to be from the blessing Bilaam was forced to pronounce, you can learn what the blessing was meant to be from the curse that came instead.

The answer: Kibbutz Goliot—the Ingathering of the Exiles.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

"G-d, your G-d will place these curses upon your enemies, and those who hate and persecute you. You will return and obey G-d, and do all His commandments, which I command you today." (Devarim 30:7-8)

If we learn anything from Jewish history, it should be this: it is not about appeasing or quelling the anti-Semites, for that NEVER works. That would only make sense if anti-Semitism was just another form of racial hatred, which the Talmud says it is not (Shabbat 89a), and history verifies it is not. It is G-d and His mandate for Creation that we need to appease.

At the end of the 1700's, just after 5500 in the Jewish counting, the Vilna Gaon began his movement back to Eretz Yisroel. This was not based upon a whimsical longing for the Jewish homeland, but upon extensive Kabbalistic knowledge that, historically, the time had come. And though the GR"A's aspirations of making aliyah died with him, his movement did not, and it wasn't long before settlements began to appear in Eretz Yisroel, and others back in Russia and Europe began to heed the call. From that point onward, aliyah became a real issue once again, after almost 2,000 years of only dreaming about it. It would take another 200 years before an actual Jewish state would exist, but Jews were definitely coming home, albeit at first in trickles, and only much later on, in waves. We're we doing this on our own, or was G-d engineering this, in advance of the Final Redemption?

That there has been tremendous resistance to all of this is not surprising, and in fact, it is to be

expected. Kabbalistically, the Final Redemption means an end to all evil, and therefore the Sitra Achra (Succah 52a). Resistance to any aspect of redemption, for the most part, comes from him, no matter through whom it is manifested, including ourselves. The Sitra Achra can be so subtle, and it is not beyond his ability to dress up his design as a mitzvah, and not beyond us to see it that way. It is absolutely amazing how many arguments, and even wars, began "L'Shem Shamayim", for the sake of Heaven, and only later, after the damage is done, are seen in a far less holy light.

Thus, it is no coincidence that just as the religious community was becoming more serious about the fulfillment of the prophecy of Kibbutz Goliot that the Zionist Movement emerged, and for the most part, derailed the drive of many to return home to Eretz HaKadosh, until this very day, just long enough for the Jewish community to build itself up in the Diaspora, making life in Eretz Yisroel undesirable once again for millions of Jews.

Thus, instead of Eretz Yisroel becoming populated by the Jews of pre-war Europe, or at least a significant amount of them, the Jewish homeland instead was officially recognized by the nations of the world, as per the mandate of the Talmud and the teachings of the Vilna Gaon, as a result of the ashes of the Holocaust.

That is a painful statement to make, a much more painful statement to hear, extremely controversial, but historical fact nevertheless.

MELAVE MALKAH:

This is the last week I will be writing Perceptions, b'n. It's been over 13 years since I first began writing it (it was one page then), thank G-d, and writing it and posting it has been a big highlight of my life. I have enjoyed it tremendously, in spite of the stress of coming up with new material each week, and writing about 5-7 pages worth of Divrei Torah weekly, aside from the other writing and teaching I do. I thank G-d for the opportunity to have done so.

It was not an easy decision, and I have thought about it now for at least one year. I have heard over the years from some loyal readers that Shabbos is not the same without Perceptions. Such kind comments have often been the source of encouragement for me to continue over the years, but I know there are so many parshah sheets available "out there" that the void, if any is created by the lack of Perceptions, will be quickly filled. For the time being, I will be maintaining my own web site (www.thirtysix.org), b"H. However, my main focus from this point onward will be writing books and teaching, so that I can generate income that will allow me to keep writing.

In closing, I want to thank the staff of Torah.org for posting and sending out Perceptions each week. There is no question that Torah.org has been a major vehicle for me to reach many people who otherwise would not have known I even exist. I also thank anyone else who has helped distribute Perceptions in one form or another, whether we know about each other or not. A very special thank you goes to Miriam Tova Weinberg, who each week for the last couple of years has edited Perceptions purely as a chesed, and on time, even when time was tight.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read Perceptions, and especially those who made a point at some time of making contact with me, letting me know that they appreciated the work. I appreciated the feedback.

Have a great Shabbat,
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