

THE ONE AND ONLY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This was shown to you so that you could know that God is God, and that there is none but Him.
(Devarim 4:35)

This is a very obvious statement for a Torah-abiding Jew. To believe otherwise is a complete violation of the most important principle of Torah, and it renders the performance of all other mitzvos meaningless. Yet, amazingly, as clear as this statement may be in theory, it seems not so clear in practice, for every day Torah Jews act in ways that are partially, and sometimes totally, in contradiction of this most basic principle of Judaism.

It's not that we are hypocrites. That's a different problem. It's that we don't realize that what we are doing is in violation of the principle of "*Ain Ohd Milvado*" — "there is none but Him." We simply don't realize what it means to live with the reality that God is everywhere, at all times, involved in our lives on all levels, and that nothing, but nothing escapes His awareness or overrides His will. Anytime that it seems to the contrary, it is merely an illusion, a very convincing one, perhaps, but an illusion nonetheless.

As mentioned last week, this is what it means when it says that on the Final Day of Judgment, God will only have to say, "I am God," and people will be unable to respond from the shock of such a statement (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10). For, at that time, God will reveal to each individual how He was completely involved in his or her life, and how we simply ignored the Divine Providence, often to our detriment, fooled instead by the people through whom He chose to work, and the events that unfolded.

The righteous person, the true yireh Shamayim — fearer of Heaven — as the Hebrew word implies, is the person who can "see" God around him at all times. He is the person who can stand before God on the Final Day of Judgment and say, "You are God!" meaning that, "I saw You at all times throughout the course of my life, and felt Your partnership all along the way. It is what guided me at all times, and why I chose the path that I did." Hence, the Talmud says that, someone who loses his temper is like one who worships idols (Shabbos 105a). Really? Is it really that bad? How can that be? Well, just think about it: why do we get angry in the first place? Because we know we deserved what happened to us? No, because we think that we DON'T deserve what occurred to us, and our anger is a way of screaming out, "INJUSTICE!"

However, the verse from this week's parsha says it's not like that at all. Even if the person who

wrongs us has clearly done something incorrect, it wouldn't have happened to us had we not deserved it on some level, because "all that God does He does for the good" (Brochos 61a): everything, large or small, is just, no matter how innocent we believe that we are at the time.

This does not mean, however, that one must suffer all wrongs with equanimity, and do nothing at all. Quite the contrary! Instead, one must, when he can, point out the wrong others are doing, and try and make the world a better place. However, at some point during one's rectification of Creation, he has to consider the question, "Why did this happen to me specifically?"

What is it meant to rectify in my own personal life? What am I meant to learn from it?"

Even what seems like a mistake is not an accident. For example, even though people may get married thinking that they are perfect for each other, only to find out later that they cannot live with each other, it does not mean that the marriage itself was a mistake. Rather, all of it was necessary at the time for the sake of personal tikun, even though Heaven knew that the marriage would eventually end in divorce. It was b'shert, meant to happen.

The trouble with all of this is we don't get to see it, often, until well after the fact, if at all in this world. And, as sloppy and as inconsiderate as human can be, we still like to get it right the first time. Healthy human beings do not purposely make mistakes, and would rather not leave things to chance. So, when things do not go as we planned them, we get upset, feel as if we have failed, and frustrated, we get angry, especially when we err in ways that we think we could have avoided. In such circumstances, saying "All is for the good" is not easy, at least not with a full heart.

It's like that joke they tell about the man caught in a flood. As the waters rise, a boat comes along and offers the man a ride to safety.

"No thanks," the man says, proud of his level of faith in God, "I believe God will save me."

"Suit yourself," the man in the boat shrugs, as he drives off to help other people, and the waters continue to rise, forcing the man to the second floor of his home. However, as he waits for the hand of God to personally save him, another boat comes along and tells him to get in while he can, because the flood waters are showing no signs of receding.

"No thanks," the man again says proudly, emboldened by the unique opportunity to prove his faith in God. "I believe God will save me."

"Suit yourself," the man in the second boat says, shaking his head, as he veers off to help other stranded homeowners. In the meantime, the rising flood waters force the man to his roof, where he is finally spotted by a rescue helicopter.

"Grab the rope and climb aboard," the man in the helicopter yells to him above the din of the rotating blades.

"No thanks!" the man on the roof yells back, still certain that a miracle will happen to save him from

drowning. Therefore, unable to convince the man to climb into the helicopter, the rescue team goes off in search of others willing to be rescued.

Sure enough, the water rises to the roof, and then above the man's head, and he drowns. Shortly after, he finds himself in Heaven, waiting to be brought before the Heavenly Court. After some time, and a lot of angry pacing back-and-forth by the drowned man, an angel comes out to call him in to the inner chamber. However, before the Chief Magistrate can say a word, the man bursts out and cries,

"Where were you?! I invested all of my faith in you, that you would save my life as you always promised you would if I had faith, and you go ahead and let me drown! What kind of reward for faith was that?"

For a long moment, there is silence in the Court Room, as if the man has made a valid point. Until, that is, the Chief Magistrate leans forward and says calmly, but firmly,

"What do you mean? Who do you think sent you the two boats and the helicopter?!"

Thus, faith, the man had. A clear vision of Hashgochah Pratis, however, he sorely lacked. And, as the story indicates, one without the other, usually, is not enough, at least not to save one's life. For, as the expression goes, "The Lord works in mysterious ways," and, "God has many messengers," and many types of messengers, as Jewish history has show on so many occasions.

Indeed, oftentimes God has accomplished very holy ends through what had seemed to us, at the time, to be less-than-holy means.

Hence, the Talmud states: Why does the letter Ayin come before the letter Peh [in Eichah]? Because of the Spies, who spoke about that which they did not see. (Sanhedrin 104b)

They did? Are we not taught that no lie can stand that does not contain an element of truth. Indeed, the Spies even brought back fruit of the land to prove that they had not fabricated their story. Therefore, what does the Talmud mean by this accusatory statement?

The answer, as mentioned last week, is also in Rashi, when they complained that "the land swallows its inhabitants" (Bamidbar 13:32). This they had clearly seen, at least with their physical eyes, but they had misperceived it. For, as Rashi explains, God had arranged for the Canaanites to be too preoccupied with burying their dead to chase down a few strangers investigating their land. Their mouths spoke about a curse that had been, in fact, a blessing, and this became the basis of Tisha B'Av.

And as the Talmud says, if the Temple has not been re-built in our day, then it means that we are perpetuating the same sin (Yerushalmi, Yoma 10:1), to this very day.

This is the "Shabbos of Consolation," something that can only be achieved when we put the Peh

back where it belongs, after the Ayin. And, this is something that can only be done once a person reaches the intellectual level of ain ohd milvado. For the greatest cause of fear and terror in life is the sense of randomness that it creates, giving man the impression that everything is hefker — without any Divine rhyme or reason. There can be no greater source of vulnerability than this.

Ain ohd milvado says that, even in what appears to be the most out-of-control situations, everything is still in control — always (Chullin 7b). It can be no other way, since everything exists within God, and nothing can exist, or act the way it does, if it is not a function of the will of God. That is a fundamental of Torah, and the basis of the first two of the Ten Commandments.

It is also the underlying basis of Shabbos Nachamu. In fact, this is the "chinum" part of the bechias chinum — the unwarranted crying — of the Generation of the Spies that resulted in Tisha B'Av (Ta'anis 29a), and the sinnus chinum — the unwarranted hatred — that resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple. Yes, there is a time to cry in history, and yes, there is even a time to hate, but not when God says that it isn't the time. Their sadness of the Generation of the Spies was the result of their own mistaken priorities, as was the hatred of the generation of the destruction

of Second Temple. It was their shared misperception of reality that resulted in unwarranted and false reactions. All of that disappears when a person rises to the level of perception that everything is a function of the will of God, and that all He does is for our good, even if it ruins our plans. For, the person who can see everything as a function of Hashgochah Pratis learns to adjust his life according to the will of God, and in doing so, become fitting for comfort from God Himself.

Text

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