

HASHGOCHAH PRATIS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

A man from the House of Levi had taken a daughter of Levi as his wife. (Shemos 2:1)

As the Talmud explains, the man from the House of Levi was Amram, the Torah leader of his generation, and the daughter of Levi had been none other than Yocheved, to whom he had been previously married. While married, they had given birth to Aharon and Miriam, but once Pharaoh decreed that all children born male were to be killed, Amram divorced his wife to avoid the issue altogether, and the rest of the men of his generation followed suit.

So, why did Amram remarry Yocheved, if Pharaoh's decree had still remained intact? As the Talmud further explains, Miriam, his daughter had convinced him to do so, arguing that having no children at all was a greater decree against the Jewish people than Pharaoh's decree against only the male babies (Sotah 13a). And, as a result of Amram's action, the rest of the men remarried their wives as well. The result of this fateful reversal of opinion? The savior was born.

What happened in Egypt was not the last time the Jewish people considered national suicide. It happened again in Roman times as well:

From the day that a government has come into power which issues cruel decrees against us, forbids the observance of the Torah and mitzvos, and does not allow us to enter into the "week of the son" (according to another version, "the salvation of the son"), we ought to not marry and have children, so that the seed of Avraham Avinu could come to an end by itself. However, let Israel go their way, for it is better that they should err in ignorance than presumptuously. (Bava Basra 60b)

But, once again, the average Jew stood in the way of such a catastrophic national decision, for, though the enemies of the Jewish people are many, they come and go. However, the Jewish people must go on. They are eternal, and as Mark Twain himself observed, they just don't seem capable of extinction, though many nations have made concerted efforts to prove history wrong.

Call it faith, faith in the Jewish people's ability to rise above even the worst crises in order to survive. Even though the Holocaust did not affect every Jew, it affected enough Jews, and in enough extreme ways, that it could have easily resulted in the fading out of the Jewish people over the next few decades, God forbid.

However, instead, we rebuilt. Children born during the Holocaust, often at great risk, became some of the most important builders of the next generation, working on reversing what the enemy had

tried to perpetrate. Hence, rather than disappear, we returned to strength, and became even more influential than before, even re-building an ancient homeland and making possible the return of exiles to holy soil for the first time in thousands of years.

It baffled Mark Twain in his time. "What is the secret of their immortality?" he asked, and if he knew the answer, he didn't tell. However, according to Kabbalah, it is called Raza d'Mehimnusa—the Mystery of Faith, as in, the secret basis of Jewish faith. Most Jews are probably not even aware of it, or even sense it.

Some refer to it as the pintele yid, that tiny Jewish spark within each Jew that can't be extinguished as long the person is alive. Indeed, it is responsible for bringing Jews back from the brink of spiritual extinction, often as the result of some of the most bizarre of circumstances that we call Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence.

You can call it that, because, essentially, it means the same thing as Raza d'Mehimnusa, except that the latter sounds more Kabbalistic, as it should. For, it is the basis of the faith that drives the Jewish people until this very day, not to mention one of the deepest of concepts known to man, rooted high up in the Sefiros. And, because it originates so high up, it connects even the humblest of Jews to the highest, and most eternal heights, of all of Existence.

This is, in truth, the greatest service and pleasure before Him, may His Name be blessed. There is nothing higher than when someone withstands an awesome test like this, entering in peace (for the sake of Heaven, and he his fitting for this) and leaving in peace, as the Zohar says (Bo 34a): "It is fitting for a man to understand good and to understand evil, and return to good. This is the Mystery of the Faith." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 342)

It means the same thing. Look how easy it is, in every generation, for the non-Jewish population to lose itself in the here-and-now. Certainly Jews who assimilate into such cultures can act the same way, but even still, after it is all said and done, on some level, there seems to be a difference. He or she may burn themselves out chasing materialism, but on some level, they see the ridiculousness of doing so.

That is a function of the inner core of a Jew, that ascends to the highest of heights, and it cannot be destroyed. It can be covered over so deep that a Jew can lose all sense of Jewish consciousness, but given the right moment, the right opportunity, and the right exposure to the truth of Torah, within a short period of time, he or she can open up and return.

The stories of how totally secular Jews became totally committed Jews, abound. And, they are incredibly fascinating stories, because they could only have occurred if Divine Providence was involved in making them take place. So many "coincidences" had to have happened to make the stories occur, and teshuva possible, and without God, most of them would not have been possible.

Which brings up another aspect of the mystery:

It is the Mystery of Faith, and what is it? "God is one, and His Name is one." God is one: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" is one yichud, and "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever" is the other yichud, so that His Name can be one. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 87)

The Leshem is talking about two aspects of the reality of God, the upper one and the lower one. In the upper world, there are no questions about Who God is, or that He controls everything. The first verse of the Shema refers to that level, during which we proclaim the sublime unity of God. Even people who do not believe in personalized Divine Providence may still believe in this level of God's reality.

However, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever," the second verse of the Shema, refers to the world in which we live, a world that often conceals the hand of God, especially to those who do not care to see it. Even for the devout believer, it can be difficult to see the hand of God in every aspect of daily life, since life is so distracting, and nature, so allpervasive. However, when a Jew acts in a way that expresses his belief in a future that may seem lost, he projects, onto the world, the unity of God. For, a person who does not believe in God, or in His involvement in the affairs of man, will not act nobly because of a rare possibility that everything, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, will turn out okay in the end. It is just not worth the extra self-sacrifice, and therefore, most people do not make it.

However, if a person does believe in Divine Providence, and acts with hope even when all seems lost, he tells the world that he believes that God, Who runs every aspect of history, is always making everything work out for the best. He brings the reality of the Shema down into everyday life.

Some of the most dramatic accounts of such a projected belief, at least in the Talmud, involve the deaths of the Ten Martyrs, about whom we read and cry over on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av. Say the Shema as one is being raked with hot combs, as Rebi Akiva just before his death? Even his own students were amazed at Rebi Akiva's spiritual fortitude at such a torturous moment (Brochos 61a).

Carry on religious discourses with a daughter and students, as fire consumes one's body and the Torah Scroll in which he was wrapped? His faith even overwhelmed the Roman executing him, who sacrificed his own life in the end just to convert to the religion of the great rabbi (Avodah Zarah 18a). You never know just how great an impact your faith can have on others.

That is the Jewish way. That is the way of the Raza d'Mehimnusa, or the pintele yid, or whatever you want to call it. It is also the source of our survival over three millennia of death and suffering, which would have been enough to wipe out any other people, and certainly the will to survive. Even extremely secular Jews exhibit some aspect of it, on some level, though it may be hard to see at first, and they have no idea what it is.

And now, as history turns a very dramatic corner, and the Jewish people are being forced once again to re-think their lives of the last several decades, it is causing some to wake and re-discover their hidden, inner Jewish core. It is causing some to tap into, once again, the thread of light that unites

them to the worlds about, and most important of all, to the Master of the Universe Himself.

In fact, when the Torah speaks about circumcising the hearts of the Jewish people at the end of history, and of turning our hearts of stone back into hearts of flesh once again, it is talking about this. It is talking about making events occur that will reach to the very core of every Jew, cutting through layers of confusion and distraction, sensitizing the Jew to his root, to his spiritual root, in ways never thought possible, making redemption relevant to him or her as well.

It happened in Egypt at the beginning of our history, and it is happening again now at the end of our history. And, for the person who realizes this in advance and works with it now, the process of development and redemption comes much easier, and much quicker.

Text

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