

BECAUSE OF US, NOT THROUGH US

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

These are the things Moshe told to all of the Jewish people on the east side of the Jordan in the desert, in the plain opposite the Red Sea, between Paran, Tofel, Lavan, Chatzerot, and Di-Zahav-11 days journey from Chorev by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-Barnea. (Devarim 1:1-2)

It is always amazing how some of the most important lessons about Jewish history are taught, in the Torah, in the subtlest of ways. In fact, sometimes, the most important pieces of information seem, in the Torah, to be the most incidental of facts, which is why they are so easily missed.

This is not without reason, for just as there are four levels on which Torah can be learned: Pshat, Remez, Drush, and Sod, there are four levels on which messages can be learned from the Torah. Hence, any message that can only be fully understood on the level of Sod can at least be partially understood on the level of Pshat. Indeed, the Pshat level is really just an invitation to go deeper into the concept, from the level of Remez to the level of Drush and ultimately, to the level of Sod.

When we reject that invitation, we damage ourselves. When we get stuck on the lower levels of a message, then eventually, we are forced to witness catastrophes such as the destruction of the temples, and the exiles of the Jewish people. For, the deeper we understand the mechanics of Jewish history, the better we are able to respond to the Heavenly messages that are sent to direct us, to tell us when we are on track or off it.

For example, hinted to in the above verses is the reason why everything goes wrong in history. EVERYTHING. Now, having said that, don't you want to go back and review the words of the above verses in search of what it might be that you missed the first time because, like most of us, you just assumed that what you see is what you get? Which word, or words, do you think provides such an incredibly profound message about Creation and history?

The question might first be asked: Why does the Torah play such a game? Do doctors do the same thing with patients who are critically ill, expecting them to correctly read into their words and instructions to figure out how to properly nurse themselves back to health? Do lawyers go to court, purposely using ambiguity to rescue their clients from jail or financial loss? So, why does the Torah teach in such a seemingly ambiguous manner if its messages are so crucial for living a correct and meaningful life?

This is because for answers to work for you, you have to buy into them. When it comes to Torah, it is not just about learning, but about learning how to learn as well. When learning is the result of a

process, and a solution is the product of personal investment, then it becomes part of one's consciousness, a facet of one's outlook on life. This is how a person takes a concept from the realm of the theoretical to the realm of reality.

As one of my friends once said, "Some people bronze a child's first pair of shoes. The Jewish people bronze a child's first question." Hence, the Seder is designed to provoke questions, because we are not just interested in giving over the importance of the evening, we are more interested in the children absorbing the importance of the evening for themselves, so that when it is over, they too will have personally experienced the reality of Jewish destiny.

Likewise, the above verse begs the question: It took 40 years to reach a point that was only 11 days away? True, the extra decades of wandering were the punishment for the Spies and their evil report. But why did they fail? What were they fighting against, spiritually-speaking?

The answer is in the number 11, which in the above verse, seems so insignificant and incidental. But it is not, far from it. Rather, it is what life in this world is all about. It is the reason for all evil in Creation, and the path to rectify all of it as well. And, the starting point to understanding how and why is the following:

There is a deep reason why the cycle-length of the sun and moon are not equal, but rather, the sun's extends beyond the moon's by 11 days. The Arizal wrote in Likutei Shas that this issue is part of the sod of the Nitzotzei Kedushah-Holy Sparks-that fell from the kings of the B"N in 11 portions: seven kings and four Achorayim of Abba and Imma, and Yisroel Sabba and Tevunah ... Thus, the Malchus is missing 11 lights, which are from the myriad of sparks ... and which are continuously being rectified until the arrival of Moshiach. Hence, because of these 11 lights that are missing from the Malchus, there are 11 days missing from the lunar calendar with respect to the solar one. (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:4:24:9)

Kabbalistic terminology and ideas aside, the answer is still clear: 11 is the number of non-rectified lights in Creation, left over for man, through this actions, to complete. It is the absence of these 11 lights that makes evil possible, and all the heresy that has existed throughout history, especially today.

Hence, 11 curses were uttered at Mt. Eival, to warn the Jewish people about the damage that can result when they cease giving the Malchus-the last of the 10 Sefiros, and which corresponds to our world-its missing lights. And, where did Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish People record these 11 curses? In Shechem, where the reality of negative 11 was quite pronounced, evident by the following:

Shechem is a place set aside for punishment; the Shevatim were damaged there (i.e., Yosef was sold there); Dinah was violated there, and there the Kingdom of David was divided. (Sotah

11a)

Thus, 11 verses from two paragraphs of Hallel- the prayer of praise and thanks to God-are not recited on Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the new lunar month. It is a monthly reminder of the work to be done in the upcoming month, and of how failure results in spiritual darkness, and an opening for Amalek to wreak havoc on the most important 11 of all.

For, the gematria of the Vav-Heh-the second half of God's Ineffable Name-is 11. This is the part of the Name that Amalek constantly tries to separate from the Yud-Heh, by making man blind to the hand of God in history. Cut off from the Yud-Heh, the Vav-Heh becomes almost nonexistent in the minds of men, making them heretics.

This is why the Generation of the Flood was punished with 11:

The Ark came to rest in the seventh [month], on the 17th day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. (Bereishis 8:4)

From here you may infer that the ark was submerged in the water to a depth of 11 amos. (Rashi)

And, while the ark, the world of man, was submerged in the water 11 amos, the waters themselves rose above the highest mountain, in the direction of Heaven, 15 amos, the gematria of Yud-Heh. Measure-for-measure, for acting as if the Vav-Heh was detached from the Yud-Heh, the ark was submerged 11 amos, while the waters ascended 15 amos.

But, Noach survived the Flood because he found chayn in the eyes of God, the very same trait for which Yosef is also known. For, like Yosef after him, he understood that life is about unifying Vav-Heh with Yud-Heh, about sanctifying the Name of God, and about revealing the hand of God in every aspect of life. To do this is to exude chayn.

However, though Noach was good at this, Yosef excelled at it. Being the 11th son of Ya'akov Avinu, he was a natural at being able to implement the power of Vav-Heh against the 11 klipos. He knew how to rectify the missing 11 lights, in order to bring them into Creation and use them to rectify the Malchus. He was the perfect conduit for the light of God.

This is what made him the prime opposition of Eisav, who in every generation draws his strength from the 11 klipos, which result from the absence of the 11 primordial lights. And this is what the Jewish people had to overcome in the desert in order to travel directly to Eretz Yisroel, and acquire it:

Eleven days journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea by way of Mt. Seir. (Devarim 1:2).

It says in the Sifri: Had the Jewish people merited the 11 days they would have entered the

land, because the 11 days would have overcome the 11 klipos, which are the 11 chiefs of Eisav.
(Drushei Olam HaTorah 2:5:3:4)

But, as Rashi points out, the Spies left with bad intentions, because turning their backs on Moshe Rabbeinu, they lost their guide through the 11 klipos, and instead became subject to them. As the name implies, for klipos means "peels," they became enveloped by them, which blinded them to the truth of what they saw, causing them to speak loshon hara about Eretz Yisroel.

Hence, as the Talmud points out, Eichah, which is read on Tisha B'Av and is an acrostic, places the Peh before the Ayin, to indicate that they spoke about which they did not actually see (Sanhedrin 104b). A world in which the 11 klipos go unrectified is one in which people cannot see clearly, for the klipos act as spiritual cataracts over the mind's eye of people. Tisha B'Av, a direct result of the Spies is the direct result of this.

Then, and now. On one hand, the world today is still relatively peaceful, thank God. On the other hand, so much is going today that can destroy that peace in a major way, and make the Jews pay for all of it. More than ever, people, even Jews living far from the action and in "safe" places in the Diaspora, sense that the situation in the world can change quickly, and not to the benefit of the Jewish people.

Yet, they cannot move past that stage. That part of Judaism and Jewish history is far more theoretical than actual, thanks to the 11 klipos and the spiritual blindness they create. Some very important priorities are not in order, and if we don't see that soon, we will be in serious danger, because we will make decisions that will seem as if they are to our benefit, when in fact, they are detrimental to us.

History is about rectifying the 11 lights and ridding the world of the 11 klipos. One way or another it will happen, either because of us, or through us. Tisha B'Av says choose the former, so that we do not have to go through the suffering that previous generations had to endure, but often did not survive.

Text

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