

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. (Bereishis 8:21)

That from the Creator of man Himself, which pretty much dictates the direction of history from that point onward. And, even as priceless as teshuvah may be to God, as mentioned last week, still, once has to wonder why God even bothered to start again with Noach's family.

Because God wasn't saying that the experiment failed, just that it changed. It's like someone who plans to run in a race and at the last minute slightly injures his foot. It doesn't mean that he can't run, just that he can't run as well as he had planned, and that maybe he won't be able to place as well as previously thought.

Prior to the sin of eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, man was free of an internal yetzer hara, which could only tempt him in the guise of the snake. At that time, if the snake didn't put evil ideas into the mind of man, man didn't think of them on his own. He was perfectly balanced between good and evil, free to choose either direction:

When Adam was first formed, he was precisely in the state that we have discussed until now, composed of two equal opposites, the body and the soul. His environment contained both good and evil, and he was balanced between the two to choose whichever he wished. (Derech Hashem 1:3:6)

The sin changed all of that, in a very profound way:

They stumbled in two ways, looking and eating. As a result, the world became more physical, including Adam and Chava themselves. Everything was changed from clothing of light of the Ohr HaGanuz, which is Kesones Ohr with an Aleph (כתנת אור) to Kesones Ohr (כתנת עור), skin of the snake. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Drush Aitz HaDa'as, Siman 4)

As the Leshem explains, the first part of the sin was not the eating itself, which could not have occurred on the level on which Adam HaRishon was first created. Rather, first Adam looked at the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, in order to understand its potential for evil, in order to rectify it.

However, the Leshem further explains, this had been premature, and rather than overcome and rectify the evil in the tree, the evil instead dragged him down to its level. This caused a spiritual, and

then a physical, transformation of the entire world, including man himself, opening the door for the snake to tempt Chava, and for the two of them to eat from the forbidden fruit.

It was to this physicalization of man that God referred when He said, "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Kabbalistically, what He was really saying was, "man's heart is physical from the start, not to mention the rest of his body and the entire world in which he lives. From this point onward, he will eat, drink, and smell temptation everywhere he goes. Not too much can be expected from him in terms of personal perfection. Let's just hope he can make it to the finish line."

Hence, we are born into spiritual poverty, as the following explains, albeit in Kabbalistic terms:

This means that it (i.e., the Ohr HaGanuz) did not continue to descend at all from the [upper] worlds into the place of the 14 sefiros, comprised of the bottom four of Yetzirah and the 10 of Asiyah. Rather, that was the place left over for the reality of the Klipos (i.e., spiritual impurity). Therefore, He told the worlds, "Dai—Enough!" (which has the gematria of 14), so that it (i.e., the Ohr HaGanuz) should not emanate into these 14 levels of the Klipos. However, as a result of the sin, all of the worlds descended and entered the four levels of Yetzirah and lower, literally into the realm of the Klipos. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 6, Perek 10)

In other words, as a result of the first sin, the world of man, spiritually-speaking, descended into the world of the Klipos. It was like moving into a bad neighborhood, in which even the best of people can't help but be negatively influenced somewhat.

However, though it may be the only world we're used to, it is not the only world that exists, even after the sin. Man may have become injured, but he is still in the race. He may not place at the finish line where it was initially thought, but he can still compete. And since this competition takes into account a person's handicaps—

According to the effort is the reward. (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

—man may still be as much of a contender, relatively-speaking, as he was before.

Where does that leave us?

He waited another seven days and again sent the dove from the ark. (Bereishis 8:10)

The Midrash often reveals clues to important messages about life in places that we might never think to look, and this is one such example, based upon the verse just quoted. For, apparently the dove that Noach sent to check for dry land alludes to the future Jewish people, whom God sent ...

Into the exile of the Greeks, who blackened the faces of the Jews. (Tikunei HaZohar 13)

For, as the Talmud states, the Jewish people are compared to the dove (Brochos 53b), and therefore, when the Torah states:

The dove came to him in the evening and behold, there was an olive leaf torn off in her mouth. (Bereishis 8:11)

the Zohar interprets:

Had God not enlightened the wise to light the candles with the oil of the olive, the survivors of Yehudah would have been lost forever ... From the moment the leaf was torn off in her mouth, 25 was made to dwell upon the Jewish people—the 25th of Kislev. (Tikunei Zohar 13)

It is not clear why at this point, according to the Midrash, the story and miracle of Chanukah destined to occur in the 36th century from Creation is embedded in the story of Noach and the Flood, which occurred in the 17th century. Hence, the Midrash adds:

How are the Jewish people like the dove? When Noach was in the ark, the dove came to him with an olive leaf. God said, "Just as the dove brought light to the world, so too will you (i.e., the future Jewish nation) bring olive oil and light it before Me." (Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 5)

Of all the holidays to speak of at such a crucial juncture in world history, Chanukah, a rabbinic holiday, seems the least likely. Then again, what reason did the Torah give for Noach's survival?

Noach found chayn in the eyes of God. (Bereishis 6:8)

—chayn being the root of the word chanukah, and the mirror image of the name Noach.

That is an important clue and link, for regarding chayn, the Talmud states:

Whoever has chayn has fear of God. (Succah 49b)

And, regarding fear of God, Moshe Rabbeinu said:

Now, Israel, what does God, your God, want from you, except to fear God, your God ... (Devarim 10:12)

This is particularly interesting because when Moshe Rabbeinu explains to the Jewish people why Amalek, their nemesis, must be completely eradicated, he says:

He confronted you on your way, and attacked the feeble stragglers who trailed behind you, while you were tired and exhausted. He did not fear God. (Devarim 25:18)

Therefore, we can assume, Amalek completely lacked chayn, and that if Noach had chayn, he certainly feared God, which entitled him to survive the destruction of mankind. The only question is, what does any of this have to do with the holiday of Chanukah?

It was for Adam HaRishon to rectify and to elevate them to Atzilus as well, and to draw down the main Ohr HaGanuz to below. However, not only did he not rectify them but he instead destroyed and lowered all the world. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 6, Perek 10)

The Kabbalah behind this is complicated, by the idea is not. Simply, when God made Creation He created five main spiritual realms, each consisting of 10 sefiros, or levels, of their own. Their names, from the top down, are: Adam Kadmon, Atzilus, Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

For the sake of free-will, God left a place for evil to exist, 14 levels from the bottom. This means, as the Leshem explained above, that the light traveled downward until it reached dai—14—levels from the bottom, a total of 36 levels altogether (five worlds x 10 levels = 50 - 14 levels = 36 levels).

It was, and remains to be, man's role to finish what God started. This means we are responsible for drawing the Ohr HaGanuz, the Primordial Light with which God made Creation, and then hid on the first day (Rashi, Bereishis 1:4), further down into Creation, the final 14 levels. Everything in Creation, from the largest to the smallest, and every aspect of history, from the most dynamic to the most trivial, has been about drawing the light of 36 levels down into the last 14 levels, perfecting Creation once-and-for-all. Everything.

Hence, when Adam HaRishon failed to do so, God asked him but one question:

"Ayekah?" (Bereishis 3:9)

It has a gematria of 36, and therefore, God wasn't so much asking Adam HaRishon when he was, but where the light of 36 was, having failed his mission.

What is the best way to draw the light down? The answer to that question is the underlying basis of the connection to Chanukah in this week's parshah. Effectively, when we light the 36 candles of Chanukah each year so close to the ground (ideally the flame should be no higher than about 35.5 inches from the ground), we indicate our commitment to draw the light of 36 down to the bottom of Creation.

Why Chanukah? If the message of the Menorah is a daily one, why is it associated with the holiday of Chanukah specifically? In a sense, this is what the Talmud itself asks with the words, Mai Chanukah. The Talmud answers:

What is Chanukah? Our rabbis taught: On the 25th of Kislev begin the days of Chanukah, which are eight on which a eulogy for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the

Temple, they defiled all of the oil, but once the Chashmonaim prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one jar of oil with the seal of the Kohen Gadol, but which contained only enough for one day. Yet, a miracle occurred and they lit with it for eight days. The following year these [days] were made a holiday with Hallel and thanksgiving. (Shabbos 21b)

This story is reminiscent of a midrash that keeps popping up, but whose significance can really be seen here in terms of fear of God and chayn:

Open for Me an entrance as tiny as a needlepoint and I, in turn, shall open for you an entrance as the entrance of a hall. (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:3)

After defeating the Greeks, the Chashmonaim ran and searched and found a single jar of undefiled oil. They did the only thing they could do, they lit it—an entrance as tiny as a needlepoint. However, as a result, God made it burn for an additional seven days—an entrance the size of a hall.

Hence, the rabbis also teach:

It is not upon you to complete the task, but you are not free to idle from it. (Pirkei Avos 2:21)

But how must I do?

As much as you can.

But what if that does not amount to very much?

If it's the best you can do; if you have taken the initiative to do that which draws down the light of God into the world, and have done all you can to share it with others, then it amounts to as much as it has to, as far as God is concerned. He cherishes that initiative because it reveals a person's yireh Shamayim, his seeing of God, and therefore, his chayn.

This is true everyday, but it was especially revealed through the story of Chanukah, and the story of Noach. For the Torah states:

These are the generations of Noach. Noach was a perfect and righteous man in his generation. (Bereishis 3:9)

This verse prompts an argument in the Talmud regarding the level of Noach's righteousness, as Rashi explains. Why did the Torah add the words, in his generation, if not to point out how righteous he was in spite of his generation? Not so, says the other opinion. Rather, the inclusion of this phrase indicates only in his generation, that is, had he lived in Avraham's time, his level of righteousness would not have been special.

Perhaps, but nevertheless, the Torah says that he found chayn in God's eyes, and he did survive the Flood. For that is exactly the point: Noach did the best he could given his generation after which God did the rest. True, had he lived in Avraham's time, post-Flood, then the expectations would have been greater. But he hadn't, and God took that into account, and therefore not only saved him, He praised him.

It's all about initiative to make the world a better place, a more Godly place. Take it, as best you can, and God will do the rest, and best of all, He'll sing your praises.

Text

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