

KNOWING THE BIG PICTURE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, took their incense pans and put fire and incense in them, and offered an unauthorized fire before God, which He did not command them to do. A fire went out from before God and burned them up, and they died before God. (Vayikra 10:1-2)

I am working on a new book these days called *Drowning in Pshat*. In short, it is about how we lose the forest for the trees, even people who are steeped in Torah, when it comes to reading the signs of history. We learn Parshah, commentaries on the Parshah, Mishnah, Gemora, Rishonim, Acharonim, Poskim, etc., perform great acts of chesed, including outreach to bring unaffiliated Jews back into the fold for their own good, as well as ours, all against a backdrop of turbulent history. We are losing Torah leaders, which represents a breach in the protective wall around the Jewish people, and are suffering tragedies, like what occurred in France a few weeks back, which represents a lack of Divine protection.

We've been losing friends for decades now, if they were ever friends in the first place, but we are now watching what was Israel's closest ally, the United States, distance itself from supporting Israel as it once did, regardless of the rhetoric being pushed from the White House. The hard, cold facts speak for themselves, one of which is that President Obama (or the people behind him), is a master of deception.

The question is, why don't we see what is going on, and if we see what is going on, why don't we respond to it in kind? Why do we always have to be looking down the smoking barrel of a gun before we realize that the bad situation that was is getting worse? Why are we always so unprepared for what hits us when we know so much Torah and halachah, and so many of the commentaries that explain them to us? No wonder so many of our prayers do not come back with what we asked for; by the time we ask for something, it is always so late in the process, often requiring a bigger miracle than we might deserve.

In fact, this is an important way of understanding what God told Moshe Rabbeinu by the sea. While Moshe Rabbeinu was doing what every good Jew does in a time of crisis—praying to God for help—God not only stopped him, but even questioned, "Why are you praying to Me?" (Shemos 14:15). Who else was Moshe Rabbeinu supposed to pray to?

There are various different answers given, but one that is overlooked is crucial for understanding the problem we are discussing. Simply put, God was asking Moshe Rabbeinu the following question:

Why are you praying to Me now? If you had prayed to Me on the way out of Egypt as you were fleeing, before the Egyptians had begun to pursue you, I could have stopped them in any number of ways that would not have seemed so miraculous. I could have inflicted them with a plague, or simply distracted them with other problems that would have convinced them that you were not worth pursuing. However, you turn to Me now while the Egyptians are ready to attack you, and the only path to safety is across a sea that will surely drown you. Do you understand the nature of the miracle you are asking for, and how much merit it would take to bring it about? You didn't have sufficient merit to even leave Egypt; how could you have it now to split the sea? You ask for too much by way of prayer.

You have to admit, God had a point. Yeah, why didn't we pray for safety when it was still easy to do so, and the cost wasn't so high? Why did we wait for so long then, and why are we waiting so long now? If we're holding off until the missiles are ready to launch or are on their way to Eretz Yisroel, God forbid, won't God reiterate His question to us? We wait because we are drowning in Pshat. Everyone can see what is happening to the Jewish people today, and where it might be heading, but few know what to make of it in a historical sense. They lack context, because Pshat, Remez, and Drush—Torah, Mishnah, and the Talmud, together with all of their commentaries do not provide it, not without the help of Sod, or Kabbalah. Kabbalah provides context, historical and philosophical.

For example, as I have discussed on many occasions in the past, that as of 1990, we have been living in a period of history that corresponds to the hour of Creation during which Adam HaRishon ate from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah. This would make our period of time unique, inasmuch as its spiritual roots are back in the main sin that caused the exile in which we still find ourselves. At the end of history, it would make this time ripe for tikun, and redemption, as in the Final Redemption.

This idea is strengthened by what the Zohar revealed, that at least as of 1990, we have been living in the period of time that the Torah calls Kibbutz Golios, the Ingathering of the Exiles. This is amazing when you consider that the Intifadah served to make Jews focus on the Land of Israel and their relationship to it, that the USSR collapsed in 1991, allowing Russian Jews to finally emigrate to Eretz Yisroel, and that organizations such as Nefesh b'Nefesh sprang up to facilitate aliyah like never before. None of this can be considered coincidence.

Nor can it be considered coincidence that so many Jews reject the idea of aliyah, claiming that they can better learn Torah and perform mitzvos in the Diaspora, when the Arizal said that the souls of the final generation will be those of those who left Egypt with Moshe Rabbeinu, and eventually rejected the land. Without knowledge of this sod, who can possibly make the connection between what they feel about the land, and what their ancestors did when they rejected it for similar reasons?

There are so many other pieces of the puzzle that are not readily available on a Pshat level. But they are available if people make the effort to dig deeper into what they learn, and what is going on in history. Because what we don't do on our own, history eventually forces us to do when the events

become confusing enough that they send us in all directions searching for answers to allow us to connect the dots. We need to connect dots.

This week's parshah is a good example of this. Probably nowhere in history had mankind reached such a pinnacle, and fallen so quickly from it. At a time that the Jewish people should only have known celebration and spiritual ecstasy, they were forced to emotionally plummet when two major players were instantly killed while trying to enhance, not denigrate, their service of God. Who were Nadav and Avihu, and what went wrong?

There is not much said about them on the levels of Pshat, Remez, and Drush, other than the fact that Moshe points out their greatness by virtue of what did happen to them, which adds strangeness to strange. However, the Arizal fills in many of the blanks about these two brothers, the eldest sons of Aharon HaKohen, in Sha'ar HaGilgulim.

Nadav and Avihu came from the good side of Kayin, [the firstborn of Adam HaRishon], and this is the sod of "the firstborn Nadav and Avihu" (Bamidbar 3:2) . . . [However,] only Nadav had his Ruach from the level of Kayin, which is the sod of the verse, "With Your generous spirit—ruach nedivah—sustain me" (Tehillim 51:14). His Nefesh came from his elder, Aminadav, the father of Elisheva his mother, and thus he took the last three letters Nadav—Nun-Dalet-Bais. However, with respect to Avihu, both his Nefesh and Ruach were from Kayin, and that is why he is called "Avihu"—he is my father—to indicate that all of his levels were from Kayin, who received the Nefesh from Adam himself, the father of the entire world. This is the meaning of Avihu: He was from Adam, the father of the entire world. This is the sod of, "We are unclean from the soul of man—nefesh adam" (Bamidbar 9:7), a reference to Nadav and Avihu, the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon himself.

Since Nadav did not have the Nefesh of Adam, it does not say "Nefashos Adam" in the plural, since the main Nefesh of Adam was only in Avihu. Avihu also received [part of his soul] from Nachson, the brother of his mother, because he was also from the root of Kayin called Nefesh. Furthermore, since the main attachment of the zuhama of the snake in Adam HaRishon was on the level of the Nefesh of Asiyah, he was called Nachson—Nun-Ches-Shin-Vav-Nun— after the snake—Nun-Ches-Shin . . . Returning to the discussion of Nadav and Avihu, since they were on the level of the Nefesh called Asiyah, the zuhama of the snake attached itself to them, and they sinned in the incident of the unauthorized Incense-Offering (Vayikra 10:1), and were punished with death. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 33)

On a Pshat-level, we barely get a chance to know who Nadav and Avihu are. Through Rashi in Parashas Mishpatim, we find out that they were worthy of death because they looked at the Shechinah when they were not allowed to. Through the Talmud, we know they compounded their punishment when they speculated that Moshe and Aharon would die before them, elevating them to leadership roles in the Jewish people. In this week's parshah, we learn that they performed a service of God while in a drunken state, a big mistake that actually cost them their lives.

Yet, Moshe calls them greater than Aharon and himself. God had foretold that someone(s) would die sanctifying the Name of God, and until this week's parshah, he had assumed that it would be Aharon and himself. Overlooking the mistakes that Nadav and Avihu had made, Moshe Rabbeinu instead sees greatness in those who died by the hand of God on such a sacred day. All of this may have been clear to him, but it leaves us baffled and drowning in Pshat.

Until Sod comes along and fills in some of the gaps:

Had the Jewish people not sinned with the calf, then the zuhama would have been completely removed from them. Had this been the case, then even though Nadav and Avihu sinned with the incense they would have simply died a normal death. However, since Israel did commit the sin with the calf, they caused the zuhama to adhere once again to the Nefesh of Adam the result being that Nadav and Avihu had to die through burning. This is the meaning of, "And all your brothers the entire House of Israel shall cry over the burning" (Vayikra 10:6): The sin of the calf caused the burning of the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon, the "father of the entire world." This is why Nadav and Avihu were considered "equal" to the entire Jewish people, like Moshe and Aharon, because they had possessed the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon itself. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 33)

Indeed, according to the Arizal, their death in this week's parshah was not the end of their journey, but the beginning of it, at least for their souls:

Regarding the ibur into Pinchas, it is written, "Remember, please—Nun-Aleph—which innocent—Nun-Kuf-Yud—person ever perished" (Iyov 4:7), as the Zohar says (Pinchas 217a). For, the first letters of Nadav and Avihu are Nun and Aleph, and they are from the root of Kayin, whose letters spell Nun-Kuf-Yud. In other words, they never perished but went into Pinchas, who was also from Kayin. However, as we explained earlier, when Pinchas sinned with the incident of the daughter of Yiftach, the ibur of Nadav and Avihu was removed from him and it went to Shmuel HaNavi. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 33)

It is no coincidence that everyone to whom the souls of Nadav and Avihu went became a prophet. According to the Zohar, their souls came from the sefiros of Netzach and Hod, the source of prophecy. Therefore, to receive their souls meant that a person automatically became a prophet, first Pinchas, then later Shmuel HaNavi, and others along the way.

Moshe Rabbeinu must have become aware of this, perhaps at the time that they died. Perhaps he conveyed this information, where their souls came from, and to where they might be going, to their Aharon HaKohen, which may have made their deaths easier to handle, allowing him to remain silent, and to be praised for it. Their journey of tikun spanned many generations, going back all the way to Kayin himself, and continuing on well past the time of Nadav and Avihu.

About two weeks ago, I had occasion to spend Shabbos in the Emergency Room at Haddasah Ein Kerem Hospital. I had come in Erev Shabbos, but by the time they discharged me, Shabbos had already come in, so I forced to remain there over Shabbos itself, which suited me fine since I was still

in a lot of pain.

Like about 20 other people, I lay on a hospital bed around the main reception area, while others lay in the curtained compartments. It was quite full, and others came in during the night and the next day. My own discomfort distracted me, especially since it was almost impossible for me at the time to find a comfortable position. But, I wasn't oblivious to what I saw and heard around me, especially since some patients were louder than my own pain once the pain killers kicked in.

As I lay there wondering how people put up with intense, prolonged pain, it didn't occur to me at the time that all of us there were undergoing some more severe moments of tikun. All of our souls had been here before, probably many times before, and were now undergoing our next stages of tikun. And, as the expression goes, you can pay us now, or pay us later; the more Gehenom a person goes through in this world, the less he has to undergo in the next one.

Since then, as I deal with my own discomfort, I keep wondering to myself, "Why, why, why?" It just slows me down, keeping me from learning, stopping me from writing Torah, and preventing from making it to minyan. I think of what I must have done wrong recently, and use that to justify my present predicament.

However, as we learn from the story of Nadav and Avihu, the events of our current lives may trigger periods of tikun, but our past lives are the reason for our tikunim. This is why it is so hard to judge other people, and why speaking loshon hara is such a severe sin. Without knowledge of a person's entire journey, it is impossible to know where he is on it, and why what he is going through is good for him. The best we can do is say over and over again: "All that God does is for the good," because knowing the big picture, only He can truly make sure that this is so for every individual.

Text

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