

RUACH HAKODESH AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, "Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them that when you come into the land . . . (Vayikra 23:9-10)

Everything is Hashgochah Pratis, Divine Providence. As the Talmud states, a person doesn't even stub his finger unless it is decreed first in Heaven (Chullin 7b), and even a blade of grass doesn't grow without an angel, or "mazel," on behalf of God, telling it to grow (Bereishis Rabba 10:6).

The only question, therefore, is not if something is the will of God . . .

A mazel has been established for each person regarding his life and sustenance, from the time he was born until the end of his life. Each person's is different from another [person's]. All of it is based upon God's hidden guidance, a function of the "Mysteries of the Merciful One" which are not revealed to any living being. It is the basis of why good or bad can occur for a righteous person, which Moshe Rabbeinu asked to understand when he said, *"Make Your way known to me"* (Shemos 33:13). According Rebi Meir, his request was not fulfilled, since God answered him, *"I will be gracious to whom I will show favor, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful"* (Brochos 7a). (Sefer HaKlallim, Hakdamah, Os 13.)

. . . but what that will is based upon how it has been expressed in what has occurred. That is where debate arises and often becomes heated.

Prophecy, of course, makes all the difference in the world. Even though most of it was to prophets in a sleep mode and often spoken in riddles, still, the prophets seemed to have been able to get a handle on the Divine message well enough to tell us, the people, something meaningful about what was on the mind of God at the time. Not that we listened anyhow, which is why, we are told, we lost the right to prophecy. This has forced us to muddle through history and at great expense to our nation and the world in general, as the Talmud warns:

All punishment comes to the world for the sake of the Jewish people. (Yevamos 63a)

We were designated to be the "light unto nations" (Yeshayahu 42:6), and evidently when we go dark so does the rest of the world. Without prophecy we are left with only hester panim:

They shall be devoured, and many evils and distresses will occur to them, until they will say that day,

"Are not these evil things happening to us because our God is not with us?" And I will surely hide—haster astir—My face—panim—that day, because of all the evil they have done by turning after other gods. (Devarim 31:17)

What this means, practically-speaking, is that God goes about His plan for history without our knowledge. When we have merited it, God has shared His plans for mankind with us in advance:

God said, "Shall I conceal from Avraham what I am doing?" (Bereishis 18:17)

The advantage of this is obvious. It means that either we will have advance knowledge of what God plans to do, allowing us to, perhaps, improve the situation, or it will at least give us an understanding of what has happened if we do not. However, it does not seem as if it is all or nothing, either prophecy or complete hester panim. According to the Talmud Heaven still leaks information to mankind in one of several ways, such as through a Bas Kol, or Heavenly voice:

He further said to me, "My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin?" I replied, "I heard a Divine voice, cooing like a dove and saying, 'Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!' " (Brochos 3a)

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "Every day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Mount Chorev, announcing: 'Woe to them, the people, because of the affront to the Torah.' " (Pirkei Avos 6:2)

There is also something called Ruach HaKodesh, which literally translates as "Holy Spirit," a term improperly "borrowed" by other religions. In Tanach, the source of the concept, it means that an individual, usually because of personal merit or on behalf of the Jewish nation, has been endowed by Heaven with "extra" spiritual or physical capabilities, or both:

And a spirit of God was upon Yiftach, and he passed over Gilead and Menashe, and he passed over Mitzpeh of Gilead, and from Mitzpeh of Gilead he passed over [to] the children of Ammon. (Shoftim 11:29)

With such a holy spirit a person is able to know things beyond the knowledge of ordinary men, do things beyond the ability of even above average people. In short, Ruach HaKodesh allows its recipients to do miraculous things, even if they are subtle enough to be overlooked by others. When they had a hunch about something it was far more than simply an inarticulate gut feeling.

Once upon a time it was even clear who had been blessed with such Divine assistance. For example, Rashi's super-human commentary on Tanach and the Talmud made it eminently clear to just about everyone that he had been helped by Heaven in his hugely important task. The same can be said about individuals of similar spiritual stature, such as the Rambam and the Ramban, and how much

more so the generations that preceded them.

In more recent times it has been less clear who has had Ruach HaKodesh, how much of it they have received, if they still have it, and how reliable it has been. Claims of it, there have been many. Stories of it, and of the supernatural feats it has allowed its recipients to do, there are plenty, especially by their followers. Authentication, on the other hand, has been difficult and often controversial to the point of violence on occasions.

So, where does that leave us today? That is an excellent but sorry question, and often one whose answer depends upon whom one follows and what one knows. We have a concept called Emunas HaChachamim, literally, belief in the wise man, which means that we must place our complete faith in our Torah leaders and what they say and teach.

This is obviously easy to do when what they instruct fits into our vision of what we should be doing, but much more difficult to do when it does not. The premise is that, being Torah giants and God-fearing Jews (two crucial criteria for achieving this level of leadership), their vision of God's "big picture" is far more complete than ours, and therefore, their decisions will be far more accurate even they do not make sense to us.

Secondly, being leaders of God's holy flock, they are entitled, on behalf the communities they lead, to Divine assistance in whatever capacity is necessary. An average Jew also gets Heavenly help from time-to-time, but not on the level of such Torah leaders. And, if they are ever "wrong," the reasoning goes, it is not because of their own lacking, but because of the people for whom they make their decisions (Brochos 32a; Maharsha, Gittin 56b).

Then there is Divine Providence itself. Dovid HaMelech wrote:

This is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:23.)

Since everything is from God, as mentioned previously, we have to assume that what Dovid HaMelech meant is that whatever is "wondrous" in our eyes is overt Divine Providence, that is, an example of God stepping into history and the affairs of man. Whatever has occurred it is about more than just the day-to-day running of Creation, which God tends to do in a more covert, "natural" manner.

The only problem is, there is wondrous, and then there is wondrous. For example, Rav Eliyahu Dessler, zt"l, wrote:

It is hard to label our presence in the Holy Land now as the beginning of the redemption. It is, however, a great kindness on God's part. After the extreme destruction of six million of our brothers, we have the opposite extreme of our nation settling in its own state in the Holy Land. We must learn and take faith from this. Woe to him who will reach the Judgment Day still

oblivious to this obvious reality! (Michtav M'Eliyahu, Part III pg.352)

Rav Dessler died in 1953, only five years after the formation of the State of Israel, long before it became what it is today. If it was wondrous then, what it has become since then, given all of the spiritual and physical development over the last six decades?

For other components of the Jewish population the only wondrous thing about the current Jewish State is that it has been able to get away with its existence. They saw nothing Godly in its formation, and they see nothing miraculous about what it has accomplished since then. If they could, they would reverse that part of Jewish and world history.

And then there are the millions of Jews in-between these two very different points of view and therefore are probably more opinions about the matter than there are actual Jews living. As the saying goes: "One Jew, three opinions," or something like that. Just kidding.

So, now where does that leave us, especially at this time of year with Yom HaAtzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, coming up once again? It's the time of year that brings out the "Zionists," religious and secular, and the flag-burning anti-Zionists, also religious and secular, and plenty of groups in-between. Oh, the confusion of it all.

What do I personally believe, and how do I fit it together with everything said thus far? That, b"H, will be the subject of next week's Perceptions, Parashas Behar, the Torah portion which "happens" to contain the words:

I am God your God Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be God to you. (Vayikra 25:38)

I hope it will be worth the wait.

Text

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