

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

"I, your father in law Yisro, am coming to you . . ." (Shemos 18:6)

HISTORY IS CONVOLUTED, something we can appreciate more today. A lot of it has been straightforward, but a lot of it has not. Sometimes, though, events can be demystified somewhat on a different, or rather, a deeper level of understanding.

Yisro is a good example of this. He is famous as Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law, a merit he earned, we are told, by rejecting every form of idol worship in his time. Like Avraham Avinu before him, he seems to have been a truth seeker, the reward for which was to find THE Truth Itself.

The story behind the story? It's more complicated. It is also built upon a pre-existing relationship between Yisro and his famous son-in-law going back in time all the way to the beginning of history. Yisro alludes to this when he says:

"I, your father in law Yisro, am coming to you . . ." (Shemos 18:6)

According to the Arizal, the first letters of the three Hebrew words for, "your father-in-law, Yisro"—Aleph-Ches-Yud—spell "ahchee," which means "my brother." On a Pshat level, Yisro referred to Moshe as his son-in-law. On a Sod level, he called him his brother. This is why:

Since the Nefesh of Kayin is one to which the impurity of the snake greatly latches on, and the evil within it overcomes its good, [the Nefesh of Kayin] reincarnated into the Egyptian . . . Moshe, who was [the reincarnation of] Hevel, wanted to rectify him by killing him using the "Ineffable Name," i.e., the 42-letter Name [of God], to separate out the evil out from within him and bring it to the level of good and holiness. On the day that [Moshe] killed the Egyptian, it entered Yisro . . . and he converted. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 36)

Though Moshe Rabbeinu and Yisro were son-in-law and father-in-law in their current lifetime, they had been Kayin and Hevel in a previous one. Thus, when Yisro, previously Kayin, brought Moshe, previously Hevel, into his family, he atoned for his murder of his brother back at the beginning of history.

Furthermore, explains the Arizal, Tzipporah, Yisro's daughter and Moshe's wife, was part of the atonement process. The Midrash says that Kayin's jealousy of Hevel stemmed from the fact that Hevel was born with two twin sisters, while he had only been born with one. Since at that time sisters became their brother's wives, Hevel had two wives while Kayin only had one. This made Kayin

jealous enough to murder his brother.

Apparently, the Arizal reveals, Tzipporah was the reincarnation of Hevel's second twin sister. When Yisro gave her to Moshe Rabbeinu as a wife, this was really Kayin giving her back to Hevel. Quite bizarre, given that there is nary a hint of any of this anywhere in the story.

It does show how multi-layered history is. It reveals how ancient forces can drive modern day events and people. It illustrates how current events may only be modern day versions of older and far more significant ones.

Does it really make a difference to know such hidden information about people and history? No doubt knowing past reincarnations does fill in some important blanks in history, but aren't they blanks we had already learned to live with?

Sometimes, but not always. Sometimes the blanks being filled are current, and the missing information provides important insight into events of the day. They frame current history in a far more relevant manner, and may even allow for life-saving preparations. This example is from the Zohar on last week's parsha:

Rebi Abba said in the name of Rav Yeisa Elder: "This is what Rebi Shimon said: 'In the future, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will revive all the kings who caused suffering to the Jewish people and Jerusalem: Landrionis, Lelupinos, Nevuchadnetzar, Sancheriv, and the rest of the kings that destroyed His House. They will rule as before, and they will gather other nations with them. In the future, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will pay them back in a revealed manner around Jerusalem . . .'" (Zohar, Beshallach 58b)

Ancient kings, modern times. The future being referred to is the Messianic time, OUR time. The souls are from the past, but they will be brought back thousands of years later for a return engagement at the end of history. It will be payback time for past destructions and anti-Semitism, but in a modern setting.

Putting that interesting Kabbalistic detail about history aside, we can open our newspapers and read about current events. The big topic: Israel and the so-called Two-State Solution.

Twenty-five years ago most people, including many Arab countries, did not care much about the Palestinians, even if they did not like the Jews. The world had other more pressing issues to deal with at the time. Life was a lot calmer in those days, and many Westerners were mostly intent on climbing the social ladder and improving their material level of comfort.

The UN was more in the background back then. But, made up of many representatives from Muslim or anti-Semitic countries, resolution after resolution was put forward to sanction what they called the "Zionist State." The only reason why it did not get much publicity then was because the resolutions kept getting shot down by the few friends Israel had in "high places" in the UN.

The winds of change began to blow back in 1991, after the Persian Gulf War. They did not pick up significant speed, however, until President Obama's time in office. All of a sudden, Israel's most valued friend at the UN became less so, and the UN became emboldened in its anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian approach to Middle-East politics.

Obama and the UN have not looked back since. One of his last acts before leaving office was to abstain from an anti-Israel resolution for the first time in American history since the founding of the State. Many believe it was Obama and Kerry who pushed the UN from behind the scenes.

Many also believe that Obama, et al, will continue to push the UN to push Israel towards the two-state solution, even after leaving office. And, as the nations GATHER under the banner of the UN AGAINST ISRAEL, one might wonder if it is even possible to put aside that interesting Kabbalistic detail about history. On the contrary, it seems as if OUR period is becoming that interesting Kabbalistic detail about history.

If so, we may not be watching only a gathering of modern leaders and enemies ganging up against the Jewish state. We may be watching a gathering of Biblical enemies in the bodies of modern leaders ganging up against the Jewish state. Clearly this would transform current events into something bigger than any headline can address.

It would also beg the question: Historical payback time may be at hand. Are we ready?