

Beshalach

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Tu BeShevat is upon us once again, *b"H*, with a very different feel than just one year ago. There had been no October 7 attack yet last year at this time, and no hostages to worry about every day. Anti-Semitism was definitely a much lesser concern than it is now, so sitting down to a *Tu BeShevat Seder* this year is less joyous.

This last past *Shabbos*, someone I spoke with compared the situation to learning how to ride a bicycle for the first time without training wheels. It is terrifying and seemingly dangerous. That's how he described being abandoned for the Palestinians by country after country. Once again, the Jewish people are becoming increasingly isolated as a result of warped thinking. The nations we once relied upon are moving away from us, and we're learning how to ride our "bike" without their help.

By now, it should be clear that human logic has little to do with it. If it did, we'd be back a few years when the world realized that the biggest obstacle to a two-state solution was Hamas, and their puppeteer, Iran. If the Palestinian "leadership" would have shown that they are more interested in being a successful nation on the land they have, than getting Israel off the land they're on, they'd be governing themselves right now. If the Palestinians would have proved by now that their love of life was greater than their hatred of Jews, they'd be running their own show.

What a dumb world. Do foreign governments really believe that Israelis enjoy having to spend so much blood and money on policing a hateful and spiteful enemy? Nothing would make Israelis happier than to live next door to Arabs with the same kind of security and peace of mind as, let's say, the Americans and Canadians do. The only reason why we can't is because of the Arab world, not the Jewish world.

But who can we tell that to other than ourselves? Who believes this truth, other than

the Jews (and not even all of them), and some righteous gentiles who see with honest eyes? We've been down this road many times in the past, and the only way it ever got better for the Jewish people was after it first got worse, sometimes a *lot* worse.

I remember back in the 1990s when it became noticeable that anti-Semitism was on the rise again that someone, presumably a Jew, wrote in response to an article on the topic, that it was about time Jews all converted to Christianity. Since anti-Semitism targets Jews specifically, eliminating Judaism, she argued, eliminates anti-Semitism.

That might be true if anti-Semitism was just racism. Racism is based upon differences, so when the differences are no more, the racism disappears. But Jews have been hated and hunted regardless of how hard they have tried to blend into their gentile populations, and they have done "good" jobs.

So no, annihilation of Judaism does not stop annihilation of the Jewish people. It can be argued historically, that it only increases it.

Shabbos Day

WE CAN APPRECIATE why from this week's *parsha*. At the end of it, Amalek attacks the Jewish people. They seem to have come out of nowhere, but *Rashi* explains otherwise:

"He named the place Massah and Merivah because of the quarrel of the Children of Israel, and because of their testing of God, saying, 'Is God among us or not?' Amalek came and fought with the Jewish people in Refidim." (*Shemos* 17:7-8)

"[The Torah] juxtaposed this section with the verse, [*'Is God among us or not?'*] implying: 'I am always among you and always prepared for all your necessities and yet you say, "*Is God among us or not?*". By your life, the dog will come and bite you, and you will cry out to Me, and [then] you will know where I am.'" (*Rashi*)

According to *Rashi*, Amalek was sent by God because the Jewish people questioned the level of Divine Providence they were living with. This would be fine if the *Gemora* didn't say this instead:

"Rav Yehudah said that Rav said: 'Had the Jewish people observed [the first] *Shabbos*, no nation or tongue would have [ever] ruled them, as it says: "*And it happened on the seventh day, some people went out from the nation to collect, etc.*" (*Shemos* 16:27). It says after: "*And Amalek came and fought with the Jewish people in Refidim.*" (*Shabbos* 118b)

So which was it that brought on the Jewish people's worst anti-Semite, the questioning of *Hashgochab Pratis*, or the breaking of *Shabbos*? The answer is, in typical Jewish fashion, both.

How can that be? Because:

"*Shabbos Kodesh* is the great sign and covenant that The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave to the Jewish people to know that God made the Heaven and the Earth in six days and everything in them, and then rested on the seventh day. It is the foundation of *emunah* to know that the world is renewed, that there is no nature or randomness in the world, and that each moment The Holy One, Blessed is He, renews and sustains the world. . . ." (*Hilchos Shabbos b'Shabbos*, Ch. 1, *Halachab* 1)

Likewise, when the Jewish people asked, as per the Hebrew, "*Is God among us or not?*" they were really asking, "*Is Ayin* among us or *Hovayab*?" *Ayin* is the level of *Hashgochab Pratis* that completely overrides nature, and *Hovayab* is the level that works within it.

On the level of *Ayin*, miracles happen for a person regardless of merit or culpability. On the level of *Hovayab*, they happen for a worthy person, but not for the person who has sinned. On the level of *Elokim*, they won't seem to happen at all for anyone, even if they do.

So, when the Jewish people broke *Shabbos* they were saying, in effect, the same thing as, "*Is Ayin* among us or *Hovayab*?"

Seudas Shlishis

THIS ALSO teaches us that there is more than one way to say something. You can make an actual statement, like "*Is Ayin* among us or *Hovayab*?" Or you can do an act that indicates that you have this question, even if you have yet to actually articulate it, even to *yourself*.

For example, the way we live now. How do you relate to *Hashgochab Pratis* on a daily basis? Is God real to you, or theory? I'm not saying you don't believe in God, *God forbid*. But there is a big difference between "just" believing in God, and living with His reality, evident by how we do what He values most.

Like *mitzvos*. Like *tefillah*. Like caring about others. Like maintaining appreciation for the gifts He gives you every day. The big things and the small things, as we say in *Modim* each day in *Shemonah Esrai*, "for all the miracles every day." We say *Hallel* on *Rosh Chodesh* and on holidays to thank God for those huge national miracles. We say *Modim* each day to thank Him for the smaller ones that we tend to take for

granted.

Taking any miracle of any size for granted means to take Divine Providence for granted, and as we see in this week's *parsha*, that brings on Amalek and all that he stands for and causes. Intellectual confusion. Rabid anti-Semitism. Misplaced loyalties. Hopelessness for good people, etc.

The trouble is, by the time we realize something needs to be fixed, we're already too far down the road of trouble and despair to do much about it. So why wait until then? We have opportunities during the course of the year that allow us to realize what we have, so we can increase our appreciation and share it with God. And that brings us to *Tu BeShevat*.

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Tu BeShevat

PRINCIPALLY TU BESHEVAT is a *halachic* day. Produce grown in *Eretz Yisroel* must be tithed, and the rule is that one year's bounty cannot be tithed together with another's year. Therefore, there has to be a cut-off point in the year to distinguish between one year's produce and another year's produce. That is *Tu BeShevat*, the 15th day of *Shevat*.

Why the 15th of *Shevat*? Because apparently that is the time by which the majority of rain has fallen in *Eretz Yisroel* during a particular season. Since rain is crucial for the success of crops, the end of the rainy season is a good day to end the growing season, and call it a crop ready for tithing.

But nothing is ever *just* technical or *halachic* in Torah Judaism. There is always something *kabbalistic* behind everything in life, no matter how big or small, especially *Tu BeShevat*. The *Pri Tzaddik* explains how it is even connected to THE tree, the *Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra*, and THE sin that has been responsible for almost 6,000 years of often ridiculous history.

That alone gives the day special meaning and creates tremendous opportunity. But the most important part of that opportunity is to absorb the amazing gift of *Eretz Yisroel*, the fantastic bounty it is giving us these days, and the tremendous opportunity to make blessings over it in giving thanks to God. *Hakores HaTov*, which means recognizing the good, is only two (Hebrew) words. However, they mean *everything* in terms of world rectification and personal completion.

So this *Tu BeShevat*, even in the Diaspora, go for it. Make a *Tu BeShevat seder*.

They're a lot of fun. Let yourself absorb the significance of all the amazing gifts we have been blessed with in this generation, and let God know how much you appreciate His giving us back our land, and blessing it with incredible bounty. It will go a long way to upping your joy in life, and mitigating the situation that seems to be going the other direction at this time.

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Chag Samayach and Good Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston