

A PARASHA THOUGHT

When Opposites are the Same

There is a conception in the world that when good things happen, the Higher Power that people ascribe to is happy with them and loves them, showing good grace by being benevolent, whereas when bad things happen, the Higher Power is angry and vindictive, showing Its vengeance in the form of disasters and suffering. However, this is not so black and white. What seems to be an act of seeming love can really be an act of apathy, whereas punishments and suffering can be a powerful expression of care and concern.

We are in the period of the nine days, about to enter the week before Tisha B'Av, the most intense period of where we show our mourning status outside of the day of Tisha B'Av itself. There is no other time in the calendar as these days where we, as a people, have suffered more. An observer, seeing the Jewish people's experiences during this time throughout history, and seeing our behavior now, would be safe to assume that the Jews have been punished by their outraged G-d. What other nation has been treated so badly and suffered so

horribly to the extent we have and are still mourning about it to this day? Yet, if that same observer would see us during Yom Tov, Chanukah, or Purim, the person would draw the opposite conclusion: this is a nation that has a close relationship with their G-d, One Who loves and cherishes them. How are these polar opposite relationships reconcilable? Shouldn't it be one or the other?

This contradiction is precisely what the Athenian elders provided to R' Yehoshua ben Chananya as proof to the Jewish people's inferiority. The gemara in *Bechoros* (8b) states that the Athenian elders presented R' Yehoshua ben Chananya with two eggs and asked him if he could identify which egg came from a white hen and which came from a black one. As the incubation period of an egg is 21 days, the Maharsha explains that they were comparing two different 21-day times in the calendar: from Rosh Hashana to Hoshana Rabba and from Shiva Assar B'Tamuz until Tisha B'Av. Their claim was that we had fallen out of Hashem's grace, as it cannot be that the same G-d with whom you claim a close relationship and celebrate, such in the month of Tishrei (as represented by the egg from the white hen), can be the same G-d who punishes you and puts you into mourning during the Three Weeks (as represented by the egg from the black hen). Rather your pride and boasting of a close relationship

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI DOVID SPETNER

Q. The *posuk* quotes Moshe Rabbeinu as telling the Jewish people that they are as numerous as the stars. Rashi quotes Sifri that asks, "Were they as numerous as the stars? They were only 600,000!" The Sifri offers an answer, but I am perplexed by the question.

The Sifri is clearly making a very significant assumption. It considered it to be a given that there are many more stars than 600,000. The Sifri made this assumption over 1000 years before Galileo began using a telescope to examine the stars. However, the unaided eye cannot detect the existence of more than a few thousand stars. How did the Sifri know that there are so many more stars than 600,000?

A. The truth is that the gemara in *Brachos* (32b) has an even more direct assumption. According to the gemara's calculation there are quadrillions of stars.

Possibly the answer may lie in Hashem's promise to Avraham Avinu that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. The *posuk* says, "He took him outside and said 'Look to the heavens and count the stars if you can count them. So shall be your offspring.'"

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, gives three different explanations for what it means that "He took him outside." The third explanation is that Hashem took Avraham outside of the universe and told him to look down upon the heavens and count the stars. According

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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to this, Avraham was being shown the true vastness of the universe and the enormous number of stars contained within it. It is possible that humankind's assumption of the vast number of stars is actually a tradition tied to Avraham's experience. 🕒

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A PARASHA THOUGHT

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with the Creator is misplaced and must not exist. R' Yehoshua countered back by presenting two blocks of cheese and asking them if they could identify which cheese came from a white goat and which from a black goat. The Maharsha continues to explain that he was refuting their claim by presenting the two goats that were brought on Yom Kippur, one of which was brought as a regular offering (as represented of the white goat) and one of which was pushed off a mountain to Azazel (as represented by the black goat). Although one would think that the goat that is brought as an offering was the one that provided the major atonement for the Jewish people's sins, it was actually the goat given to Azazel

that provided the major atonement. The Maharsha explains that R' Yehoshua ben Chananya was telling them that it is the same G-d, our Father in Heaven who is acting towards us in benevolence and care, but showing it in two different ways; however, both of them are through love and, ultimately, lead to same outcome of atonement and closeness to Him.

In life, when we have to prioritize our time and resources, we are constantly viewing it through a cost/benefit analysis. Is this errand/idea/venture worth my time and money or do I not bother with it? Even in a situation where we have spent tremendous time and effort, if at any point we feel it's no longer worth our while, we will abandon it, no matter how painful it is. However, an endeavor that we are consistently putting our energies into is a symbol of how much we care and it's precisely this that compels us in our continued efforts. If we were to abandon it, that would prove quite the opposite: we no longer care about what the outcome will be and are no longer expending time, energy, or resources into this. It is the parents who invest their time with the children, not allowing them to do whatever they want, resetting them in the proper direction, and allowing them to make mistakes in their decision process who are the parents who truly love their children. A child who is given free reign to do what he likes, is given

whatever he wants, and never has to live with the consequences of his decisions is the child who is truly unloved and abandoned by his parents.

The fact that throughout the more than 3300 years after we've become Hashem's nation we are still suffering, absorbing losses, and seemingly punished is not a manifestation of Hashem abandoning us; nothing could be further from the truth! It is *because* Hashem cares and loves us that He still spends effort to ensure that we will continue on the right path and that we receive the atonement necessary to live the ultimate life of good and peace. Therefore, Hashem's love for us, whether in the height of our mourning or at the climax of our joy, is unchanged and is just as powerful in both situations. And as we enter the week prior to the apex of our day of national suffering, we should not feel abandonment or discouragement; it is our same benevolent and caring Father in Heaven who is right beside us, as He always has been and always will be. 🕒



TRIVIA

RABBI GAVI KADISH

To wear, or not to wear, or to wear only hand; *tefillin* on Tisha B'Av, that is the question.

Believe it or not, the Tur (*O"ch siman* 555) quotes the Mahra"m MaRutinburk who *paskens* that it is forbidden to wear *tefillin* on Tisha B'Av! Why? A mourner on the first day of mourning is forbidden to wear *tefillin*. On Tisha B'Av we are compared to a mourner on the first day of mourning "and there is no day more bitter (than Tisha B'Av) seeing as it is a day established for weeping for generations." The Rambam (*Hilchos Taanis* 5:11) remarks "there are some sages who are accustomed to not don the head *tefillin* (on Tisha B'Av)." The Beis Yosef cites commentators who understand the Rambam that one only dons the arm *tefillin* and not the head *tefillin* (Rabbeinu Yerucham understands from the Rambam that it is forbidden to wear *tefillin*). At first glance this seems a bit bizarre. What is the reason for such a novel idea? The *Hagos Maimuniyis* explains that since the head *tefillin* are referred to as "*pe'ar*," or glory, it is improper to place *tefillin* on one's head when ashes, symbolic of mourning, are supposed to be in the exact same place. Many other *rishonim* argue (Rosh, Ran, Rashba) that one is in fact obligated to wear *tefillin* on Tisha B'Av. The *Shulchan Aruch* (555:1) codifies that one should wear *tefillin* on Tisha B'Av at *Mincha*. Why *Mincha* and not *Shacharis*? There are several reasons offered. The Pri Megadim offers two rationales. One is that some of the *minhagim* of *avielus* are lifted at that point. Alternatively, there is a certain element of *simcha* that starts to settle in being that *moshaich* is born on *motzai* Tisha B'Av (others say on Tisha B'Av itself – see *Sefer Tamai Haminhagim*). The *Mishna Berura* (555:2) cites two additional explanations for this phenomenon. The first reason is to show some semblance of consolation on Tisha B'Av itself. The second reason is that the *Bais Hamikdash* already started burning by then, and this effectively meant that Hashem punished us by destroying the structure of the *Bais Hamikdash* instead of our physical bodies. It is noteworthy that some congregations, especially those of Sephardic descent, don *tefillin* during *Shacharis* (*Be'er Heiteiv* and *Kaf Hachaim*). 🕒