

Mattos & Massey

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It all comes down to what you believe, for now. As long as God decides to hide His hand, and we're not talking about playing cards here, perception is up for grabs. It's not that Divine justice isn't working; it always is, as the *Gemora* points out (*Sanbedrin* 30b). It just prefers a smokeless gun at this stage of history, so evil only gets its due in ways that allows people to mistakenly think that it is having its cake and eating it too.

In the *Chumash*, when someone was guilty of the death penalty, the *Sanbedrin* took them out into public and executed them according to the Torah-prescribed form of death, of which there were four. If they had to receive lashes, they received them in an organized and obvious way, in order that "the people should see and fear."

In this week's *parsha* the Jewish people, as commanded by God, took revenge against Midian for their role in Bilaam's fiasco. All the guilty parties, including Bilaam himself, got their due. It must have been very satisfying for those on God's side, and frightening for those who weren't. Justice was swift and complete.

Today, a person who is supposed to die by stoning might fall off a roof while fixing it, or from a ladder while changing a lightbulb. A person who *balachbically* is supposed to be strangled to death might drown instead during some freak accident. And no one would be the wiser. Etc.

The *Gemora* says elsewhere that when God decides it is time to purge the world of *mamzerim*, every 60 - 70 years or so, He brings some major catastrophe onto mankind that kills all kinds of people (*Yerushalmi, Yevamos* 49b). No one dies accidentally, but it certainly doesn't seem as if the crisis was directed at any one particular group. The people do not see, and they certainly do not fear.

It can drive you nuts. Though, if you beg for justice to do its thing against evil it can easily spill over into your own camp. After all, even “good” people are “benefactors” of *bestei panim*. Can anyone be so sure of their righteousness that they can feel safe from the punishing hand of God. . . especially if God judges those close to Him to a hairsbreadth? Sometimes bad things happen to good people because they happen to deserve it, from the Heavenly *Bais Din’s* point of view.

What purpose does it serve? Why did Divine justice go underground once the Jewish people went into exile? How does it serve the purpose of Creation to allow so many people to become so confused about right and wrong, and feel free to choose the latter? It’s not that God took a break from history. He couldn’t even if He wanted to, not without Creation going poof. “Everything God does He does for the good” (*Brochos* 60b), but where’s the good in all of this?

Shabbos Day

IT COMES DOWN to an important discrepancy in points of view, *ours* and *God’s*. Most people are committed to personal comfort, to enjoying this world as much as they possibly can. We understand that sacrifices are a necessary part of life, but try to minimize them as much as possible. It’s the classic idea of having your cake and eat it too, which in this case means getting to the World to Come while enjoying this world in the meantime.

God, on the other hand, is committed to our *tikun*. He wants to help us become the very best version of ourselves *as He defines it*. That may be a mystery to us but it isn’t to God. So, when we say that everything God does is for the good, it means it that it will help our *tikun*. Though we may not know how at the time, we can trust that He does.

The amazing thing is how history can appear so random, or just as a constant series of causes and effects, and yet still deliver *tikun* to everyone God wants to rectify. In fact, this idea actually changes the way a person should look at history.

For example, the *Gemora* says that Rus was born to Moav in the merit of the 42 sacrifices Balak, the king of Moav offered to God to buy favor with Him to curse the Jewish people. The question is, would Balak have agreed that it was a merit for him if his illustrious descendant was destined to convert to the people he was trying to eliminate, and become the ancestress of their savior? And had Balak not offered the sacrifices, would Rus not have been born?

The question doesn’t come up because it is not the way history works. The starting

point was that Rus was destined to be born and convert. The real question is, what has to happen in history to make Rus become everything she eventually became?

It's like baking a cake. You can either just throw ingredients together and see what comes out, which is how many people live their lives. Or, you can start with an idea of what you want the cake to be like, and then reverse engineer it to figure out how to make it happen, as God does with history.

In other words, the starting was not Balak's sacrifices. The starting point was Rus, which required a Balak to offer 42 sacrifices. But that wasn't going to happen without a Bilaam, so God invited him via Balak in on the scheme. But that only happened because the Jewish people defeated Sichon and Og, etc.

The only problem is, oops. Balak's 42 sacrifices may have led to the eventual birth of Rus, but didn't his collaboration with Bilaam also lead to the fiasco in Shittim with the daughters of Midian? It led to the deaths of 200,000 Jews and Reuven, Gad, and Menashe choosing live east of the Jordan river, holding off the final redemption until this very day.

Collateral damage only?

Seudas Shlishis (*Massey*)

LIFE'S A JOURNEY. How many times have you heard that one? Okay, but how many times have you really thought about what that means?

For example, how many times have you considered what your final destination in life might be today. . .last week. . .last year? How many times have you considered it your entire life? Most people are just focused on getting through the week, and have some short term goals to keep. Besides, not knowing how long we have to live, who can really think about their final destination in life?

The *Pri Tzaddik* explains that it is no coincidence that the Jewish people made 42 stops throughout their 40 years in the desert. It was intentional. Every stop was another letter of God's 42-letter name that had to be acquired to achieve national completion. Each journey was to learn about the "letter," and each camp was for integrating it.

This means that whatever the Jewish people experienced on a leg of their journey was a lesson about the particular letter, and what it means in terms of character development. Each stop was for contemplating what was learned, and then adjusting perspective in life according to it.

The *Pri Tzaddik* says that this is true about every individual all the days of their life. Our weekday experiences are for learning about and preparing to acquire the spiritual level of the current letter we are working on, and each *Shabbos* is for integrating what we achieved the previous week.

And what we don't acquire of the 42-letter Name in one lifetime, we return in other lifetimes to complete. Bizarrely, all that we go through, what we plan and what don't plan, what we want and what we don't want, what we understand and what we don't understand, is all for this purpose. Even the "collateral damage."

So yes, Shittim was an unmitigated disaster that we should have tried to prevent at all costs. But the fact that we didn't and it happened anyhow? That makes it a part of the journey too. . . just like all the insanity happening around us today. It's hard to believe it could be part of the process too, but if we understood personal and national *tikun* like God does, we'd get it too.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 58

I HAVE MENTIONED the *sefer Acharis K'Reishis* before. It is a relatively new *sefer* but it is built upon the writings of the *Ramchal* and *Vilna Gaon* which explain how, as the title implies, the redemptions from Egypt and Bavel were the prototypes for the final redemption. Important clues to our redemption are revealed through what happened in those redemptions.

Part of the discussion includes the topic of evil, and how it tends to rise up and do its worst just prior to the final stage of redemption. Both the *Ramchal* and the *GR"A* emphasize that the evil we see is really good in disguise, and though it does damage for a time it will eventually turn around and be seen for its good, the "damage" too. Then everyone will see that evil worked for God too, which means it was never really evil, just perceived as evil by us.

Of course. For evil to have an independent reality it would have to exist outside of God, and there is no outside of God. Everything that exists does so inside God at all times and is therefore a part of God, even the most evil and the most *chutzpadik* people of all time. Ascribing independent powers to evil is basically what idol worship is all about.

That makes life tricky, at least for the people who cannot see past the evil. You have to be upset about injustice because that's how we show that we care about God and His Creation. He creates the perceivable injustices to see if we care, and how much, and to trip up those people who don't responsibly do their homework. Ultimately,

all of it is just part of the redemption process, perhaps even to expedite it.

As proponents of society become more anti-Torah and more annoying, you have to make a point of stepping back and going above it all. You have to meditate on *ain od Milvado* and recall how all of it is from God, even those people doing “evil” things in their war against Him. Just because they think they are their own bosses doesn’t mean that we should believe it too. That’s what *sblepps* us down into their world, this is what delights Amalek.