

Nitzavim Vayailech

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his last week I lost a good friend and mentor, Rabbi Yehudah Landy, *zt"l*, to a brain tumor at a young age. He was the one who first approached me in 1993 to write a *parsha* sheet which shortly after became "Perceptions." I have admired him ever since.

From the family line of the Vilna *Gaon*, he learned and knew huge amounts of Torah, and yet found time to teach, and be a *Tanachi* tour guide par excellence. But his natural humility meant that he never took himself too seriously, and it was never intimidating to be in his presence. May this be an *illuy Neshamah* for him, and may Rav Yehudah be a *meilitz yosbar* for all of *Klal Yisroel*, and may his family be comforted among the mourners of *Tzion* and *Yerusbalayim*.

The *Gemora* talks about how Rav Zeira "slipped by" Rav Yehudah on his way to *Eretz Yisroel* from *Bavel*. The former held that it was a positive *mitzvah* to remain in *Bavel* until God came for us. Rav Zeira didn't want to wait, and didn't (*Kesuvos* 110b).

What was the basis of Rav Yehudah's opinion? The verse from *Yirmiyahu* that says, "They shall be brought to *Bavel*, and there they shall be until the day I remember them" (*Yirmiyahu* 27:22). In other words, Rav Yehudah held that there was a positive *mitzvah* to remain in *Bavel* until God came for them and brought them back to *Eretz Yisroel*.

Rav Zeira obviously held differently. For one, he and Rav Yehudah did not live during the exile to which the verse applies, the first one to *Bavel*. Quite the contrary, three

more exiles had since occurred: Median, Greek, and Roman. And besides, God had already “remembered” the Jewish people with the victory over Haman and the return to *Eretz Yisroel* from *Bavel* of many Jews during Ezra’s time.

Tosfos also asks the question but only answers, “Some say that the verse was also particular about the second [exile].” But why, and what about the third and fourth exiles?

The *sefer Acharis K’Reishis* gives a more explanatory answer. He says that Rav Yehudah wasn’t focusing on the leaving of *Bavel* per se, but on how they were meant to leave *Bavel*, only after God “remembered” them. He held that this detail of the verse was not unique to leaving *Bavel*, but that it applied to the leaving of any exile, and hence Rav Yehudah’s disapproval of Rav Zeira’s desire to make *aliyah*.

But, says *Acharis K’Reishis*, we have learned from the *GR”A* that every redemption has two phases, what he called *Pekidab* and *Zechirab*. Both mean “remembering,” except that, the *GR”A* explains, a *pekidab* is a short and small remembering that signals the beginning of a redemption. A *zechirab* is the obvious and usually spectacular completion of the redemption.

The historic example of a *pekidab* is when *Koresh*, king of Persia, miraculously permitted the Jews to return to *Eretz Yisroel* to rebuild their temple in 3390, only 52 years into a 70 year exile. Only 42,000 Jews answered the call, and they got as far as building the foundation of the Temple when, after two years, *Koresh* rescinded his offer. Apparently, that is all God was prepared to allow at the time.

It wasn’t until 18 years later that Haman rose to power, threatened to wipe out the Jews, and was toppled by Divine Providence. That led to *zechirab* and the *Purim* miracle, finally ending the Babylonian-Median exile. Fully remembered by God, many of the Jews of that time returned to *Eretz Yisroel*.

Shabbos Day

THAT’S THE POINT. The verse from *Yirmiyahu* uses the Hebrew word *pokdei* for *remembering*. The implication of this, according to the *GR”A*, is that we don’t need a *full* remembering to leave exile for *Eretz Yisroel*, just a partial one. In fact, he explains, it just has to be something *geulah*-like and it doesn’t even have to stay around. It just has to have occurred to be a sign that, no matter how much it looks like the opposite is true, redemption is underway.

For the *GR”A* in his time, one such *pekidab* was history itself. According to the *Zohar*, 5500 (1740 CE) from Creation during the sixth millennium was equivalent to

the beginning of the day part (day follows night in a Jewish day) of the sixth day of the week, or *Erev Shabbos*. Thus, the last 500 years of the millennium are considered to the *Erev Shabbos* of history, and therefore it is the time to get into redemption mode.

For this reason, at the age of 20 the *Gaon* from Vilna began to focus his efforts on returning to the land and rebuilding the *yishuv*, as prophesied in this week's *parsha*:

And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse which I have set before you that you will consider in your heart, among all the nations where God your God has banished you, and you will return to God, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you this day to you and your children, then, God, your God, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you. He will once again gather you from all the nations, where God, your God, had dispersed you. Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, God, your God, will gather you from there, and He will take you from there. And God, your God, will bring you to the land which your forefathers possessed, and you [too] will take possession of it, and He will do good to you, and He will make you more numerous than your forefathers.
(*Devarim* 30:1-5)

Eventually the *GR"A* prepared and sent his trusted students and their families to confront all the elements and begin the long, dangerous, and arduous task of rebuilding the Jewish presence on the land. This began back in the early 1800s and their efforts have evolved over centuries into a highly developed state with half of the world's Jewish population living in it.

Pekidab? There have been plenty, including the official formation of a Jewish state with the world's approval. Many might say, "Who cares if gentile governments sanction the formation of a secular state? What does a Torah Jew care about any of that?"

Well, according to the *GR"A*, just as the Jewish people could only return to *Eretz Yisroel* with Koresh's permission during *Golus Bavel*, likewise did we have to get the permission of the nations of the world to reclaim our Jewish homeland and re-settle it in our time. It's part of the redemption process when we don't deserve redemption outright.

That's the "problem" with a *pekidab* versus a *zechirah*. If you don't realize what it is, you'll miss it. If you don't understand how it works, you'll overlook it. Then you'll have to wait until the full *zechirah* to understand and appreciate what by-passed you

along the way to redemption.

Seudas Shlishis

LIFE IS SO intellectually challenging. If we didn't know better, and some seem not to, we'd think that God is a major trickster Who enjoys throwing mankind off His trail. There is just so much confusion and misguided thinking that could all be straightened out in a moment if God would only be heard saying something to set us right. His silence is deafening and *extremely* misleading.

But the real problem is not God, but all the noise that man makes. The prophet Eliyahu told us something very important when it comes to hearing God:

He said: "Go out and stand in the mountain before God, behold! God passes, and a great and strong wind splitting mountains and shattering boulders before God, but God was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake —God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake fire, God was not in the fire, and after the fire a still small sound. (I Melachim 19:11-12)

The Torah calls Moshe *Rabbeinu* the humblest man to have walked the face of the earth. Was it just paying a compliment to the greatest prophet to have ever lived, or explaining to us why he became such a great prophet? Was it telling us why Moshe's prophecy was greater than Miriam's and Aharon's, whose criticism was based upon their thinking that they were equals in this regard?

A still small sound can refer to more than just an actual sound. We say "I hear that" but we do not necessarily refer to sound per se, but to the understanding of an idea. Remember that bush that Moshe noticed wasn't burning and then he approached, only to find God through it? That too was a *pekidab* that might have gone unnoticed by anyone else who was not as spiritually sensitive as Moshe was.

Hearing God in history is a merit that one achieves by developing their level of spiritual sensitivity. This is what gives a person, like Mordechai in his time, the ability to look at history and see God communicating through it, to see and recognize a *pekidab* when it happens. It's the difference between being ready for redemption and being caught by surprise when it happens.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 65

I AM TO my beloved and my beloved is to me. That's what *Ehul* alludes to (in Hebrew) with its letters. It is talking about the relationship between God and the Jewish people, which given all the curses in last week's *parsha*, is hard to

understand. Last week sounded more like hateful spouses on their way to divorce court.

The answer is right in the verse itself. It says that God is only our beloved when we are His. And when we're not, then we suffer the scorn of a "spouse" that has been rejected. Then it is amazing how quickly a great love can turn to a great hatred, and the consequences that can result.

Cheating on a spouse does not always mean with another person. It can also mean with another thing. Divorces have occurred in recent times just because a spouse has spent too much time on the Internet. Sometimes business can interfere with *shalom bayis*, and even Torah learning.

Ain od Milvado means that God is our only partner in life. There should be none other than Him, meaning that even when we have to pair up with other people or things, it is always with the perspective that it is God working with us through them, just as He does through angels.

If we go into *Rosh Hashbanah* and the *Aseres Yemai Tesbuwah* with God as our only beloved, we will come out of them as His beloved as well.

Thanks for reading another year and I wish you a *Shannah Tovah*,

Pinchas Winston