

The Canaanite King of Arad heard... of the approach of Bnei Yisrael. (33:40)

Rashi teaches that the king of Arad heard of the passing of Aharon *HaKohen*, thereby signaling the end of the protective barrier of *Ananei HaKavod*, the Pillars of Cloud. They felt that it was a message that the Jewish People were now vulnerable to attack. Apparently, when the king of Arad attacked, the Jewish People had no idea that it was linked to the passing of Aharon *HaKohen*. Indeed, they attributed Aharon's death to his participation in the sin of *Mei Merivah*, the waters of strife, when the stone was hit instead of being spoken to. The attack from Arad was, as far as they were concerned, an isolated, unrelated event. It was only now, as Moshe *Rabbeinu* was reflecting on their various encampments in the wilderness, that they put two and two together and realized the true motivation for Arad's attack.

Is this not always the way it is? We go through life with nary a care in the world. Things happen – events occur – but, in our minds, they are unrelated. We are clueless to what takes place around us, because we are not prepared to think, to ask the “what” and the “why” – because it might impinge on our comfort zone. It is so much easier to travel the road of life without applying ourselves to its implied messages. It is only later, in retrospect, out of hindsight, often when it is too late to effect a change, that we wake up and wonder: Could things have been different?

We view life through the prism of our mortal vision, which is severely restricted. We see only what is available to us, and, furthermore, most often, only what we want to see. Thus, we are confronted with challenges which, for many, are insurmountable. We are not all capable of “waiting” until we are enlightened by the passage of time. A few years ago, I came across a *dvar Torah* in which *Horav Yissachar Frand* quoted a beautiful exposition from **Horav Avraham Yehudah HaKohen Schwartz, zl**, author of the *Teshuvos Kol Aryeh*, which graces the *hakdamah*, preface, to his *sefer*.

When Yaakov *Avinu* was descending to Egypt, he was concerned, and rightfully so; this was a land of perversion and evil. Hashem told him, “Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up; and Yosef shall place his hand over your eyes” (*Bereishis* 46:3,4). Concerning the end of the *pasuk*, “And Yosef shall place his hand over your eyes,” The **Zohar HaKadosh** makes a cryptic comment, “This is what the secret of *Krias Shema* is all about.”

Exactly what is the *Zohar* teaching us? The *Kol Aryeh* illuminates the *Zohar* based on a passage in the *Talmud Pesachim* 50a, where *Chazal* distinguish between *Olam Ha'zeh*, this world, and *Olam Habba*, the World to Come. In this world, when one hears good news, he recites the blessing, *HaTov u'Meitiv*, “He, Who is good and does good”; on hearing bad news, he recites, *Baruch Dayan ha'Emes*, “Blessed is the true Judge.” In *Olam Habba*, however, only one *brachah* is recited, “He Who is good and does good.” *Chazal* apply this teaching to explain the *pasuk* in *Zecharyah* 14:9, *V'hayah Hashem l'Melech al kol ha'aretz, bayom ha'hu yiheyeh Hashem Echad u'Shemo Echad*,

“And Hashem will be King over the entire land (world); on that day He will be One and His Name will be One.”

In his commentary to the *Talmud Pesachim*, the **Tzlach** explains that, in this world, we see events as they appear before our eyes. A tragedy is viewed as a tragic, unfortunate experience. Occasions which appear to be good and wonderful, are, likewise, viewed as such. True, there are those special, spiritually-elevated individuals who are able to confront the unfortunate with extreme faith, uttering the famous dictum *gam zu l'tovah*, “This too is for the good.” This, however, is not the norm. Most people perceive a dichotomy between “good” and “bad” news. Thus, they recite two different blessings, each addressing the individual situation – as they see it at the moment – here and now. In *Olam Habba*, when we will no longer be restricted by time, we will be able to see events in the context of the bigger picture. We will, therefore, recite only one *brachah*, because we will see clearly that everything is inherently good.

The *Kol Aryeh* quotes his *Rebbe*, the venerable **Chasam Sofer, zl**, who explicates Moshe *Rabbeinu's* dialogue with Hashem. Moshe asked, *Har'eini na es Kevodecha*, “Show me, please, Your Glory” (*Shemos* 33:18). *Chazal* explain this as a reiteration of the age-old request, “Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?” Hashem responded, “You will see My Back, but My Face may not be seen” (*Shemos* 33:23).

The *Chasam Sofer* presents the idea, “My Face may not be seen,” as a reference to understanding the deeper meaning of events as they occurred. By nature of his corporeality and limited vision, man is incapable of understanding the idea of the suffering of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked. It runs counter to everything in which we believe. Only when man stands with Hashem and looks “back,” reviewing all of history in one perspective, is the unique vision of seeing things in their proper context within his grasp, thereby enabling him to appreciate that all events are for the good. This is what is meant by looking from the “Back” – in retrospect, through hindsight and total vision, unhampered by the restrictive parameters of time.

This is the meaning of *Hashem Elokeinu* – Hashem (Who) is our G-d – *Hashem Echad* – Hashem is One: We believe that *Elokeinu*, which is derived from *Elokim* – the Name of G-d which reflects His Attribute of Strict Justice (*Middas HaDin*) – and the Name of Hashem, *Yud Kay Vov Kay* – the Name which represents His Attribute of Mercy (*Middas HaRachamim*) – are *Echad*, one and the same. Thus, the seminal declaration, *Shema Yisrael*, the verse that accompanies the Jew as he leaves his mortal life, is, in fact, an affirmation of the belief that while, at times, Hashem appears to be acting with Strict Justice and, at times, He seems to show boundless compassion, it all emanates from the Name Hashem, the One G-d – the Name *Yud Kay Vov Kay* – the Name of Hashem which is associated with mercy.

We are taught in the *Talmud Berachos* 13b that Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi would cover his eyes when he recited *Shema*. Why do we cover our eyes? Based upon the above, we understand that *Shema* declares our belief that whatever we confront is the result of Hashem's Mercy. Let us not

fool ourselves. So many troubles appear before our eyes that this becomes increasingly difficult to accept. It is difficult for us to say unequivocally that it is all good – when our “eyes” tell us it is not good. Therefore, it is best that we cover our eyes and do not look. If we do not “see” the troubles – even allegorically – they will be much more palatable.

What greater example of *gam zu l'tovah*, all of this is for the good, is there than the life of Yosef *HaTzaddik*? He was: maligned and hated by his brothers; hounded and thrown into a pit; sold like cattle to pagan merchants who, in turn, sold him as a slave in a country where hedonism had been elevated to the level of art; libeled by his master's wife; placed in a dungeon with Egyptian derelicts for twelve years. What must have coursed through Yosef's mind during all of this misery? Ultimately, the dungeon was his source of salvation from which he rose to stardom as the viceroy of Egypt and savior of his family.

Yaakov *Avinu* feared descending to Egypt. He knew the vicissitudes, both physical and spiritual, to which his family would be subject. Hashem assuaged him, saying, “Yosef will put his hands over your eyes.” Despite everything that Yosef went through – he came out on top, with everything working for the best. “This is the secret of *Krias Shema*,” says the *Zohar* – “*Hashem Elokeinu – Hashem Echad*.” The *Krias Shema* tells us that it is all good; it will all work itself out.

I could have selected from a plethora of stories that underscore the idea that we are clueless as we go through life. We must maintain our conviction and believe that everything will work out. We may not ignore any incident by relegating it to the dung heap of coincidence, because there is no such thing as coincidence. Everything is part of Hashem's Master Plan. The following episode – which my *Rav*, Rabbi Aharon Dovid Lebovics, related this past *Shabbos* – accentuates this idea.

This story was originally told by the hero's son, who is a fine *ben Torah*. His father was a pilot, originally trained by the Israeli air force. Upon retirement from the military, he took a position as a commercial airline pilot. Slowly, he began to gravitate towards Jewish observance. Although he had been raised in a totally non-observant home, he felt a tug at his heart, knowing that, for a Jew, observance is like air: one must have it to survive. He was far from observant, but he was not prepared to renege Judaism totally. Therefore, when his flight schedule for the next few months showed that he would have to fly on *Rosh Hashanah*, he immediately called around to see if another pilot was willing to trade days with him. One pilot agreed, but, in order to make it worth it for him, he wanted one more flight. In other words, he would take the *Rosh Hashanah* shift on the condition that the Jewish pilot gave him one other flight.

The Jewish pilot needed the money, but he felt committed enough that he was not going to fly on *Rosh Hashanah*, so he relinquished one more flight. That second flight which he gave up to allow him to observe *Rosh Hashanah* was United Airlines flight 93, which was a tragic victim of a terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. By trading a few dollars for his religious conviction, he ended up saving his own life.