

It was at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers. (38:1)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* 85:1) make a fascinating observation, one over which we, as Jews living *b'ikvessa d'Moshiach*, during the epoch of *Moshiach*, should carefully ruminate again and again. The Torah relates that Yehudah went down from his brothers and turned away toward an Adulmite man whose name was Chirah – a seemingly benign statement. *Chazal* explain that Hashem was quite “occupied” during this seemingly innocuous period. The *Midrash* opens with a *pasuk* from Yirmiyahu (29:11) which implies (as per *Chazal's* interpretation) that Hashem knows what is going on in everyone's mind. He knows that while others are each individually engaged in thinking about other (personal) things, He is thinking about how to bestow the ultimate good upon the Jewish people. In other words, we are clueless about what Hashem is doing – but He is doing everything for us.

Having said this, *Chazal* make the following observation: The tribes were preoccupied with selling Yosef. Yosef was preoccupied with his sackcloth and fasting (over being separated from his father's house). Reuven was preoccupied with his sackcloth and fasting over missing out on the opportunity to save Yosef from being sold to the Yishmaelim. Yaakov *Avinu* was mourning what appeared to be Yosef's death at the hand of an animal. Yehudah was preoccupied with looking for a wife. During this very time, when each of the brothers and Yaakov were involved in personal grief, Hashem was busy creating the light of *Moshiach*. (This means that, while *Moshiach* had not yet been created, the seeds from which he would eventually emerge were being set into place.)

Yehudah's role in the sale of Yosef caused him to lose his leadership position in the family. Thus, the term “going down,” which led to his seeking a wife with whom he eventually fathered three sons, two of whom died untimely deaths. This set the stage for Yehudah's meeting his daughter-in-law, Tamar, and marrying her, which provided the union that resulted in the birth of Peretz, the progenitor of David *HaMelech* and *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*. All these harmless – seemingly unrelated – events were orchestrated by Hashem in order to prepare the scenario for the birth of *Moshiach*. (Obviously, this is merely a superficial treatment of the subject.)

We derive from *Chazal* that even amid the bitter darkness that enveloped Yosef, the darkness that preempted *galus Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian exile; even during the time when all of the Jewish leadership – Yaakov, Reuven, Yehudah, Yosef – was beset and submerged in grief and mourning, Hashem was planting the seeds, laying the framework for the future redemption. Light emerges from the darkness. Despite being plunged into the blackest nights, the deepest darkness, the Jew knows not to despair. Hashem will bring about an emergence of bright light from within the bleak, heavy darkness.

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, notes that following the cataclysmic conflagration that destroyed the major Torah centers of Europe and with it the lives of six million of our brothers and sisters, the

Ponovezher Rav, zl, escaped to *Eretz Yisrael*, physically broken and emotionally traumatized beyond human endurance. He did not allow his personal grief to overwhelm him, as he immediately occupied himself with rebuilding Torah from the ashes, a task he would prioritize for the rest of his life. One has no “down time” when it affects the building of Torah.

Rav Shternbuch relates that he heard from *Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl* (author of *Seridei Eish*), that in the Warsaw Ghetto weddings were being held daily. This was despite the bitter, tragic fact that every day thousands of Jews were being loaded into the infamous cattle cars and sent to Treblinka to be murdered. The Jews never gave up. The weddings kept on coming. It happened more than once that the Nazi murderers would crash the wedding party and haul everyone away to their deaths. Yet, the weddings continued. Parents married off their children. They always held on to defiant hope. At least, their child will have been united with another Jewish *neshamah*, soul. They would arrive together before Hashem’s Heavenly Throne, united as husband and wife. This is how a Jew thinks. This is how a Jew lives. This is how a Jew dies.

Rav Shternbuch enjoins us constantly to review, especially during periods of distress, the powerful words of *Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuvah 2:5)*, “And one who trusts in Hashem should hold on during the vision of his distress; for the darkness will be the cause of the light; as it is written (*Michah 7:8*), ‘Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; since I have fallen, I rise again, since I sit in darkness, Hashem is my light.’ As our sages taught, (*Midrash Tehillim 22*), ‘If I had not fallen, I would not have risen; ‘If I had not sat in darkness, Hashem would not have been my light.’”