



issue #860
perceptions

Ki Seitzai

You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear God. (Devarim 25:17-18)

I MENTIONED YEARS ago that I was traveling when the movie about the Titanic came out. At one airport, in the Duty Free section, they had books piled high on a table that was obviously part of the movie promotion. Fascinated, I picked one up and went to the pictures at the middle of the book.

The sinking of the Titanic was something almost everyone knew about, even 85 years later. They even had a camp song that recalled the tragedy, and how “they thought it was a ship that water would never go through.” They found out differently after hitting an iceberg.

What a “coincidence.” I don’t know how many ships have been sunken by icebergs, but none of them ever boasted that they couldn’t be. The Talmud has an expression that says, “Do not open your mouth to the Satan” (Kesubos 8b), because doing so can get his interest and inspire him to cause mischief, real SERIOUS mischief. That’s what must have happened to the Titanic.

At least that is what I had assumed, more-or-less, until I saw a picture in the book, I think the first one. I had never seen the photo before or even heard about it. Seeing it though really took me aback, and I always wonder why people have to go so far and risk so much just to be cocky.

What was the picture? It was a bunch of passengers holding a long banner on the deck of the Titanic before sailing that read: A SHIP THAT EVEN GOD CAN’T SINK.

Really? You had to be SO proud? You had to take it SO far? Remember Titus who took on God, and who was taken down after only two years in power . . . by a gnat (Gittin 56b)? Remember Apollo 13, that not only did not make it to the moon as planned, but almost did not make it back home either:

Apollo 13 was the seventh manned mission in the Apollo space program and the third intended to land on the Moon. The craft was launched on April 11, 1970, at 14:13 EST (19:13 UTC) from the Kennedy Space Center, Florida, but the lunar landing was aborted after an oxygen tank exploded two days later, crippling the Service Module (SM) upon which the Command Module (CM) had depended. Despite great hardship caused by limited power, loss of cabin heat, shortage of potable water, and the critical need to make makeshift repairs to the carbon dioxide re-

moval system, the crew returned safely to Earth on April 17, 1970, six days after launch. (Wikipedia, Apollo 13)

It wasn't the first disaster to happen in the space program. Apollo 1 didn't even leave the earth and all three astronauts died in a terrible fire. But there were some unusual occurrences that added EXTRA drama to this story. The principle of, "This is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes" (Tehillim 118:23), makes one wonder about these unusual circumstances, and the Divine Providence behind the incident.

This is the background to that dramatic story:

According to the standard crew rotation in place during the Apollo program, the prime crew for Apollo 13 would have been the backup crew for Apollo 10 with Mercury and Gemini veteran L. Gordon Cooper in command. That crew was composed of L. Gordon Cooper, Jr (Commander), Donn F. Eisele (Command Module Pilot), and Edgar D. Mitchell (Lunar Module Pilot). Deke Slayton, NASA's Director of Flight Crew Operations, never intended to rotate Cooper and Eisele to another mission, as both were out of favor with NASA management for various reasons . . . For the first time ever, Slayton's recommendation was rejected by management, who felt that Shepard needed more time to train properly for a lunar flight, as he had only recently benefited from experimental surgery to correct an inner ear disorder which had kept him grounded since his first Mercury flight in 1961. Thus, Lovell's crew, backup for the historic Apollo 11 mission and therefore slated for Apollo 14, was swapped with

Shepard's crew and the original crew selection for the mission became: James A. Lovell, Jr., T. Kenneth Mattingly II, and Fred W. Haise, Jr. . . . Three days before launch, at the insistence of the Flight Surgeon, Swigert was moved to the prime crew [to replace Mattingly]. (Wikipedia, Apollo 13)

Though 13 is considered a bad luck number in the secular world, it is the opposite from a Torah perspective. So, we won't attribute the Apollo mission's failure to its number. Is there anything that MIGHT have had something to do with all the extraordinary circumstances involved in making the Apollo 13 mission so spectacular?

Honestly, who even knows, besides God Himself? But, it is interesting to point out, given the other stories above, that Lovell is quoted as saying, regarding Neil Armstrong's dramatic first walk on the moon, "From now on we'll live in a world where man has walked on the Moon. It's not a miracle, we just decided to go."

Hmm. Miracle implies God, and taking God out of something as MIRACULOUS as space travel, given all the THOUSANDS of things that had to be built, and go right, as the Apollo 13 crew were reminded, to make a mission succeed. Perhaps had Commander Lovell kept that in mind and spoken differently about the moon walk, he might have walked on the moon himself as he had so wanted.

It never pays to challenge God. It's one thing to not follow His will, but it is a whole different level of "bad" to actually CONFRONT Him. It's not that He gets offended and has to respond in kind. It's more that the Chillul Hashem created by the brazenness then needs fixing up.

The sinking of the Titanic humbled the world. Titus' death showed God's ability to get at any person He wants, any way He wants, whenever He wants. The Apollo 13 mission caused hundreds of thousands of people around the world to pray for their safe return, to ask God to MIRACULOUSLY spare the astronauts from sure death.

Challenging God, on any level, even inadvertently, is suicidal, at least to some degree. It unnecessarily adds additional risk to life. And, though it may not make a person an Amaleki, it is still a very Amaleki thing to do. Even a disbeliever would be wise to exercise a little fear of God in life. He may not be able to praise God, but he certainly shouldn't disparage Him either.

The rule is, if you're not going to sanctify God through what you do, then you will sanctify God by what happens THROUGH you. It wasn't enough for one scientist to show how Creation began with a big bang. He insisted that it also proved that God didn't have to be involved in Creation. I'm not saying he suffered terribly for it. I'm just saying that I for one was super-impressed by what he was MIRACULOUSLY able to accomplish in spite of his extreme handicap.

My closing statement is the one from the Talmud, at the end of Maseches Krisos. Someone who "challenged" God received their due in kind, to which one rabbi commented: Blessed be God who paid Yissachar of Kefar Barkai his due [in this world] (Krisos 28b)! Apparently God does, so why provoke Him?

dedication opportunity

Reincarnation is a hot topic, as I have written about already. This has caught the attention of my distributor of Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Hardcopy), who would like me to package up "Reincarnation Clarified" and "What Goes Around," into a single hardcopy book for worldwide distribution. To cover the cost of the printing, I need to raise the money through dedications. If you are interested in dedicating the entire sefer, or contributing to its publication, please let me know at pinchasw@thirtysix.org at your earliest convenience.

Also, attached is a sample of my latest book, "See Ya: Regarding the Downfall of American Society." This is a book in need of dedication as well. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

connecting the dots

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This last past Shabbos, I was reminded, by the Vilna Gaon and Ramchal, just how important HOPE in redemption is necessary for bringing it. Clearly we will not have the sufficient merit to actually be worthy of redemption. If anything Yechezkel has said, our LACK of merit may make it impossible NOT to bring redemption.

Don't get excited and start planning to rack up demerits. Yes, demerit may bring redemption faster, but no, not in any way that we will enjoy. If anything, redemption will only occur THIS way after the War of Gog and Magog. We do NOT want the War of Gog and Magog, even for the sake of redemption.

The ONE mitigating factor, explained the GR"A and Ramchal, is HOPE in redemption, BELIEF that it WILL happen, even if we ARE unworthy and it seems, historically, unlikely. Hope in redemption is this mystical element that seems to transcend anything that can stand in its way, and open redemption doors that we think are shut.

We've already discussed that it's one of the six things we're asked about on our final day of judgment.¹ I've written about how the Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan counts anticipating the redemption as part of the first of the Ten Commandments, the one about believing in God. We've mentioned Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein's harsh words for those who do not daily discuss impending redemption.²

What we have not discussed much is what it means to hope for redemption in THIS generation. During the Holocaust, it was clear what it meant. It meant believing that the Hell the Nazis created for the Jewish people on earth would finally end, and lead to a better world. Before that, it meant that the pogroms would finally end, and there would still be Jews alive to enjoy it.

Before that, hope in redemption meant that the Crusades, or the Romans before them, would cease to torture, murder, or force convert every Jew along their bloody way. It's easy to figure out what HOPE IN REDEMPTION means

¹ Shabbos 31a.

² Emunas HaGeulah, Ohr Yechezkel.

when you live in total fear for your life, and have little or no means of survival.

But that's not today, thank God. Today we are not hunted in most countries. Today we have jobs, food, clothing, and nice homes. Today, for the most part, we not only know that our children will grow up and be married, but that we will probably have enough money to marry them off. Today, it's not so clear what it means to hope for redemption when it is easier to forget that we haven't experienced it yet.

As the GR"A points out, redemption is not only about religious freedom, or just freedom itself. That's more a by-product of redemption, though to many it may be everything. Rather he explains redemption is about Kiddush Hashem, about the sanctification of God's Name in the eyes EVERYONE.

It's not called full redemption if a single atheist, or even agnostic remains. It is certainly not called redemption while Torah and those who learn it are not taken seriously and given the proper respect. It is not called redemption while the Jewish people "bleed" members to other religions or counter-philosophies, religious or political, and children find secular life far more appealing than a Torah one.

And how can we act as if we have been redeemed while we remain without a Temple, and a mosque is in its place instead, surrounded by churches, all on HOLY soil? Are we redeemed when we have to protect the Torah world from our own kind, and Jews who go out of their way to secularize the religious community?

Enough Jews live in poverty to remind us that redemption is not yet here, not completely at least. Enough health problems affect the nation to make it clear that we

are far off from living completely in the Messianic Era. It could change in a moment, but until it does, we're very much on THIS side of the Moshiach-line. How we get to the other side is very much a matter of HOPE in redemption.