

Dayenu, Pesach 2024

Moshe Taragin

As Pesach approaches, our minds and hearts are flooded with a range of conflicting emotions. October 7th was the darkest day in modern Jewish history. Our people were savagely attacked in their homeland. We incorrectly assumed that rape, murder, and torture of innocent and defenseless Jews were scenes from our painful exile and could not occur in Israel. That day left us with so many questions, chief among them: how could Hashem allow this to happen?

For the past six months, as we have battled to defend our land and our people, Hashem's presence hasn't always been evident. In a world of pure evil, rabid hatred, and fabricated truths it was sometimes difficult to detect the presence of Hashem. We have lived through an agonizing period of *hester panim* in which the face of Hashem is concealed. The Pesach hagaddah phrase which best typifies this period is the lament of v'hi she'amda: "in every generation they rise up against us to annihilate us". So many who we thought were enlightened and who we thought possessed moral conscience have risen up against us in fanatical hatred. The world has felt very dark and very broken.

A week ago, on motzei Shabbat, this reality partially shifted. On one remarkable evening Hashem's presence became more apparent. We were savagely attacked by an Iranian missile blitz aimed to inflict enormous casualties upon our innocent civilians. Astonishingly, almost none of these death warheads penetrated Israeli airspace and no lives were lost. Hashem enabled our military scientists and engineers to develop a system to barrier us from lethal weapons which, literally, fall from the sky.

The Talmud Yerushalmi reports that on the first Saturday night after creation Hashem gifted Adam with fire, signaling His desire that Man's divinely endowed creativity be employed to perfect Hashem's deliberately imperfect world. This past motzei Shabbat we deployed Hashem's gift of creativity to preserve human life. In the wake of this extraordinary evening Hashem's hand has become more easily visible.

When Remedies Come First

We also felt His love and caring. The gemara I Megillah comments that during dark periods, Hashem's presence is manifested when a cure appears prior to an illness or the refu'ah prior to the makkah. A few years ago, the world suffered an unforeseen pandemic which disrupted every aspect of our reality. The outbreak of the Corona virus launched a frenzied worldwide campaign to develop a vaccine. Though a vaccine solution was ultimately developed, it arrived too late to save those who had already succumbed to the disease. In this instance the world didn't receive the cure before the illness struck.

This past motzei Shabbat was different. We had been developing anti-missile defense systems for years. Yet, despite its importance, this project went relatively unappreciated, save for those directly involved. Until this past motzei Shabbat. Facing a massive and unprecedented attack from a range of different missiles we discovered that, in our case, the remedy was delivered prior to the threat. Through human agents, Hashem delivered a solution even before the peril surfaced.

A War in Heaven

The evening wasn't just miraculous, it was also historically resonant. As I sat in my safe area waiting for the danger to pass, I recalled the Jews of Egypt on the night of yetziat Mitzrayim, trapped in their own homes, waiting for the danger overhead to pass. Just as they awoke the next morning to safety, Israelis awoke feeling sheltered and protected. Death had literally passed over us. It was a night of protection, similar to an earlier original night of protection, at the dawn of Jewish history.

Though the similarities of this miracle to the plague of the first born were obvious, I was more intrigued by the similarities to the plague of barad. This loud and fiery hailstorm was initiated by Moshe Rabeinu lifting his hands to the heavens. All the previous plagues had occurred at ground level. The Nile was converted to blood, reptiles swarmed over the country, Egypt teemed with vermin, and dead animal carcasses

dotted the land. The initial series of plagues unfolded beneath the feet of the Egyptians.

Barad, however, redirected Egyptian eyes heavenward. Once their eyes were lifted to heaven they never returned to Earth, as the ensuing plagues of locust and darkness, and the massacre of the first born were all centered in heaven.

Directing their attention skyward lessened the Egyptians about a God who inhabited the heavens. Hashem lies beyond human imagination and cannot be captured by human thought or terminology. This hierarchy between Man and Hashem is exemplified by the distance and altitude between them. While humans inhabit the Earth, Hashem resides in Heaven. The loud and crackling thunder of barad, coupled with the fiery hailstorm stressed the awesome might of a God who exists beyond human imagination. Shifting the Egyptian's attention toward heaven visually underscored the difference between Man and Hashem.

This past Saturday night was an extremely loud battle waged entirely in heaven. Unlike the ground invasion of Oct 7th, the entire war was waged above. Ballistic missiles leave our atmosphere and reach the edge of space. Wars in heaven have a divine feel to them. It was deeply symbolic that, with Hashem's assistance, we defeated our enemies on His turf and in His realm. Hashem delivered us the technology to triumph in His realm.

We Are Not Alone

Additionally, it was significant that the defense of our land was achieved through international cooperation. For the past 75 years we have stood alone, facing a consortium of hostile enemies as we defended our rights to our ancient homeland. This past Saturday night a collation of our allies helped defend Israel. Jewish history is cyclical. What happened before will happen again. But it also changes and advances. Just as we recall and celebrate the past, we must also appreciate when history evolves.

This Pesach we juggle mixed and even contradictory feelings. The long road of Jewish history reminds us that sometimes we see Hashem's

presence and sometimes we don't. Faith should steady us, enabling us to both to weather difficult periods and to celebrate our success. Hashem is always present supervising human affairs. Sometimes we understand His ways and sometimes we don't. Faith should help smooth out the differences between periods of clarity and periods of confusion.

We must also thank Hashem for the minor miracles even if our larger victory isn't complete. Despite the joy and triumph of this past Saturday night we are still entangled in a very delicate and fragile predicament. The Iranian threat is far from neutralized, and we still face a complex situation in Azza. Our hostages are still suffering and families across Israel face a heartbreaking first Pesach without their loved ones. It is naïve and insensitive to celebrate the past week's miracle while ignoring the continuing danger and the larger tragedy.

Yet we thank Hashem for mini-victories even if we can't yet see the fuller picture. Dayenu. Step by Step. We appreciate all we have been given, while we yearn for much that is missing. Even if we don't achieve everything, we thank Hashem. Dayenu.

Life isn't binary and doesn't easily break down into moments of darkness and moments of light. Darkness and light overlap. Joy and sadness go hand in hand. This Pesach, celebrate Jewish triumphs of the past and the present without whitewashing suffering or simplifying struggle.

In every generation they rise against us. Yet we thank You. Dayenu.

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