

DESTINY TODAY

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The plot thickens. At the end of last week's portion, Yoseph accused the brothers of stealing his magic goblet. Yehuda, in charge of the troupe, denies even the remotest possibility that any one of the brothers could be a thief. So confident was Yehuda that he pre-ordained the would-be thief to a death penalty and offered the remaining group of nine brothers as slaves were if the egregious accusations proved correct. Unfortunately, Yehuda was unaware of Yoseph's precontrived ruse of planting the goblet in Benjamin's sack. This week's portion begins as Yoseph wants to keep Binyamin, and only Binyamin, as a slave, something that Yehuda will battle to the very end to prevent. Yoseph and his brothers confront each other. In a mixed array of rage, fury, and emotional pleas, Yehuda bargains with Yoseph. Almost threatening war over the matter, Yehuda explains that "Benjamin cannot be taken as a slave as he has left an old father who awaits his return. If he will not return to his father, the old man will die of grief and aggravation. After all, he already lost one son to a terrible accident."

After seeing the concern that Yehuda has for his younger brother, Yoseph makes the startling revelation. "I am Joseph Is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3) Yoseph then forgives the brothers and tells them that his episode was divinely preordained. It set the path as a lifeline from the ensuing famine. He then sends his brothers back to Canaan to bring his father, but before doing so he presents each of them with a set of clothes. However, Yoseph gives his youngest brother Benjamin five sets of clothing and three hundred pieces of silver (Genesis 45:22). The Talmud (Megillah 16b) asks a very poignant question. How is it that Yoseph, a victim of jealousy, provoked his brothers by favoring Benjamin? Didn't jealousy spur the hatred that led to the original calamity? Why didn't he learn from past experience, not to show favoritism? The Talmud explains that Yoseph was very calculated in his actions. He was alluding to a similar event that would occur in the future. After being saved from the gallows, Mordechai, a descendent of Benjamin, miraculously rose to power and prestige. He was gifted with five changes of clothing as he left the palace of Achashveirosh. Benjamin's five changes of clothing were symbolic of a future sartorial gift that Benjamin's descendent would one day receive. Some commentaries ask a powerful question. Obviously, Yoseph did not explain the deep meaning of his actions to his brothers. What then was gained by favoring Benjamin in front of them? Would the symbolic reference negate any ill feeling? Would some mysterious token resolve a problem that may have been simmering? Why does Yoseph, in the midst of the turmoil of his startling revelation, decide to make a ceremonial gift that favors one brother over the rest, in order to foreshadow an event destined to occur in more than 1,000 years in

the future? Could he have not saved symbolism for a more complacent setting?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells this beautiful tale in his latest work, *Along the Magid's Journey*:

In 1939, the Nazi Gestapo shut down Rabbi Moshe Schneider's yeshiva in Frankfurt, Germany. With tremendous effort and support from the English community, he was able to relocate the school to England. Survival during that horrific period was both a tremendous spiritual and physical challenge but two boys in the Yeshiva helped meet that challenge. They both were named Moshe. One Moshe would rise in the early hours of the morning and pick up leftover bread from a generous bakery. Carrying the bags of bread and leftover rolls while walking through the bitter cold was not easy, but Moshe never missed his duties. In fact, he often took the place of other boys who were supposed to do the chore.

The other Moshe also woke up early. He led a special learning session before dawn. He encouraged his friends to make the extra effort - which they religiously did.

After years of uninterrupted efforts, one day the boys got public recognition. Rabbi Schneider blessed them in front of the entire school. "Moshe who shleps the bread is not only schlepping today's bread. One day, he will help distribute bread for thousands of people. And the Moshe who is concerned with spirituality of others will continue to do so in years to come," announced the Rosh Yeshiva. "Their actions today are only seeds of the future."

His words proved true. Moshe, the bread-shlepper, became Moshe (Paul) Reichman, one of our generation's most benevolent philanthropists. Moshe, the young teacher, became Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, Rav in Johannesburg, South Africa and Har Nof, Israel, an author of prestigious books on Jewish Law, and a teacher of thousands.

Perhaps Yoseph is telling us the secret of our people. Moments earlier Benyamin stood in shackles. He was accused of stealing a magic goblet and was humiliatingly sentenced with life-long enslavement to Pharaoh. Moments later he was not only liberated, but identified with honor and integrity as the blood brother, from both mother and father, of the most powerful man in the world. Yoseph gives the former slave-to-be a special a five-fold gift as an announcement to the world. With Benyamin, he declares the destiny of his people. Yoseph declares through Binyamin that today's events are our manifest destiny. Due to the courageous actions of Yehuda, Binyamin, the slave-to-be, walked away triumphantly, not with one change of clothing but with five. This was not a symbolism for thousands of years to come, but rather a symbolism of the ever-present character of the Jewish people.

The events of Benyamin in Egypt manifested themselves in almost direct comparison and beautiful symmetry with events that occurred centuries later in Persia. Mordechai the Yehudi, a descendant of Benjamin and by many accounts Yehuda, stood his ground under the greatest threats of death and humiliation. He defied the prophets of doom and walked away with glory and splendor.

Yoseph's message was no riddle, it was no illusion, and it was no mystical prophecy. It was our destiny. Courage in the trying times yields greatness. It was not a message only for the future. It was a message of the future - for today. That was a message all the brothers could appreciate -- at that moment. It is a message we too, can appreciate --right now.

Drasha is sponsored this week by David Samet in memory of his grandmother Gittel Bas Yitzchok Dovid Haleyvei a"h, whose yahrtzeit is the seventh day of Chanukah. Please study this class in her memory.

Good Shabbos!

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