

A GREAT FIRST MOVE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan. **These are the generations of Yaakov;** when Yosef was seventeen years old, being a shepherd, he was with his brothers with the flocks, and he was a lad, [and was] with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Yosef brought evil tales about them to their father. (Breishis 37: 1-2)

These are the generations of Yaakov: When Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility the troubles of Yosef sprang upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "What is prepared for the righteous in the world to come is not sufficient for them, but they seek [also] to dwell in tranquility in this world!" - Rashi

Rashi is telling us that all the many events that unfolded are all a result of a single choice by Yaakov. He felt it was time to settle down and learn in tranquility after decades of tribulation and The Almighty had a different plan. Avraham was promised his children would be strangers in a strange land for 400 years... and therefore, jealousy between the brothers erupted, and because of Yosef's prophetic dreams he was sold to Egypt. With a world famine about to happen Pharaoh had a troubling dream and since Yosef had shown his expertise as a dream interpret... The rest is history. This is all beyond astonishing! King David tells us, "Many thoughts are in the heart of a man but the plan of HASHEM, it will be established!"

Life is like a chess game! How so? Almost nothing looks more orderly than chess pieces before a match starts. The first move, however, begins a spiral into chaos. After both players move, 400 possible board setups exist. After the second pair of turns there are 197,742 possible games, and after three moves, 121 million. At every turn, players chart a progressively more distinctive path, and each game evolves into one that has probably never been played before. According to Jonathan Schaeffer, "The possible number of chess games is so huge that no one will invest the effort to calculate the exact number."

Some have estimated it at around 10^{120} to the power of 100,000. There are only 10^{100} to the power of 15 total hairs on all the human heads in the world, 10^{100} to the power of 23 grains of sand on Earth, and about 10^{100} to the power of 81 atoms in the universe. The number of typical chess games is many times as great as all those numbers multiplied together—this is a wondrous feat for 32 pieces lined up on a board.

If there are so many possibilities with just 64 squares and 32 piece moving one at a time, taking turns

alternately at a snail's pace on a flat two-dimensional board- Then how much more so when you have free willed human beings, hundreds and thousands making millions of simultaneous decisions on various plains of existence. It's staggering how organized and predictable so much of life is when we understand how complex and unique each day really is.

I tell my wife too often, when she asks how my day went, "Every day is like chasing a bouncing football!" Sometimes it's running away from you and then it jumps back into your face unexpectedly. We cannot predict with specificity what will happen, when there are so many moving parts, such unpredictability, and limitless possibilities. No matter what happens one day, the next day the pieces are lined up for another contest with and against the choices of a thousand players.

Thomas Henry Huxley had cleverly noted, "The chess-board is the world; the pieces are the phenomena of the universe; the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that His play is always fair, and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that He never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance."

Consider how many myriad pieces had to be moved for HASHEM's plan to come to fruition so that Yaakov chose to go down to Egypt, to fulfill a Divine promise, and now how lighting a Menorah is **a great first move!**