

THE INSIDE STORY REVEALED

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

It's hard to believe it, but two years have passed since the end of last week's parsha. It had been in the tenth year of Yosef's stay in prison that he had interpreted the dreams of the baker and the wine steward. However, one mistake had cost him two extra years in prison, and that was that he had put too much trust in the wine steward as an instrument in his redemption from jail (see Rashi on 40:23).

The only question is, to most of us, it would seem as if Yosef had merely made a reasonable "hishtadalus" (effort) to free himself from his predicament. The Talmud teaches that one is not allowed to rely upon miracles, and Yosef's actions seem to have been consistent with this dictum.

After all, it had already been a miracle that G-d had placed the royal baker and wine steward into the same prison as Yosef. It had been a miracle that they had dreamed and felt in need of an interpretation, and had been prepared to confide in Yosef. How many more miracles could Yosef have relied upon to change his situation? Wasn't it time to take advantage of G-d's help, and play a role in his own redemption?

For most people, yes. However, Yosef was a tzaddik and being so, he would have been justified in relying one-hundred percent on G-d, given that he saw through the veil of nature, and was somewhat unbound by it. On the other hand, even a tzaddik has to work within the confines of nature, and therefore, perhaps, Yosef's mistake lay not in the first part of his statement, but the latter part.

Looking at the possuk, it says:

"Please remember me when it works out well for you, and please be kind to me and mention me to Paroah and bring me out of this house. For, I was kidnapped from the Land of the Hebrews, and here also I did nothing to warrant being thrown into prison." (Bereishis 40:14)

Although it is true that Yosef probably felt the need to clear his name, what kind of impression did the last part of his statement leave in the minds of the people in prison? He had done the favor for the wine steward by positively interpreting his dreams. The realization of his interpretation would have confirmed that Yosef was no ordinary "criminal." Why did he have to add the words, "For, I was kidnapped from the Land of the Hebrews, and here also I did nothing to warrant being thrown into

prison." Doesn't it sound like bad things happen to good people, randomly?

As the Chumash proves, Yosef's tenure in prison was not for naught. It was a stop (albeit a dreary one) along his long and arduous route to greatness, and the fulfillment of his own dreams. But for someone on Yosef's level of righteousness, "All is for the good" should have been his motto, and instead of complaining about how he arrived in jail, he should have been asking,

"Gee. I wonder what great result will come of all of this? I wonder what fantastic finale G-d has in mind for me?"

For us, it might be difficult to say such words with conviction in a similar dilemma as the one Yosef was in, but for Yosef the Tzaddik (as he is called), they should have been easier. Think of the tremendous sanctification of G-d's Name had Yosef simply stopped short, and merely asked for a favor in return!

We find a similar situation later on in the Chumash (Bereishis 47:8). After Yosef and his father are finally reunited in Egypt, Ya'akov was brought before Paroah to be introduced. Upon seeing how worn down Ya'akov looked, Paroah asked Ya'akov his age. Ya'akov sensed Paroah's wonder and offered an explanation for why he looked so old. However, say the rabbis, for each word of "complaint" Ya'akov articulated, he lost one year of life, forty-four years altogether.

If we learn anything at all from this episode that is relevant to our own lives, we must remember that, being part of the Jewish people, we have the responsibility to remind the world that G-d runs the world, and that nothing happens randomly, even when it appears otherwise. We have to accept what happens to us with as much of a "stiff upper lip" as possible, and show our best face. It is difficult, but, on the other hand, who knows what positive results will occur as a result?

Shabbos Day:

From the moment the Viceroy of Egypt (Yosef in disguise), accused his brothers of being spies, they sensed that something was "rotten in Denmark," or Egypt, as was the case. What had they done to warrant such an absurd accusation? The whole episode must have seemed so surreal to them.

The truth is, Yosef wasn't trying to drive them up the wall with his false accusations; he wasn't taking revenge either. In fact, according to a book called "Bris Shalom," in his words was a clue that it was him; for, the Hebrew word for spy (meraglim) is made up of six letters that could allude to the following six words (each letter of "meraglim"-mem, raish, gimmel, lamed, yud, mem-is the first letter of each of the following words):

M'imi Rachel genavtem, l'Midyanim Yishmaelim mechartem-from my mother Rachel you stole me, to Midyanites and Arabs you sold me.

Now, you're probably wondering, what kind of clue was that? First of all, you'd have to suspect that the stranger talking to you was sending a message, and then, you'd have to be a master decoder to figure out the clue fast enough to know what was happening at the very moment it was unfolding. Was that fair?

The truth is, "meraglim" as a clue onto itself could never have been enough. But sometimes, a series of strange events when woven together into a unified tapestry create a broader vision that reflects on each piece of the "puzzle," until every detail seems like a clue meant for interpretation-if not to the brothers, then at least to Ya'akov once they returned home and related all that occurred to them in Egypt.

In fact, there is reason to believe from what occurs later on in the parsha that Ya'akov did sense that the strange dictator in Egypt was no normal Egyptian after all. Working through his remaining sons, Ya'akov may have even entered into the "game" to see where it would end. Perhaps, just perhaps, it might return his dear missing son, Yosef. Perhaps, just perhaps, all was not lost, as it had seemed for thirty years.

It is no different with G-d, who drops hints all over the place in our lives, each of which on its own makes no sense as a clue. However, taken in context of many events transpiring in a single period, or even over many periods of one's life, we can see the "hint" for what it is, and notice the hand of G-d in our lives directing us towards truth and fulfillment. And the faster we take note of this, the more direct the dialogue between G-d and us can become.

Seudos Shlishi:

Though many people are accustomed to giving presents on Chanukah, the truth is, it is a "borrowed" custom (probably from that non-Jewish "holiday" that occurs around the same time of year as Chanukah). The Jewish custom is to give Chanukah-gelt (money), which is why playing dreidel for money is a centerpiece of the Chanukah experience (it was designed not only to make little kids rich).

What connection is there between Chanukah and money?

Chanukah is a holiday about revealing inner potential. The olive oil, which we light during the eight days of Chanukah, comes from within the dark, (unpickled) bitter olive. Paralleling this is the body and the soul; the soul, like the oil, is hidden within the body, potential light that only shines when "extracted" and "ignited." This is why the words "hashemen" (the oil) and "neshama" (soul) are made up of the same letters: nun, shin, mem, heh (not to mention "mishnah," which is the Oral Law that is hidden in the Written Law).

To extract the oil, the olive must be squeezed. To extract the soul and reveal it, the body must be "squeezed" also so-to-speak, which is the role of Torah and mitzvos. Torah and mitzvos create "crises" by making demands upon our bodies that go against their nature, like acting with kindness and selflessness, among many other types of mitzvos. This is why Torah and mitzvos are the best way to refine personality and raise one's level of consciousness.

The Greeks believed that "seeing is believing," and made the olive the symbol of their wisdom since it was what they saw. The Jews claimed and died for the believe that "believing is seeing too," and that nothing is necessarily what it seems to be on the surface. (Even today in Western society psychologists have difficulty acknowledging the presence of the soul since it can't be seen with physical eyes.)

There are very few symbols of hidden potential as accurate as money itself. Barely worth the paper it is printed on, the dollar can transform itself into almost anything, open closed doors, even transform the way of thinking of an entire nation almost overnight. (Perhaps the U.S. dollar is one of the strongest currencies in the world to this day because it is the only one to at least mention G-d on the bill itself!).

Presents are limited to what they can become, and in for what they can be bartered. On the other hand, money can fulfill almost any need at almost any time, which is why people are living and dying for it. However, as powerful as money may have become in the minds of men, the most important thing to recall is that money is, at best, only a symbol of the real currency and potential that matters most to G-d: the light of the hidden soul.

Melave Malkah:

This is a Chanukah-story I tell it every year, if only to proclaim the miracle. I can confirm its veracity, because it happened to me personally.

In my second year of marriage, we lived in a neighborhood of Yerushalayim called Har Nof. At the time, I had been learning in a kollel in the Old City, some forty-five minutes away by bus. Yet, still, Friday mornings I used to go in for the morning to learn, even on the short winter afternoons, such as erev Parashas Mikeitz which happened to fall that year during Chanukah, as it usually does.

We were having important guests for Shabbos-my father- and mother-in-law-and I wanted to prepare a special d'var Torah for the Shabbos table. As was my custom in those days, the last fifteen minutes before leaving for home, I would begin learning the parsha to search for a question to ponder on the way home, which, I hoped, would form the basis for my Shabbos table d'var Torah.

How many times I have learned this week's parsha, I do not recall. But I do know that I never stopped

on the possuk I stopped on that morning, the one which has the freed and cleaned-up Yosef standing before Paroah, answering Paroah about his claim that Yosef can interpret dreams:

Yosef answered Paroah, saying, "Not I, but G-d will answer the peace of Paroah." (Bereishis 41:16)

All of a sudden it occurred to me: how could Paroah talk seriously with Yosef, let alone trust his interpretation of the royal dreams? Wasn't Yosef accused of being an adulterer? And if you tell me, so what! Egypt was an extremely immoral place, I'll counter by telling you that we learn from Avraham that, although the Egyptians didn't mind murdering people, they did hate adultery (that's why Avraham told Paroah that Sarah was his sister, and not his wife, fearing that Paroah would kill him in order to take Sarah and avoid adultery!). It was like President Clinton pulling some ex-con out of penitentiary to interpret his dreams, and then, after liking the interpretation, elevating him to the position of Vice President! Wouldn't that raise some eyebrows? As I closed my Chumash and prepared to make the long journey home, I was satisfied that I was on to something big, and began pondering the question as I left the Old City for Har Nof.

Now, for those familiar with the Old City, let me just state that in those days, buses did not enter the Old City by the Wall. To leave the Old City, you either took a taxi or you walked out Sha'arei Yaffo (Jaffa Gate) and took the Number Twenty bus. That alone constituted a fifteen minute walk, mostly uphill. Loaded down with challahs and other Shabbos food, I headed for the bus.

However, it happened to have been a beautiful, warm, sunny erev Shabbos afternoon, even though it was December. Though I was loaded down, I was inspired to walk even further to the main post office past the Old City, where I could catch either the Fifteen or Eleven bus, both of which go directly to Har Nof, saving me the need to transfer buses later. In fact, the only difference between the two lines was the route: the Fifteen bus passed through Geulah, and the Eleven bus passed by Machanei Yehudah (the "Shuk"). For me, the only issue was, which pandemonium did I want to suffer, erev Shabbos chaos of the shuk, or of Geulah?

As I weighed my options, life became even more confusing when both buses showed up at the same time, equally as crowded. I'm not quite sure what steered me, but I headed for the Fifteen bus, and after getting on, I began my odyssey to the back of the crowded bus, hoping to find some safe place to hang on to my groceries and a pole for balance; a seat was too much to ask for.

As I made it to the back of the bus, I saw a seat in the corner that was empty. Not wanting to seem selfish and make a chillul Hashem (profanation of G-d's Name), I let the seat remain empty, just in case someone else had precedence over me. No one sat down. I began to check the seat for bubble gum, or something of the sort, but the seat checked out. Once I felt safe, I sat down, parked my groceries under the seat, and silently sang praises to G-d for my little island of calm in the midst of all the panic.

I had barely opened my pocket Chumash to re-think through my question when the bus made its way to Geulah. After fighting some traffic, it finally made it to the main stop on Malchei Yisroel,

letting off many people, but taking on even more. I was engrossed in my Chumash, and barely noticed that the only seat available was the one next to me.

However, in the back of my mind I was somewhat conscious of the krexing (groaning) of a tired, middle-aged man, as he made his way right for the seat next to me. I had this eerie sense that he was the talkative type, and I turned myself toward the window even more, and made my Chumash even more obvious. The only thing missing was a "Do not disturb" sign.

I should have gone for the sign, because the angle at which I sat, and my raised Chumash did little to deter this American who seemed bent upon striking up a conversation with anyone who would listen, or not listen, for that matter.

"I see you're learning Chumash," he said quite innocently.

"Yes," I said politely but curtly, hoping to indicate that that was to be the end of the conversation. There was only twenty more minutes to Har Nof, and I had yet to find a satisfactory answer for why Paroah was prepared to overlook the charges against Yosef of adultery. However, the man was politely insistent.

"Where do you learn?" he asked next. I told him the name of my yeshiva, expecting little in return, but again, I had been wrong. Like Yehuda in this week's parsha, I had had other plans, and was blind to the unfolding Divine Providence.

"Really? I know your Rosh Yeshivah. In fact, his brother is my rav back in the States, and his son made my son's shidduch. It's a great story. Let me tell you how it goes ..."

And so he did, and did, and did. Defeated, I closed my Chumash, and slipped into a captive audience mode. The truth is, it was a remarkable story. Had it been any other time, and had I already developed a novel d'var Torah for the Shabbos table, the story would have thrilled me. It was hard to feel both frustration and excitement simultaneously.

As the bus made its final approach toward Har Nof, the story ended, and the man said,

"I'm sorry. I know you were learning Chumash before I interrupted you ..."

"So you noticed, eh?" I thought to myself.

"... At least let me give you a d'var Torah on this week's parsha ..."

"You might as well," I thought to myself, sarcastically, "because I sure don't have one!"

"... In fact, it is right on the possuk that you had your finger on, before you closed your Chumash ..."

My eyes, for the first time that trip, lit up. He continued,

"In that verse (the one upon which I had stopped on in the yeshiva when the question first occurred to me), there is an extra word ..." "Nu?" I said to myself, still somewhat skeptical.

"In the possuk before it, it says, 'Paroah said to Yosef, I had a dream and no one can interpret it, and I heard about you, saying (leimor), you can hear a dream and interpret it.' The next possuk says, 'Yosef answered Paroah, saying (leimor), Not I, but G-d will answer the peace of Paroah.' It seemed to me

that the 'leimors,' at least one of them, was extra." "Well, it is not uncommon that the Torah speaks like that ..." I said. "I know," he jumped in, "so I went to many rabbis in my city to see what they thought, and they all agreed that the leimor was extra, but had no interpretation for it. However, one rabbi I went to had already noticed the extra word on his own, and did have an interpretation to offer, which I found very interesting. He told me that the leimor was to allude to a sub-dialogue between Paroah and Yosef." "A what?" I asked, now feeling the pressure of my stop fast approaching, and the need to get off the bus.

"The rav was basing his pshat (interpretation) upon the Talmud, in Sanhedrin (56b), which is finding sources for the Seven Noachide Laws in the Torah. It turns out that, according to the Oral Law, different words allude to different mitzvos. The word 'leimor' is the word that alludes to the mitzvah not to have illicit relationships!"

Boinggggg! "Like adultery?" I asked hesitatingly, feeling something very hashgochadik (Divine Providence-like) about to happen. "Exactly," he answered. "Paroah's leimor alludes to Paroah asking Yosef, 'How can you be an interpreter of dreams? You're an adulterer! Even your own G-d hates such illicit behavior ... why would He want to work through you?!' Yosef's leimor means, 'That's exactly the point! The very fact that I can interpret dreams correctly, which only can be done with G-d's help, proves my innocence!' (After the fact, I noticed that "leimor" also appears in the episode of Yosef and the wife of Potiphar, and Rashi makes reference to the gemora itself there in 39:9.) Yosef's point was well-taken by Paroah, which is why he felt confident raising Yosef to the position of Viceroy of Egypt! A great answer, no?"

My jaw dropped open. Shivers went up and down my spine, as I pondered the odds of such a possibility. (At that point in my life, I had not seen the gemora in Sanhedrin, and even once I would years later, would I have made the connection? Could I have, when the word "leimor" had not even caught my attention?) Within seconds before arriving at my stop, I quickly explained what had just happened, and the shocked expression on my face. The man laughed, and finished by saying,

"To think! I came six thousand miles just to answer your question!"

I smiled warmly. We said good-bye to each other, and thanked one another for what had obviously been very, very b'sheret. As I got off the bus with a far better, more fascinating Chanukah d'var Torah than I had ever bargained for, I looked heavenward and thanked G-d for what was the most important message I could ever learn:

Answers are from G-d; it is only up to us to formulate the questions, and to be available to receive that Holy, Hidden Light of creation, when G-d decides to send it down to us.

Have a great Shabbos, and a light-revealing, freilechen Chanukah,

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