

DREAMING OF REALITY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

This is the parsha during which everything breaks loose. As if going back on their word (and destroying Shechem in the process) wasn't enough, Ya'akov's sons saw fit to sell Yosef into slavery and plunge their father into 22 years of mourning. And in the midst of all of this, Yehuda unwittingly became the father of the Moshiach by "accidentally" taking his past daughter-in-law, Tamar, as a wife. There's certainly what to talk about in this week's parsha!

The following midrash provides a brief summation:

The tribes were involved with the sale of Yosef; Yosef was immersed in mournful thoughts about his separation from his father; Reuven was involved with mourning over his sin; Ya'akov was mourning for Yosef; Yehuda was busy taking a wife for himself (Tamar). And the Holy One, Blessed is He, was busy creating the light of Moshiach. (Bereishis Rabbah 85:2)

From this midrash, it seems that everyone was acting out the fulfillment of a master plan they knew about, but yet, were unaware of. But make no mistake about it-every detail, the good ones and the bad ones, were pieces in a puzzle that envisioned a glorious redemption and fulfillment of creation.

Stepping back, the above midrash sounds very much like the dreidel played with on Chanukah, which, unlike the grager of Purim, is spun from the top to rotate the bottom (the grager is spun from the bottom to rotate the top). According to the Ta'amei HaMinhagim (Chanukah, 859), which explores the origins of traditions, this difference between the dreidel and the grager is not accidental; on the contrary, each was designed to reveal the nature of the miracle that gave rise to the holiday.

In Mordechai's time, the miracle was a hidden one, coming very much through nature. It was Mordechai who prompted the miracle, by going out of his way to antagonize Haman, who, in turn, sought to destroy the Jewish people. In the beginning, the Jews questioned Mordechai's dangerous attitude towards Haman. However, in the end, like all such evil dictators, his attack on the Jewish people triggered his own demise, albeit quite miraculously. Mordechai "spun" first from the world below, and that prompted a miracle from Above.

On the other hand, Mattisyahu was "pulled" into his rebellion against the Greeks. As the story goes, he had seen a Jew sacrificing an impure animal on a pagan altar, which incensed him to the point

that he killed both the Jew and the Greek soldier. The result was a perceived rebellion, and a battle that led to the obvious miracles we mention during Chanukah, first the one on the battlefield and then of the oil that burned seven extra days. Heaven "spun" from Above first, and that caused a reaction below.

The story of Yosef and his brothers seems to be a disagreement over which mode history was in at the time. Was it in the "Purim" mode, or the "Chanukah" mode? Was it a time to take history into their own hands and make things happen, or was it a time to see what Heaven was up to, and respond to that?

From Ya'akov's passive response to Shechem it seems as if he was in a Chanukah-like mode. From Shimon's and Levi's revenge on Shechem last week, and the selling of Yosef in this week's parsha, it seems as if the brothers sided with the Purim mode. In fact, according to the midrash, the brothers even included G-d in their selling of Yosef, and swore Him to secrecy, so-to-speak, so that He wouldn't tell Ya'akov about what they had done with Yosef!

In the end, as the midrash above indicated, Ya'akov and Yosef had been right all along. While everyone had been running around like "chickens with their heads cut off," G-d had been masterfully and subtly guiding all the events like the master orchestrator that He is towards history's grand finale-the creation of Moshiach. And as a result, whereas the brothers saw themselves as the saviors and shapers of Jewish destiny, it turned out that they had been unwitting pawns in G-d's plan to place Yosef in power, and pave the way for Egyptian oppression, and eventual redemption.

It is a lesson to take to heart. We have to make sure that we are in the right mode at the right time to work with G-d, and be a real maker of history. As the brothers will find out a few parshios from now, nothing is worse than thinking you are the maker of your own destiny, only to find out, in the end, that you were just a pawn in someone else's.

Shabbos Day:

From the beginning of the parsha, dreams have a lot to do with the storyline. It was Yosef's dreams that turned the hatred of his brothers into the kind of jealousy that made them callous enough to sell their pleading brother into slavery. Later (in next week's parsha), it was Yosef's dreams that found him favor in prison in Egypt, and which, eventually, skyrocketed him out of prison to Second-in-Command over Egypt.

The Talmud in Berachos discusses dreams and their interpretations at length. However, one key statement that raises a question on this week's parsha is the following: the dream goes after the interpretation. In other words, dreams are a potential that become actualized once they are

interpreted and verbalized. Otherwise, says the Talmud, they are like an "unread letter."

You will notice that Yosef never bothered to offer an interpretation of his own dreams. Rather, he simply relayed to the rest of the family each time what he saw in his dream; it was the brothers first, and then Ya'akov who interpreted the dreams of the Yosef. If the dreams go after the interpretation, then, according to the Talmud, it was the brothers who had pronounced royalty on Yosef with their own interpretation of his dreams! So why blame Yosef?

This just goes to show you how mistaken perceptions color our perspectives. The truth is, the brothers had been spiritual giants, being the sons of Ya'akov, and we can't forget that. They are called the Shivtei Kel-the Tribes of G-d. What we have to recall always is that our vision of them and what they did is through G-d's eyes, Who reads hearts; for Torah is His word as communicated through Moshe. Had we been there with the brothers we too would have been convinced of their innocence and their reasons for removing the "threat" from the Jewish people. Instead, looking "through" G-d's eyes, we are convinced of their guilt and petty jealousy.

However, the brothers had been aware of just who they were, and what was expected of them. Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov had lived just to produce them, the fathers of the Twelve Tribes. It was up to them to build the Jewish kingdom, and all of their time had gone into this historical "project."

However, they had been wrong somewhat about what the final form that kingdom was supposed to have. Not only did it include the likes of people like Yosef, but it would eventually be ruled by many of his descendants. In developing their perspective, they became blind to that potential, and even though their own minds understood the nature of Yosef's dreams, those same minds could not accept their inevitable fulfillment. That is why they could not recognize Yosef when he stood before them as Viceroy of Egypt. And, as we will see in Parashas Mikeitz, G-d willing, it is also why they could not correctly interpret the clues Yosef left all over the place for them to use to discover his secret identity.

It is our mistaken perceptions, and perhaps our hidden desires, that cause us to misinterpret the world around us, and the events that shape our lives. They cause us to misjudge people, and ignore messages from G-d that come to help us grow spiritually. And though such perceptions are usually formed to protect us and to create a secure world in which we can shelter ourselves, in the end, they often backfire and leave us more vulnerable than we could have ever imagined as Yosef's brothers, and many throughout history have found out ... the hard way.

Seudos Shlishi:

If you don't work with Divine Providence, then you become a "victim" of it. At least that's what happened to Yehuda in this week's parsha at the hands of Tamar.

First some background information:

The Torah relates how Yehuda had lost his wife, and had mourned her for some time. Years earlier, he had lost two of his sons, each of which in turn had been married to Tamar. Fearing that marriage to Tamar caused his sons' death, he sent Tamar back to her father's home until Shelah (his youngest and last son) "grew up," claiming that until then, he shouldn't marry Tamar. That was never to be, and Tamar had sensed that.

However, Tamar had been bent on being a part of Jewish destiny, and waited for the time that G-d would oblige her. That time came when, one day, Yehuda had taken his flocks out to graze in a direction that crossed Tamar's path.

Well, almost. Says the midrash, Yehuda's path wouldn't have crossed Tamar's path had events progressed "naturally." But this was a crucial time in Jewish history when the seeds of the nation were being planted by G-d Himself, and to this end an angel had been dispatched to steer Yehuda towards Tamar, who disguised herself as a woman of hire to catch Yehuda's attention and desire.

But how could she have known that she would be successful at her ruse? She had had one shot at this-how did she know that this was the way to go about contributing to the future destiny of G-d's chosen people, especially in such an "underhanded" way?

She hadn't. However, she trusted that if G-d wanted her to play a role in Yehuda's life specifically, and of the Jewish people in general, then all she had to do was make herself "available" at the right time in the right way with all the right intentions, and leave the rest up to G-d to arrange. Unlike Yehuda at the time, she recognized the Divine Providence in all that had happened to her and her father-in-law, and she patiently waited to watch events unfold, even if it brought her to the brink of death, which it did, once Yehuda thought that she had been unfaithful to the family.

In the end, it was Yehuda who had to bow to Divine Providence, and who exonerated Tamar, admitting that her twins were from him. It had been an important first stage in Yehuda's tshuva for overlooking the Divine Providence in Yosef's and his life when he decided to sell the "dreamer" into slavery. And as we will see in the coming weeks, G-d willing, it will be Yosef himself who will teach Part Two of this crucial lesson to Yehuda, and countless generations to come.

Melave Malkah:

"... The well was empty, there was no water inside it." (Bereishis 37:24)

From the fact that it says the well was empty, would it not be clear there was no water inside? Rather, it teaches you that there was no water inside, but there were snakes and scorpions. (Shabbos 22a)

What makes this midrash fascinating is that it is found in the only gemora that deals with Chanukah, and that it follows this halacha:

... Chanukah candles placed higher than twenty amos (about 30 feet) are possul [they do not fulfill the mitzvah] since the eye cannot see clearly [something placed at that height].

Is there a connection between the two statements? True, they are both taught over in the name of the same rabbi. But it is uncanny that the Talmudists would "randomly" wedge this verse about Yosef and its midrashic interpretation of it into Chanukah halachos. Perhaps there is another deeper, yet more subtle connection?

To begin with, why hadn't Yosef's brothers noticed the miracle? Yosef was sharing space with poisoness roommates, and none were causing him any harm! Wasn't that a miracle, and don't miracles come from G-d? Perhaps, if they had seen the miracle, they might have had pause to reconsider their harsh judgement of his character, and redeem him. Just think of how much suffering would have been avoided if they had! However, they hadn't noticed the miracle and had instead let Yosef go as a slave.

Chanukah is a holiday that says: Little is what it appears to be on the surface. By lighting the candles during the week of Chanukah, we are committing ourselves to the task of peeking below the surface of people and ideas to find their inner essence, to determine their validity or falsehood. Chanukah says,

"Open your mind's eye and see! Until Moshiach comes, G-d's truth must be sought out and found by the inquisitive and honest mind."

This is, perhaps, why the two statements are juxtaposed in the Talmud. It is as if to say that the brothers' perception of what was happening on the "outside" did not line up with what was happening on the "inside." The olive they could see, but the oil inside they overlooked; Yosef the young boy they noticed, but the powerful and mature soul inside they missed entirely. It was if this perception of Yosef was out of their mental eyeshot, like a menorah placed higher than 20 amos.

It is a confusing world out there. There is a lot of information jostling for room in our minds, much of it being unnecessary and even false. In an age saturated with information, never before has it been more crucial to have a discerning mind, in order to sift through the knowledge looking for the kernels of truth in order to discard the debris. Never before has the message of Yosef and his

brothers, and of the menorah of Chanukah, been more relevant than in our generation.

Have a great Shabbos.

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