

DOORWAY TO JEWISH DESTINY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

All's well that ends well, or so it seemed.

In this week's parsha, Yosef finally revealed himself to the utter shock of his brothers who were left speechless. After 22 years of painful separation, Ya'akov recovered his long lost and dear son Yosef, and the family was reunited in Egypt. Amazingly enough, Yosef felt no hard feelings towards his brothers, and they seemed to take his painful charade in stride. Any loose ends let to tie up?

Well, the truth is, not everything had worked out the way Yosef had planned, and because it didn't, the Jewish people had to enter into a bitter exile, and Moshiach's arrival was pushed off for millennia!

What went wrong?

To begin with, putting the Viceroy's silver chalice into Binyomin's sack was to accomplish more than to arouse the loyalty of his brothers in his defence; it was to arouse more than a streak of self-sacrifice for their father who waited with every bone in his body for the safe return of all of his sons, especially Binyomin. In fact, of all the things the brother did wrong in selling Yosef "up the river," one of the worse was that they had been "choshaid b'kasherim," that is, they had suspected an innocent person of wrongdoing.

As the rabbis are quick to point out, the brothers were against Yosef not out of petty jealousy, but, because they saw a dangerous potential within Yosef, one that could lead generations of Jews in the wrong direction. The truth be known, they had not been so wrong about this, for, it was Yeravam ben Nevat, a descendant of Yosef who helped split Shlomo HaMelech's kingdom into two parts, after which he blocked the path to the Temple for his constituents, and then set up golden calves for worship!

However, Yosef himself had posed no personal threat to anyone, and if anything, he proved to be their redeemer in the end. Thus, no matter how the brothers justified their actions, they had been, in the end, choshaid b'kasherim - they had falsely accused Yosef. And, according to the Talmud, this is no small crime:

Anyone who falsely suspects an innocent person will physically suffer. (Shabbos 97a)

Instead, says the Talmud, everyone had an obligation "to judge a person to the side of merit ..." (Shabbos 128a). And because the brothers had not, Yosef wanted to fix this up, and this was the principle intention behind everything he had done in concealing his identity. It was all a set up to create a similar scenario since complete repentance requires being in the exact same position again, and then doing the right thing instead. Hence, by putting the cup into Binyomin's sack Yosef had created the opportunity for the brothers to decide whether or not Binyomin had in fact stolen the goblet. If they could overlook the evidence and absolve Binyomin of his apparent theft, then this would prove to Yosef, and more importantly, to G-d, that they had repented completely for what they had done to Yosef. Alas, the midrash tells us what they had really thought:

When the cup was found with Binyomin, they said, "You thief, the son of a thief! You are just like your mother who stole from her own father (Rachel stole the idols from Lavan; Bereishis 31:32)!" (Bereishis Rabbah 92:8)

Oy!

Like many times to come throughout history, the moment of truth came and went, and so too did the chance for complete rectification. Another opportunity to "end it all" had come and gone in the long, tiresome history of the Jewish people. Won't we ever get it right? Must everything we do to bring the final redemption be for naught!

Despair not! Not all was lost, and it never is! The process of fixing up this mistake began with the brothers, and much was accomplished. However, what wasn't rectified was left up to future generations to complete. We ourselves can start to end that process by learning to judge our fellow Jew to the side of merit.

Shabbos Day:

The Talmud says:

A person should never treat one child differently than the others, for, because of the two selas of material that Ya'akov gave to Yosef over his brothers, the brothers became jealous of Yosef, and it led to our fathers going down to Egypt. (Shabbos 10b)

The astute student of Chumash should ask: Didn't G-d tell Avraham that his descendants would have to go down to Egypt, which seemed to be the result of Avraham's own error, not his great-

grandchildren's'? Tosfos himself asks this question, and answers that, perhaps it was not the brothers' jealousy of Yosef that caused us to go down to Egypt, but it was their jealousy which led to a more intense exile of slavery than what was foretold to Avraham.

However, there is another midrash that seems to answer this question and lead the discussion in a more perplexing direction:

"Go and see the works of G-d, awesome in deed (Hebrew: alilla) toward mankind." (Tehillim 66:5); Go and see how when The Holy One, Blessed is He, created the world, from the first day He created the Angel of Death as well ... Man was made on the sixth day, yet death was blamed on him. What is this similar to? To a man who decided that he wanted to divorce his wife and then wrote her a Get (divorce document), after which he went home holding the Get looking for a pretext (Hebrew: alilla) to give it to her.

He told her, "Prepare me something to drink."

She did, and taking it, he said, "Here is your Get."

She asked him, "What did I do wrong?"

He told her, "Leave my house, because you made me a warm drink."

She answered him, "Were you able to know that I would prepare you a warm drink in the future, that you wrote a Get in advance and came home with it?"

So too did Adam say to The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! Before You created the world, Torah was with You for 2,000 years ... And what is written in it, 'This is the law when a man will die in a tent ...' If You had not established death for Your creations, would You have written this? Rather, You just wanted to blame death on me ..." ... It also says the same thing with respect to Yosef ... Rav Yudan said,

"The Holy One, Blessed is He, wanted to carry out the decree of 'Know that you shall surely be (strangers)' and therefore set it up in such a way that Ya'akov would love Yosef and that the brothers would hate him and sell him to the Arabs, and that they would all go down to Egypt ... " This is what is meant by "awesome in deed." (Tanchuma, VaYaishev 4)

From this midrash it seems as if Adam's eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was inevitable, as was Ya'akov's loving of his son and the sale of Yosef. If so, what sense can be made of the first midrash, which pins the blame of Egyptian exile on Ya'akov's special treatment of Yosef, and of the Torah itself, which blames the sale of Yosef on the brothers?

One way to answer this is to know that G-d has a master plan for creation, and He is always looking for people to play specific roles to help Him carry out that plan. It doesn't necessarily mean that

Person "A" has to do this or do that; just that someone has to do it. Who that someone will be will depend upon that spiritual level of that person at the time history requires a particular detail to be executed.

If the person is a spiritually sensitive person who is growth-oriented, G-d will work it out that the person is at the right place at the right time to get the credit for something G-d ordained to occur. Otherwise, if, G-d forbid, a person is spiritually insensitive, then G-d will work it that that person is the perpetrator of a required negative deed. There are no accidents in G-d's world; it is thief and the person stolen from that are paired together by G-d for reasons that may only be known to G-d Himself.

Thus, we can't always directly control the world in which we live and how it will impact us, or how we will impact it. However, by being on guard and working on spiritual growth, we develop an aspect of ourselves that makes us suitable for the positive tasks in creation. Otherwise, we can find ourselves being the vehicles for negative things to occur, even though we didn't intend to do so on our own.

Seudos Shlishi:

[Ya'akov] sent Yehudah up before him to Yosef, to Goshen (Hebrew: Goshnah). (Bereishis 46:28)

When Ya'akov sent Yehudah down to Egypt to arrange with Yosef for the future immigration of Ya'akov and his family, he sent him to Goshen. According to the B'nei Yissachar, the word "Goshnah" alludes to Chanukah, for, the four letters (gimmel, shin, nun, heh) are the same four letters found on the sides of the dreidel and which stand for: *neis gadol hayah shumm*-a great miracle happened there.

What a strange place to insert an allusion to Chanukah, no?

Perhaps a clue to understanding this particular Chanukah-hint lies in this week's Haftarah, and Yehudah's mission on behalf of Ya'akov.

The prophet wrote:

The word of G-d came to me to say: You, Son of Man, take one piece of wood and write on it, "For Yehudah and the Children of Israel, his friends," and one piece of wood and write on it, "For Yosef, the wood of Ephraim and the entire House of Israel, his friends." Bring them

together each to the other to become one piece of wood, and they will become one in your hands. When they say to you, your people, "What does this mean?" Tell them, so says G-d, "Behold, I will take the wood of Yosef which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Yisroel, his friends, and I will put on them the wood of Yehudah and make them one wood, and they will become one in My hand ..." (Yechezkel 37:1)

This week's parsha, as indicated by the prophet, is not just about a family reunion; it is about the longed for reunion of the entire nation of Israel; not just then, but in the future, when Moshiach comes. The connection to this week's parsha is that the reunion itself began in Goshen, when Yehudah went down to join forces with Yosef.

What caused the reunion to take effect?

[Ya'akov] sent Yehudah up before him to Yosef, to Goshen (Hebrew: Goshnah). (Bereishis 46:28)

... To establish a Bais Talmud (House of Study) ... (Rashi)

One of the only places the Jewish people ever achieved such unity was at Mt. Sinai, when the Torah was given (Shemos 19:2; see Rashi). The pristine revelation of G-d drew the soul out of everyone there, to the point that personal biases were overcome and objectivity, and hence, national unity, was achieved.

By sending Yehudah down to Goshen, specifically on a mission of Torah was the key factor in cementing the bond between Yehudah and Yosef, for it is Torah that brings objectivity and which makes unity possible. Subjectivity blinds us to the point that we take ourselves too seriously, and other people, not seriously enough. It is subjectivity that causes us to distort the words of Torah to suit our personal causes at the cost of its essential message of truth. Some people are so busy getting offended that they "lose the forest for the trees," they "throw the baby out with the bath water," etc. In other words, they reject what they personally don't like, rather than accepting what, objectively speaking, must be true.

During the Chanukah battle, the main war was among the Jews themselves - Jews who wanted to adhere to the practice of their ancestors since Har Sinai, and Jews who wanted to throw off the "yoke" of their past and adopt newer, more modern lifestyles like the Greeks around them; between the Sages and the Hellenists. The result was, and has been since then, bitter internecine fighting!

Goshen symbolizes to all future generations the true heart of the nation: Talmudic learning. It is the Talmud, and specifically the Oral Law it discusses that makes us unique as a nation, and which connects up all the generations like pearls on a necklace. It is the Oral Law that unites not just a single generation, but all the generations throughout all the ages. No wonder the midrash writes:

"The people who walk in darkness see the Great Light" (Yishiyahu 9:1): These are the masters of Talmud who see the Great Light because The Holy One, Blessed is He, illuminates their eyes ... The (darkness) is the Oral Law, which is difficult to learn and causes great pain; this is why it is compared to darkness. (Tanchuma Noach 3)

And is it any wonder then, that one of the four places that the Hidden Light of Creation, which shone for thirty-six hours on Day Six and Shabbos of creation before being hidden for the Righteous at a future time-and which, in the meantime, can be accessed through Shabbos; through the thirty-six righteous people in every generation; through the thirty-six candles of Chanukah-can also be accessed through the thirty-six tractates of the Babylonian Talmud!

Chanukah may end this week, but its message lingers on, as does its promise of national and international unification, when the Jewish people rally around the Torah.

Melave Malkah:

The number of people who came to Egypt with Ya'akov, who were his blood descendants, totaled 66, not including the wives of Ya'akov's sons. Yosef's sons, born to him in Egypt, added another two individuals; the number of individuals in Ya'akov's family who came to Egypt was 70. (Bereishis 46:26)

In Torah, seventy is a mystical number, representing, primarily, wisdom:

Anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge of his Creator ... has the knowledge of the Seventy Elders; wine was given with seventy letters (Rashi: the gematria of yaiyin-wine-is 70), and the mystery (sod of Torah) was given with seventy letters (sod equals 70) ... (Eiruvim 65a)

There are seventy facets to Torah. (Zohar, Bereishis 36)

There are many other such quotes equating the number 70 with Torah and wisdom. The reason for this is because, since G-d made the world in six days, and attached Shabbos to the week, seven became a number that represents physical creation and the potential for physical completion. Since the physical world was designed and "constructed" according to the Torah, which acted as a kind of "blueprint" for creation, anyone who studies the world in search of spirituality, will, by definition, gain wisdom. This is, according to the midrash, how Avraham discovered the existence of G-d, and why G-d first communicated with Avraham in his seventieth year.

But that was the wisdom that Avraham gained up until prophecy. From that point onward, Avraham's

prophecy took him beyond the wisdom of physical creation, which had merely been a preparation for the prophecy of Torah itself. (This is one of the reasons why Chanukah had to be eight days long, though the oil only burned for seven extra days. Chanukah represents a departure from the natural world, into the world of the spiritual.)

This is why Ya'akov entered Egypt as a family of seventy souls. This was to indicate that all the Forefathers had accomplished until then had been the preparation for what was about to come up: the purification of the Egyptian furnace. The "raw material" that was to eventually become B'nei Yisroel entered shortly after the reunion of Ya'akov and Yosef, and their settling in Goshen. It would take 210 years and a descension into the lowest depths of spiritual impurity, but in the end, a nation would emerge that could stand before G-d at Har Sinai, and receive His Holy Torah, and the wisdom that goes beyond 70, into the realm of the supernatural.

Have a great Shabbos.

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