

OF ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

It was the end (mikeitz) of two years [literally: two years days] when Paroah dreamed, and behold, he was standing by the river. (Bereishis 41:1)

It is interesting how such a simple word--mikeitz--can set off so much discussion. To begin with, Rashi comments and Sifsei Chachamim explains:

"As the Targum translates: at the end, because also such usages of 'keitz' imply the end of something." (Rashi)

"It is obvious that it is 'at the end' as the Targum rendered it; however, what was problematic [for Rashi was the use of the word] 'days' in the verse. Why [did it write this]? It works fine if 'keitz' does not mean 'end' but 'partial,' then the verse had to mention it to tell us that it was exactly two years to the day, and not 'almost two years.' However, since 'keitz' does mean 'end,' what purpose does 'days' serve? [The answer is:] From the verse, one could assume that 'mikeitz' can mean 'partial,' and therefore that all usages of the word 'keitz' can mean 'partial.' However, since it is clear from our posuk that it means 'end' because of the usage of the word 'days,' we can learn then that all usages of the word 'keitz' mean the 'end' of the something ..." (Sifsei Chachamim)

Right. And all from that short Rashi!

The Ba'al HaTurim goes a different route:

"It says here 'mikeitz' and it writes regarding Avraham 'mikeitz' (Bereishis 16:3); [just as over there mikeitz meant 'at the end of ten years,' so too does mikeitz here] mean 'at the end of ten years, with the addition of two extra years.' " (Ba'al HaTurim)

In other words, the Ba'al HaTurim found an allusion in this week's parshah to what Rashi spoke out at the end of last week's parshah:

"[The wine steward] forgot him ... From this point Yosef placed his trust in him and therefore caused himself to remain in prison two extra years." (Rashi, Bereishis 40:23)

The Ba'al HaTurim hammers home his point by bringing a gematria that only he could bring: It was

the end of two years when Paroah dreamed equals (in Hebrew) ten years.

The Da'as Z'kainim m'Ba'alei Tosfos both explains Rashi and seems to contradict him:

"He [Rashi] needed to explain like this because we find times when 'mikeitz' is used to mean the 'beginning' of something, as it says in Yirmiyahu, 'At the beginning (mikeitz) of seven years they sent him into freedom ...' (Yirmiyahu ?) concerning the Jewish slave ..." (Da'as Z'kainim m'Ba'alei Tosfos)

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh adds a whole different understanding to the word "keitz" and the posuk:

"... For this reason, the posuk starts with the word 'vayehi' ['It was ...' which alludes to bad tidings and suffering to tell you that] the reason [for Yosef's suffering in jail two extra years] was 'keitz,' which refers to the yetzer hara, as it says, ' ... the end (keitz) of all flesh ...' (Bereishis 6:13) ..." (Ohr HaChaim)

In other words, because Yosef capitulated to his yetzer hara and mistakenly put his trust in the wine steward to gain freedom from jail, he remained in jail two extra years.

Now, having said all of that, let's tie it all together. If you analyze the essence of sin, you will see that it is the result of the yetzer hara. Not only does the yetzer hara try to make that which we know is wrong--or at least suspect is wrong--right, it tries to minimize the consequences of committing such a sin, giving us the impression that there will always be time to make up that which is wrong. You will find that people who value time and opportunity for spiritual growth tend to minimize sin. In fact, this is true yiras Hashem--fear of G-d!

It is also the basis for true freedom as well--geulah shlaimah. For it is only the person who is real with time and spiritual growth, that takes life seriously enough to make mature and spiritually rational choices. The rest are enslaved to the yetzer hara, which the Egyptians personified. If this is a person's "beginning," then it will also be a person's "end" as well, for the yetzer hara's game is a viscous circle that is hard to break out of, without help from Heaven (Kiddushin 30b). Only when we rely upon G-d can we break the cycle, and achieve true and lasting freedom--at the right time.

Shabbos Day:

Paroah sent and called for Yosef. They rushed him from the pit. He shaved, and changed his clothes and came to Paroah. (Bereishis 41:14)

And changed his clothes ... Here there is an allusion to the rabbis statement that Yosef went out from jail on Rosh Hashanah, since the gematria of "and he changed his clothing" is equal to the "first of Tishrei." (Da'as Z'kainim m'Ba'alei Tosfos)

The truth is, the night of Paroah's dream was itself Rosh Hashanah, because that's when G-d

determines whether the world will enjoy surplus or suffer famine (Rosh Hashanah 10b). Perhaps this is why the chief butler shaved Yosef (in order to stand before Paroah), and Yosef didn't shave himself, for he had kept the laws of the Torah even while away from home, and shaving is certainly not permissible on Yom Tov.

However, what is more fascinating is the clothes Yosef changed into:

"An angel brought him clothes from Gan Aiden and put them on him." (Sifsei Kohen)

In fact, even though the posuk implies that Paroah called Yosef and requested his presence to interpret his dreams, the Zohar says that it was the Shechina--the Divine Presence--that actually called Yosef. The fact that G-d called Yosef and instructed him to stand before Paroah, and that his new clothes came from Gan Aiden courtesy of an angel must have tipped Yosef off to the fact that something special was up, and that he was the center of all of it. And the fact that it all happened on Rosh Hashanah must have made Yosef feel a sense of awe about all that was transpiring.

In a way, it is really a parable for every Jew on every Rosh Hashanah. Current history and its problems may demand that we stand before the leaders of the world and bargain for our security, but deep inside we must never lose sight of the fact that it is really G-d that hearkens us. History is just another "mask" that G-d wears to conceal how He works to bring the Jewish people closer to spiritual perfection. If, as a nation, we're spiritually on-track, then history works in our favor; if not, then history often works against us, forcing us to do teshuvah.

And when we do that teshuvah, then we change our spiritual clothes, and we don new ones that come from Heaven, so-to-speak. Perhaps this is why on Rosh Hashanah we make a big deal about wearing our special Yom Tov clothing; perhaps it is symbolic of our spiritual change of clothing, in advance of standing before the real King--the King of Kings.

It is not far a stretch of the imagination to use Yosef and his situation as example of such ideas. Later on, in Parshas Vayigash, when Yosef reveals himself to his brothers with the words, "I am Yosef," the Midrash is quick to say:

That is the way it will be on the final Day of Judgment. G-d will only have to say, "I am G-d," and like Yosef's brothers, we will be speechless when we realize how what we took as "accidental" and simply a matter of "nature," was in fact the hand of G-d guiding us through life.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Ya'akov saw that there was [grain] for sale in Egypt, [and] Ya'akov said to his sons, "Why do you show-off? I have heard that there is [grain] for sale in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so we can live and not die." (Bereishis 42:1-2)

While the rest of the known world at that time was scrambling to find food because of the famine,

apparently the sons of Ya'akov were not. This was not because they didn't need food, but because they didn't want it to appear as if they were affected by the famine. Therefore, Ya'akov reproved them and said,

"Would you mind humbling yourselves, because there is nothing worse than causing jealousy. After all, the first set of Ten Commandments will be given amidst much fanfare, and yet, will be broken in the end, and Jerusalem will only be destroyed because of jealousy." (Tanchuma, Vayaishev ?)

However, what did the brothers gain by pretending to be doing fine, while the rest of the world acknowledged the famine and responded responsibly? Did they simply what to ignore reality and live in a dream world? Was that behavior fitting of the Shivtei-Kah--G-d's holy tribes?

No. Rather, what the brothers wished to do was avoid a Chillul Hashem--profanation of G-d's Name.

In other words, every time even a single Jew suffers it is a Chillul Hashem. This is because once G-d designated Avraham to be the recipient of a special Divine relationship, the world has expected things to go well for us and our descendants. After all, if G-d is good, shouldn't He treat his "loved ones" well?

This is why, says the Nefesh HaChaim, we pray for the recovery of a fellow Jew who suffers. It is not because we feel wise enough to know which sickness is good or bad for a person; it is because when a Jew suffers, it looks bad for G-d and Torah. At least, it makes G-d look unreliable and at worse, absent. Therefore, we pray to end the sickness in order to end the Chillul Hashem, to prove to the world that G-d is here, actively involved in the affairs of man, and still looking out for the welfare of His nation.

However, as Ya'akov told his sons, creating jealousy among the nations does not result in a sanctification of G-d's Name either. On the contrary, it too can be the cause of ayin hara--jealousy--and ultimately, a Chillul Hashem. A delicate balance between the two extremes has to be reached, where our trust in G-d reveals our belief that G-d still loves us and takes care of our needs (albeit indirectly oftentimes), while our concern for the general welfare of the world and our "practical" response to the situation reveals our connection to the rest of mankind. Even if behind the scenes Divine Providence is wroughting all kinds of miracles to keep us going.

Melave Malkah:

And Shlomo awoke [vayikatz], and behold, it was a dream. He went to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Covenant of Hashem, and offered up Burnt-Offerings and Peace-Offerings, and made a feast for all his servants. (I Melachim 3:15)

This week's Haftarah joins a story in progress. Shlomo is just twelve years old and is sitting on the

throne of David after the death of his father, wondering how he will rule the Jewish people. All of a sudden, G-d came to him in a dream and asked him what he would want, and the new, young king chose wisdom to rule the people justly. G-d's response was:

"Because you have asked for this thing and have not asked for long life for yourself, or riches for yourself, or the life of your enemies, but you have asked for understanding to discern judgment, I have fulfilled your request; I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there was none like you before you, nor shall any arise like you. I have also given you what you have not asked for, both riches and honor, so that there shall be no kings like you all your days ..." (I Melachim 3:11)

Then what follows is the famous exhibition of Shlomo HaMelech's new wisdom, after he was approached by two women who claimed to be the mother of the same child. Threatening to divide the baby in two and share it, the real mother, as Shlomo assumed, withdrew her claim to save the baby's life, while the other woman encouraged the carrying out of the decision. Obviously the real mother could never allow such a solution, and the baby was returned to its rightful mother; the wisdom of Shlomo became known far and wide.

Obviously, a connection to this week's parshah is the first word in the story: vayikatz, from the same word that started off this week's parshah: miketz--both Paroah and Shlomo awaken from a dream. However, the juxtaposition of the two Divinely-invoked dreams of two kings seems to invite a comparison.

To begin with, Paroah's dreams were clearly on behalf of Yosef, to set the stage for his rise from "rags to riches"; Shlomo HaMelech's were for him personally. G-d communicated with Paroah through symbols, but communicated with Shlomo HaMelech directly, even conversing with him. When Paroah awoke, he had no idea what his dreams meant and was forced to depend upon others to interpret them. Shlomo awoke fully aware of having dreamed, and of what the dreams meant, and was able to act upon them immediately.

All of this serves to re-emphasize the special Divine Providence that Jewish leaders enjoy, since G-d takes special care to be involved in the historical affairs of the Jewish people. However, such direct Divine attention is a two-way street, for it means that when the Jewish people slide, G-d plays close attention to that as well. This we see from the sale of Yosef, and at the end of the parshah, as Yehudah proclaims:

Yehudah said, "What can we say to my master? What can we speak? With what can we justify ourselves? G-d has found guilt in your servants. We are here to be slaves to my master, all of us and the one in whose hand the goblet was found." (Bereishis 44:16)

It is our job to learn from people like Shlomo HaMelech, who caused Divine Providence to work in his favor, and who turned dreams of greatness into reality. After all, this is what Chanukah is all about, isn't it?

Have a freilechen Chanukah and a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston
