

THE DREAM TEAM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Ya'akov settled in the land of his father, in the land of Canaan. These are the descendants of Ya'akov... (Bereishis 37:1-2)

Just like Parshas Lech-Lecha represented a turning of a historical corner, so too does this week's parshah. Until Lech-Lecha, the Torah had an eye on all of mankind, discussing the life of Noach only within the context of world history. The story of Avraham represented a change of focus, from the family of mankind to the singular family of Avraham Avinu.

However, Avraham's descendants also included the likes of Yishmael, the other sons of Hagar (Keturah), and Eisav and his families via Yitzchak. Until this week's parshah, they too were included in the Torah's narration. With Parshas Vayaishev, and the words "these are the descendants of Ya'akov," the focus of attention is again narrowed to the lives of the Twelve Tribes--the Shevatim--and that is where the focus will remain from this point onward.

Or maybe the focus is even narrower, as the posuk seems to indicate:

These are the descendants of Ya'akov: Yosef was 17 years old.

Rather than list all twelve sons of Ya'akov, the Torah only mentions his eleventh son, Yosef. We know from last week's parshah that Yosef represents something special to Ya'akov, as Rashi reiterates in this week's parshah as well:

"Ya'akov settled ... A flax-driver came into town with camels laden with flax. A smithy wondered, 'Where will all this flax go?' A smart individual answered, 'One spark from your bellow will burn it up!' Thus Ya'akov saw all the chieftains of Eisav mentioned in the previous chapter and asked, 'Who will be able to conquer them?' What is written after? 'These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef' as it says, 'The house of Ya'akov will be fire, the house of Yosef will be a flame, and the house of Eisav will be straw; one spark will go out from Yosef and burn it all up.' " (Rashi)

We see from this that Ya'akov loved Yosef most of all not just because he was the son of his cherished wife, Rachel. Yosef represented something that had, and would have tremendous impact on Jewish history. Yosef was a shield against Eisav and his plans to destroy Ya'akov and all that he

symbolized. And, according to Rashi, Yosef had already assumed that role at the historical confrontation with Eisav and the beginning of last week's parshah:

"Yosef and Rachel approached ... The rest of the mothers came forth before their children, but with respect to Rachel, Yosef approached first. He said, 'My mother is of beautiful appearance. Maybe that evil one will stare at my mother. Therefore, I will stand before her and prevent his gazing at her.'" (Rashi, Bereishis 33:7)

For playing this role, Yosef was well-rewarded. And it was his innate lack of fear of our spiritual enemies that landed him second-in-command of Egypt, because it gave him the wherewithall to maintain his spiritual greatness in the most immoral country at that time. It will also provide his distant descendant with the courage and spiritual strength to stand up and out at the right time, when the time for Moshiach ben Yosef comes to pave the way for the Final Redemption.

Shabbos Day:

The brother's saw that he [Yosef] was loved the most of all the brothers and they hated him, and they could not speak a word of peace (l'shalom) [with him]. (Bereishis 37:4)

Normally the word for "peace," shalom, is spelled: shin, lamed, vav, mem. However, in the above verse, it is spelled without the letter vav, which according to Tradition, is often a clue that there is a less obvious message being conveyed here. Perhaps it is the missing vav that causes Rashi to comment:

"From this negative remark we learn praise of them as well, that they didn't speak differently than they felt in their hearts." (Rashi)

In other words, at least they were consistent. They may have hated Yosef, but, at least the brothers let it be known rather than pretend to like him. However, the Ba'al HaTurim uses the missing vav in a different way:

"L'shalom: the missing vav makes the value [of the word] 400, because it caused the 400 years of oppression." (Ba'al HaTurim)

What the Ba'al HaTurim is saying is that it was the brothers' hatred for Yosef that led to his being sold into slavery, and their eventual descent into Egyptian enslavement. Therefore, the very word that describes that hatred also alludes to the 400 years of exile, for, if you add up: lamed, shin, lamed, mem, you arrive at: 30+300+30+40, which equals 400. Had the missing vav been included, the gematria would have totaled 406.

The only question might be is, why here? Why does the Torah use this word to allude to the 400-year impending exile? The answer is an old answer: achdus. Achdus means unity. Achdus means

oneness. Achdus is another way of expressing holy concepts such as, "Every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow Jew" (Sanhedrin 27b), and, "k'ish echad b'leiv echad"--like a single person with a single heart (Rashi, Shemos 19:3). Achdus is a very important key to the Jewish people meriting to stay in Eretz Yisroel.

Hatred, jealousy--these are difficult feelings to control and everyone experiences them at some point or another, sometimes more intensely than others. However, the land can tolerate that for a time, and has over the millennia. But, when such feelings eventually dissolve the unity of people, then Eretz Yisroel can't help but reject the people--exile becomes inevitable. This is one of the reasons why the Midrash says that when the tribes of Reuvain, Gad, and Menashe opted not to live in Eretz Yisroel, the Babylonian Exile began--850 years before it actually occurred!!

The tough part in life is being able to discuss and even fight over important issues without coming to hate the other side. To hate evil is one thing, and to hate people who personify evil is a mitzvah; but to hate confused people who espouse values contrary to your own, be they false according to the Torah (especially when they accept the Torah) is a tragic mistake, and the basis of sinnus chinam--baseless hatred. And we know where that gets us in the end!

The Ba'al HaTurim is telling us where it landed our ancestors as well: into 400 years of oppression at the hands of the Egyptians. You have to be a zealot for Torah and its truth, and being willing to put yourself on the line for both. But you have to also be a zealot for Ahavas Yisroel--love of your fellow Jew, and to find the kosher medium between them both. Admittedly, it is not an easy task, but then again, is it supposed to be?

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

After these things, the wine servant of the king of Egypt and the baker transgressed against their master, the king of Egypt. Paroah became furious with his two officials, the chief of the wine servants and the chief of the bakers, and had them arrested. He put them in the custody of the house of the chief of the butchers, where Yosef was imprisoned. (Bereishis 40:1-3)

We all know the story. Yosef is falsely accused by his master's wife, the wife of Potiphar, and winds up a royal prisoner. He earns the praise of the warden, and later earns the trust of the two royal servants who failed at their jobs serving Paroah. The two of them dream. Disturbed by their dreams, they seek an interpretation, and just when they are ready to give up hope, in walks Yosef, the dream-interpreter.

True to Yosef's interpretation, the baker is executed while the wine steward is restored to his former position, setting the stage for Yosef's miraculous redemption from jail. In next week's parshah, Yosef, the expert dream interpreter, will be freed to stand before Paroah in order to interpret the royal dreams, and win the praise of the Egyptian ruler. In the end, it is Yosef's dreams that come true--he

becomes a ruler in Egypt.

It was quite an elaborate scheme to bring about Yosef's redemption from incarceration, and it certainly revealed the hand of G-d to Yosef. However, according to the Rashi, there was another reason for all the drama:

"Because all those who spoke of him used to curse the tzaddik (Yosef), The Holy One, Blessed is He, brought the downfall of these (the chief baker and wine steward) so that the people would turn on them and not on him [Yosef]..." (Rashi, Bereishis 40:1)

In other words, the downfall of the baker and the wine steward was a distraction, a diversion to take the minds of the people off Yosef and focus them instead on Paroah's servants. It was G-d's way of making sure that the people no longer concentrated on Yosef, another good example of how G-d helps out the Jewish people from behind the scenes.

In fact, we see a similar idea much later in the Torah with the story of Bilaam, who tried to curse the Jewish people from up in the mountains. In the meantime, down below in the Jewish camp, life went on as normal, and the Jewish people remained oblivious to the miracles occurring to save their lives and their futures, up in the hills above them.

In recent history, people have commented on how often, just when the Jewish people are receiving some heat, some unexpected event occurs on the world stage that distracts the world's focus from the Jewish people to other unrelated events. That too is Divine Providence at work, and though we never know when it will happen for us, we have to be grateful when it does.

The first stage to doing this is recognizing that G-d works this way. After that, we have to look at world history in this light, and once we do, it is amazing how what seems to be a crisis on the other side of the world somehow buys us some time and saves us some face on our side of the world. In fact, the Midrash says, in End-of-Days, G-d will show us how even a pin dropping in China occurred to somehow, albeit very indirectly, help the Jewish people move the world closer to its intended fulfillment.

Melave Malkah:

The chief of the butchers appointed Yosef to be with them. He served them, and they were in custody for one year. One night the two of them dreamed, each dreaming in one night, the wine servant and the baker of the king of Egypt who were imprisoned; each dream seemed to have a special meaning. In the morning Yosef came to them and could see that they were troubled. He asked the officials of Paroah who were with him in the custody of his master's house, "Why do you appear so troubled today?" They said to him, "We dreamed and there is none to explain it." Yosef

said to them, "Don't explanations belong to G-d? Please tell me." (Bereishis 40:4-8)

It is very significant how much dreams play a role in the building of the Jewish nation. Ya'akov dreamed of a ladder, and of exile and redemption. Yosef dreamed of climbing the royal ladder, and now the servants of Paroah had dreams in need of interpretation, in advance of Paroah's dream of plenty and famine. It will be these dreams that will allow Yosef to fulfill his dreams.

The Talmud makes a reference to the dreams of the baker and wine steward:

Rebi Eliezer asked: How do we know that all dreams go after the mouth (i.e., verbal interpretation)? Because it says, "... And when he interpreted [our dreams] for us, that's what happened for me ..." (Bereishis 41:13) ... "The chief of the bakers saw [that Yosef interpreted the wine steward's dream correctly] ..." (Bereishis 40:16)--How did he know? Rebi Eliezer said: From here we learn that each saw the dream and interpretation of the other [and therefore, could confirm Yosef's interpretation of the dream]. (Brochos 55b)

There is a blaring contradiction in the above statement. On one hand, the Talmud seems to indicate that the interpretation of the dream determines the outcome of the dream. On the other hand, the Talmud is telling us that the interpretation of the dream was decided before Yosef even came on to the scene! It must be--at least in the case of Yosef and Paroah's servants' dreams--that Yosef's interpretation was a matter of Divine Providence, revealed to the chief of the bakers in advance, and realized through Yosef's mouth.

The truth is, this is what Yosef told them:

Yosef said to them, "Don't explanations belong to G-d?

This is why the hatred of the brothers for Yosef turned to jealousy after hearing Yosef's second dream, and why Ya'akov "guarded the thing." Yosef's dreams could have meant a lot of things, but the interpretation that is coming to our minds, the brothers had to have thought, is an allusion to future royalty. Where's that coming from? As long as they thought that Yosef would amount to nothing, they hated him. But now that they saw G-d had serious plans for him, they became jealous of him.

In fact, when G-d wants to communicate a message to us, He knows exactly how to do it. He can create an event that He knows we'll interpret only one way--the way He wants us to interpret it--because He knows what we think and what assumptions govern our lives. He knows what will cause us to think one way or another way, and He designs a cause that will lead to the Divinely-desired effect.

We too work that way in life; that is, we do things hoping to achieve a desired result. The trouble is, though, we can't always be correct about what cause leads to the effect we want to bring about. We don't know the world, its people, or even ourselves well enough to be so accurate in orchestrating outcomes.

But G-d can. And for that reason, if you want to know the cause of a particular event--good or bad--look at the effect, and you will have a better understanding what was lacking from your life and the world around you that led to the occurrence in question. In a period of history that lacks prophets (that's p-r-o-p-h-e-t-s, not p-r-o-f-i-t-s), it is a good way to stay in touch with Divine Providence, and staying in touch with Divine Providence is what a Jew is all about.

Have a good Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston
