

A MATTER OF APPROACHES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Yehudah approached [Yosef] and said, "My master, let your servant speak a word in my master's ears. Don't be angry with your servant, for you are like Paroah ..." (Bereishis 44:19)

So began Yehudah's discourse before the second highest leader in Egypt. It is lengthy, to be sure, and quite frankly, says the Ramban, unnecessary. Furthermore, adds the Ramban, what difference did Yehudah's critical words, "That I may set my eyes upon him" make? The fact that a ruler requested someone's presence does not mean he guaranteed that person his safety; how much more so when that person stands accused of stealing the wine goblet of that ruler! Furthermore, originally he did treat him, and all the brothers for that matter, very well. As Yosef himself said,

"Say to them, 'Why do you repay evil for good? Isn't this that from which my master drinks, and from which he divines? You have done evil by what you have done.'" (Bereishis 44:4-5)

Rather, says the Ramban, Yehudah is not working according to logic here. He is a broken man, forced to throw himself on to the mercy of the court. Control of the situation had been wrested from him, and he had gone from victor to victim, as he admitted at the end of last week's parshah:

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." (Bereishis 44:16)

One can feel the sense of helplessness in his words. In spite of all the innuendoes of his words (accusing Yosef of setting Binyomin up, of not acting honorably, and threatening to kill Yosef if he refused to release Binyomin), Yehudah sounds like a man who is saying anything he can to save his life and the life of his family.

The truth is, Yehudah had reason to assume that his words would hit their mark. Earlier, Yosef had told the brothers that he "feared G-d" (Bereishis 42:18), seemingly indicating that Yosef was cut from a different fabric than the rest of the Egyptians. Perhaps Yehudah was depending upon this trait to make the difference, and was appealing to this aspect of Yosef.

However, from a Divine Providence point of view, perhaps it was a sign of what the future redemption from Egyptian slavery would be like. Later on, after the 210 years of slavery were

coming to an end, Moshe was sent in to Egypt to redeem the Jewish people. However, as G-d had told him, he failed. The next time Moshe brought news of the impending redemption (six months later), the people could not respond--the intensified labor had crushed their spirits and hopes of redemption, leaving them kotzer ruach--short of breath (Shemos 6:9).

However, it was precisely while in this state of helplessness that G-d worked His miracles and set the redemption from Egypt in motion. And that's often the case. The purpose of creation is to reveal the hand of G-d, to make His providence eminently visible to all mankind. As long as man takes credit for his success, as if it is a function of his own devices and logic, then the minds of men are diverted from the true source of his success.

However, when man himself admits that his situation is hopeless and futile, then any turnaround is clearly the result of Hashgochah Pratis--Divine Providence, and the hand of G-d becomes very evident. If you add to this the rabbis' words that Yosef's revelation, "I am Yosef" is an allusion to G-d's future revelation on the Day of Judgment of, "I am G-d," it makes sense that this a timely place to learn this lesson.

Shabbos Day:

... Yosef gave them wagons according to Paroah's instruction, and provisions for the way. To each man he gave a change of clothes, [but] to Binyomin he gave 300 pieces of silver and five changes of clothes. (Bereishis 45:21-22)

It is remarkable that Yosef should go ahead and do the very thing that created trouble for him in the first place. So much of the jealousy that the brothers had felt for Yosef stemmed from his father's special treatment of him:

A man should never treat one son better than his other children, for, because of the two selayim of material Ya'akov gave to Yosef more than the rest of his brothers, they became jealous of him and caused our fathers to go down to Egypt. (Shabbos 10b)

One could say that there is a difference between the favoritism shown by a father for a son than that of a brother for a brother, which, no doubt, is true. Nevertheless, one can also assume that for people with a propensity to feel jealousy, it doesn't make that much of a difference in the end who is favoring whom, especially when, as in the case of the brothers, there was reason to suspect revenge as well. (Furthermore, mentions the Maharshah, singling out Binyomin could have been viewed as a public demonstration of Yosef's hatred for his brothers.) Was Yosef testing his brothers--again?

Perhaps. But the Talmud adds another dimension to Yosef's partiality for his beloved brother:

Is it possible that the very source of that righteous person's [Yosef] suffering would be his own

stumbling block? For, Rava bar Mechasyia said in the name of Rav Chama bar Guria, that Rav said: A man should never treat one son better than the others, for, because of the two selayim of material Ya'akov gave to Yosef more than the rest of his brothers, they became jealous of him and it eventually led to our fathers going down to Egypt. Rebi Binyomin bar Yafes answered: He [Yosef] was hinting that in the future his [Binyomin's] descendant would wear the five pieces of clothing of kingship, as it says, "Mordechai went out with blue clothing of the kingdom ..." (Esther 8:15). (Megillah 16b)

Apparently, Yosef's act had been Divinely inspired. However, these parshios are usually related to Chanukah, not Purim. In fact, if the brothers could be faulted for anything at all, it was for acting in a Purim-mode, and not a Chanukah-mode. Let me explain.

According to the source book, Ta'amei HaMinhagim 859 (Chanukah), the reason why we play dreidel on Chanukah, and why at Purim we use a grager, is because at Chanukah-time the initiation of the redemption was not from below, but from Above. It was G-d who created the events that "dragged" Mattisyahu and his sons into a conflict they had not bargained for, which led to the miraculous victory. However, in Persia, it was Mordechai who went out of his way to instigate a "war" with Haman, which eventually led to Haman's downfall, Jewish redemption, and the holiday of Purim.

For this reason, we play dreidel and grip it from the top while it spins at the bottom, indicating that "Above" caused the Jewish people to "spin" into action against the Greeks. At Purim time, however, we twirl gragers, which we grip from below to cause the top part to "spin," to indicate that Mordechai "forced" Heaven's hand to bring about a miracle, a hidden miracle at that.

In the Torah, we see how the brothers had taken history into their own hands, first by attacking Shechem and then later, by selling Yosef. They even told G-d to take an oath not to tell Ya'akov that Yosef had only be sold and not killed. As far as the brothers were concerned, they were running the show.

However, the events gradually turned against them, and the climax of this turnaround was Yosef's pronouncement of, "I am Yosef." They had been speechless because they were amazed at just how incorrectly their assessment of the situation had been, and how incorrect their response to history had been.

So what then was Yosef's connection to Purim?

Perhaps Yosef was sending the brothers another message: You might think that your approach has no room in Jewish history, no place for a people that is supposed to live above nature and which is supposed to trust in G-d. However, that is not true. There is a time when the Jews will have to initiate their own redemption--it will come in Persia at the time of Purim.

In other words, the trick for the Jew is to know which response and when--to know when in life it is time to initiate, and when it is time to simply follow G-d's lead. It's when we don't think the situation

through, and plan the wrong response that we err, even sin.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" But his brothers weren't able to answer him because they were in shock. (Bereishis 45:3)

There are different ways to understand these words. The simplest explanation is that the brothers, never having suspected that the viceroy controlling their lives had been Yosef, were shocked to find out that the evil Egyptian ruler had been their righteous brother in disguise all along. That, for sure, would be a shocker.

However, in a deeper sense, what may have shocked the brothers is just how far G-d is prepared to go to let people utilize their free-will. He let them trap Yosef and cause him suffering, sell him to strangers, and force their father into an extended period of mourning! He let them wreak havoc on Jewish history for twenty-two years before bringing truth to bear on them and their family. Even the famine that affected the entire known world at that time had been because of them--a heavy burden to bear and price to pay for a mistaken perception of reality.

Ultimately, maybe what took the brothers' words away was the implication of such a thought: untold suffering at the hands of cruel leaders and peoples--maybe even, perhaps, a Holocaust down the road. And, as they knew only too well, nothing happens without G-d's permission, which means that events can occur down here on earth that go against logic, man's logic to the point that history can appear out of control. That's a very frightening, awesome thought--enough to take away anyone's breath.

However, after recoiling from the shock of Yosef's revelation, the brothers also saw that in the end that it will be a happy ending--a reunion of G-d with His people. Nevertheless, until that time, there can be the chaos and confusion, and all too often, the pain with only scattered moments of joy. Not a pretty forecast. On the other hand, it is what gives us the possibility to choose to have faith in G-d and His ways, or not to. And it is precisely for that choice that G-d chose Avraham and his descendants in the first place.

Melave Malkah:

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)

Parashas Vayigash is about the long-awaited reunion of Ya'akov Avinu's family. It is about the end of a twenty-two year long period of mourning of a father over a loved son, and about forgiveness of one man for his brothers. Therefore, the haftorah for this week's parshah carries this theme into the future of the Jewish people, speaking about the eventual reunification of the Twelve Tribes in the days of Moshiach.

That will be a profound reunification, because it will signal the reunification of something else as well, something that became divided long before Yosef and his brothers had been old enough to even argue with each other. In fact, it was the dissolution of this "something" that made possible all disunity within creation, including the philosophical division within Ya'akov's family. It is this that 6,000 years of history is "fixing" up.

How many trees were there in the Garden of Eden?

Those who know the story always answer, "At least two." That is, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and more than likely, many more trees as well. Otherwise, what value would G-d's words have when He told Adam:

"You may eat from every tree in the Garden, except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you do, you will certainly die, from that day." (Bereishis 2:16-17)

However, the true answer is one-one tree, and it was the Tree of Life. Every other "tree" was actually a "branch" off the Tree of Life, that is, until Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil without G-d's permission. From that point onward, the Tree of Knowledge "split" from the Tree of Life and gained an independent existence. This split was a warning of things to come, a hint to the divisive powers let loose upon creation.

It is to the repair of this initial rupture that the prophet Yechezkel is also referring. And, as is clear from his words, the repair of this primordial breach will signal the reunification of all pieces that belong together as part of glorious whole-from Yosef and his brothers to the entire Jewish nation. When that time comes, the Hidden Light of creation that revealed itself through the Chanukah Lights will shine forever.

Have a great Shabbos,

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