

'ON THE SENT' OF CHANUKA

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Ya'akov sent angels ahead of him to Eisav his brother, to the Land of Seir in the Field of Edom.
(Bereishis 32:3)

It is Kislev already and Chanukah is in the air. Here, in Israel (particularly in Meah Shearim), the menoros and shemen zais (olive oil) are making their way to the sidewalks for easy and quick sales. The days are shorter but the weather is mild, and it is easy to tap into the spirit of the Holiday of Lights.

It is no different with these parshios, which always come at this time of year. Everything about the story of Ya'akov, Yosef, and his brothers is Chanukah-based--even though Chanukah wouldn't come around for another 1,300 some odd years. The following Midrash, on the above mentioned posuk from this week's parshah, also creates that impression as well:

Noach sent a raven from the ark, and after that he sent a dove, because he saw that a king would rule before Israel; Eisav is the raven and the dove is K'nesses Yisroel. Edom, in gematria is equal to [the Hebrew "nah," spelt] "nun-aleph" (51), and this is [what was alluded to in the verse], "Please [nah], my master, pass before his servant ..." (Bereishis 33:14). (Megillos Amukos, Ophen 40)

This somewhat obscure Midrash is making a correlation between the raven and dove that Noach sent out after the Flood, and the kingdoms of Eisav and Yisroel destined to come in the future. Traditionally, the dove has always been used as a symbol of the Jewish people, and though several animals have been used to "represent" Eisav/Edom in history, in this case, it is the raven that does so.

Hence, the raven being sent out first, says this Midrash, is allusion to the fact that Edom would first establish a kingdom before the Jewish people would, as the the parshah later confirms (in Chapter 36--the number of candles we light during the eight days of Chanukah):

These are the kings which ruled in the Land of Edom before a king ruled over the Jewish people ... (Bereishis 36:31)

And, Ya'akov, when he told Eisav to leave their "meeting" without him, interjecting the word "nah" into his sentence, was, in fact, acknowledging this reality.

So, how does this connect to Chanukah? Well, first of all, the Hebrew word for dove is "yonah," made up of two parts, the word "yavan," which means "Greece," and the letter "heh" (which usually alludes to G-d). But, better than this, there are the following midrashim:

He [Noach] waited another seven days and again sent the dove from the ark. Then, toward the evening the dove returned to him carrying a plucked olive leaf in its mouth. (Bereishis 8:10)

G-d said, "The olive brought light to the world," as it says, "Then, toward the evening the dove returned to him carrying a plucked olive leaf in its mouth." (Vayikra Rabbah 31:10)

He [Noach] waited another seven days and again sent the dove...

... into the exile of the Greeks who blackened the faces of the Jews ...

... the dove returned to him carrying a plucked olive leaf in its mouth ...

Had not G-d enlightened the wise to light the candles with the oil of olive, the remainder of Yehudah would have been lost forever ...

... a plucked olive leaf in its mouth.

... From the moment the leaf was plucked off in her mouth "twenty-five" was to dwell upon the Jewish people--the twenty-fifth [day] of Kislev. (Tikunei Zohar 13)

How are the Jewish people like the dove? When Noach was in the ark, the dove came to him with an olive branch. G-d said, "Just as the dove brought light to the world, so too will you (Jewish people) bring olive oil and light it before Me." (Tanchuma Tetzaveh 5)

So, though it is true that the raven alludes to the Kingdom of Edom to be established before the Jewish kingdom, the dove alludes to the Kingdom of Israel going into exile much later in the time of the Greeks, and the eventual redemption of Chanukah in the THIRTY-SIXTH century. More importantly, the sending out of the dove and its return to Noach alludes to the power that Chanukah places into the hands of the Jews to overcome the darkness of Edom, in this last, long, and difficult exile that we are now watching come to an end--a power alluded to by the Ner Chanukah (whose first letters spell "Noach").

And, this is what Ya'akov referred to with the word "nah," and why Ya'akov's life and these parshios are laden with allusions to the holiday of Chanukah, and the eventual redemption at the hands of Moshiach.

Shabbos Day:

He (the angel) saw that he could not prevail against him (Ya'akov), and he touched the hollow of his

thigh, and he sprained the hollow of his thigh as he wrestled with him. (Bereishis 32:25)

The famous wrestle of all history is the one between Ya'akov and the "stranger" in this week's parshah, whom the Midrash says was the angel that represents the nation of Edom. It was a supernatural wrestle, one that resulted in two very significant results: Ya'akov's name change to "Yisroel," and, the prohibition to eat the gid hanasheh (sciatic nerve) of kosher animals.

The Midrash teaches us that the angel really wanted to damage Ya'akov's body, but wasn't able to; Ya'akov held him off. Therefore, the angel went after a more external, less spiritual part of Ya'akov, his leg. As the posuk relates, he was successful there, and did quite a bit of damage.

Question: Which leg did the angel affect?

The Zohar on this week's parshah answers this question: the left leg. This was Ya'akov's weakest point because it represents mankind's weakest point, being the place that the yetzer hara first entered Adam HaRishon after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Besides, the "left" side, Kabbalistically, always represents the side of "Gevurah," or, "Tzimtzum"--constriction of G-d's light.

The left leg itself corresponds to the "sefirah" (emanation) called "Hod"(Glory). Just as white light contains different colors that, when directed through a prism or filter, become revealed, so too does G-d's light "break down," so-to-speak, into different levels of spiritual light, called "sefiros" (circular emanations).

For those who "invite" the spiritual "guests" ("Ushpizin") into their succos during the week of the holiday, they already know that the lower seven (of ten sefiros) also correspond to one of seven great Jewish leaders. The sefirah of Hod corresponds to Aharon HaKohen, Moshe's brother, and the one who was famous for bringing peace between G-d and the Jewish people, and between Jew and Jew.

It was this leg, this sefirah, the spiritual force that the angel of Eisav damaged that night in his fight with Ya'akov. Perhaps this explains the splintering nature of the Jewish people to this very day. Indeed, IN THIS VERY DAY, for he damaged that part just before the sun rose, the symbol of the Final Redemption (night symbolizes exile).

Though, the Zohar identifies the legs of Ya'akov as representing the financial "supporters" of Torah, alluding to the fact that Torah would struggle for financial support before Moshiach comes, we can now also conclude that "achdus"--unity of the Jewish people--also came under attack that night that Ya'akov fought with the angel--a night that the rabbis say symbolize the long exiles of the future Jewish nation.

As well, Kabbalah teaches that Hod is the spiritual source for prophecy, and that too was lost within 1,000 years of the giving of Torah, and has not returned since. It was taken away, says tradition, because false prophets were rampant, and Jews no longer paid attention to real prophets and their

messages. Perhaps that too was the result of Eisav's angel's attempt to undermine the Jewish people's success as a nation of G-d.

But, the body of Ya'akov, which symbolized Torah, went untouched. Perhaps that explains why Torah is found almost everywhere today, enhanced by beautiful synagogues and study halls the world over, while unity of the Jewish people remains a distant memory.

However, just as Ya'akov's gid hanasheh was healed the next day, so, too, will our lack of achdus be repaired once again, one way or another. And, tradition tells us that in Moshiach's time, prophecy will also return. And, the following tells us that the lights of Chanukah have a very important role to play in the healing process of both, as the posuk says and the Maharil explains:

Ya'akov called the place "Peniel," because [he said] "I saw an angel face-to-face, and my soul was saved." The sun shone for him (lamed-vav) ... (Bereishis 32:30-31)

"To heal his lameness." (Rashi)

What aspect about the sun healed his lameness?

The sun shone for him (lo) ... The word lamed-vav (which equals thirty-six in gematria) refers to the thirty-six candles of Chanukah. (Maharil, Avodah Zarah 3b)

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Ya'akov came complete to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; he camped before the city. (Bereishis 33:18)

After surviving Lavan for twenty years, fighting an entire night with the angel of Eisav, living through a confrontation with Eisav, Ya'akov probably looked at his stay in Shechem as a time to physically and spiritually recuperate. It was time for a little "R&R," as they say.

Alas, it was not to be so. On the contrary! his troubles were just beginning, for, it would be just a short while before Shechem son of Chamor (literally, "son of a donkey") would violate Ya'akov's daughter, Dinah, and take her off. That crisis would spawn another catastrophe: the annihilation of the men of Shechem at the hands of Ya'akov's own sons, Shimon and Levi, and a retaliation by the nations of Canaan.

There is no rest for the righteous.

It has been, and it remains to be, the Jewish dream to "settle down." Even though 6,000 years is a very small pittance compared to Eternity in the World-to-Come, while here, it is hard to relate to that. Our physical bodies tire after a few hours of labor; surely the nation is tired after thousands of years of struggle and exile. Some people have even coined the phrase, "It is difficult to be a Jew."

You'll notice that Ya'akov did not go to pieces when he learned of what happened to his daughter--a holy member of his holy family violated by the "son of a donkey." In fact, he even chastised his sons for taking revenge against the perpetrators! Ya'akov, though devastated on the inside by the horrible and animalistic act of Shechem son of Chamor, on the outside, was as "cool as a cucumber."

How could Ya'akov act this way?

Answering this question requires some background. First of all, the child conceived by Dinah ended up, with the help of Heaven, in the house of Potiphar--and later married Yosef. From Yosef and Osnos, Ephraim and Menashe were born, in whose name we bless our sons every Friday night.

What role did Shechem play in all of this? According to the Arizal, when Adam's soul "splintered" after the sin, some good aspects ended up in Shechem son of Chamor, later on in history. Those holy sparks needed redemption from the side of impurity and to be brought into the Jewish camp. Shechem took Dinah, but Dinah took his sparks, and that is why he was later killed by Shimon and Levi.

It all worked out in favor of the Jewish people in the long run.

This is why Shechem has the gematria of 360, or, ten times thirty-six, the number of candles we light during the eight days of Chanukah. People think that the message of Chanukah is that Jews are a miraculous people who can rise above nature and conquer all, and they are right, but only partly right.

The redemption of Chanukah was never completed, and what was achieved was soon lost to the Romans. The darkness the Greeks brought to the Jewish nation had not been lifted, and still has not lifted to this day. It will take Moshiach to bring an end to that darkness once-and-for-all.

Then, what was the big deal about the miraculous oil that burned for eight days, and the miraculous victory of the small Jewish army over the larger Greek-Syrian army? The big deal was their message, that we may be in exile, but G-d is there with us too. We may not have the strength to overcome our enemies, but we have the inherent ability and Divine help to outlive them.

And outlive them we have, and, with G-d's help, outlive them we will.

This is what Ya'akov understood that let him keep his peace in face of what happened to his own daughter. This is what some survivors of the Holocaust told me they kept telling themselves throughout the war in the camps, though they had to face Nazis (may their names be erased) and their barbaric tactics everyday. And this is what the Jew today has to tell himself, in order to avoid making spiritual compromises that can and usually undermine our own survival.

It is as the Talmud says:

Their enactments are temporary and will cease to exist eventually; ours are eternal. Why overturn a permanent enactment for a temporary one? (Kesuvos 3b)

It is a question that all of us must ask ourselves each day of our lives, but especially at this time of year, when the darkness of winter reminds us of the darkness of exile; and especially when we kindle the Chanukah candles that emanate the light of thirty-six.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Sing to G-d a new song, sing to G-d everyone on earth. Sing to G-d, bless His Name, announce his salvation daily. (Tehillim 96:1-2)

This is the second paragraph of the Friday Night Kabbalos Shabbos section, and the seventh tehillah that Moshe composed. According to one commentary, this psalm was dedicated to Zevulun, who rejoiced when they went out to earn a living which helped to support Yissachar in their learning.

Zevulun appreciated that their wealth was from G-d, that it was also on account of Yissachar's Torah learning that they were so financially successful, and that it was their own merit that they were able to have such a relationship with the Torah scholars of Yissachar. Zevulun truly felt that Yissachar was doing THEM the favor by allowing their tribe to support Yissachar's Torah learning--something that is not always the case today in the Supporter-Learner relationship.

The rabbis tell us that Eisav also wanted to enter into such a relationship with his brother, Ya'akov. This is the meaning of the verse from this week's parshah:

He (Eisav) said, "Let us journey; let us go, and I will accompany you." (Bereishis 33:12)

--that is:

Eisav said, "Let us travel together; we will divide This World and rule together." (Zohar, Bereishis 172a)

Eisav told Ya'akov, "My brother Ya'akov: Let us walk as partners in This World." But Ya'akov answered, "You go on ... I need to take my time." (Devarim Rabbah 1:17)

According to tradition, Eisav understood that he had forfeited his right to the World-to-Come, going back even to the time when he sold the birthright to Ya'akov at the age of fifteen. However, in the back of his mind, he remained interested in finding a way "back in," and lacking the ability to do so on his own, he looked at Ya'akov, his righteous brother, as his "ticket" in.

"Everyone needs money," Eisav reasoned. "Even a talmid chacham has to eat and feed his family," he knew. "Let me lighten Ya'akov's physical load, and this way, he will lighten my spiritual load."

And why not? Was this not the relationship between Zevulun and Yissachar, and so many wealthy Jews and Torah scholars throughout history? Yet, Ya'akov rejected Eisav's request--turned him down flatly, deciding instead to persevere in poverty if need be to continue his study of Torah.

Why? What was the difference that Yissachar accepted Zevulun's terms, but Ya'akov rejected Eisav's? Because, as the Talmud states, Torah and the World-to-Come cannot be bought with money--they are bought with self-sacrifice, as it says:

Three gifts The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave to Yisroel, and all of them were given only through hardship. They are Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and the World-to-Come. (Brochos 5a)

"Sorry, Eisav," Ya'akov, in fact, told his brother, "The World-to-Come is not for sale. You have to earn it with your own self-sacrifice for Torah and mitzvos, just as I have done!" However, that being the case, then what about Zevulun? Were they not then deluding themselves into thinking that Yissachar's learning would also count for them in the World-to-Come?

No, of course not. Zevulun didn't look at their financial contributions to Yissachar's physical survival as a way to buy their way into Eternity. Rather, it was Zevulun's perspective that they looked at Torah as being the most important possession in This World (and the Next), and at the people who learned Torah as the most respected of society. Thus, they yearned to have the merit to learn Torah, and to be counted among those fortunate to learn Torah.

However, as they found out, that was not their strength. Their ability lay in being excellent merchants, and they saw that G-d blessed them in all that they were involved. Seeing this, Zevulun thought to themselves, "We can't really learn Torah as we would like to, but, we can at least help those who can, as much as our means allow us to." In other words, Zevulun just wanted to have a part of their beloved Torah and its world.

For this self-sacrifice for Torah, Zevulun was blessed at sea and on land. But, more importantly, they were blessed with a wonderful portion in the World-to-Come, carved out, a large part, by the holy Torah-learners of Yissachar. And this crucial message Moshe capsualized for all of us throughout the ages in Tehillah 96. And, we say it at the entry of Shabbos, at the time of week that are supposed re-focus our sights on the true priorities in life.

Good Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston
