

REPENT! FOR THE END IS DEAR

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Then Paroah said to Yosef, "Since G-d has made all of this known to you, there can be no one as understanding and as wise as you. You will be in charge of my house, and people will do what you say." Paroah called Yosef "Tzafnat Panayach" [Seer of the Hidden]. (Bereishis 41:39-45)

This is THE Chanukah parshah, with all its many hints to the "Holiday of Lights," even though this year, as it does only on rare occasions, falls on the Shabbos after Chanukah. And, speaking of ends (mikeitz), it is going around here that, the number of times that the letters "kuf" and "tzaddik" appear together in the Torah, letters which spell the word "keitz," a term used for the "end of history" at the hands of Moshiach, is 5,761 time. Just thought I'd pass that on.

To understand how this is so, we have to bridge the gap between the resolution of Yosef and his brothers, and what the story of Chanukah comes to teach us in every generation, and why more this is truer of Chanukah than, let's say, the holiday of Pesach.

There are many themes to both the story of Yosef and his brothers, and, Chanukah. However, what we need is the universal thread that binds them both together -- the MAIN theme common to both stories, and that theme is: Nothing is NECESSARILY what it seems to be on the surface, and, this principle has been part and parcel of creation ever since Day One of creation.

The Torah writes:

G-d saw the Light, that it was good, and He separated be-tween the Light and the Dark ... (Bereishis 1:4)

-- and Rashi comments:

G-D SAW THE LIGHT, THAT IT WAS GOOD AND HE SEPARATED: For this also we need the words of Aggadatah (Midrash): He saw that it would not be fitting to use it, and He separated it for the righteous in the Time-to-Come. (Rashi)

Hence, the name of the Original Light of creation: Ohr HaGanuz -- the "Hidden Light" of creation, because, from the first day of creation onward, G-d hid that light, which, obviously, is not the light of the sun, moon, and stars, or Westinghouse light bulbs. Although, it did make one last guest

appearance on the sixth day of creation, according to the Talmud, when it shone for Adam HaRishon for thirty-six hours (Yerushalmi, Brochos 8:5) -- the number of Chanukah candles we light over eight days (not including the Shamash of each day).

Hence, it says:

The original Light of creation was hidden in the thirty-six candles of Chanukah. (B'nei Yissachar)

Where? And, how did G-d get all of that light in there, a light which the Talmud says Adam could use to see from one end of the world until the other end of the world (Chagigah 12a)? That was sommmme view.

What is unique about the candles of Chanukah is that they burn as a reminder of the miracle that happened with the oil in the Menorah at the time of the Chashmonaim -- a strong case to use olive oil in one's Menorah. JUDGING from the amount of the oil that was found by the Chashmonaim -- one small jar's worth -- there was enough to burn only one day, and, as the Talmud teaches:

A judge has only what his eyes see. (Bava Basra 131a)

However, be a judge only when you HAVE to be, for Halachah's sake, for, we the Jewish people are called "Rachmanim" -- "Merciful Ones" (Yevamos 79a), or else, suffer the consequences, as did Yosef's brothers:

The brothers said to one another, "We are guilty because of our brother [Yoseph]. When he pleaded with us, we didn't pay attention, and therefore this anguish has come to us." (Bereishis 42:21)

What had they been doing instead? Judging him, says the Midrash, and so confident were they in their decision that they were able to sit down and drink after (Bereishis Rabbah 84:16). He kept crying about his innocence until the very last moment, and they kept calling him guilty, at least that was the way it appeared to THEIR eyes (Bereishis Rabbah 91:10) -- which were used to seeing things only on the surface:

And the well was empty, there was no water inside it (Bereishis 37:24). From the fact that it says the well was empty, would it not be clear there was no water inside? Rather, it teaches you that there was no water, but there were snakes and scorpions. (Shabbos 22a)

On the "surface" of the matter, Yosef was in a waterless pit, held prisoner by his own brother's spiritual blindness. However, below the surface, Yosef was encased in miracle, a clear sign that the hand of G-d was actively and directly protecting his beloved Yosef. This intellectual blindness, we will see next, b"H, is the reason behind most of what goes wrong in Jewish history, and, in the lives of Yosef's brothers.

Shabbos Day:

Yosef saw his brothers and he recognized them, but acted as a stranger to them and spoke to them harshly. He asked them, "From where have you come?" They answered, "From the land of Canaan to buy food. Though Yosef recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. (Bereishis 42:7-8)

What we said in the previous d'var Torah also explains the above posuk, which emphasizes that:

Though Yosef recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. (Bereishis 42:8)

How could they? Their eyes only saw a viceroy of Egypt before them -- they were not equipped to see the Yosef below the surface of Egyptian clothing and fanfare. The Hellenists could only -- would only -- see a Written Torah before them; they were not spiritually equipped to see the Oral Law within, of which the Midrash writes:

"The people who walk in darkness see the Great Light" (Yeshayahu 9:1): These are the masters of Talmud (of which there are THIRTY-SIX tractates) 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)

Great Light? The Hidden Light of creation, the one that was hidden away for the righteous of the future, of which there are THIRTY-SIX in every generation. In fact, the Sifsei Chachamim explains Rashi's comment as follows:

FOR THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE TIME-TO-COME: For the righteous person who is "good," and therefore He made a separation, meaning, in order that there should be a distinction between the righteous person who is "light" and the evil person who is "darkness." (Sifsei Chachamim)

This makes Rashi's comment later (from Bereishis Rabbah 100:10), when Yosef is reassuring his brothers that he harbors no plans of revenge, even more accurate:

HE SPOKE TO THEIR HEARTS: If ten candles could not put out one candle, how then can one candle extinguish ten? (Bereishis Rabbah 50:21)

What the brothers originally saw as darkness, turned out to emanate the greatest light of creation, ever since Yosef uttered the fateful words,

"I am Yosef" (Bereishis 45:3)

However, continues the verse:

His brothers weren't able to answer him because they were in shock.

So brilliant was the illumination, made even brighter by the supposed darkness from whence it came -- second-in-command of Egypt, the most immoral nation on the face of the earth at that time.

However, that's just the way it appeared on the surface, for, Yosef had not been Egyptian -- never was and never would be, just like the Torah is not what the Hellenists -- ancient and modern -- think it is either. They just don't understand:

"And this stumbling block is under your hand" (Yeshayahu 3:6). A person cannot stand in Torah unless he stumbles in it. (Gittin 43a)

In "yeshivishe language" it is called "breaking one's teeth." Whether we are talking about "hashemen" (the oil), "Neshamah" (soul), or, "Mishnah" (Oral Teaching) -- all of which have the same letters as the word "Shemonah" (eight) -- it is all the same thing: light hidden below the surface.

It is a Tree of Life for those who GRASP it. (Mishlei 3:18)

Waiting to be revealed through the deeds of man, and, ignited by the actions of the wise:

The wise will understand these, the understanding will know them, for the ways of G-d are straight, and the righteous walk in them, while the sinners stumble in them. (Hoshea 14:10).

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Then he searched, starting with the eldest and ending with the youngest. The goblet was found in Binyomin's bag; they tore their garments. Then each one loaded his donkey and returned to the city. (Bereishis 44:12-13)

From the Torah, it would appear that the brothers never suspected Binyomin of actually stealing the viceroy's wine chalice, but, the Midrash tells another story:

When the goblet was found in Binyomin's sack, the brothers shouted at him, "Thief, son of a thief, son of Rachel who stole Lavan's idol!" (Bereishis Rabbah 92:8).

And, in spite of Binyomin's pleas of innocence, and warning to them that they were being tested by G-d, the brothers still insisted it was Binyomin's fault, and they even dealt him blows!

Would they ever learn? First they misjudged Yosef, and look where it got them and at the uncontrollable suffering it caused their righteous father, Ya'akov. Then, Yehudah assumed his own sons' deaths were the fault of Tamar his righteous daughter-in-law, and not their own evil fault, as the Torah reveals to us that it was. Then he assumed that Tamar was guilty of playing the harlot, when, instead, he HIMSELF had been guilty of doing so. And now, in spite of ALL OF THAT, still, they insisted on misjudging and mistreating those they misjudge, in this case, righteous Binyomin!

The road to righteousness and spiritual completion for the brothers had been a bumpy one, and, sometimes, the greater and more serious the issues, the more difficult it is to avoid the bumps. And, as the Arizal points out, until righteous people expunge whatever small amount of evil sparks they

may contain -- a result of Adam's eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil -- they can end up doing sins that even simple people don't seem to commit (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 20, p. 55).

Here's a story you can tell one night this week, b"H, as you watch your Ner Chanukah burn brightly with the healing light of the Hidden Light of creation. It emanates out from the story of Yosef and his brothers, and, is a very, very powerful lesson for all of us until the end of time. Enjoy.

One stormy night many years ago, an elderly man and his wife entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia. Trying to get out of the rain, the couple approached the front desk hoping to get some shelter for the night.

"Could you possibly give us a room here?" the husband asked. The clerk, a friendly man with a winning smile, looked at the couple and explained that there were three conventions in town.

"All of our rooms are taken," the clerk said. "But I can't send a nice couple like you out into the rain at one o'clock in the morning. Would you perhaps be willing to sleep in my room? It's not exactly a suite, but it will be good enough to make you folks comfortable for the night."

When the couple declined, the young man pressed on. "Don't worry about me; I'll make out just fine," the clerk told them.

So the couple agreed. As he paid his bill the next morning, the elderly man said to the clerk, "You are the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe someday I'll build one for you."

The clerk looked at them and smiled. The three of them had a good laugh. As they drove away, the elderly couple agreed that the helpful clerk was indeed exceptional, as finding people who are both friendly and helpful isn't easy.

Two years passed. The clerk had almost forgotten the incident when he received a letter from the old man. It recalled that stormy night and enclosed a round-trip ticket to New York, asking the young man to pay them a visit.

The old man met him in New York, and led him to the corner of Fifth Avenue and 34th Street. He then pointed to a great new building there, a palace of reddish stone, with turrets and watchtowers thrusting up to the sky.

"That," said the older man, "is the hotel I have just built for you to manage."

"You must be joking," the young man said.

"I can assure you I am not," said the older man, a sly smile playing around his mouth.

The older man's name was William Waldorf Astor, and the magnificent structure was the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The young clerk who became its first manager was George C. Boldt. This

young clerk never foresaw the turn of events that would lead him to become the manager of one of the world's most glamorous hotels. The Bible says that we are not to turn our backs on those who are in need, for we might be entertaining angels.

And the lesson is: Treat everyone with love, grace and respect, and you cannot fail!

End of story; I didn't change a word. Though, I'm sure there are many stories like it amongst the Jewish people, but this one just happened to be sent to me this week, just as I sat down to write this d'var Torah, and just as I was wondering how I'd end it. It seemed to fit in so nicely.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song of Ascents. Behold, bless G-d, all you servants of G-d, who stand in the House of G-d in the nights. (Tehillim 139:1)

Another very short, but very powerful psalm.

"Night" is exile. "Night" is "hester panim," the hiding of G-d's Providence, giving the world a feeling of randomness. "Night" is a time of judgment, when mercy seems to be a distant reality, and even good people are made to suffer at the hands of the wicked. And, "night" is a time that people often run away from G-d, and not towards Him.

Specifically, then, night is a time to bless G-d, for, as the Nefesh HaChaim points out (Sha'ar 2), the concept of blessing G-d works to end night, and its cold darkness. To bless G-d, Who has all that He could ever "need," is to do that which draws His Presence into the world; it is to "increase" the clarity of His involvement in creation and the affairs of man.

This is why learning Torah, as the Rambam points out, is especially important at night time. In fact, the Talmud teaches that anyone who learns Torah at night time will be rewarded with his own increased blessing the next day, not to mention it saves one's home (Eiruvin 18b).

As the Malbim says, the true servant of G-d never leaves his "post" nor forsakes his mission. In the Western world, it is, "Where the going gets tough, the tough get going." However, in the Torah world it is, "When darkness of exile encompasses you, you encompass the darkness of exile" -- with the light of Torah in the "houses of G-d" -- beacons within the sea of exile -- and the performance of mitzvos with enthusiasm, and, according to the Talmud, this posuk is talking about those very people who do, and, their families who support them (Menachos 110a).

Lift your hands in the Sanctuary and bless G-d. May G-d bless you from Tzion, Maker of Heaven and Earth. (2 - 3)

And, this is just not A purposeful thing to do, this is THE purposeful thing to do. It is the path to "Tzion" -- the code word for the Final Redemption, when the Jewish people will return to Eretz

Yisroel and live under Torah and those who uphold her.

And, as the Midrash points out, it is no coincidence that "Yosef" and "Tzion" share the same gematria, for, they represent the path to the same end goal. For, which light is it that we are to emanate out at night -- the "Great Darkness" -- if not THE LIGHT, the light of the first day of creation -- the Ohr HaGanuz. And, the very same light that is hidden within and, through our efforts, revealed from the thirty-six candles of Chanukah.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston
