

THE PAGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Ya'akov settled in the land of the sojournings of his fathers in the Land of Canaan. These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef was seventeen years old (Bereishis 37:1)

This year, 5761, has already been a special year as far as the holidays are concerned, with many falling on Shabbos (double-holiness), and, now, with Chanukah spanning two Shabbasos. That's a lot of extra holiness and light to be gained for the spiritual opportunist.

These parshios are full of hints to the holiday of Chanukah, though they occurred long before there was even a Jewish people to leave a Greek exile. However, even history yet to be lived out, including Moshiach's arrival, is in the Torah as well, for, as the Midrash explains, the Torah is the blueprint for creation, and therefore, all of history, every last detail of it, by definition, must be there on some level.

For example, Yosef "goes out" from Ya'akov at the age of seventeen years of age, just like a flame is supposed to do, as Rashi re-quotes again in this week's parshah. Now, seventeen is a special number in Kabbalah, because, it is the gematria of the word "tov," which, of course means "good."

But, more importantly, it is the word used to describe the creation of light on the first day of creation, the First Light, the Primordial Light -- the Ohr HaGanuz -- the "Hidden Light" of creation. This light, says the Talmud Yerushalmi (Brochos 8:5), shone for Adam HaRishon, erev Shabbos on Day Six and Shabbos itself, at total of thirty-six hours altogether -- the number of candles we light over the course of the eight days of Chanukah (not including the Shamashim, which are not really part of the mitzvah). The word "light" appears in the Torah thirty-six times (Rokeach).

Even in "Mispar Katan," a form of gematria that pursues the "root" of an idea by reducing a gematria to a number less than ten, for example, $17 = 1 + 7 = 8$. Eight, as we have already said is the number of days it takes to light all thirty-six candles, and, as is well known, is a number that symbolizes the supernatural, and, the day of Bris Milah -- which Yosef symbolized. As well, it is pointed out, the "tes" of "tov" has four tagim (crowns) upon it (in a Sefer Torah), and when multiplied by the numerical value of the tes itself (nine) yields the number thirty-six.

Yosef is a flame alright -- a Chanukah flame!

Then there is this unusually long Rashi on the first posuk of the parshah:

AND YA'AKOV SETTLED: A certain flax-seller brought camels laden with flax (into the city), and, a blacksmith wondered (out loud), "Where will he put all that flax?" A wise guy answered, "One spark from your bellow will burn all of it up!" Thus, Ya'akov saw all the chieftains (of Eisav) mentioned previously (in Chapter THIRTY-SIX), and wondered, "Who can conquer all of them?" What is written after? "There are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef," and it is written, "The House of Ya'akov will be fire, the House of Yosef will be a flame, and, the House of Eisav will be straw." (Ovadiah 1:18): a spark will go out from Yosef and burn them all up! (Rashi)

Is Rashi's parable original? Perhaps not completely, for, we find a similar case in a Mishnah:

If a camel laden with flax pushed into the doorway of a store and caught fire from the storekeeper's candle, burning down the entire building, the camel owner is responsible. However, if the storekeeper left his candle outside, the storekeeper is culpable. Rav Yehudah says: If it was a Chanukah Candle, he is not responsible. (Bava Kamma 62b)

Why such a strong connection between these parshios, and Chanukah specifically? And, what is it about Yosef that makes him a living example of the light of the Chanukiah, which, in itself, is an expression of the Hidden Light of creation, as it says:

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

Because, Yosef HaTzaddik, as his name implies, was about Jewish identity, and so is the story of Chanukah. It was only one parshah ago that Ya'akov entered the "darkness" of exile and fought with the Angel of Eisav, who embodied all the ideals of an Eisavian way of life. After a long, bitter struggle, Ya'akov emerged as "Yisroel," the namesake of the truly fulfilled and completed Jew.

"Yisroel" is not merely a name, it is a "title," and a "blessing," something to be achieved, and therefore, something that can be lost as well. This is why unlike Avraham, Ya'akov can be called either "Ya'akov" or "Yisroel." When a descendant of Ya'akov acts like the twin brother of Eisav -- mimicking his behavior and idolizing his ideals -- then he is, at best, a Ya'akov, and, at worst, an Eisav.

However, when a Jew maintains his Torah integrity and godly-identity, then, he is, at least, a Yisroel, and at most whatever spiritually-elevated level of greatness he is able to achieve. The sky's the limit for such a Jew, and even higher for that matter. Then a person emanates the Divinely-cherished light of creation, which burns from within our Ner Chanukah.

That is the light of the tzaddik, of Yosef HaTzaddik, which "went out" in this week's parshah, via the city of Shechem, and burned so brilliantly within the darkness of Egyptian exile.

Shabbos Day:

His brothers went to herd the flock of their father in Shechem. Yisroel said to Yoseph, "Aren't your brothers herding in Shechem? I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." He told him, "Please, go look into the well-being of your brothers and of the flock, and come back and let me know." (Bereishis 37:12-14)

So began the odyssey of Yosef. What started out only as a difficult mission turned into a two-decade separate between father and son, during which Yosef would be terribly shamed and frightened by his scheming and seemingly heartless brothers, sold into slavery, ensnared by his master's wife, jailed, released, catapulted into second-in-command over the mightiest nation of his time, and, given a chance to take complete and perfect revenge. And all within twenty-two years yet!

What possessed Ya'akov to endanger his son as he did? Was it simply a father's inability to believe that his own sons could harm their sibling? Or, was Ya'akov well aware of the "lion's cage" into which he was sending his beloved son, the one in whom he placed all his hope for the transmission of the values of his own fathers? And, if the latter, what did he expect to happen to Yosef, if not something completely dangerous?

Later in the parshah, we read:

They took Yoseph's coat, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the coat in the blood. Then they brought the fine colored coat to their father and said, "We found this. Check to see whether it is your son's coat or not." He recognized it and said, "It is my son's coat. A wild animal has eaten him. Yoseph is certainly torn to pieces." Then Ya'akov tore his clothing and put on sack-cloth, and mourned over his son for many days. All of his sons and daughters tried to console him, but he refused to be consoled and said, "I will go to the grave mourning for my son." His father wept for him. (Bereishis 37:31-35)

The Talmud tells us that G-d put forgetfulness into the world, specifically for the reason that we should be able to let go of the dear departed, without which a person could mourn, as did Ya'akov, for decades (Brochos 58b). Who could survive such extended mourning?

Thus, for this reason the rabbis have taught that, if a person cannot accept the death of a missing individual and "let go" of their memory in spite of trying to, it may be a Heavenly sign that the person has yet to actually die, as in the case of Yosef. But, if so, knowing this, then this alone should have been Ya'akov's comfort; he should have taken his inconsolability as a sign from Heaven that Yosef remained alive. Why didn't he?

Because, Ya'akov mourned for more than Yosef -- he mourned for his life's work, and that was "dying" everyday of his life with him. Sending Yosef into the lion's den was more than just a way to

keep up on the welfare of his other sons; it was a way to "test" the Divine Providence of Yosef himself, to see if G-d was with the son the way he was with the father, directing, guiding, protecting, and nurturing.

For, in spite of all his best efforts -- and he made great ones -- Eisav could not get his hands on HIS brother's "mantle" of leadership and sully it with any blood, especially Ya'akov's own. And, where Eisav left off Lavan picked up with enthusiasm, as Ya'akov testifies:

"Unless the G-d of my father, the G-d of Avraham and the Dread of Yitzchak had been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. G-d has seen my misery and the labor of my hands, and He proved so last night." (Bereishis 31:42)

An animal? A WILD animal? Torn to pieces by a WILD animal? Sounds awfully random awfully meaningLESS! How unProvidential and ignoble a death could one suffer -- especially given how Providential and noble Yosef's beginning had been, having all those wonderful dreams!

Precisely what the brother's wanted Ya'akov to think -- precisely what the brother's themselves wanted to think, for, they had known and,

They said to one another, "The dreamer is coming. Let's kill him, and throw him into one of the pits. We will say a wild animal has eaten him" (Bereishis 37:19-20)

For, Yosef was "the dreamer," and dreams, at least at that time of history, were a form of prophecy, a revelation of G-d's Divine Providence for that person.

"then we'll see what will become of his dreams."

Exactly. That's what it was all about in the end, wasn't it? For whom was G-d "working" -- for whom was He looking out?

Ya'akov was right about his son's greatness, but wrong, perhaps, in his decision to test it out and assist the Hashgochah on its way to paving the way for redemption. The brothers, ironically, were guilty of the same thing, pressing Hashgochah Pratis to protect the "chosen one" of Ya'akov's family -- though counting on just the opposite -- and they suffered a lot for that too. And Yosef had been doing the same thing all along with his brothers by overtly getting them into trouble with Ya'akov.

And, in spite of all the human fiddling, when the "dust" settled, every single speck did so in the place meant for it from the beginning of creation, for nothing, but nothing can prevent the Hashgochah from carrying out its purpose:

Many are the schemes of man, but the plan of G-d always prevails. (Mishlei 19:21)

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

While she was being taken out, she sent for her father-in-law saying, "I am pregnant by the man to whom these belong. Please identify to whom this signet ring, cloak, and staff belong." (Bereishis 38:25)

Tamar was what we might call a "cool cucumber." There she was, about to be burned to death -- the capital punishment for a daughter of a priest who acted in that way -- and she is camouflaging the true meaning of her words, words whose meaning she needed understood right then and there to save her life. But, she acted as if she had all the time in the world by playing a word game with her principle accuser, her father-in-law, Yehudah.

The truth is, she was probably "sweating bullets," as they say, knowing full well that at any moment she could leave the world in a blaze -- and not a very glorious one at that. The truth is, she was probably terrified as she spoke so calmly, determined that, if she was going to leave this world, and in a blaze at that, then, she would do so in a blaze of glory -- dying instead of embarrassing another in public.

And, this is the extent, the rabbis teach and learn from Tamar in this week's parshah, one must go to avoid embarrassing another in public:

It is preferable for a person to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to embarrass the face of his friend in public. From where do we learn this? From Tamar (Brochos 43b)

We learn a similar law from Tamar's descendant, Dovid HaMelech, as the Talmud portrays, and to what extent the punishment goes for violating it:

Dovid said before The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! It is revealed and known before You that if they tore open my flesh, blood would not flow to the ground (i.e., so humiliated I have been). Not only that, but, even when they are learning the laws of Negayim (Ritual Plague) and Ohalos (laws regarding enclosures that contain the dead), they say to me, 'Dovid! What kind of death for one who commits adultery?' I tell them, 'He is to die by strangulation, but, he still receives a portion in the World-to-Come. However, one who embarrasses another in public has NO portion in the World-to-Come!'" (Bava Metzia 59a)

"They," of course, were referring to Dovid's taking of Bas Sheva, which, unfortunately, had the appearance at the time of him taking a married woman. He, of course, was referring to the great embarrassment they were causing him in public, murdering him in a sense since embarrassment, the Talmud teaches, causes the blood to leave a person's face, leaving them white with humiliation. And, he was warning them of what their ultimate fate would be if they didn't stop humiliating him -- a fate far worse than any worst-case scenario they might have been imaging for their king.

"Character Assassination" sounds pretty serious in itself, but, it does have one thing going for it: unlike murder, it gives the victim a second chance to start life anew after the attack. That distinction, from a Western perspective, is enough of a difference to put it in the category of "harmless offences," though, if you are personally offended by the effects on your reputation, you can sue a

person and try to regain some moral ground. However, no one ever gets capital punishment (in a "civilized" society), even during times when it is an acceptable form of judgment, for assassinating someone's character.

However, capital punishment, from a Torah perspective, is more a form of atonement for the soul than a form of punishment for the person. The true punishment comes later on in history, long after this chapter on creation has been closed. There can be no greater punishment than not receiving a portion in the World-to-Come, which, a murderer who does teshuvah and receives his appropriate "atonement" in This World can still receive, just like the adulterer. The public-embarrasser does not.

It will not be the Western media or the Supreme Court of the United States of America who will decide our reward or punishment on that "great and awesome Day of Judgment," but the Torah itself. Whose perspective on public embarrassment, then, should we abide by?

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song of Ascents for Dovid. Behold, how good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers, also in unity. (Tehillim 133:1)

In English, the words may not be so familiar. However, in Hebrew they go, "Hinei ma tov u-mah noyim shevet achim gum yachad," and they are sung at many Shabbatonim and Jewish conventions. Aside from the nice melody to which these words are sung, they express one of history's greatest aspirations: universal peace and brotherhood.

Just this week these words came to my mind, this past Tuesday. We were having some shelving installed in a storage room of ours, to try and bring some semblance of order to our home. As usual, we called on the local Yerushalmi carpenters to do the work, and not just because they are conveniently located in our small little community, but, because, well, they are just nice guys to work with.

Their work is good, and is the result of two brothers, and one worker. When it comes to installation, though, usually one brother stays behind in the shop and works while the other brother and the worker come and install. However, this time, on a rare occasion both brothers came and did the job together.

Greater than my excitement over the arrival of our new shelving, was that from watching two brothers work together, in harmony, peacefully, and in love. They're probably not the types to express emotions, especially to one another, but, I could sense a very close, respectful, and trusting relationship, and I enjoyed watching it in action. I am envious of their relationship, in a positive way. It is a rare pleasure that my wife and I enjoy whenever we can, especially when our own children get along in such a way, which, unfortunately, is not as often as we would like.

"Sibling" and "rivalry" ought to be oxymorons, but, unfortunately, they seem as natural together as bread and butter, ever since Kayin killed Hevel. The story of Yosef and his brothers is one of hatred and jealousy among brothers, with disastrous results, and, had G-d not been directly involved, who knows where that one would have ended up!

In fact, the Final Redemption is seen as the resolution of such sibling enmity, as the Haftarah for Parashas Vayigash reveals:

"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 Yoseph, 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 Yoseph which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel, 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)

The Talmud says that this psalm is really talking about two specific brothers, role models for all relationships, Moshe Rabbeinu and his older brother Aharon HaKohen, as the next line reveals:

Like the precious oil upon the head running down upon the beard, the beard of Aharon, running down over his garments. (2)

The oil, of course, refers to the Oil of Anointing, which Moshe used to inaugurate his brother into the priesthood, oil that amounted to twelve logs -- one for each of the 12 Tribes -- no matter how much was used. It was Miracle-Oil, which, according to the Yalkut Reuveini on last week's parshah, had belonged to Ya'akov Avinu. He had found it the next day after waking up from his dream of the ladder, during which the twelve stones under his head had become one stone.

And the small jar that Ya'akov returned across the Yavok River for, before battling with the angel the entire night, and gaining victory and the new name, "Yisroel"? That's right -- it was filled with this miraculous oil which the Maharil says led to the merit of the Chashmonaim finding their (the same?) Miracle-Oil after defeating the Greeks, you know, the one that keeps replenishing itself.

Where there's oil, there's light

To say that Moshe and Aharon loved each other is an understatement. Moshe so worried about Aharon's honor (he was older than Moshe) that he argued with G-d about being the one to free the Jewish people. Aharon so loved his brother that he danced with joy upon hearing of his brother's appointment to the office of Savior. And, Dovid HaMelech so loved them both and their relationship that he played about it upon his harp and wrote about here in Tehillim.

Like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Tzion, for there G-d has commanded the blessing. May there be life forever! (3)

There is something very primal about brotherly love, which may explain why it is so difficult to achieve, and why it is such a rare, valuable gem when find it. Dovid HaMelech wrote about the very thing Ya'akov wanted to do: settle among "settled brothers." Alas, the fulfillment of his dream was premature, not achieving completion in his lifetime, the lifetime of Yosef, or even, within the lifetimes of his surviving brothers.

In fact, we're still waiting. Guess it will just have to be one of those things Moshiach -- the TRUE "Big Brother" -- will have to take care of when he does his thing.

Have a great, holy, and REVEALING Shabbos-Chanukah,
Pinchas Winston
