

AT LAST, THE FINAL APPROACH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

"I am Yoseph" (Bereishis 45:3)

If I had to choose a posuk to sum up the story of Yosef and his brothers, besides the one just quoted, it would be, "The stone the builders despised became the cornerstone" (Tehillim 118:22). This verse was said by Dovid HaMelech about himself, for no one -- not even Shmuel HaNavi -- suspected that young, red, and ruddy Dovid -- would be G-d's choice for king over the entire Jewish people and ancestor of Moshiach himself.

No one suspected that Yosef was inside the viceroy's clothing wielding the power of the second-in-command over the mightiest nation on earth at that time. No one suspected that Yosef would be G-d's choice to act as the "Yesod" -- the foundation -- for the future of the Jewish people. Certainly not his brothers.

And, of course, this posuk also sums up the message of Chanukah as well, which, as we have already said, is about revealing hidden lights, often from sources within which we never thought they resided.

It's an old malady -- quite old, in fact. Adam HaRishon overlooked the Tree of Life for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and gambled away Paradise. According to the Kli Yakar, that was because the Tree of Life lacked the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which was external, visible, and therefore tangible.

However, the bark itself of the Tree of Life was its fruit, something that, from the outside, did not seem obvious. No, in fact, to the physical eye, the Tree of Life appeared inedible, and therefore, without any real value -- just like secular people view Torah today. As any Ba'al Teshuvah will tell you, the "Tree of Life" looks much, much different on the "inside" than it does on the "outside," extremely nourishing and life-supporting.

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

For those who GRASP it, not for those who remain and examine it at a distance.

This is why G-d comes to Adam with the question, "Aiyekah," a word whose gematria is equal to

THIRTY-SIX -- the number of the Hidden Light of creation, and, the Ner Chanukah. It is also a word that can be read, "Aiyeh-koh," -- "Where is TWENTY-FIVE" -- the other number for the Hidden Light, and, of course, the day in Kislev on which the "Holiday of Lights" begins.

Probably the only reason why many of the THIRTY-SIX righteous people upon whom the world stands in each generation are HIDDEN is because of the posuk above:

"The stone the builders despised became the cornerstone."

For, we are constantly doing it. We are constantly assuming that G-d sees the world that same way that we do, and feels the same way about people that we feel. Make no mistake about it: Yosef's brothers were Torah-observing individuals, righteous in their own right, though, perhaps in need of an even higher level of perfection. But, with all of their spiritual greatness, they still missed out big time with respect to Yosef's role in Jewish history.

And, Dovid HaMelech's brothers were tzaddikim too. His own father, Yishai, the Talmud says, was so righteous that, had it not been for the decree for man to die, he would have gone to the World-to-Come without dying (Shabbos 54b). And Shmuel HaNavi -- the posuk says that he equaled Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen combined (Tehillim 99:6)! But, with all of their spiritual greatness, they still missed out big time with respect to Dovid's role in Jewish history.

And, how many times do we do it too? There are people walking around us doing special things, but, for one reason or another we find other things about them that make us "despise" them on some level, or, at least discount their importance to G-d. Maybe on occasion, when we're in an objective mood, we look and become somewhat impressed, but, all too often, we lapse back into our old sense of doubt about them, and write them off as, well, just ordinary people.

However, each "Yosef" of history gets his day, if not now, then, at some time in the future. And when he or she does, we'll be shocked at the revelation, maybe even speechless like Yosef's brothers were. And, for the unassuming person who respects all people and is busy being a messenger of G-d in This World, there may be the biggest shock of all, when he finds out that he, too, was one of G-d's main cornerstones with which He has built the Final Redemption, and, His Kingdom on earth.

Shabbos Day:

He sent Yehudah ahead to Yosef to prepare for their arrival. They traveled to the land of Goshen (Goshnah). (Bereishis 46:28)

The other posuk that I think sums up Chanukah and the story of the brothers accurately is the one that follows the posuk mentioned above, "This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes"

(Tehillim 118:23). This posuk instructs us about Divine Providence, so that we won't be fooled, like the brothers were, regarding Divine messages sent to us as clues about the will of G-d in history.

You could say, "What Divine messages? Yosef engineered the whole thing!"

However, as the Talmud says, a man does not lift a finger if it is not willed by Heaven (Chullin 7b). Even the idea to lift that finger often comes from Heaven, to help us help Heaven bring the master plan of creation to fruition, willingly or unwillingly, the former bringing us credit for being G-d's partner in creation, the latter bringing us no glory whatsoever, as Yosef's dumbstruck brothers realized the hard way.

The above posuk from this week's parshah makes its own connection to the Chanukah-story, for as many commentators point out, the word "Goshnah" is spelled: gimmel-shin-nun-heh, the very same letters on the side of the dreidle that allude to the words: Neis Gadol Hayah Shumm -- a "Great Miracle Happened There."

What do those words mean to us?

Usually, they act as a reminder that G-d once "interfered" in the history of man, and "arranged" events that the small Jewish army under the leadership of Mattisyahu and his sons could overcome the mighty Greek army under the leadership of Antiochus. Every year, on Chanukah, we commemorate and "publicize" that miracle, and more importantly, the miracle of the olive oil that burned for seven extra days.

However, there is also "mussar" in those words as well, based upon the posuk, "This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes." A corollary of this verse is, if you can't see the hand of G-d in life, then, it is because life has lost its wonder for you. For YOU, not for G-d, for Whom creation is also wondrous because it is one big, ongoing miracle. It is the yetzer hara that says, "Big Deal!" about life.

As Rebi Chanina Ben Dosa told his daughter, who was amazed that the vinegar she mistakenly ignited burned as if it were the oil she thought it was, the only reason why oil burns better than vinegar -- NORMALLY -- is because that is the way G-d wants it. As you have just found out, he told her, it doesn't HAVE to be that way -- unless you believe that it MUST.

But, if you believe in the miracle of life, and, are real with G-d's hand within nature, controlling nature like a puppeteer does his puppet, then miracles won't surprise. They will delight you, but not surprise you, just as was the case with Rebi Chanina Ben Dosa, because, seeing the world the way G-d does, you will sense that a miracle is forthcoming, AND, the brothers would have recognized Yosef even before he had revealed himself. And, even had they waited until that fateful moment, they would have, instead of being silenced, celebrated the fantastic turn of events.

A Great Miracle Happened There -- UNEXPECTEDLY -- because, we were out of touch with Reality, with THE Reality -- G-d's Reality. And, the Talmud and the Holy Books tell us that, at the end of history, great miracles will happen for the Jewish people of that generation as well, on the level of

those which happened for the Jews who left Egypt, and greater. Who will expect them, see them coming, and, who will be surprised.

It was the right place for Yehudah to meet Yosef, in "Goshnah." For, at this particular meeting point in time and space, Yehudah, and by learning the story, future generations, are reminded that, if we are sensitive to the wonders of life and the events of our days, we will be able to see the hand of G-d, and work with it, as partners, to bring the Final Redemption, may it come speedily in our days.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Then Yosef brought Ya'akov his father, and presented him to Paroah. Ya'akov blessed Paroah. (Bereishis 47:7)

From the posuk we don't know who was there at this ceremonial event, when the Gadol HaDor came and blessed the president of the super power of the time. However, the Midrash fills in the guest list for us, but revealing that:

At the time when Ya'akov came before Paroah and blessed him, as it says, "Ya'akov blessed Paroah," Og was sitting there. Paroah said to Og, "Did they not used to say about Avraham, that he had a wife who could not give birth, yet, here is the son of his son, and seventy of his descendants!" At that time, Og gave them an "evil eye," and, The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, "Evil one! Why are you causing an evil eye to My children?" He blinded that evil one, and, in the future, he would fall into his hand." (Yalkut Reuveini, Vayigash)

Og, the giant sure got around, seemingly always in the wrong place at the right time. While all others were being drowned by the Flood waters in Noach's time, Og managed to stay alive by hanging onto the Ark. And later on, when he set his eyes on Sarah, Avraham's wife, he informed Avraham of the war in the land and the capture of his nephew, Lot, in hope that Avraham would die in battle, which, of course, did not happen. And there he was again, already in Egypt ahead of Ya'akov, chumming up with Paroah, casting evil eyes on Avraham's descendants.

But it backfired. Not only did Og's evil eye have no affect on the Jewish people, but, it paved the way for his own downfall at the hands of Moshe Rabbeinu, much later in history at the end of Parashas Chukas. And, it is another good example of how G-d fights wars on behalf of the Jewish people without us even knowing it, as we saw in the case of Bilaam who was hired to curse the Jewish people (Parashas Balak):

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Israel: Know how much "tzeddakah" I did for you, by not getting angry in those days of Bilaam the Evil. For, had I allowed Myself to get angry (at the time that I NORMALLY do), then not one Jew would have survived! (Sanhedrin 105b)

In fact, as one person put it to me this week, if the Jewish people knew how much evil there was out there, and how much scheming against the Jewish people there is, they'd shake in their boots and learn Torah with great enthusiasm and say Tehillim in-between. We have learned just evil evil can be when it is allowed to rear its ugly head.

So, why don't we? Because, often G-d keeps evil at bay, or, at least, minimizes its effects. Many times, here in Eretz Yisroel, a timely rainstorm not only waters thirsty fields and fills the low Kinneret, but, it has also foiled a terrorist plot. In fact, during Sukkos this year, when, uncharacteristically, it poured several times, terrorism dropped dramatically. And, as one soldier who fought in the '67 War said, "The reason we won the war was because of superior firepower. But, we all knew that we were shooting better than we were able to."

However, as we have learned the hard way many times throughout history, G-d only fights our wars for so long -- about as long as we appreciate His help and show it in our actions. If not, then.

MELAVE MALKAH:

For the Conductor, a psalm of Dovid. Free me, G-d, from the wicked man; from the man of violence preserve me. Who devise evil schemes in their hearts, who assemble daily for war. (Tehillim 140:1-3)

It is, after all, quite overwhelming. So much evil in the world! So many people doing evil things in the world -- stealing, raping, murdering abusing entire countries. So much deceit! One can almost imagine the yetzer hara sitting in some executive chair at the top of the world's tallest and most impressive skyscraper, calling the shots.

I once tried to convey to my children one day how the chocolate bar they wanted to buy was just making someone rich, someone who sits around all day scheming how to take advantage of children's desires to make themselves rich. They bought the chocolate bar anyhow, just as I did when I was their age, because the person who made that chocolate bar knew their yetzer hara better than they did.

Such people, of course, were not exactly what Dovid HaMelech had in mind when he composed this psalm, though, on some level, they can be included. He was talking about far more abusive and harmful people, people who live for war and thrive on it, one kind of war or another, one way or another. They define themselves by war and their acts of war, and, this, in the end, is what makes them so dangerous, so difficult to live with.

And there are a lot of them, which necessitates our constantly turning to G-d for help.

They have sharpened their tongue like a serpent, a spider's venom is on their lips, Selah. (4)

Swords can physically kill a person, but, words can make a person go through a living death. Dovid

HaMelech experienced this first hand, because they used to spread terrible rumors and lies about him, regarding his ancestry from Rus the Moabitess, and, regarding his marriage to Bas Sheva. And, when those words come from seemingly "credible" sources, and the people listening either do not have the wherewithal to check out the validity of the statements, or, the will to do so, then, such "venom" settles into the minds of the masses, and are hard to reverse.

How many times has a single statement turned the lives of others upside down, perhaps even resulting in death, or, worse, pogroms, as in the case of blood libels? Yet, there are people, unscrupulous people, people who only think about getting ahead in life, even, perhaps, at the cost of others, who delight in using their sharp tongue to inject their venom.

Guard me, G-d, from the hands of the wicked one, from the man of violence preserve me -- those who have schemed to cause my steps to slip. The arrogant have hidden a trap for me and ropes, they spread a net near my footpath, they set traps for me, Selah. (5 - 6)

There is a name for this process, and that is "Politics." Some call it the "Game of Politics," because that is what it is to them, a game. Man seems to be a political "animal," and, he certainly loves to play games. Sometimes politics just seem to be a more civil form of gladiator fights. In the name of politics we often hide truths that ought to be revealed, and, in the name of politics we often reveal truths that ought to have remained hidden.

"Clean politics," assuming the term is not an oxymoron, is part-and-parcel of life. However, when politics inspire and allow people to act immorally, then, politics itself become a false god, and form of idol worship. Some feel that, in the name of politics, everything is fair game. G-d begs to differ.

I said to G-d, "You are my G-d! Listen, G-d, to the sound of my pleading." G-d, my L-rd, Might of my salvation, You protected my head on the day of armed battle. Grant not, G-d, the desires of the wicked one; do not cause his conspiracy to be successful, for them to be exalted, Selah. (7 - 9)

On the last line, the Talmud comments:

Ya'akov said to The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! Don't fulfill the heart's desires of the evil Eisav, the "bit" do not remove from his mouth!" This is Germania of Edom, for, if they went out, they would destroy the entire world(Megillah 6a)

At the back of the Talmud, a commentator amends this word to read, "Germania," an Ashkenazic tribe that descended from Eisav. Was Ya'akov seeing the future?

The Pri Tzaddik, however, points out that Edom's physical strength is drawn only from Ya'akov's spiritual weakness, and therefore, G-d could answer Ya'akov's request by saying, "I should control Eisav?! That's your job! Just live by Torah, and the "bit" will never leave Eisav's mouth!"

Therefore, says the Pri Tzaddik, Ya'akov was really referring to the Eisav side of himself, which represents his downfall and can trap him in exile. After all, Ya'akov WAS the twin brother of Eisav;

there must be some similarity to his twin brother on SOME level.

Indeed, "Ya'akov" IS the twin brother of Eisav, and possesses the potential to mimic Eisav's ways. However, "Yisroel" is NOT the twin brother of Eisav, and thus, this is what we must strive to achieve: the level of Yisroel. Hence, Ya'akov was really saying, "Dear G-d, please, help me with my yetzer hara so that I can expunge all Eisav-type qualities from my being. That way, Eisav my brother, and his descendants will have no power of me."

And, when they do, then, it is a clear sign that we have slipped into a Ya'akov, twin-brother-of-Eisav mode.

Only the righteous will give thanks to Your Name; the upright will dwell in Your Presence. (13)

All the more reason to enlist G-d's help to overcome our Eisav-like tendencies, and fulfill our potentials to be spiritually great.

Have a great Shabbos,
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