

# THE NAME OF THE GAME

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt with Ya'akov . . . (Shemos 1:1)*

There are two very important rules to know if one wants to maximize his or her control over life. I say "maximize" because complete control over one's life is not relevant since that would imply the power to even veto the will of G-d, which is never possible. Nevertheless, that still leaves plenty of room to be somewhat a master of one's own destiny.

The first rule is that all of life is a function of a very elaborate and often elegant system of cause-and-effect relationships. Not a single act can happen anywhere in the world that does not have some effect on creation, though the effect may go undetected by human senses. However, it is built into creation and therefore, one should consider every act he performs and contemplate its potential effect.

The second rule is that small things tend to lead to big things, like in the story of "Kamtza u'Bar Kamtza." (Gittin 56b) Some call it the "Ripple Effect," some call it the "Butterfly Effect," and others call it the "Snowball Effect." However, whatever the name they all mean the same thing, and not only does cause lead to effect, but it often leads to an effect that seems to increase over time.

These two principles help to explain the great leap from last week's parshah to this week's parshah. One week we're privy to a reunion of Ya'akov and his sons and their journey down to Egypt, and the next moment we are reading about the enslavement of a massive nation and their descendants. Seemingly, something is missing in between.

However, you have to admit that it serves to drive the point home that whatever happened in the previous parshios was the direct cause of the enslavement of the Jewish people in this week's parshah, though seemingly, it was small compared to the upcoming servitude of the Twelve Tribes.

However, that is the whole point, and that is why Yosef cried when his brothers lied to him that Ya'akov warned him not to harm his brothers. He hadn't cried because they had hurt his feelings, because he understood. After all, they were ten men within a vast country that Yosef controlled. Besides, Yosef was too big a person to get hurt over things like that.

No, Yosef cried because he knew the brothers' cause was going to have a very dramatic effect

down the line, once it rippled out through the years of life in Egypt. He knew that his brothers' insecurity and lack of trust in G-d to protect them was going to eventually lead to vast assimilation, and as a result, a harsh response from Heaven. THAT was something to cry about!

On the other hand, I personally witnessed the same thing in a positive way last night. Last night, Motzei Shabbos, I had the wonderful merit to be at a Melave Malkah in Eretz Yisroel with about twenty other couples. What made this Melave Malkah unique was that everyone there was from the same home town, Toronto, Canada, and had either recently made aliyah or had done so some time back. A couple of people there were either trying it out or planning it for the near future.

As I scanned the room, I felt a tremendous surge of emotion. It felt like we had all once been trapped behind enemy lines and had somehow escaped only to rendezvous later, but in friendly territory. It was a tremendous reunion and many of us felt a little of the power of "kibbutz golios," the eventual and total ingathering of the Jewish exiles.

When I considered what it took to arrive at this wonderful point, I traced all the causes and effects back to home study groups back in Toronto, group discussions, conversations over coffee, and a whole host of other factors that, at the time, had not seemed all that important. Last night I came to realize just how important each one of those factors were in all of our lives.

If only the brothers had accepted with a complete heart what Ya'akov alluded to when he said the "Shema" upon being reunited with Yosef after 22 years. Had they, then the sojourn in Egypt would have only been that, and nothing more. Certainly, the brothers would not have worried about Yosef's behavior towards them, and he would have had no reason to cry.

Again, on the other hand, the implication is that one person doing a small thing can eventually have a rather dramatic effect, and will. It may take a while before the results are tangible and visible, but come they must, and more than likely in a major way. It is the necessary consequence of the two principles that govern everyday life.

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## **Shabbos Day:**

*Return to Egypt since all the people have died who wanted to kill you . . . (Shemos 4:19)*

The Torah takes the concept of a vow quite seriously, because it invokes the Name of G-d and often involves the usage of a holy object to lend importance to the "neder" being taken. Consequently, there is an entire volume in the Talmud devoted to the laws of oaths, called "Nedarim," and a separate one that deals with oaths as well.

Aside from the discussion of what constitutes a valid vow according to Torah law, there is a

discussion about the annulment of such vows as well. One of the ways to do so is the concept of "nolad," which literally refers to something born anew. In this case, what was "born" was an unforeseen event that changes the feeling of the person who made the vow.

In such a case, the rabbis ask the person who vowed, "Would you have made such a vow if you knew that such-and-such a thing would happen?" If the person answers in the negative, then they annul the vow and the person is free of his previously self-imposed obligation.

One of the proofs for the validity of this cancellation process is the above posuk from this week's parshah. Says the Talmud:

What is the reason for Rebi Eliezer? Rav Chisda said, the posuk says, "Since all the people have died" - their death was an unforeseen event, and from here we learn that you can open up with "nolad." (Nedarim 64b)

As Rashi explains, Moshe Rabbeinu had vowed to Yisro his father-in-law that he would not return to Egypt because of the people who wanted to kill him, namely Dasan and Aviram, who had reported his killing of the Egyptian to Paroah. However, now that Dasan and Aviram had died, Moshe's vow became cancelled, permitting him to return to Egypt to save the Jewish people.

In truth, as the Talmud points out, Dasan and Aviram had not actually died. In fact, they had only become impoverished, which as the Talmud declares, gave them the status of being "dead." If so, then how could Moshe be relieved of his vow? Say the rabbis: because it happened before he took his vow, and therefore the very premise upon which the vow was based had never really existed.

Nevertheless, it is VERY interesting how the future and crucial salvation of the Jewish people came down to a technical reality of a vow. Surely if the lives of millions of people are involved, a vow should not have the power to restrain someone who can save them, which of course it doesn't. Furthermore, if G-d says, "Moshe, go down to Egypt and save My people," what is Moshe going to say, "Sorry G-d, I made a vow not to go back unless . . .?"

However, all of this becomes easier to understand when one recalls that the redemption from Egypt is all about redemption of the mouth. That's right, the mouth.

Moshe's stutter is the first issue that he brings up as a reason why he can't face Paroah, whose name in Hebrew can mean: peh rah - evil mouth. The escape of the Jewish people from "Pi HaChiros," which literally means the "mouth of freedom," into the "midbar" (desert), is the same letters as "one who speaks" (medabehr).

This, of course, is only a scratch across the surface. However, it does help us to better understand why the man chosen to "free" the Jewish mouth had to make sure that his vow was properly dealt with before he went down to Egypt.

## SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

*Moshe took his wife and his sons, and placed them upon the donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. (Shemos 5:20)* Egypt is Mitzrayim, or rather, Mitzrayim is Egypt. Which one is it, or does it really even matter?

If it is the former, then Mitzrayim exists even today, even though the people have been conquered and moved around throughout the millennia. However, if it is the latter, then Mitzrayim and Egypt are not necessarily the same thing, only when certain criteria are fulfilled. Thus, the Egypt of today is not necessarily the Mitzrayim of the Torah.

This does not mean that the physical location of Mitzrayim was not the physical location of Egypt today; it was. Rather it means that the people of Moshe Rabbeinu's time, unlike the people of Egypt today, represented a certain spiritual consciousness and they "happened" to live in the north-east part of South Africa.

This does not mean that the place itself does not play a role in the spiritual development of a nation, for it does, and it certainly did for the "Mitzri'im" of Moshe's time. However, in the times of Noach and the Forefathers, it was more important from whom you descended than where you lived, although the latter was a function of the former.

Furthermore, more than likely, there is a spiritual residue that the Mitzri'im left behind embedded in the very soil of Mitzrayim that could affect all the generations after them. Perhaps this is why the Egyptians of today seemed to have inherited a thirst for blood libels against the Jews that were unique to Russia and parts of eastern Europe.

However, if Mitzrayim is more of a consciousness and a concept than of a people, then it also means that it is not bound by physical borders. Whereas Egyptians are people who come from the country of Egypt, "Mitzri'im" can live anywhere in the world and bear the "physical" nationality of any nation of the world.

Just as the Jewish people are scattered around the world today, Mitzri'im may also be scattered around the world today. However, instead of being located in one place and looking alike, they might be American, Canadian, British, South African, or any of the other many nationalities of today. This, of course, makes freedom from "them" slightly more difficult than in Moshe Rabbeinu's time.

However, there is one tell-tale sign that identifies a "Mitzri" from all the rest, and it is implied in the very name itself. "Mitzrayim" (mem-tzaddi-raish-yud-mem) is composed of two words, "metzer" (boundary) and "yumm" (sea), except that it does not refer to a sea shore, but rather to a different "sea" - the "sea" of Divine knowledge often referred to as the "Nun Sha'arei Binah" - the "Fifty Gates of Understanding." This is why the letters "yud-mem" (yumm) add up to the number fifty.

Thus, "Mitzrayim" means "boundary of fifty," and refers to any ideology that runs contrary to the Fifty Gates of Wisdom - the wisdom of Torah, and particularly of the Oral Law, which is the revelation of the "Fifty Gates." That is also one of the reasons why it is called the "Sea of Talmud."

As you read through these parshios of the exile and redemption of the Jewish people from Mitzrayim, look around you. Mitzrayim is not just a people, but a concept, and the worst kind of enslavement is the one you can't even recognize. How many Jews today and over the centuries have knowingly abandoned their 3300 year old tradition to be "modern," unaware that, instead, they only returned to Egypt - rather, Mitzrayim - after so many millennia of being away?

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## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

### **Installment #6: Ya'akov Avinu (Part 2)**

Is it any wonder that going back for that little jar resulted in the battle with an angel, and more importantly, in a name change:

Ya'akov remained alone, and a man battled with him until the morning light. When he saw that he could not overcome him he touched his hind thigh and uprooted the thigh of Ya'akov. (Bereishis 32:25)

Of course, the battle had not been a typical fight between two men. According to the midrashim, the all-night battle represented the "night" of Jewish history: exiles. The angel represented all the enemies of the Jewish people who would try to extinguish the light of Torah, and thus, Ya'akov's victory was the eventual redemption of the Jewish people.

Therefore, having said this, it is not surprising that it was also a source of revelation for the Hidden Light of creation:

He (the angel) said to him, "What is your name?"

He answered, "Ya'akov."

He said, "No longer is it Ya'akov, but Yisroel, for you fought with G-d and with men and succeeded. (Bereishis 32:28)

NO LONGER IS IT YA'AKOV: He strove with an angel and overcame it. "He cried and pleaded to him." (Hoshea 12:5, Rashi)

The Hebrew words of this posuk that Rashi uses to describe the angel's reaction to Ya'akov's victory can be read as, "on the TWENTY-FIFTH there was a CHAYN of THIRTY-SIX." The "twenty-fifth" is an allusion to the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, the "chayn" is an allusion to the root of Chanukah, and the "thirty-six" is an allusion to the Hidden Light of creation within the thirty-six candles of Chanukah.

Even the gid hanashe (sciatic nerve) with which the angel injured Ya'akov before taking his leave, is

connected to the holy oil of Chanukah (Ohr Torah 10), conceptually and numerically:

gimmel-yud-dalet, heh-nun-shin-heh =  $3+10+4+5+50+300+5 = 377$ , which in "Small Gematria" =  $3+7+7 = 17 = 1 + 7 = 8$

- the same gid hanashe that Yosef had removed before his brothers eyes when they came back before Yosef for the second time, and for the moment of truth:

"u'tvoach tevach v'hachayn" (vav-tes-bais-ches, tes-bais-ches, vav-heh-chof-nun) - "Slaughter and prepare . . ." (Bereishis 43:16)

Explains the Talmud:

"Prepare" means remove the gid hanashe in front [of the brothers]. (Chullin 91a)

And, just coincidentally:

The last letters of "u'tvoach tevach v'hachayn" spell Chanukah, and their total numerical value is equal to 44, the number of candles of Chanukah (including the shamashim). (Eliyahu Rabbah, Chanukah 10).

In the meantime, Ya'akov left his victory over the angel limping from his injury. However, it was not to be a permanent injury for Ya'akov Avinu, for the healing process had already begun for him, as the posuk says:

The sun shone for him (lamed-vav) . . . (Bereishis 32:32)

THE SUN SHONE FOR HIM (LAMED-VAV): The word "lamed-vav" ( $30+6$ ) refers to the thirty-six candles of Chanukah. (Maharil, Avodah Zarah 3b)

The thirty-six candles of Chanukah? For Ya'akov Avinu? Almost two thousands year before Chanukah even became a holiday? How can that be? Whatever it was that shone for Ya'akov that morning, healed his wound and was a function of the light of thirty-six, the Hidden Light of creation.

As a result, Ya'akov left Peniel, the place where he "saw G-d face-to-face," a changed man. Ya'akov's victory was as much an inner one than any other kind of victory. It transformed him into Yisroel - the namesake of all his descendants and the description of the perfected nation . . . the "light unto the nations."

However, as climactic as the victorious moment was, Ya'akov still had to "grow" somewhat into the role and instill the trait of Yisroel into the national psyche of the people he had begun to create. Unfortunately this drained Ya'akov of his life's energy and even led to an early death at the age of 147 years.

First, his daughter was violated in Shechem, the place "set aside" for punishment. (Rashi, Bereishis 37:14) Even as disastrous as this was, somewhere amidst the tragedy and confusion lurked the light

of creation, albeit hidden. This we have already seen from the head letters of the Hebrew words for "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever" - "bais-shin-chof-mem, lamed-vav" - which spells "In Shechem thirty-six."

Shortly after dealing with that episode, Yosef, Ya'akov's chosen spiritual heir was sold into slavery by his brothers. This occurred in, of all places, Shechem. At what age was Yosef sold? At seventeen years of age - the numerical value of "good" (tes-vav-bais) which the light of creation was called.

For twenty-two difficult years Ya'akov could not be consoled for the loss of Yosef, who is compared to the light of the Menorah:

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)

YA'AKOV SETTLED: A flax-driver came into town with camels laden with flax. A black smith wondered, "Where will all this flax go?" A wise guy answered, "One spark from your bellow will burn it up!" Thus, Ya'akov saw all the chieftains of Eisav mentioned in the previous chapter (Chapter 36!) and asked, "Who will be able to conquer them?" What's written after? "These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef . . ." as it says, "The house of Ya'akov will be fire, the house of Yosef will be a flame, and the house of Eisav will be straw; one spark will go out from Yosef and burn it all up." (Rashi)

Ironically, the only Mishnah in the entire Oral Law that makes any kind of reference to Chanukah does so in the following similar manner:

A spark which comes from a hammer and damages, makes one culpable. If a camel was loaded with flax and pressed through the door of a store and caught fire from the storekeeper's candle, burning down the building, the camel owner is culpable. However, if the shopkeeper left his candle outside, the shopkeeper is culpable. Rebi Yehudah says, if it was a Chanukah candle, he is not culpable. (Bava Kamma 62b)

This is because the mitzvah is to light the Menorah outside where it can be seen and the miracle of Chanukah can be proclaimed in public. Furthermore, it is supposed to be placed between three and ten tefachim (about 12" to 40" from the ground), where the flax of the camel driver can easily come into contact with the flame and catch fire.

How coincidental that Rashi should use such an analogy to speak about someone who is an extension of the very light embodied in the Ner Shel Chanukah!

Making a very long story shorter, Ya'akov and Yosef are eventually reunited in Egypt. At the extremely emotional reunion of father and son as Yosef cries on his father's neck, Ya'akov Avinu recites the twenty-five letters of the Shema - the creed and mission statement of the Jewish people.

The last seventeen years of Yisroel's life were spent in Goshen, which is called "Goshnah" in Parashas Vayigash. The letters of "Goshnah" (gimmel-shin-nun-heh) are also the head-letters found

on the dreidel and which stand for: a great miracle happened there, another unexpected Chanukah-allusion found within the parshios of Yosef and his brothers.

Yisroel taught his own grandsons, and watched as his son, Yosef, resumed his role as leader of the family. And when he finally died, he left this world in a blaze of glory, shining with the light of thirty-six. This was evident not just from the way he lived, but even in the way he died:

In the beginning, before the Egyptians saw the way the entire world honored Yisroel (Ya'akov), they did not conduct themselves honorably toward the brothers of Yosef. However, after they saw how they were honored by the entire world, they too paid their due respects. The following posuk indicates this, "And they came to the threshing-floor surrounded by thorns." (Bereishis 50:10) Is a threshing-floor made of thorns? Rav Avahu said: This is to teach you that they (the kings of the entire world) surrounded the coffin of Ya'akov with crowns like a threshing-floor surrounded by thorns . . . They went with plans of war, but when they saw the crown of Yosef on the coffin of Ya'akov, all of them took off their crowns and placed them on Ya'akov's coffin . . .

How many crowns altogether?

THIRTY-SIX crowns they placed on the coffin. (Sotah 13a)

Thus, there is no denying it: Ya'akov fulfilled the purpose of life as represented by the number thirty-six. He lived the least amount of years of all the Avos, but when it was all said and done, clearly he shone with the light of creation.

Have a great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

*This week's parshah is dedicated to Leah Amelia Kahn on the celebration of her birthday, by her mother, Michelle Kahn. May the entire family be blessed with health and happiness until 120 years of age.*