

PAKOD YIFKOD

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Ya'akov lived in the Land of Egypt for 17 years; the days of Ya'akov's life were 147 years. (Bereishis 47:28)

At last, a happy ending to what had started out to be a pretty sad story.

It seemed that Ya'akov could handle living on the run from his vengeful brother Eisav. He seemed to even be able to cope with hiding out for twenty years with his double-crossing Uncle Lavan. Even losing his beloved wife Rachel upon returning to the land of his fathers did not drain Ya'akov of his purpose to live. However, losing Yosef just about did, and regaining him physically and spiritually made all the worry and suffering worthwhile once it was all said and done.

However, as Rashi points out on this posuk, the happy ending wasn't as happy as it ought to have been:

Why is this verse closed (in a Sefer Torah)? Because, once Ya'akov Avinu died the eyes and hearts of Israel became closed since it signaled the beginning of the servitude. Another explanation is that Ya'akov wanted to reveal the end to his sons but it was closed to them. (Rashi)

The end of what, and are they really two different reasons?

What Rashi is referring to is found in the Talmud:

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: "And Ya'akov called his sons and told them, 'Gather around and I will tell you what will happen to you in the End-of-Days.'" (Bereishis 49:1). Ya'akov wanted to reveal the End-of-Days to his sons, but the Divine Presence left him. So he said, "Perhaps, G-d forbid, there is something unfit from my bed (i.e., a spiritually unworthy child), just as Yishmael was born to Avraham, and Eisav to my father Yitzchak?" His sons answered, "Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad (Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One): just as in your heart only (G-d is) One, so too in our hearts, there is only One." At that moment, Ya'akov said, "Boruch Shem kevod Malchuso l'olam va-ed (Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever)!" (Pesachim 56a)

In other words, you need not assume, Ya'akov Avinu, that it was your sons who were responsible for the loss of prophecy about the End-of-Days. Perhaps, in the end, Heaven just didn't want to reveal this "classified information" to them, even though they were perfectly righteous individuals. Oh well.

If only we had learned that precious secret . . .

However, was Ya'akov Avinu convinced? Apparently not, as the Zohar reveals:

Ya'akov wanted to establish the Mystery of Unity below, and composed the twenty-four letters of, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever." He didn't make it twenty-five letters, since the Mishkan (Tabernacle) had yet to be built. Once the Mishkan was built, the first word was completed . . . With regard to this, it says, "G-d spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying . . ." (Vayikrah 1:1), which has twenty-five letters. (Zohar 2:139b)

That is, the last part of the first posuk of Parashas Vayikra after the words, "G-d spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying . . ." has 25 letters. Somehow these twenty-five letters are a replacement for the twenty-five letters that "Boruch Shem, etc." was supposed to have had, but didn't. Had that been the case, it would have mirrored the Shema perfectly, having exactly six words and twenty-five letters, just like the Shema itself, for a combined total of twelve and fifty.

Just like Ya'akov's sons, the Twelve Tribes. Oh well, missed by one.

Shabbos Day:

Because their father had died, Yosef's brothers said, "Maybe Yosef will hate us and repay us for all the evil that we did to him." They had someone say to Yosef, "Your father commanded us before his death to say to Yosef, 'Please forgive the crime of your brothers and their guilt though they have done evil to you. Please forgive the crime of the servants of your father's G-d.'" Yosef cried when they spoke to him . . . and Yosef said to them, "Do not be afraid. Am I in place of G-d? (Bereishis 50:15-19)

The answer to the question comes at the end of the parshah (in Chapter 50!) but it may not be the answer we suspected. Nevertheless, it is the answer we need to hear because it addresses the lives of Jews throughout our entire history, and particularly at the end of history.

In spite of the brothers having answered their father with a recitation of the Shema, the Divine Presence had nevertheless left him at that crucial moment when he wanted to hand over the keys to Jewish history. That was significant - that was VERY significant.

However, what was wrong? Did the brothers not repent for their having sold Yosef into slavery? From the reunion alone it certainly seemed as if they had been sufficiently repentant. Did Yosef not forgive them for having sold him into slavery? Yosef himself emphasized how much all that had occurred to him had been a function of Divine Providence -

"You decided to do evil to me, but G-d decided it should be for the good, in order to achieve what has occurred, to keep a large alive." (Bereishis 50:20)

- meaning that he did not hold a grudge against his brothers.

If so, then what was left to fix up?

The above posukim answer that question. To his brothers' concern, Yosef said what should have been obvious: Am I in place of G-d? Rashi explains:

If ten candles could not extinguish one candle, can one candle extinguish ten? (Rashi)

In other words, the brothers obviously felt vulnerable. Perhaps it was because they were surrounded by a huge and powerful nation that Yosef controlled. Perhaps it was because they still felt guilty about having sold Yosef, and wondered if G-d still had whated to "collect" from them, maybe even with their lives, and Yosef would be his messenger to do so. Perhaps . . .

However, it really doesn't make a difference in the end. If a person TRULY believes that all that happens to him and in the world is not only for the good, but a direct result of Divine Providence, and lives with the reality of this ultimate truth, then he knows that no one can be killed if it is not allowed by Heaven. Likewise, he knows that no one can save him or another if it is not decreed by Heaven (Chullin 7b). No matter how precarious the situation, no matter how large the army, yours OR theirs, it is all - ALL OF IT - a function of Divine Providence, AND for the good.

"But how can THAT be for the good . . . And how can THIS be for the good?"

It is a good question, and one that we will have to ask G-d at the end of history. However, the fact is that what has happened or is happening to us or someone else does not sit well with us, does not negate the principle that all that G-d does, He does for the good, even the "bad" stuff.

That was the part about the sale of Yosef that the brothers didn't quite rectify. As the Talmud points out, miracles had happened for Yosef all over the place, especially while in the pit in Shechem:

Rav Kahana said, Rav Nasan bar Meniyumi learned in the name of Rebi Tanchum: Why does it say, "The pit was empty and there was no water" (Bereishis 37:24)? If I am told that the pit was empty, do I not learn that there was no water? Thus the Torah says, "there was not water" to teach you that there was no water, but that there were snakes and scorpions. (Shabbos 21a)

Yet, not one bit Yosef, and snakes and scorpions don't have to be hungry to bite someone. If the brothers had only been able to see the Divine Providence in that one, they might have reconsidered their actions and taken Yosef out of the pit, and saved themselves decades of anguish. In fact, Yosef's life from beginning to end was one big miracle, which is why, according to the Arizal he died at the age of 110 years - the gematria of "neis" (nun-samech) - "miracle."

However, so set in their opinion of the events of their lives, that 12 (there's that number again) years later when they once again stood before Yosef, who by then had fulfilled his dreams by becoming Viceroy of Egypt, they couldn't recognize him. However, as the Ba'al HaTurim points out, the problem had not been a physical one as much as a psychological one:

They didn't recognize him at all because it never occurred to them that Yosef could achieve such success. (Ba'al HaTurim 42:8)

In spite of Yosef having given them many clues all over the place, it was him engineering all the chaos in their lives. In fact, had the brothers really been on the ball, Yosef would never have had to reveal himself with the words, "I am Yosef." After all that Yosef had done to the brothers, asked them, and told them, they would have instead said, "You are Yosef, for only Yosef could have known that or said that!"

However, before they could come to that far-fetched conclusion, they had to first accept that all the events had been G-d's doing, and that He was working through them to fulfill Jewish and world destiny. Once a person believes that, then anything becomes possible, even the seemingly impossible.

Everything becomes "good" in the ultimate sense of the word, no matter how painful it might be for us now. That is why Ya'akov Avinu himself, upon feasting his eyes once again on his long-lost son Yosef in Egypt, recited the Shema before saying or doing anything else (Rashi, Bereishis 46:29).

That's also why Rebi Akiva recited the Shema at the time of his death at the hands of the cruel Romans, probably more for his distraught students than for himself. And probably more for us than his distraught students, for in it lies the secret to the final test of the Jewish people at the End-of-Days, as we will now discuss, G-d willing.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am about to die and G-d will remember you (pakod yifkod) and bring you up from this land to the land which He swore about to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov." (Bereishis 50:24)

According to tradition, Egyptian exile did not have to amount to Egyptian slavery. It would have been enough just to go down there and undergo whatever rectification Heaven had in mind. When the brothers still had failed to rise to the level of spiritual clarity as Yosef had, the heat of Egyptian slavery had to be turned up to intensify the spiritual refinement of the Twelve Tribes.

That is why Yosef cried at the end of the parshah when the brothers came to him with suspicion and concern. Seeing that they had yet to get the message about Divine Providence perfectly clear, he knew what was in store for his brothers and descendants. That is why he ended off his life with a promise of redemption, but not just for his immediate descendants, but for all of his descendants until the Final Redemption itself.

Thus, his words "pakod yifkod" - G-d will remember you - were not only his parting words, but the very words that Moshe Rabbeinu later used to announce the redemption that Yosef had foretold.

(Midrash HaGadol 50:24) This was a way of assuring that the Jewish people would know all that had happened in-between Yosef's life and what would happen in the future redeemer's life, were all part of the master plan, G-d's master plan.

Which future redeemer? The first one who would lead them out of Egypt, Moshe Rabbeinu, and if that redeemer failed to be the final one, then whoever will be the final one once the Final Redemption is actually at hand.

Who knows, maybe this is really the meaning of "Moshiach ben Yosef." Maybe the Moshiach who is a "son" of Yosef is just the redeemer who ends the process that Yosef himself started millennia ago. If so, then maybe we can add an interesting twist to the whole idea of why Moshiach ben Yosef will die in battle in advance of the arrival of the final Moshiach, ben Dovid.

For, as the Arizal and the Maharal teach, dying is a relative concept. The concept of "dying" is also used to describe the transformation from one reality to another, like a child who evolves into an adolescent. In such a case, the childhood is said to have "died" as the stage of adolescence is said to be born.

If "Moshiach ben Yosef" is the process of redemption, then eventually, especially in the End-of-Days, it will have to give way to a more final concept: Moshiach ben Dovid, who is said to have the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu himself. In fact, Yosef HaTzaddik himself corresponds to the sefirah of Yesod, which itself has the characteristic of joining things, but not of actually being the end result itself. That trait belongs to the part of the Yesod referred to as the "Ateres HaYesod," the "Crown of the Yesod," which is really the Malchus and the trait of Yehudah, with whom Ben Dovid comes, and with whom the kingship resides.

It is a very fascinating concept, and it is not so far-fetched.

Chazak!

MELAVE MALKAH:

Chanukah & The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six

Installment #5, Part 1: Chapter Four: Avraham & Light

Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son for Avraham in his old age at the appointed time G-d had said. Avraham called his son that Sarah bore for him "Yitzchak." Avraham circumcised Yitzchak his son when he was eight days old as G-d had commanded. (Bereishis 21:2-4)

When Yitzchak was circumcised on the eighth day of his life, he became infused with all that "eight" represents, raising him forever above the natural world. This is why he, at such a young age warranted to see the Divine Presence like his father, and why he was so willing to offer himself up as

a sacrifice to G-d:

Yitzchak said to his father Avraham, "My father." "I am here my son," he answered. Yitzchak said, "Here is the fire and the wood - where is the sheep to be offered?" Avraham answered, "G-d will reveal the sheep to be offered, my son." The two of them walked together. (Bereishis 22:7)

TOGETHER: Even though Yitzchak understood that he was going to be slaughtered, they still walked together with equal intent. (Rashi)

Yitzchak's life was not free of struggle. Still, the issues of "thirty-six" and "twenty-five" did not play such a major a role in his life, at least not in any obvious way. Certainly this is true in comparison to the life of his son, Ya'akov. Ya'akov's life from beginning to end seems to have merged the realities of the Hidden Light of creation with mankind.

Considering the following midrash, it is not surprising that the account of Yitzchak's life (even after the Akeidah) is not as elaborate as Ya'akov's:

Rav Shmuel ben Rebi Yitzchak said: Avraham would not have been saved from the furnace of fire had it not been for the merit of his future grandson, Ya'akov. A parable explains this: Once a man was brought before the Sultan to be judged. The Sultan then ruled that the man should be burned to death. However, by way of astrology it was revealed to the Sultan that in the future, the man would father a daughter who would one day marry the king (and he should not be executed). The Sultan said, "it is worth saving this man's life for the daughter that will one day marry the king!" Thus, Avraham was judged to be burned in Ur Kasdim, and when it was revealed before G-d that in the future Ya'akov would descend from Avraham, G-d said, "it is worth saving Avraham in the merit of Ya'akov!" (Bereishis Rabbah 63:2)

Avraham was a righteous person whose very life embodied the values of the Hidden Light of creation. Yitzchak was a pure individual who reached a great spiritual climax at the end of thirty-six complete years (the Akeidah occurred in his 37th year). However, as the midrash alludes, it was the life of Ya'akov that truly told the story of the light that was hidden for people such as Ya'akov Avinu himself.

Parashas Toldos and the story of Ya'akov's life begin:

And these (aleph-lamed-heh = 36) are the generations of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham . . . (Bereishis 25:19)

Her days became complete to give birth and she had twins in her stomach. The first one came out completely red and covered in hair like a wool coat, and they called him, "Eisav." After that his brother came out holding his ankle, and He called him, "Ya'akov." (Bereishis 25:24)

HE CALLED HIM: That is, The Holy One, Blessed is He called him "Ya'akov." (Rashi)

The midrash which states that Ya'akov was the merit necessary to save Avraham from the flames of

Ur Kasdim is based upon the above posuk, "And these are the generations." Thus, though the posuk refers to the births of both Eisav and Ya'akov, it is primarily an allusion to the birth and importance of Ya'akov.

Perhaps then, in this case "these" (aleph-lamed-heh), having the numerical value of thirty-six, refers to Ya'akov, as if to say: thirty-six was the descendant of Yitzchak. This is not so absurd considering how much of Ya'akov's life was connected to this number and considering that he resembled an angel:

YA'AKOV: The gematria is equal to Malach HaElokim (Angel of G-d). (Ba'al HaTurim 25:27)

In the beginning of Ya'akov's life into the wonderful world of thirty-six, we only see him buy the birthright from Eisav (Bereishis 25:31), and then later in life receive Eisav's blessings from Yitzchak (Bereishis 27:1). This, of course, forced him to flee for his life since Eisav had had enough of his brother's pranks and wanted to kill him in revenge.

However, it is not until much later in Ya'akov's life that thirty-six and Chanukah become prevalent factors in his story, sometimes against his will. For seven years Ya'akov toiled for Lavan in order to marry his youngest daughter Rachel. (Bereishis 29:20) However, Lavan, ever the trickster, gave Leah to Ya'akov as a wife instead of Rachel much to his annoyance.

The gematria of Leah is THIRTY-SIX (lamed-aleph-heh).

Eventually, Ya'akov married Rachel also. But how could that be?! Marry two sisters? That is one of the THIRTY-SIX sins for which the punishment is "kores" (excision); how could such a righteous person as Ya'akov commit such a horrible sin, especially when the Talmud teaches that the Forefathers kept all the commandments, even the rabbinical ones! (Yoma 28b)

So, the Ramban explains that the Avos only kept the mitzvos while living inside Eretz Yisroel, but not necessarily while living outside the Land. Not that Ya'akov wouldn't have wanted to remain consistent with mitzvos anywhere in the world, but what could he do? Divine Providence arranged for this one, and thus, he found himself married to two wives who happened to also be two sisters, which of course presented a problem once Ya'akov decided to return back to the land of mitzvos, Eretz Yisroel.

Now what? Well, just as Divine Providence had arranged for Ya'akov to be married to two sisters while living in Padan Aram, It also arranged for Ya'akov Avinu to be married to only one of the two sisters upon returning to Eretz Yisroel:

Rachel died and was buried on the way to Efrat, in Beit Lechem. (Bereishis 35:19)

And, how old was Rachel when she died giving birth to her second son and last tribe of Israel? THIRTY-SIX years old. (Seder Olam 2)

In what year of Ya'akov's journey away from home and back again home?

From here we learn that Ya'akov hid in the house of Eiver for 14 years and after that went to Charan . . . Ya'akov was away from his father another 20 years in the house of Lavan, and delayed two years along the way. (Rashi, Bereishis 28:9)

That's THIRTY-SIX years altogether.

However, that is only the beginning of Ya'akov and his connection to the number thirty-six and the Hidden Light of creation to which it alludes. For, as he approached the borders of Canaan, it was then that Ya'akov's life became truly intertwined with the concept thirty-six. In going back across the Yabok River for some small containers, Ya'akov made the thirty-six candles of Chanukah possible:

Ya'akov took them and crossed them over the river and all that was with him. Ya'akov remained alone . . . (Bereishis 32:24)

He remained for small jars. (Chullin 91a)

G-d said to Ya'akov, "for endangering yourself for a small container, I Myself will repay your children with a small container to the Chashmonaim." (Midrash Tzeidah LaDerech)

But WHY? What was the connection? Why should the miraculous pach shemen in the days of the Chanukah miracle be connected to the seemingly insignificant pach katan of Ya'akov's time? Because, the small container for which Ya'akov returned was no ordinary container, nor was it empty either. Says the Midrash:

From where did Ya'akov get this jar? When he picked up the stones from under his head and returned them in the morning (Bereishis 28:18), he found a stone that had a jar of oil in it, and he used it to pour on the top stone. When it refilled itself, Ya'akov knew it was set aside from G-d. He said, "it's not right to leave this here . . ." (Yalkut Reuveni, VaYishlach)

Now, that sounds familiar: oil that doesn't become expended. No matter how much of it you use, it just keeps coming back, and back, and back. In fact, says the Yalkut Reuveini, every miracle that happens with oil in Tanach is really happening with this miraculous oil that Ya'akov passed on to his descendants, kind of a family heirloom.

Where did he find that miraculous jar of oil? On the future Har HaBayis (Temple Mount), the place that his grandfather, Avraham Avinu referred to as koh (chof-heh), the place from which G-d created the entire universe. It will also be the place that the war-weary Chashmonain will find, to their delight, a miraculous jar of oil undefiled by the Greeks in the THIRTY-SIXTH century from creation.

Have a great Shabbos,
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