

# YESOD HAOLAM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef; Yosef was seventeen years of age . . . (Bereishis 37:1)*

Yosef was one of twelve "generations" of Ya'akov! What about the other eleven tribes? Rashi answers that question in a few ways, one of which is:

An analogy! A flax-driver came into town with camels laden with flax. A smithy wondered, "Where will all this flax go?" A certain wise guy answered, "One spark from your bellow will burn it up!" Thus, Ya'akov saw all the chiefs of Eisav mentioned in the previous chapter (Parashas Vayishlach) and asked, "Who will be able to conquer them?" What is 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". (Ovadiah 1:18, Rashi)

However, can this be the true answer? Even if Yosef was the biggest, strongest human being that ever walked the face of the earth, which he wasn't -- still, how could he stand up to the likes of Eisav and his descendants, who tended to be the biggest and strongest human beings who ever walked the face of the earth?

Furthermore, the picture the Torah paints of Yosef is not so reassuring either. He is called a "lad," not usually too complimentary of a term in the Torah, and a shepherd to boot, not usually the most aggressive and strongest of people either. If ever there was a David-and-Goliath scenario, it is this: Yosef against the Eisav dynasty!

Rashi, it seems, was also bothered by this question, and therefore he brought a posuk from Ovadiah to explain to us what we need to understand. The posuk says, in essence, who cares how big the field is and how large the stocks of wheat are? One small flame can bring the whole thing down in a matter of hours, and undo in minutes what may have taken years to build up. That is the power of fire and the weakness of straw.

In other words, our question was predicated on the assumption that Yosef was the straw and that Eisav and his descendants were the flame. How can a piece of straw stand up to a single flame, let alone an entire arson brigade? Comes along the prophet Ovadiah who says that we have it

backwards: Eisav is the weak and vulnerable straw, and Yosef and his descendants are the powerful flame that cannot be extinguished.

After all, look at how weak little Yosef went down to Egypt and not only humbled the entire nation, but even brought his own brothers to their knees for the wrong they had committed. True, the Egyptians still hated the Jews in their hearts, but nevertheless, they were forced to do his bidding like it or not, which included performing circumcision on themselves and their children. (Bereishis 41:55)

The truth is, we see that Yosef himself was already rising to the task from a very young age:

When Eisav came out to meet Ya'akov, all of the Matriarchs went before their children to bow down. However, with respect to Rachel it says, "Yosef and Rachel and they bowed." (Bereishis 33:7) Yosef said, "This evil one is quite haughty. Maybe he will see my mother and take her." Thus, he went out before her and extended himself to hide her. (Rashi, Bereishis 49:22)

The truth is, Yosef's ability to save us from Eisav is alluded to by his very birth, a power, perhaps, he inherited from the very mother he sought to save from Eisav:

G-d remembered Rachel, and G-d listened to her and opened her womb. (Bereishis 30:22)

G-D REMEMBER RACHEL: He remembered how she gave the signs to her sister . . . (Rashi)

" on what was supposed to have been her own wedding night, to save her sister Leah from embarrassment, and more importantly, from marriage to Eisav "

. . . and how she (Rachel) was worried that Ya'akov would divorce her because she had no children and thus would fall to Eisav, who also thought this when he heard that she remained childless. (Rashi)

Thus, even in birth Yosef saved his mother from the clutches of Eisav, though Binyomin would have done the same thing, eventually. However, it was the birth of Yosef that was the sign that Binyomin would be born, as Rashi explains:

G-D WILL ADD (Yosef) TO ME ANOTHER SON: She knew through prophecy that Ya'akov would father twelve tribes, and therefore she prayed, "May it be G-d's will that the tribe destined to be born come from me." (Rashi)

What is the source of Yosef's fire?

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## Shabbos Day:

*G-d was with Yosef and he was successful . . . His master saw that G-d was with him; in all that he did,*

*G-d made him successful. (Bereishis 39:2-3)*

Talk about the "golden touch." For, as the posuk says, if everything Yosef touched didn't turn to gold, it did the next best thing. However, that was only because G-d made it work out that way for him, and that is really the most important point of the verse; his father Ya'akov even acknowledges this in his deathbed blessing to Yosef:

"The arms of his hands remain supple and vigorous by the hands of the might G-d of Ya'akov."  
(Bereishis 49:24)

... The (literal) translation would be "his hands were made golden." (Rash= i)

In fact, we are not really interested in whether or not Yosef was a financial success, or the most popular person in Egypt:

... Daughters tread on the wall ... (Bereishis 49:22)

The girls of Egypt used to climb up to gaze at his beauty ... each of them to a place from which she could best obtain a glimpse of him. (Rashi)

After all, Eisav has, and continues to produce most of the highly successful business people and most stunning men and women. However, that is b'derech teva - through "natural" means, a function usually of "mazel," often hard work (though not always), genetic processes, and perhaps grooming. Yosef's success, indeed his very existence, was completely a function of obvious Divine Providence - of supernatural means.

One could argue that Eisav's success is better. After all, the rabbis teach us that "according to the effort is the reward," and Yosef seemed to achieve his successes effortlessly while Eisav and his descendants have had to work hard to carve out lives for themselves. However, one would be arguing wrongly, because that is not what the rabbis had in mind by "effort."

In fact, of the six sefiros that govern history - Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod - and which correspond to our main ancestors (in order): Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Moshe, and Aharon, it is Yesod that corresponds to Yosef HaTzaddik. This itself is extremely telling of the source of Yosef's strength and ability.

For, the trait of Yesod is that it acts as the main exit to reveal on the outside what was previously hidden on the inside. In the sefiros, it is the place where the light of Ain Sof (G-d) makes its way from sefirah to sefirah down to this world for our benefit, and is finally revealed in the world.

In fact, when it comes to Yosef HaTzaddik, this is so obvious that even someone as low on the spiritual totem pole as Paroah could pick it up:

Paroah called Yosef, "Tzafnas Pa'e'nayach" ... (Bereishis 41:45)

- which means, as Rashi and Targum Onkeles reveal:

"Explainer of hidden things" (Rashi), or "the person through whom hidden things are revealed."  
(Onkeles)

This is why it says:

Tzaddik yesod olam - a righteous person is the foundation of the world (Mishei 10:25)

- and why the Zohar comments:

This is the foundation upon which the Holy One, Blessed is He, created His world, and it is called "Light." (Zohar Chadash, Beresishis 11b)

Which light? The Primordial Light of creation, of which the Torah says:

G-d saw the Light, and it was good (tov) . . . (Bereishis 1:4)

The gematria of "tov" (tes-vav-bais) is seventeen - the age of Yosef at the beginning of this week's parshah.

And Paroah said to his servants, "Can one be found like this person within whom is the Spirit of G-d?" (Bereishis 41:38)

If you think it is easy to fashion oneself into a vessel holy enough to receive and transmit the light of G-d, even to a level as spiritually low as the one upon which the Egyptians lived, and remain spiritually intact, think again. Yosef may have been born into the job, but when on his own he used his spiritual assets to improve upon that which he was Divinely given, drawing down the Heavenly light on his own, forcing it, if you will, to join with him which resulted in all that he touched turning into gold.

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## SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

*G-d was with Yosef and showed him mercy, making him favorable to the officer of the prison house.*  
(Bereishis 39:21)

In hindsight, it is clear that Yosef ended up in jail as a stepping stone to become second-in-command of Egypt. Certainly, there are other more pleasant ways to promote a person in life. However, Divine Providence chose this route for Yosef for reasons that may be known only to Heaven.

On the other hand, the fact that Yosef was able to succeed and remain spiritually unscathed even in the lowest part of the lowly Egypt, was a tremendous comment about Yosef's spiritual stature. Furthermore, he did not lose his ability to reveal the unknown even while he was there, evident by his ability to correctly interpret the dreams of Paroah's servants who "happened" to be in prison at the same time he was there.

This, perhaps, is the basis of Yosef's ability to play such an important role in the Final Redemption of the Jewish people, when they seem to be at their spiritual lowest. If the first Moshiach to come - Moshiach ben Yosef - is a spiritual heir to his illustrious ancestor, then a major part of his success will be his ability to reveal the hidden ONLY FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN, (many can do it for their own gain and glory), to act as a pure and successful channel for the Light of G-d.

In light of this idea, it is understandable why the great Rabbi Chaim Vital was almost Moshiach ben Yosef. Said Rabbi Shmuel Vital regarding his father:

They further hinted to the name of my father and master in this posuk ("Behold Tzion, the city of our festivals; your eyes will see Yerushalayim;" Yeshayahu 33:20): "ches" from "chazeh," the "yud" from "Tzion," the "yud" from "Kiryas," and the "mem" from "Moadainu," which spells "Chaim." He told me that it was not possible to build Yerushalayim during the time of the Great Rav, but that it was possible to do so during the time of my father and master if Israel were to have done teshuvah, and that my father and master could have been Moshiach ben Yosef. It was to this they hinted, "Your eyes will see Yerushalayim," and not, "my eyes." These were the words of my father. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 36)

In Chapter 38, Rav Shmuel Vital reveals that the Arizal told his father that he (the Arizal) had only been sent into the world to teach him (R' Chaim) Sod (Kabbalah). It would be Rav Chaim Vital's role to "filter" what he received from the mouth of his master and make it accessible to those from the rest of Klal Yisroel whose understanding would permit them entry into this most holy realm of Torah.

This idea also helps the following to be understood:

It seems to me, (the author, Chaim Vital), that the two of them reincarnated into Eliyahu of Binyomin. And this level, which is called the "Drop of Yosef," Eliyahu gave to Yonah ben Amitti HaTzarafis, when he revived him. (I Melachim 17:17-23) This is the sod of what is written in the Zohar: It was taught: Yonah came from the legion of Eliyahu, and this is why he is called, "ben Amitti" ("son of Truth"), as it says, "and that the word of G-d in your mouth is truth!" (I Melachim 17:24, (Vayakhel 197a). This is also the sod of what Chazal write: It was taught in the school of Eliyahu, "The lad that I revived was Moshiach ben Yosef," for he came from a drop of Yosef and therefore he will be Moshiach ben Yosef, may it happen speedily in our time." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 32)

Son of Truth! That is Moshiach ben Yosef, someone from whom the unadulterated truth will flow like a stream of clear, refreshing, life-giving water. He will be a person so pure, so devoted to the will of G-d, that the Light of G-d will be drawn to him like metal filings to a magnet, and all that he does will be successful. His truth will be like fire that will burn up the straw - the lie - of Eisav.

If so, why must he die in the process of bringing redemption (Succah 53a), only to be revived again by Moshiach ben Dovid, the final Moshiach?

It is a good question, and one that will have to wait until next week to be answered, b'ezras Hashem,

as we further discuss the traits of Yosef HaTzaddik and his role in redemption.

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## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

### **Chanukah & The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six Installment #2: Chapter Two: Aiyekah**

The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and attractive to the eyes, and [she] desired it to understand and ate and gave to her husband with her, and [he] ate. The eyes of the two of them were opened, and they knew they were unclothed . . . (Bereishis 3:6-9)

They knew they were unclothed . . . Even a blind person knows when he is unclothed; rather . . . they had one mitzvah and were "stripped" of it. (Bereishis Rabbah 19:6, Rashi)

. . . and they sewed fig leaves and made a belt for themselves. They heard the voice of G-d coming in the Garden in the breeze of the day, and the man and his wife hid from G-d in the trees of the garden. G-d called the man and said to him, "Aiyekah?" (Where are you?)

Rebi Shimon ben Pazzi said: The word "aiyekah" (aleph-yud-chof-heh) is only used as a gematria equaling thirty-six . . . (Midrash Zuta, Eichah 1:1)

The Torah is called the Original Light of creation of "good," implying that it was an accurate fulfillment of the Divine intention when creating the world. This is what "good" always means: the results have fulfilled the intention. Thus, evil is by its very nature that which violates the intention of the Creator, at least as far as we are told by the Torah and by those who uphold it.

Adam's violation of the commandment to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was such a violation, and as such, a contravention of the very concept embodied by the Supernal Light - a light alluded to by the number "thirty-six," and one that we will see later, has deep Kabbalistic significance.

Thus, it is not surprising to find that when G-d approached Adam to see about his whereabouts, or more precisely, to give him a chance to take responsibility for his sin and do teshuvah (Rashi), He asks only one question, only one word:

"Aiyekah?"

A word that is really not a word, for you will never find it again in Tanach. You will find the same four letters and even in the same order, but they will have different vowel sounds and therefore, a completely different pronunciation, as in "Eichah."

No, here the word is "Aiyekah?" and though translated as, "Where are you?" it is really, instead, as Rebi Shimon ben Pazzi said: it is a gematria of the number thirty-six. But why? Why would G-d come

to Adam with a number instead of a real question, to which Adam could provide a real answer?

He DID. And this is the question that the number thirty-six alludes to:

"How have you acted in a way that reveals the Hidden Light that shone for thirty-six hours, and which embodies all that thirty-six stands for?"

It was a tough question to answer. However, in it is an important clue that indicates that, as much as the Original Light of creation was hidden in the first week of creation, it is still possible to reveal it through our actions, or conversely, keep it hidden. If so, then at least we can understand why there can be an allusion to this spectacular light a millennia later in the Ner Shel Chanukah, the Chanukah Lights, a holiday that celebrates a victory that occurred in the THIRTY-SIX century from creation.

Have a great Shabbos,  
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