

MAKING LIGHT OF ANTI-SEMITISM?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Eventually a new king came to power over Egypt who had no recollection of Yosef. (Shemos 1:8)

The Jewish people came down to Egypt in 2238/1523 BCE. Ya'akov Avinu "died" after 17 years of bliss in Goshen, in the year 2255/1506. Yosef died 54 years after that in 2309/1452, and Levi died 23 years later in 2332/1429. He was the last of the Twelve Tribes to die, leaving behind no trace of Yosef's immediate family. That's where this week's story begins, 94 years after the Jewish people had first descended to Egypt.

That's a long time, isn't it? The Torah makes it seem like a decade or two, but the math reveals that the Jewish people had been in Egypt for almost a century before conditions began to get worse, and worse, and the worst. However, the conditions didn't get bad overnight; there must have been signs all along the way, but what difference did it make if no one paid attention to them?

The truth is, even during the golden era when Yosef was securely second-in-command we saw that Egyptians would not break bread with Hebrews. They found that disgusting, revealing that Jews were never fully accepted into Egyptian society. That was an important sign that all the niceties were purely for the sake of making Yosef want to stay around, to help steer the country through the rough times ahead.

And, even after the famine came to an end, G-d was clearly with Yosef, making Egypt prosper. Why end a good thing? Why cut the nose off to spite the face, and let anti-Semitism be a reason to dispose of the most successful leader Egypt had ever known? As long as the blessing of Yosef lingered, so did the memory of his contribution to Egypt, and it was good for the Jews.

With the death of Levi, that changed. No longer was the idea of blessing attached to the Jewish people. Rather, words like "curse" and "burden," became the terms that Egyptians used to describe the Semitic minority living among them, and they quickly began to demonize the descendants of Ya'akov until it became a matter of national security to do something about them. A solution was needed - A Final Solution.

And the rest is history, and history repeats itself. The amazing thing is how we, as a people, contradict it, and we're doing it again and again. We never learn. It's not that we forget what happened to our people in the past, it's just that we become convinced that such things can never

happen again. We look at the people around us, and though we may be a little suspicious of their real feelings towards us and the Jewish people in general, we do not and cannot perceive a malicious bone in their bodies.

True, they may inadvertently insult us one day, lacking a certain level of sensitivity to what offends a Jew, but not anything we can't overlook, we think to ourselves. True, they might say nasty things, in jest of course, about Jews behind closed doors, behind our backs, but at least they have the decency to make us feel equal when in their presence, we may justify and even rationalize.

However, just like the Yosefs of history come and go, so to does the blessing they represent, the "reason" to justify making us feel at home while living in Chutz L'Aretz. When that happens, their true feelings come out, and they are far more powerful than the ones displayed during better times. Human equality is not a material issue, it is an ideological matter, and unless a society constantly inculcates such philosophy into its adherents, they don't do it on their own.

Everywhere Jews go in exile, they have to identify the "Yosef" of their time and place, the blessing that is associated with them by the host nation they live in. That will make it easier to notice when it starts to decline.

SHABBOS DAY:

Then you must declare before G-d, your G-d, "An Arami tried to destroy my ancestor." (Devarim 26:5)

The Jewish world today is pretty much evenly split between America and Israel. Of course, there are significant Jewish communities in other countries, but they total far less than any of these two populations. In Israel, Judaism knows its enemy: terrible ignorance of Torah, self-hating Jews, and a desire to be like one of the Western nations to the point of religious abandonment. The race is on to push Torah Judaism completely out of the political and legal picture.

The only "Yosef" we have ever had in Eretz Yisroel is political convenience. Miraculously, over the decades since the inception of the Jewish State in 1948, the Orthodox world has held some political sway, enough to prevent the yeshivah world from fleeing Eretz Yisroel to preserve Torah. There have been very few illusions about what has been feeding the uncanny relationship, and how volatile it has been over the years.

What about in America? Has there been a "Yosef"? Is "he" still around? Do the Jews represent some kind of special blessing for the American people that could, perhaps even at a moment's notice, dry up? It's not a question that the average American Jew would like to ask, and it is not one the most can answer, even though past experience has proven that by doing so, entire communities can be saved.

Ironically, one of the most dangerous hosts we have ever stayed with lived in the White House (Bait Lavan), and he was our father-in-law as well. Yet, right there in the Torah, and later on in the Haggadah as recall the exodus from Egypt, we are adamantly reminded that an "Arami" wanted to

kill us. If there was anyone to whom the expression "kavdeihu v'chashdeihu" applied - honor, but suspect as well, it was Lavan.

Why do you think he was called "Lavan"? As the Talmud points out, he was a *ramai* (a trickster). Unlike Eisav who had no trouble letting the world know what he felt about his brother, and what he was prepared to do to him, Lavan kept it all on the inside. He didn't just rob Ya'akov straight- out of his wages, he just constantly changed them, to make everything look legal in practice when it was so crooked in spirit.

Even after Lavan died and reincarnated into Bilaam, he still sought to destroy the descendants of Ya'akov. Indeed, when Bilaam was on his way to curse the Jewish people on contract from Balak, he passed by Gilead and the pile of stones he and Ya'akov had set up to mark their pact of peace. The donkey was made to ram Bilaam's leg into the stones to remind him of this, in an effort to tell Bilaam that should he continue on his journey he was in violation of that very pact.

Furthermore, the Kabbalists point out that the reason why Bilaam could claim to know "Da'as Elyon," as if he could predict the mind of G-d, was because his soul was rooted on a very high level. Thus, Bilaam had all kinds of great spiritual potential that he abused, but spiritual potential nevertheless.

The bottom line: Until Moshiach comes and the yetzer hara is removed, there is no place a Jew can go and feel fully secure. Such security is, at best, imaginary because it does not take into account what lurks below the surface. The safety Jews feel away from Eretz Yisroel is circumstantial, and therefore subject to change, and sometimes very quick changes, as the circumstances dictate. And, as the best forecasters will tell you, circumstantial change is not something we can control or even predict.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

A man from the house of Levi had taken a daughter of Levi as his wife. The woman became pregnant, and gave birth to a son. (Shemos 2:1-2)

After Levi died in 2332, as we mentioned above, Moshe Rabbeinu was born in the year 2368, 36 years after the darkness of slavery began, a clear sign that his very birth was a revelation of the Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light of Creation) represented by the number 36.

The Talmud takes the comparison of Moshe to the Ohr HaGanuz seriously:

It is written here, "And she saw that he was good" (Shemos 2:2), and there it is written, "God saw the light, that it was good." The Chachamim say that when Moshe was born, the entire house filled with light (Bereishis 1:4). (Sotah 12a)

Kabbalah states it straight-out:

The level of Moshe Rabbeinu was . . . from the Ohr HaGanuz itself. (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:255b)

Thus, the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu represented a replay, on some level, of the first day of Creation, when the Ohr HaGanuz made its first official appearance. Ironically, just as the Ohr HaGanuz was hidden just after it entered Creation, so too was Moshe Rabbeinu hidden just after his birth, only to come back and function in the world, in a hidden way, just like the light itself.

And, Torah is the Ohr HaGanuz, with the letters acting as conduits between Heaven and earth, allowing access to the Ohr HaGanuz if, as we have said before, one's character traits permit it. Just opening a Torah scroll does not allow instant access to the light, only access to the letters. Approaching the Torah with inadequate character traits is like standing in front of an impenetrable metal door without the key. Thus, Torah is called Toras Moshe, not just because he received it on behalf of the Jewish people, but because he and Torah are so similar.

Thus, when the Talmud says that Moshe Rabbeinu was ten amos high, about 20 feet in height, it doesn't have to mean physically. To avoid attention, G-d could have kept Moshe's physical height a normal one, but the ten amos would be an allusion to the gigantic soul he possessed, spanning all Ten Sefiros.

Aharon HaKohen would have noticed this, but not Pharaoh. For, someone that is on the level of the light, that is the Ohr HaGanuz, is invisible to all those who are unworthy to see it. Moshe could come and go before Pharaoh and his evil court, and rather than inspire awe he would have instead prompted their loathing. Evil people see darkness where there is light, and see light where there is darkness.

Thus, this is the reason why Torah leaders don't faze evil leaders as well. Rather, the evil leaders despise them all, and want to do away with them. They look at them and their followers as parasites rather than as the human angels that they really are. For, as the Talmud says, tzaddikim are repositories of the Ohr HaGanuz, and their holy essence is only visible to someone with the mind's eye to see it.

The only question is, why do evil people seem to have their way with righteous ones? Why doesn't the Ohr HaGanuz protect the righteous if it is so holy?

MELAVE MALKAH:

The Children of Israel saw the face of Moshe and how the skin of Moshe's face beamed. (Shemos 34:35)

The olive has oil, and the oil has light. However, neither is visible when looking at the olive itself. To see the oil, it has to be squeezed out first. To see the light, the oil has to be ignited. Performing both acts releases the light, the same way splitting the atom releases the powerful strong force that binds the atom together, resulting in an atomic explosion and a tremendous revelation of light.

The purpose of light is to bring order to Creation. That is the way it was used on Day One of Creation by G-d, and that is the way it has worked ever since. And, it doesn't matter if we talk about physical or spiritual light; they both work in the same way, creating relationships between people and other

people, and people and objects, though spiritual light is a far more powerful tool for doing this.

Sometimes the light is so strong in comparison to the darkness that the darkness is completely dispelled. However, sometimes the light is weak compared to the amount of darkness, and though visible, it just can't combat the darkness. A greater light is necessary to save the situation.

The soul has always been a powerful light at all times, before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and after it. The main impact of the sin was not to the soul, but to the body. It became physical and more material. As a result, the light of the soul had more difficulty penetrating through the physical body from the inside to shine outside. This was something that was rectified for Moshe Rabbeinu when G-d passed by him while he hid in the cleft of the rock.

The Leshem explains that the Ten Martyrs who clearly possessed the Ohr HaGanuz in their generation, died to save the world. The Romans had brought the world to a state of Tohu that was so great, that the tremendous light these great rabbis emanated on a daily basis, was not enough to counter the intense darkness of their time. There needed to be an atomic explosion of soul light into the world at that time.

Merit comes to those who are merit-worthy, and demerit to those who are without merit. The Ten Martyrs contained the light necessary to justify Creation until Yemos HaMoshiach, but it had to be extracted in a way that their bodies, at that time of history, did not permit naturally. The Romans had the capacity to "extract" that light through torture that forced a Kiddush Hashem, and a revelation of the Ohr HaGanuz, into the world, the results of which we are still living off today.

Evil people do not have the way with righteous people. Righteous people are the light of the generation, and merit to keep it running on a daily basis. And, on occasion, they merit to save entire generations, and the evil people have the terrible demerit of acting as the vehicle to release into Creation the very light they sought to destroy.

May the day come when the Ohr HaGanuz can shine freely, without cessation, and without the need for any further sacrifice or loss of life.

Have a great Shabbos,
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