

# JOIN THE DOTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*These are the descendants of Ya'akov: Yosef was 17 years old . . . (Bereishis 37:2)*

Transitions rarely come easy in history, and the Jewish people are no different. The transition from Avraham to Yitzchak came through the Akeidah, and from Yitzchak to Ya'akov as part of the story of Ya'akov's having to sneak the blessings, flee for his life, and fight the Sar shel Eisav on the way home thirty-four years later. In this week's parshah the transition from Ya'akov to Yosef is no less turbulent.

Gum zu l'tovah (everything is for the good). This means that, no matter what happens, it fits into the ultimate goal of Creation, and of the people involved. As long as they're good people, people who are willing to grow and who are interested in accomplishing something meaningful in life, then tikun is going to result from the happy and sad events of life. Tikun is not only about fixing what went wrong, but even the harshest of circumstances may be the "best" way to result in fulfillment.

On the surface, it doesn't always seem that way. Why did Yosef end up as a slave in Egypt? Because his brothers sold him into slavery. Why did his brothers sell him into slavery? Because they thought he was spiritually dangerous. Why did they think that? Because he used to curl his hair and speak loshon hara, and he seemed overly interested in values that his brothers felt were a liability for the Jewish people. And also, because his dreams of grandeur did not help the situation.

Were they right? Yes, but not enough to justify their actions. Was Yosef right? Not enough to save him from the troubles he underwent after being sold by his brothers. Was it a tikun for all of them? Without a doubt, especially when you consider the following midrash:

"Go and see the works of G-d, awesome in deed toward mankind" (Tehillim 66:5). Go and see how when The Holy One, Blessed is He, created the world, from the first day He created the Angel of Death as well . . . Man was made on the sixth day and yet death was blamed on him. To what is this similar? To a man who decided that he wanted to divorce his wife and wrote her Get after which he went home holding the Get looking for a pretext to give it to her. He told her,

"Prepare me something to drink."

She did and taking it he said, "Here is your Get."

She asked him, "What did I do wrong?"

He told her, "Leave my house, because you made me a warm drink."

She answered him, "Were you able to know that I would prepare you a warm drink in the future, that you wrote a Get in advance and came home with it?"

So too did Adam say to The Holy One, Blessed is He,

"Master of the Universe! Before You created the world Torah was with You for 2,000 years . . . And what is written in it, 'This is the law when a man will die in a tent' (Bamidbar 19:14). If You had not established death for Your creations would You have written this? Rather, You just wanted to blame death on me."

It also says the same thing with respect to Yosef . . . Rav Yudan said, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, wanted to carry out the decree of 'Know that you shall surely be (strangers)' (Bereishis 15:13), and therefore set it up in such a way that Ya'akov would love Yosef and that the brothers would hate him and sell him to the Arabs, and that they would all go down to Egypt . . ." This is what is meant by "awesome in deed." (Tanchuma, Vayaishev 4)

If so, then the story of Yosef and his brothers did not begin once they were born, grew up, and began to impose their own version of order on Jewish history. Rather, it began the moment it became necessary for Avraham's descendants to go down to Egypt. The entire episode, it seems, was part and parcel of the journey down into the "Iron Furnace" meant to mold the children of Ya'akov into the Jewish nation.

The question is, why? How?

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*"Why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me?" (Shemos 5:22)*

There are different ways to look at Jewish history, and here is a new one: Join the dots. You know that game that kids play, where there's a bunch of dots on a page with numbers that when connected produce some kind of picture? Well, that's Jewish history as well, a bunch of dots scattered over the course of about 3,500 years of history, connected by seconds, hours, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, and finally millennia - and all the events that occurred in them.

Imagine for a second being one of those dots. Even if you were able to see some of the other dots on the page of Jewish history, you would not be able to see the big picture of which you and your neighbors are a part. All that would concern you is your continued, safe existence, especially given the fact that things always seem to happen beyond your control, but in your world.

"Why in the world did THAT happen to me?" You find yourself saying from time to time. And, of course, "Gum zu l'tovah," which would now mean: Whatever happens to me is for the sake of joining me up with the myriad of dots on the page, for the sake of drawing me into the Big Picture. And you would be right, just as Yosef said to his brothers later on:

"Clearly G-d sent me before you to preserve life, because of these two years of famine in the midst of the land, and another five years during which there will be no plowing or harvesting. G-d sent me before you to make a [way] for you to remain in the land, and to assure that you survive." (Bereishis 45:5-7)

You see, since everything had been happening to Yosef he had already taken out his pen to try and join the dots in his vicinity. Having been thrown into jail gave him some time to reflect on his situation as well, and by the time the brothers had come down to Egypt, G-d had already joined some of the dots for Yosef in order to give him somewhat of a glimpse of the larger picture that was being formed, beginning with Avraham Avinu and ending with Moshiach.

Thus, the Midrash says:

The tribes were involved with the sale of Yosef; Yosef was immersed in mournful thoughts over his separation from his father; Reuven was involved with mourning over his sin; Ya'akov was mourning for Yosef; Yehudah was busy taking a wife for himself . . . And the Holy One, Blessed is He, was busy creating the light of Moshiach. (Bereishis Rabbah 85:2)

Just a bunch of dots on a page of history, connected by G-d Himself, to form the picture of Yemos HaMoshiach.

This helps to explain G-d's harsh criticism of Moshe Rabbeinu, who complained about how his demand of redemption resulted in an increase in slavery:

"Why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me?" (Shemos 5:22)

One might have expected G-d to respond by saying,

"Yes, I know Moshe, it must be tough for you. I realize that increasing the slavery looks like anything but redemption from your perspective, but if you hang in there a little longer, you will understand why it was necessary."

Instead, Moshe does not receive one ounce of sympathy or empathy, but he receives the following instead:

"What a shame about the ones who are lost and are not to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as Kel Shakkai, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, 'What is Your Name?' I told Avraham, 'Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.' (Bereishis 13:17). Yet, when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn't find anything until he purchased land for four hundred shekels!" (Sanhedrin 111a)

### **SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Hashem. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov as Kel Shakkai, but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them." (Shemos

6:2-3)

But, obviously, G-d came to Moshe Rabbeinu as Hashem - spelled as the Tetragammatron (the four-letter Name of G-d that we do not pronounce as it is written), and that was to be his advantage over the Forefathers. This is what Rashi says:

[G-d was saying, "This Name of G-d implies] I made promises to them, and in all of them I said, 'I am Kel Shakkai.' But through My Name, 'Hashem,' I did not become known to them . . . I was not recognized by them in My aspect of truth because of which I Am named 'Hashem,' which implies that I Am faithful to uphold My word, for I promised them, but I have not fulfilled My promise." (Rashi, Shemos 6:3)

In other words, G-d was telling Moshe, "You have the distinct advantage of seeing how the dots are joined together, and previewing the picture they make. That is, what the Name Hashem means: It is the line that joins all the dots, even the ones yet to appear on the horizon at the time, into a comprehensive picture of redemption. To Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, I appeared as Kel Shakkai, revealing to them the dots, but not necessarily how they all join together in the end. And, yet they said Gum zu l'tovah on everything, accepting that the ultimate picture was completely good."

"But you," continued G-d, "are watching me draw the line between the dots. So what if one line moves backwards temporarily! That does not mean that it is not part of the picture. That does not mean that the suffering along the way is not meaningful and, yes, for the good of everyone and everything. Indeed, you are drawing that line with me by becoming the redeemer of the Jewish people!"

Thus, we can also understand on a little deeper level why it is that Amalek attacks the Name of Hashem, as Rashi explains at the end of Parashas Beshalach. He is trying to attack the Big Picture; he is trying to reduce the picture of Jewish history with its ultimate and grand designs to just a bunch of unconnected dots, meaningful only inasmuch as one comes before it, and one comes after it. Indeed, he tries, and judging by the look of the Jewish people today, he has succeeded to make the Big Picture the spitting image of exile.

And, we learned from Parashas Vayaitzai and Vayishlach, that there is only one person capable of standing up to that. There is only one type of person who is immune to the exile-inducing mindset that is the weapon of Amalek and all those who have carried on in his ways. It was not Avraham, it was not Yitzchak, and it was not even Ya'akov. For:

The house of Ya'akov will be fire, the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav straw; and they will ignite them and devour them. (Ovadia 1:18)

And, the transition from Ya'akov Avinu to Yosef HaTzaddik, and all the events that the transition entailed was for this very purpose.

## MELAVE MALKAH:

Why did the Jewish people need to go down to Egypt? According to the Ramban, the famine in Canaan was not a reason to go down to Egypt. Rather, it was a test of Avraham's faith: he should have stuck it out in Eretz Canaan to see how G-d would support him even during a time that food was scarce. After all, did G-d bring Avraham to the land flowing with milk and honey only to starve him to death?

Therefore, says the Ramban, to make up for this apparent lack of faith in G-d's Providence, Avraham's descendants were forced to go down to Egypt to rectify what their forefather did wrong. And, says the Ramban, he didn't make matters any better when he hid Sarah, his wife, in a suitcase to spare her from being abducted and taken to Pharaoh.

Though others disagree (most notably the Rambam, who held that Avraham had done the right thing by descending to Egypt), it is interesting to note that just as famine had sent Avraham packing for Egypt, it was famine that eventually sent his descendants down to Egypt. Indeed, it was only because of their search for food that Yosef's brothers found themselves once again before their long lost brother, setting up the final reunion of their family.

In fact, it was Yosef's dream of food that led to his being sold into slavery in the first place:

Yosef had a dream, and he told it to his brothers, which made them hate him even more. He told them, "Please, listen to this dream that I dreamed. We were binding sheaves in the middle of the field and my sheaf stood up and remained standing. Your sheaves gathered around and they bowed down to my sheaf." His brothers said to him, "Do you want to reign over us? Do you want to rule over us?" Because of his dreams and what he said, they hated him even more. (Bereishis 37:5-8)

Perhaps, it was not Avraham's response to the famine in his time that led to Yosef's family crisis and the nation's eventual sojourn in Egypt. Rather, it was their need to be in Egypt that set up the need for the famine in Canaan in Avraham's time, forcing his hand and making him descend to Egypt in response.

For, if what the Midrash says is true (and it is):

Rebi Shmuel, the son of 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, who subsequently ruled that the man should be burned to death. However, by way of astrology, it was revealed to the Sultan that in the future, that man, should he not be killed, would father a daughter who would one day marry the king. 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, Avraham would have a descendant named Ya'akov, G-d said, "It is worth saving Avraham in the merit of Ya'akov!" (Bereishis Rabbah 63:2)

If this was true of Ya'akov and Avraham, how much more so was this true of Avraham and Yosef?

Thus, when Avraham went down to Egypt because of the famine in his day, he was actually going down to Egypt in preparation for Yosef and his family who would have to go down in their day. And, whereas Avraham went down to save the lives of his family and entire entourage, Yosef also went down to save the entire Jewish people, and not only the people of his time. For, at the end of history, he (or whoever will function in his role) is destined to return as Moshiach Ben Yosef.

Somehow, going down to Egypt galvanized Yosef's role in Jewish history, and in next week's parshah we will look at how that is so, b'ezer Hashem.

*Have a great Shabbos,*  
*PW*

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