

REDEMPTION AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Yehudah approached [Yosef] and said, "My master, let your servant speak a word in my master's ears . . ." (Bereishis 44:18)

Just like big things come in small packages, big ideas come in short parshios. This week's parshah is one of the shortest, but we have in it and in the next one as well, some of the most important lessons for the Jewish people on this side of history.

Of course, it all centers around Yosef's revealing of himself to his brothers, the end of a short exile and the beginning of a far longer one. It is a parshah that occurred thousands of years ago, but which reaches across time and touches us. There are so many themes and sub-themes, many of which we have brought out over the years, but this is one that most don't consider...

Imagine learning Torah with your brothers in yeshivah, or your sisters in seminary, for many years. Obviously, not everyone learns on the same level, but for the most part, you would be equal in knowledge as you move from level to level together. And then, all of sudden, you are taken from learning and disappear for many years, falling behind in your learning as your siblings keep on track.

Then, all of a sudden, some 22 years later you are found and there is a reunion. As it turns out, you reviewed what you learned while were away from home, and perhaps after constant repetition, even gained deeper insights. However, certainly your siblings whose learning continued uninterrupted all through the years would be far ahead of your own.

Thus, as Yosef stood there in his position of power as viceroy of Egypt, with his brothers all around him flabbergasted by the carpet that had, with a few short words, been completely pulled out from under them, and he had to realize that he was lording himself over the Gedolei HaDor (Torah leaders) of his time. THE Gadol HaDor, Ya'akov Avinu, was still alive but back in Eretz Canaan, but Ya'akov's brothers had probably advanced tremendously in Torah while he was gone.

It would have taken a miracle to somehow keep Yosef up to speed, away from home, away from the Bais Midrash, away from all the seforim that he would have needed to keep up his intense schedule of learning, and especially if his brothers were going to respect his judgment as their leader, not just as the leader of a morally corrupt society.

According to the Arizal, he got that miracle:

You can also understand what Chazal wrote, based upon the end of the posuk, "(He appointed it as a testimony to Yosef when He went out over the land of Egypt) when I heard a language unknown to me" (Tehillim 81:6): That night, Gavriel came and taught him seventy languages (Sotah 36b). What actually happened was that, Chanoch or Mattatron, the minister over the Seventy Nations, who knows the seventy languages, entered him b'ibur. When, that night, the Neshamah of Mattatron entered him, immediately he knew the seventy languages. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 31)

This was just before they took Yosef out of the pit to stand before Pharaoh. Pharaoh knew the seventy languages, but could not learn Hebrew. To gain leverage over Pharaoh, Yosef needed to know all seventy-one languages, so he received an ibur, an extra soul that comes equipped with the extra spiritual ability the recipient has merited through his desire to spiritually accomplish. This is how a person can go beyond his own personal ability.

And, one can safely assume that the seventy languages were not the only benefit Gavriel brought to Yosef that night. Rather, it is safe to assume that with the crash course in seventy languages Yosef received, he was also enhanced with all the Torah knowledge he would have learned back home, and then some. The siyita d'Shamayah (Heavenly help) he must have received was tremendous, which is why he was able to lead the family during Ya'akov's time, and also after it.

SHABBOS DAY:

Who makes wise men retreat and makes their knowledge foolish. (Yeshayahu 44:25)

Regarding siyita d'Shemaya, there is the following account in the Talmud:

As the Roman's laid siege on the walled city of Jerusalem to force the surrender of the resident Jewish community, there was an internal disagreement as to how to respond to the plight. The division was between the Torah scholars of that time, led by the great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, and the non-religious Jews, led by his nephew.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai saw the futility of the situation and decided that survival of the Jewish people was better served by surrendering to the powerful Roman army just beyond the walls. The Bironim, as the other group was called, wanted only to stand their ground and fight to the finish. They were even prepared to murder any Jew willing to leave the besieged city and bargain with the Romans.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Yochanan defied the ban and risked his life to leave the city and meet with the conquering Roman general to negotiate the surrender. When [Rebi Yochanan ben Zakkai] arrived [at the Roman camp], he said, "Peace unto you, king! Peace unto you, king!"

[General Vespasian] answered him, "You are now deserving of death twice. Firstly, I am not the king and yet you have called me king. Secondly, if I am the king, why did you not come to me earlier?"

He answered, "I called you king because one day you will be. For, if you weren't a king, then

Jerusalem would not have been given over to you . . . As to your question, that if you were a king why did I not come to you earlier, it was because the rebels among us prevented me from leaving."

However, Vespasian responded, "If there is a barrel full of honey and a serpent is around it, is it not proper to break the barrel because of the serpent?"

Rabbi Yochanan could not answer.

Rav Yosef and others say Rebi Akiva applied the following posuk to him, "Who makes wise men retreat and makes their knowledge foolish" (Yeshayahu 44:25). [For, Rebi Yochanan] should have answered, "It is better to take tongs and remove the serpent from the barrel and kill it, and leave the barrel intact." (Gittin 56a)

This is a troubling tract of Talmud, one that can easily be abused and throw into question, G-d forbid, the authority of Torah leaders. Is not Emunas Chachamim (faith in Torah leaders) based upon our belief that G-d is with them, assisting our Torah leaders in their decision-making for the best of the Jewish people? How could G-d have denied Rebi Yochanan such an important answer at such a crucial moment? And, how often does this happen in Jewish history?

For some reason, Rashi and Tosfos do not explain the meaning of the posuk quoted by Rebi Akiva. However, fortunately, the Maharshah does, and as a result brings to light another very important concept. He wrote:

In other words, the sin of the people of the city was the cause for The Holy One, Blessed is He, to "make wise men retreat," denying them the knowledge to answer. (Maharshah, q.v. Who makes wise men retreat)

In other words, explains the Maharshah, Rabbi Yochanan's silence was not due to any shortcoming of his own. Rather, his inability to answer correctly at that moment was the result of the people he had left behind. Indeed, from elsewhere we see that a Torah leader's Heavenly help is a direct function of the people they lead:

"G-d told Moshe: Go down" (Shemos 32:7); what does "go down" mean? Rebi Elazar said, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Moshe, 'Descend from your [level of] greatness, for I have given you greatness only for the sake of Israel, and now Israel has sinned.' Immediately, Moshe became weak and he lost the strength to speak." (Brochos 32a)

Thus, whatever miracle was performed for Yosef HaTzaddik in terms of developing him as a leader of the Jewish people, as great as he might have been in his own right, it was still in the merit of his family and the generations to come that he was given such phenomenal Heavenly help.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

The Angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame (Bais-Lamed-Bais-Tav) of fire . . . When G-d saw that he turned aside to see, He called out to him from the midst of the bush, "Moshe, Moshe." (Shemos 3:2)

Moshe Rabbeinu was born great and lived great, but you need a lot more than that to lead 3,000,000 Jews into the desert, to receive Torah on their behalf, and teach it to them over the next forty years, and above all, to talk to G-d while remaining conscious.

When, in fact, did that happen for Moshe Rabbeinu? Here:

I have already explained that, until the vision of the bush, Moshe had yet to rectify the letters of Hevel and Shais (of whom he was a reincarnation), except for the Shin of Shais and the Heh of Hevel, hinted at in the name "Moshe" (Mem-Shin-Heh). The three letters (Bais-Lamed) of "Hevel" had yet to be rectified. This is the reason that Gershom and Eliezer were not that righteous . . . Returning to the matter, the bush rectified the letters of Heh-Bais-Lamed (Hevel) as well. Thus it says, "The Angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame (Bais-Lamed-Bais-Tav) of fire" (Shemos 3:2), to hint that in the beginning the letters Lamed- Bais-Tav" were not yet rectified. Therefore, it says, "in a flame (Lamed-Bais-Tav) of fire," from the side of judgment, since they were not yet rectified. However, at the bush they became rectified, and this is indicated by the repetition of Moshe's name ("Moshe, Moshe"). The first one refers to before the bush when he wasn't rectified, and the second to his newly rectified state. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 31)

The Arizal explains that Moshe went through further spiritual enhancements, perhaps the most dramatic of all after achieving atonement for the sin of the golden calf:

Moshe went down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of testimony in his hand. While Moshe descended, he was not aware that the skin of his face emitted rays of light because G-d had spoken to him. (Shemos 34:29)

Though the Torah describes the passing of G-d's Presence while Moshe hid in the cleft of the rock in very much the same way it would be of one person passing another, it is fundamentally different. Though both are spiritual experiences, the passing of a person by another is primarily a physical one. The physical terminology used to describe what happened to Moshe on top of the matter is for the sake of intellectual simplicity, though there was nothing physical about it.

Essentially, the result was an elevation of Moshe's soul to such an extent that his body became spiritually enhanced as well, becoming less spiritually "opaque," allowing the light of his soul to filter through. And, this was not just a gift to Moshe Rabbeinu for his unwavering loyalty to G-d, but it was an addition to his spiritual ability for the sake of leading the Jewish people the next thirty-nine years in the desert.

It is this Heavenly help that takes our already great leaders and pushes them leaps and bounds beyond the rest of us. And, does knowing this help to answer a question that many seem to ask today, "If Moshiach is already amongst us, does he already know that he is Moshiach?"

MELAVE MALKAH:

"If the redemption is not far off, then why hasn't Moshiach revealed himself yet? If he's Moshiach,

wouldn't he know it by now? Wouldn't we suspect it of him already?"

Appointing Moshiach is not like voting in a President of a country. Presidents rarely come out of nowhere, no matter how qualified they are. Usually they have a political career trailing behind them, and eventually they have to run in the primaries and first become leader of their party. By the time they take office, we know quite well who they are and how they got there.

Moshiach, on the other hand, can be unknown until the last moment to everyone, except for Heaven. And, even after G-d revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu a year before the redemption that he was the man for the job, he refused to accept the tap on the shoulder until compelled to by G-d Himself. And until Yosef was whisked out from jail to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and then miraculously made viceroy over Egypt, he probably had little faith in the direction his career was heading.

A politician has to be trained to become President. There are so many things to know and have experienced, and there are few short cuts. Politicians plus short cut usually equals scandal, or failure, or both.

And, although Moshiach will probably have had to pay his dues in terms of character refinement and Torah advancement, he won't be just any leader. Whether we are talking about Moshiach Ben Yosef or Moshiach Ben Dovid, he will already have been born with a special soul, one suited to the task he is destined to fulfill. The task that each comes to fulfill is so primordial, their souls will be likewise.

However, just look at the world today, and try to imagine what it would take to transform it into one in keeping with the Torah's version of perfected Creation. It's like trying to mount a wagon being pulled wildly by a team of horses running in the wrong direction. Take control of the horses, slow down the wagon, and change its direction - a daunting task of unbelievable proportions for any Torah leader, especially when the world doesn't listen to any of them.

But that's okay: when it comes to the Final Redemption, Heaven will spare no expense. There are some very powerful souls down here, but they pale compared to the souls of Moshiach Ben Yosef and Moshiach Ben Dovid, which "sit" in waiting while the vessel (the appropriate body) is prepared to receive them. The preparation to become that vessel can take a lifetime, as it did for Moshe Rabbeinu, or less, as was the case with Yosef HaTzaddik. However, when the moment is right and the soul descends to enter the body of the chosen recipient, the transformation will be instantaneous.

Everything they will need to know, they will instantly know.

Everything they will need to have experienced, they will instantly have experienced.

That is why redemption can feel years away, but in fact, it will come at a moment's notice.

May it be so in our time.

Have a great Shabbos,

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Text

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