

CASTING PARTS IN THE PLAY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Ya'akov lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years. Altogether he lived for 147 years. The day came close for Israel to die. (Bereishit 47:28-29) Ya'akov has reached the end of his life. He was 130 years old when he descended to Egypt, and he lived there, quite peacefully for another 17 years. It might have been longer, but 33 years were subtracted from his life when he "complained" to Pharaoh about his difficult life:

Ya'akov said to Pharaoh, "I've wandered for 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, which has not yet reached the years of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." (Bereishit 47:9)

Well, these are not exactly "complaints". We can assume that the great Ya'akov Avinu would not complain to Pharaoh, especially at such a happy time as the unexpected reunion of his entire family. A man such as Ya'akov Avinu, who spent his entire life trying to sanctify the Name of G-d, wasn't about to do the opposite and undo all the good he had worked so hard to achieve.

Yet, he is held accountable for each word, and his life was shortened one year for each one - a very severe punishment.

It is reminiscent of the time that Ya'akov said:

With whomever you find your gods, he should die. (Bereishit 31:32) He did not know that in uttering such words, he had cursed his beloved wife Rachel to an early death at the age of 36 years. Apparently, the idea of Rachel taking the idols, even for the right reasons, had not crossed his mind and he let slip what he thought was a "safe" statement of innocence.

He was wrong.

And, knowing Ya'akov Avinu, he probably had tried to sanctify G-d's Name by what he told Pharaoh. We would even be careful not to profane G-d's Name in front of a gentile leader of the world, so certainly Ya'akov Avinu would be even more careful. Nevertheless, whatever his intentions were at the time, he died 33 years early.

But what if Ya'akov hadn't said those fateful words that led to the death of Rachel Imeinu? Would she not have died when she did, at the place she did? Didn't she have to die then?

After all, as the Ramban explains, the Avot fulfilled all the Torah mitzvot inside the borders of Eretz

Yisroel, one of which included not being married to two sisters at the same time. Had Rachel survived the crossing of the border into Eretz Yisroel, then Ya'akov Avinu would have been in violation of a Torah prohibition, and a serious one at that, in Eretz HaKodesh.

And what about Ya'akov Avinu? Let's say that he would have lived an additional 33 years until the age of 180, like his father before him, would that not have had major ramifications in terms of the Egyptian exile, and therefore the redemption? After all, it was Ya'akov's death that set into motion all kinds of events that led to the change of attitude of the Egyptians towards the Jewish people. That would have been pushed off at least another 33 years.

No, I think we can safely assume that Ya'akov Avinu died when he did, if in fact he actually did die, since the Talmud seems to imply that he didn't (Ta'anit 5b), because history required it, just as Rachel had to die just as the family entered Eretz Yisroel while giving birth to Binyamin and his two sisters, which Kabbalah explained necessitated the death of Rachel Imeinu.

If so, then the question now becomes, what difference did Ya'akov Avinu's statement make in either case, with respect to Rachel's death, and with respect to his own death? Secondly, doesn't it seem that Ya'akov was set up in each case, almost forcing him to say what he said, setting up all the ramifications of doing so as well? What are we supposed to make of all this Hashgochah Pratit, which when dealt with separately, makes interesting divrei Torah, but when dealt with as a whole, raises a whole lot of philosophical questions?

SHABBAT DAY: *"Go and see the works of G-d, awesome in deed (Hebrew: alilla) toward mankind."*
(Tehillim 66:5)

These two episodes are reminiscent of a third one, as illustrated in the following Midrash, based upon the posuk above:

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, yet death was blamed on him. What is this similar to? To a man who decided that he wanted to divorce his wife and then wrote a Get (divorce document), after which he went home holding the Get looking for a pretext (Hebrew: alilla) to give it to her. He told her,

"Prepare me something to drink."

She did, and taking it from her 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 in the future I would prepare you a warm drink 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 and Torah has been 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 want to blame death on me!" (Tanchuma, Vayaishev 4)

From this we see the very same idea that even though G-d intends to carry out some action regardless of what man does, He tends to set up situations that somehow result in man doing something that warrants the same consequence.

There's a word for this with regard to human beings: conspiracy, the point of which is to get what you want while blaming others for it, like in the following case:

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)' (Bereishit 15:13), and therefore He 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." (Ibid.)

If this were a talk show, the lines would be ringing off the hook with all kinds of philosophical questions, mostly to do with the issue of free- will. However, the bigger question here is, "Why?" Human beings conspire against one another, either because they don't want to get caught breaking the law, or to be the object of revenge. However, since neither of these issues concern G-d, why does He conspire against us in such a way when He can do whatever He wants and not worry about anything except a little bit of bad PR?

How does this behind-the-scenes interference in the history of man further the cause of free-will, the purpose of Creation, and why did He choose to tell us about it?

And while you're thinking about the answer to those questions, consider the ramifications of what we have said so far. We are taught that Dinah was violated by Shechem because of two reasons, firstly because Ya'akov hid her from Eisav when they met, and secondly, because he delayed the fulfillment of his vow. Yet, the Arizal revealed that Shechem ben Chamor had a spark of Adam HaRishon in him that had to be redeemed by someone, and that someone was Dinah. This resulted in the birth of Osnat who was given to Yosef as a wife in Egypt.

With this thread, we can go back through all of history and ask the same question: Who is really to blame for what happened? G-d, man, both, or neither?

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

When I wrote my book, "Not Just Another Scenario", a fictional story about the days in advance of and during the arrival of Moshiach, I created the characters from scratch. The philosophical basis of the book is fact and derived from authoritative sources, but the story-line was totally the product of my own imagination.

Nevertheless, based upon the feedback that I have received over the years, it seems to be real enough to many people that they have difficulty not seeing it as current history, at least while reading it. In fact, at one point I was even approached by someone about making a screenplay out of the book and turning it into a movie, and all of a sudden I found myself wondering which actors would fill which spots.

I have to admit that when I wrote about the Moshiach character, I had a certain Mekubel in mind. However, the rest of the characters, including Eli Gerwitz, more-or-less evolved as the book progressed, and sometimes I had to go back and write in something about them earlier in the book that satisfied the needs of the plot later on in the book. In other words, the events that HAD to happen shaped the nature of the characters involved in the story, natures that real-life people would have to be able to portray if they are to land their parts in the movie.

Once the production of a movie reaches such a point, the search begins for actors whose portfolios show development in areas that match the natures of the characters of the screenplay. However, the portfolios do not adjust themselves while on the desktops of the casting director, while vying for a part in the latest movie he is casting. Rather, they are what they are: the product of many years of development, and of a decision once made by each particular actor regarding the direction of his or her acting career. Now, the only question is, is there a part for such an actor?

The parable should be clear. G-d is the greatest screenwriter to have ever existed, and His production is history itself. And, like the characters in a play, history appears to us to be evolving without any real guidance when in fact it follows a storyline known to the Author from the very beginning. And, whereas man-made productions are made to look as if they involve huge portions of the world and mankind, G-d's actually does, every last aspect of it down to the tiniest detail. The only variable is, who will play which part and at which time?

The events are written; the "actors" are not.

So, in the end, yes, Rachel had to die at the border of Eretz Yisroel, and Ya'akov had to die 33 years "early", and indeed, Yosef had to be sold into slavery. Someone was meant to bring death into the world, and someone had to get that holy spark out of Shechem at precisely the time it happened. In violating Dinah, Shechem, in fact, violated himself, surrendering the holy spark that justified his remaining alive in this world.

The question is not, "Whodunnit?", but was always, "Who will do it?" Who will be the shaliach, the Divine messenger for good or for bad? Who will be the enslaver and who will be the redeemer? That is the choice that all of us have to make, and never at the time of crisis, but between the crises, when we are left by Heaven to decide who we want to be, and how we want to go about being that person.

MELAVE MALKAH: Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 16

The next few paragraphs from Chapter 16 require significant Kabbalistic background, which is posted on my web site, and is beyond the scope of this parshah sheet. However, I am including them anyhow, but the reader may just want to peruse them along the way to less complicated material coming up later.

The wise understand that it is the same for the upper root as well, that only the lower level of "The Mother of Children", the mystical source of the upper living soul, enters and emanates within the upper man, by the mystery of "addition", according to the rectification accomplished through the positive actions of the lower beings.

This is the secret of the Mochin Kadishin his first three [sefirot], his main part being the six sefirot (Chesed through Yesod), as it is known, and as it is explained to the one who understands, in Aitz Chaim, Sha'ar Abba v'Imma, Chapter Eight. As they have said, the Neshamah dwells in the brain.

Part of it hovers and illuminates the head within close proximity, alluded to by the verse, "The crown with which his mother crowned him" (Shir HaShirim 3:11). This is also the underlying concept of "the breath that leaves the mouth of the mother to be an enveloping light for him", as it is taught in Aitz Chaim, Sha'ar HaKlallim, at the end of Chapter Eleven, and in Likutei Tanach, Tehillim. Hence, as we have explained, the Neshamah is the breath of the "mouth" above, but its essence is hidden above in its upper source within the mouth, and that part emanates light from the distance.

This helps to make clear the rabbi's words regarding the verse, "G-d will give wisdom, and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding" (Mishlei 2:6). They said: To what can this be compared? To a king who had a son who came home from school and found a plate before his father, who gave him a piece... The son told his father, "I only want from your mouth"; so he gave it to him. What the son was asking for was to receive from the sparks of light from the level of Neshamah, whose source is hidden away in the "breath" of G-d's mouth.

Within their holy language is another allusion. They specifically used the analogy of child who came home from school to teach that in this world, there is no alternative way for accessing the sparks of light from the Neshamah, if not through involvement in, investigation into, and meditation of the holy Torah and while in a state of holiness, since they both come from the same source.

And the rabbis also said: When Israel stood at Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, they wanted to hear the Ten Commandments from the mouth of G-d Himself, as the verse says, "He will kiss me with the kiss of his mouth" (Shir HaShirim 1:2). At that holy time they merited this, for the brilliant sparks of the Neshamah from the "breath" of G-d hovered over them and illuminated them. This is the underlying idea of the crowns they merited at Sinai, and the "joy of the world on their heads" (Yeshayahu 35:10; see Shabbat 88a).

It was through this that they merited the secrets of the inner Neshamah of the holy Torah, as the Zohar says:

The Torah has a body... The rabbis are the servants of the Upper King; those who stood at Mt. Sinai saw the Neshamah (of Torah) which is the main aspect of Torah... (BeHa'alotecha 152a)

This is also what the rabbis have taught many times throughout the Midrash Rabbah:

They had "weapons" at Mt. Sinai and the Ineffable Name was engraved upon them.

This refers to the high level of understanding of the Neshamah, the secrets of Torah, which is the Ineffable Name. This is the way it is above at the upper root, as we have said in the previous chapter with respect to the underlying idea of the verse, "the crown with which his mother crowned him" (Shir HaShirim 3:11). They further interpreted the rest of the verse to mean: "On the day of his wedding" (i.e., at Mt. Sinai), and "On the day of his heart's joy" (i.e., words of Torah). The "crown" refers to the crowns we previously spoke about which were given at Sinai, the "life of the King."

See the Aitz Chaim, Sha'ar HaKlallim, at the end of Chapter Five.

[In short, the Nefesh HaChaim is reiterating the point that the level of Neshamah is on a very high level up in the Sefirot, and only emanates light downward that hovers above our head, allowing for an influx of light when we merit to rise to a higher spiritual level. All of this serves to show how great man is spiritually, in spite of his physically low disposition.]

Have a great Shabbat,

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