

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

At the end of two full years, Pharaoh had a dream; he was standing by the river. (Bereishis 41:1)

At first glance, this verse says very little, especially in English. However, at second glance, and especially in Hebrew, it provides an important insight into history and Hashgocha Pratis—Divine Providence—alluding to ideas that we need to be clear about, especially at this tumultuous stage of Jewish history; especially as Jewish names keep making it into the press in a very unfavorable light.

Even though many such financial fiascoes, such as the latest one that has cost investors 50 billion dollars world-wide, had to have been many years in the making, is it mere coincidence that they have gone public now? True, the severe economic downturn, which is affecting everyone, has played a major role in bringing to light fraudulent activities, or just poor management. However, if God wanted to, He could have, as He has done in previous recessions, left Jewish names out of it.

This is one of the advantages of being God: He is above time. And, being above time, He can set in motion events today that will only have their impact years later, exactly at the precise moment for which He planned. He can say:

"In 20 years time, I'm going to have to unleash financial chaos on the Jewish world, as part of the redemption process at that time, but in as natural a way as possible, so that free-will will not be suspended. Who can I use now to start businesses, or rise to prominent positions in existing businesses, so that when the time comes to make it all happen, Jewish names will be in the headlines?"

Imagine driving along a highway with moderate traffic. As you make your way to your destination, in no immediate rush, there are times you simply cruise at the speed limit in the right lane, and there are times when you must, to maintain speed and stay on schedule, weave around slower traffic. Sometimes you go a little slower, sometimes you go a little faster. It feels as if the road answers to you.

Then, after a while, traffic starts to slow down, and passing cars becomes impossible. Besides, the police are out in full force directing traffic, helping drivers to safely navigate past what seems to be construction. Now, you have no choice but to obey their commands: they say left, you go left; they say right, you go right, and if traffic comes to a standstill, so do you. Previously, the road danced to the beat of your drum; now you dance its.

In the above analogy, the first situation is comparable to everyday history. It is during those periods that man seems to do his own thing, for good or bad, without much notice from Heaven. Life just seems to run the course that man sets, responding to what he does, and not the other way around.

The second traffic situation represents the concept of a keitz, a predesignated "end-time," a time which dictates to man what has to happen next. A building has to go up on that spot, and to do that, trucks had to have access to the site, which means tying up traffic during certain hours of the day. It was planned, which is why the police are on hand to manage the situation, which, for many drivers is quite frustrating, especially if they hadn't known about it in advance.

Likewise, history, which at times seems to flow randomly, like an open highway that goes on endlessly into the distance, does not, especially when it comes to keitzin—Divinely designated moments in history by which certain things must be accomplished as part of the immutable Divine plan for Creation. And, when a keitz comes, such as the one in this week's parsha "at the end of two years," history will do what it is told to do, and that is why Pharaoh not only dreamed, as he had on many occasions before, but he dreamed in a way that forced him to release Yosef from jail, and promote him to second-in-command over Egypt.

This is what the Talmud means when it says:

Rav said: "All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds." But Shmuel maintained: "It is sufficient for a mourner to keep his [period of] mourning." This matter is disputed by Tannaim: Rebi Eliezer said: "If Israel repents, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed." Rebi Yehoshua said to him, "If they do not repent, will they not be redeemed! Rather, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will set up a king over them, whose decrees will be as cruel as Haman's, whereby Israel will repent, and he will thus bring them back to the right path." (Sanhedrin 97b)

What Rebi Yehoshua is saying, in effect, is that when it comes to a keitz, it is impossible that what needs to happen will not happen. Rather, if we don't cooperate with it, for whatever reason, then God will impose upon history situations that will bring about the expected result. That is why, after every major crisis the Jewish people go through, something geulah-like results.

In fact, that is how Mordechai knew to stand up to Haman, while the rest of the nation cowered before. It is also why he could tell Esther the following:

"Do not imagine that you will be able to escape in the king's palace any more than the rest of the Jews. For if you continue to remain silent at a time like this, relief and salvation will come to the Jews from another place, while you and your father's house will perish. And, who knows whether it was for such a time as this that you attained the royal position!" (Esther 4:13)

For, Mordechai, knowing the principles of Jewish history, said to himself,

"Where did Haman come from, and so fast? The man was a slave of mine, and now he is in a position

to enslave us? His rise to power, and hatred of the Jewish people, must have been arranged by Heaven, to make us do teshuva. Therefore, this must be a time of keitz, and a redemption must be at hand, and we must respond accordingly."

Likewise was it the case with Mattisyahu and his tiny army of zealots. Surveying the developing situation around him, they sensed that a keitz, and therefore, a redemption as well, was at hand. This encouraged them, like Mordechai before them, to take a stand and fight, bringing about the Chanukah miracle we celebrate each year, with the lighting of the Menorah. For, it is the Menorah that symbolizes this very idea of how God builds into Creation what He needs for each keitz along the way.

For example, long before there was even a first temple, let alone a second temple to rededicate, the Torah alludes to the miracle of Chanukah:

But he got up that night and took his two wives, his two handmaids, and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Yabok. And when he took them and had them cross the stream, he sent over what was his. Ya'akov was left alone ... (Bereishis 32:23-25)

Rebi Elazar said: He remained for small jars. From here we learn that righteous people value their property more than their own bodies. (Chullin 91a) God said to Ya'akov, "For endangering yourself for a small container, I Myself will repay your children with a small container to the Chashmonaim!" (Midrash Tzeidah LaDerech, Maharil)

Indeed, the Biblical roots of the Chanukah miracle go back even further in time, while Ya'akov Avinu was just starting his journey, not as he was finishing it:

From where did Ya'akov get this jar? When he picked up the stones from under his head and returned them in the morning, he found a stone that had a jar of oil in it, and he used it to pour on the top stone. When it refilled itself, Ya'akov knew it was set aside for God. He said, "It's not right to leave this here." All miracles throughout Tanach occurred with this jar of oil. (Yalkut Reuveini, Vayishlach)

And, apparently, even those beyond Tanach as well:

What is the basis of [the holiday of] Chanukah? The rabbis taught: On the 25th day of Kislev begin the days of Chanukah, eight days during which we do not eulogize or fast. For, when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they defiled all the oil in the Sanctuary, and when the kingdom of the House of Chashmonai proved victorious, they searched and could only find one jar of oil with the seal of the Kohen Gadol still intact, sufficient for only one day of lighting. A miracle happened to it [the oil], and they were able to light from it for eight days. (Shabbos 21b)

Indeed, this is a novel way to define a keitz: an event during which the undercurrent of history rises to the top, like a geyser of water exploding through the surface of time.

This is why, the number 36, which represents the revelation of the Ohr HaGanuz, the supernal

Hidden Light with which God made and maintains Creation:

For 36 hours the Light served ... and Adam HaRishon saw with it from one end of the world to the other. (Yerushalmi, Brochos 8:5)

keeps surfacing throughout history. For, every time it does, it means something to do with redemption, or the lack of it, has occurred:

God called out to the man and said to him, "Aiyekah—Where are you?" (Bereishis 3:9)

The word "aiyekah" is meant only as a gematria, totaling 36. (Eichah Zuta 1:1)

Hence, Ya'akov Avinu was away from home for a total of 36 years, was married to a wife who died at the age of 36, and to another whose name has the gematria of 36. It is also why, after struggling with the angel for the entire night, and sustaining some bodily damage, it says: The sun shone for him—Lamed-Vav—as he passed Penuel and he was limping on his hip. (Bereishis 32:32) The word "lo" refers to the 36 candles of Chanukah. (Maharil, Avodah Zarah 3b) Each time the number 36 surfaces, it is a revelation of the undercurrent of history, a keitz, which is why Chanukah occurred in the 36th century from Creation. And, when we light our Menorahs each Chanukah, it is this that we are supposed to have in mind, and how much more so this Chanukah, as we witness the keitz of an era of extraordinary Jewish financial success, and perhaps the keitz of all of history.

What does this mean to us? It means, being prepared, prepared for a world in transition, prepared for a nation in transition. It means not just talking the talk, but walking the walk as well: we talk about how God runs the world, occasionally discuss the concept of exile and redemption, and often end our drashos with, "And Moshiach should come in our time." While the "traffic" was good, that was sufficient. However, now it may be as we have been saying, that he is, in fact, coming in our lifetime, and that this long and final exile, indeed, is actually coming to an end. We have to get real with that. And, one of the best ways to that is, to answer the following question:

If you were certain that the redemption was just around the corner, what would you do differently today?

Give it some serious thought, and soon. Judging by the rate at which history is changing, and at which the Jewish people are being affected, not to mention being cast in a negative light, we should take the moment seriously, and use it wisely. Let's turn this keitz into a positive one.

In the meantime, happy preparing.

Happy Chanukah.

Text

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