

YOSEF'S APPROACH TO GOD-BASED EVENTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Yosef answered Pharaoh, "Elokim will answer about the well-being of Pharaoh, not I." (Bereishis 37:1-2)

If I had to sum up this week's parshah in one word, it would be Elokim. Of course, this Name of God appears throughout the Torah, as do various other Names. But, if any parshah summed up the meaning of this particular Name, it is this week's.

Technically-speaking, the Name Elokim refers to God's trait of judgment, to the constriction of His light which always results in Hester Panim, the hiding of God's face, which gives some people the impression that God isn't here. But, Kabbalistically-speaking, it is a Name that denotes God accomplishing His purpose in Creation in a way that makes event seem completely natural.

Famines are not such irregular events, especially in desert areas such as Egypt. The fact that Yosef foretold of one was not such an amazing feat at a time that astrology was a real science. The way that he was able to foretell of how the famine would follow seven years of plenty just meant that he was a top-notch astrologer, which was not much different from having a direct line to his version of God.

It probably never occurred to Pharaoh to ask himself, or better yet, Yosef, why the famine was coming in terms of the Big Picture. As far as he was concerned, he had to prepare his nation for the upcoming disaster, so that they could come out of it intact. It mattered not to him that the famine was not simply nature running its course, but a specific way that God was using to draw Yosef's family down to Egypt, something that Yosef probably figured out, or at least wondered about.

In other words, the Name Elokim denotes a spiritual door of sorts, one that keeps people on the outside unless they choose to open it and walk in. It says, "Sure, you can deal with the events of history as if they are random, and learn nothing from them, usually a mistake. Or, you can look into them, and see how the appearance of nature is really just a cover-up for the mystical way in which God directs of Creation."

Recently, an event occurred in Toronto that is worth speaking about in terms of this concept of Elokim, because it is a prototype for many other events just like it.

A prominent university there invited a speaker who has known connections to Hamas, as evident from videos that can be seen on YouTube. At one point he wasn't even allowed into Canada

because of such connections, and I am not even sure why this changed, given that he is clearly a devout supporter of Hamas and anti-Israel, especially after Prime Minister Harper's recent and bold speech against anti-Semitism.

In any case, when word of his invitation to speak became public, a rabbi led many from the Toronto Jewish community and university student body in a protest against the event. This sparked a verbal confrontation between the rabbi and the university, the latter threatening legal action because of what they called defamatory remarks against the university and the people responsible for allowing the speaking engagement to occur and proceed.

As far as the university was concerned, they had done nothing wrong, nothing anti-Semitic, and therefore they insisted upon a retraction and a formal apology from the rabbi. The rabbi saw this as a form of intimidation, and rather than back down, forwarded his letter once again, together with the university's response, and his response to that.

In the end, the speaker spoke, the protesters protested, and I do not know where the threatened legal action is headed. My question regarding situations like these is: What are we fighting for, and what are we fighting against?

This is not a criticism of the rabbi's call-to-arms, but an analysis of what I believe really happened at the university and what I believe its subsequent response to the Jewish reaction to their program — which they had to have known in advance was going to rock the Jewish boat — means to the Jewish people today, especially in the Diaspora.

I am not saying that the planners meant to antagonize the Toronto Jewish community or the Jewish student body (though I can't help but suspect that this may have been on the agenda of some of the people involved). I am saying that what happened at the university was inevitable, and therefore, the way in which it was dealt only concerned the 'small-picture,' not the 'big-picture.' We are appealing to people's sense of logic and sense of fair play when there may be very little of either.

Yosef told Pharaoh:

"As for the repeating of the dream twice for Pharaoh, God is ready to bring it about; God is hurrying to do it." (Bereishis 41:32)

That is what Yosef told Pharaoh, but what did he tell himself? He knew he was special, and that all that happened to him was part of some larger plan. He could see how Pharaoh's dream had freed him from prison, and he probably sensed that they would elevate him to a higher level of prominence. And, he knew that there was some unfinished family business that had to do with his own dreams, and he had to have wondered, "How does all this tie back to my own personal life and destiny? What is Elokim saying to me?"

So, I ask, what is Elokim saying to us?

The dichotomy of living in the Diaspora makes it difficult to find the balance between settling down and building communities, while at the same time living with a sense that all we have become in the Diaspora is only temporary. Yes, the synagogues may make it to Eretz Yisroel at the time of redemption, but that does make the communities that exist around them in the Diaspora permanent.

Yet, we defend them as if they are. When Ya'akov Avinu heard his brothers-in-law complain that his newly-acquired wealth really belonged to their father, and when he saw Lavan turn somewhat hostile to him as well, he did not stop to defend himself. What would have been the point, at least while still there? It would have saved Ya'akov from nothing, and if anything, it would have increased the rift.

Rather, Ya'akov Avinu took the anti-Semitism as a sign that it was time to leave. He didn't just deal with Lavan on the level of his personal nature and try to reason with him; he knew with whom he was dealing. Rather, he looked past Lavan in search of a deeper message, and saw Lavan and his sons as part of a Divine mouthpiece that delivered one message: Go home. And for this, he merited a prophecy from God that confirmed what he had interpreted from the events occurring around him.

After completing my new novel about the End-of-Days (Not Just Another Scenario, Book Two), b"H, I am going to do a series of essays on the thinking of the Radical Left, based upon a very enlightening book called, "A State Beyond The Pale," by Robin Shepherd. It explains in vivid detail the kind of Left-Wing thinking that has turned Europe anti-Israel, a thinking that seems to be most dominant on university campuses today.

The Jewish people often act today like a lion tamer, complete with chair and whip, capable of subduing the beast. We act as if the lion can be beaten back, tamed by our constant defending of ourselves with whatever chair and whip we can find. We behave as if the lion has a limited attention span, with no specific agenda, and can be pointed in another, safer direction.

Anyone who thinks like that is so wrong. Not only does the lion have an agenda — eat the Jewish people — but he is relentless, and believes that if he cannot get around the chair and whip now to get at us, that we will eventually tire and eventually let down our guard, at which time he will pounce on us. And, he has even cleverly maneuvered us away from the door, blocking any last minute escape plans.

Anyone stuck in such a position has to wonder why he didn't leave the cage earlier.

It would have been wrong, and even dangerous, not to protest against such a speaker on a university campus. Indeed, one has to wonder how the person even got into Canada in the first place, since he has certainly has not given up his connection to Hamas, or softened his position on the right of the State of Israel to exist.

But, now that he has spoken, and the protests are over, the leaders of the Jewish community, in

Toronto and anywhere else in the Diaspora, have to take a good, hard look, at the message behind what is happening. We have to take note of the fact that it did happen, and that whereas once, they might have apologized to us, now they are demanding apologies from us.

They simply don't care about the Jewish people, having become more Left in their thinking, and more radical in action. There was a time when they cared more, and were more sensitive to the needs of the Jewish people. No longer, and it won't get better before it gets worse, as Ya'akov Avinu understood while he lived in the Diaspora:

He heard Lavan's sons saying, "Ya'akov has taken everything that belonged to our father; from our father he has gained so much." When Ya'akov saw Lavan in person, he didn't behave with him as before. (Bereishis 31:1-2)

But in the end, this is all really quite academic, at least for the moment. People live in the Diaspora with the belief that they will remain there for generations to come. Even religious people who pray for the redemption many times a day live as if it has already arrived, and have barely a connection to Eretz Yisroel—even though the situation for Jews is becoming more dangerous by the day.

The trouble is that it all happens b'Derech Elokim, in a way that if a person wants to gloss over the deeper meaning of historical events, he can. If a person wants to accept only the Pharaoh-level of the planned events of God, he can choose to do so. In the past, in similar circumstances, how many people have chosen the Yosef approach to Elokim-based events?

Chanukah is a good time to contemplate such questions.

Text

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