

LIGHT BURST

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" But his brothers weren't able to answer him because they were in shock. (Bereishis 45:3)

And we all know why, right? You would be in shock and speechless too if you went to Egypt to buy food during a famine, only to find out that the one ruling all the food in the mightiest country of the time was your baby brother whom you sold into slavery 22 years earlier because you thought he was a silly dreamer and dangerous to your family.

No one likes to be wrong in life, but especially that wrong. Not only had they kidnapped an innocent Jew and sold him into slavery, the punishment for which is usually death, but they caused him incredible anguish that must have weighed very heavy against them in Heaven for the last 22 years. And, even worse, they had caused their father incredible pain and suffering after lying to him about the whereabouts of Yosef and his status—all for nothing. It is one thing to live a lie; it is something far worse when that lie hurts and damages other people.

The truth had finally caught up to them that fateful day when Yosef revealed himself, and it hit them like speeding train. It was so big, so overwhelming that words failed them. There just wasn't anything to say.

That is definitely pshat. However, there is a way to look at that pshat on a different level of reality, one that is especially relevant having just finished Chanukah, the holiday of the Ohr HaGanuz—the Hidden Light of Creation.

What is the Ohr HaGanuz, and why is it called this? The answer to this question is the subject of much Kabbalah, but the truth is, part of the answer is in Rashi on the fourth verse of the Torah:

God saw that the light was good, and God separated between the light and the darkness.
(Bereishis 1:4)

He saw that the wicked were unworthy of using it, and therefore set it apart for the righteous in the Future Time. (Rashi)

Thus, according to Rashi, to avoid allowing the light to be abused by the evil people of history, who

do a bad enough job with physical light, God hid this very powerful spiritual light from the evil people, once again implying that the good guys have to miss out because of the way the bad guys abuse the system.

Not so in this case, says the Leshem. Indeed, the hiding of the Original Light was more sophisticated than that, as the Leshem explains:

He made a separation in the illumination of the light, that it should not flow or give off light except for the righteous, whose actions draw it down and make it shine. However, the actions of the evil block it, leaving them in darkness, and this itself was the hiding of the light. (Sefer HaKlallim, Klal 18, Anaf 8, Os 4)

So, yes, the Ohr HaGanuz was hidden on the first day of Creation, but only from the evil people whose very actions close them off to any access to it. And, even though, as the Leshem explains, we won't really access the full force of this light until later on in history, after Moshiach comes, we can still access it somewhat now, until that time, when we act in ways that draw the light to us.

And, where the light goes, miracles follow—always. That is why it is associated with Chanukah and the light of the Menorah. The Chashmonaim, with their self-sacrifice for God and Torah, drew the Ohr HaGanuz to them, and overcame a much more powerful and well-equipped army with its help. When the Menorah burned seven more days than the oil they found should have naturally permitted, it was because the Ohr HaGanuz made it possible.

We could recap history at this point and speak about all the times that the Ohr HaGanuz entered history and became less hidden, causing great miracles in its wake, but that is not the point here. The question here is, how is it possible that such a fantastically spiritual and high-powered light can be abused by evil people? If anything at all, it should overwhelm them and make them subject to its impact, not the other way around.

Correct, and that is precisely the problem. God wasn't worried that the evil people of history would harness the power of the Ohr HaGanuz, as they do physical light, and use it to further their plans for evil. Quite the contrary! God was concerned that exposure to the Ohr HaGanuz would put an end to the evil plans of such people, but not as a function of their own free-will, which is the purpose of Creation, but because the truth would overwhelm them, and transform them against their will, and there can be no greater abuse of the light than this.

In fact, this is why, as the Leshem explains, and contrary to widespread Jewish belief, the Jewish people had to leave Egypt quickly:

Even according to the commentators who speak of a fiftieth level it is impossible to say that the reason why they could not remain in Egypt was because they would fall to the fiftieth level,

God forbid, since on the first night of Pesach impurity had no power at all. It means just the opposite, for The Holy One, Blessed is He, emanated His holy light onto the Jewish people, as the author of the Haggadah has written, "The King of Kings was revealed to them." Therefore, they could not remain in Egypt a moment longer lest the S"A become completely eradicated and free-will become eliminated, the purpose of Creation. For, Egypt was the chief of all the Klipos and if she been destroyed then so would the S"A and yetzer hara have been destroyed completely. Free-will would no longer have existed, and for this reason they could not delay. Thus, the verse says, "Egypt imposed itself strongly upon the people to hasten to send them out of the land, for they said, 'We are all dying'." (Shemos 12:33): they had to leave quickly in order that evil could still exist, so that free-will could still function and justify Creation. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 2, Siman 4)

Where the Ohr HaGanuz goeth, evil cannot remaineth. Either the person has to foresake his evil ways and do teshuvah, or suffer the consequences of increased Divine light, and perish as a result.

For example, there is the story of Rebi Chanina ben Teradion, whose tremendous sense of calm and adherence to God and Torah principles as he was burning to death with the Sefer Torah he taught from, caused his Roman executioner to do teshuvah and jump into the fire to go to the World-to-Come (Avodah Zarah 18a). The light that emanated from Rebi Chanina penetrated the darkness of even this previously spiritually-insensitive Roman, and made him shine with Divine light as well. That is the power of the Ohr HaGanuz.

This is another example of the same idea, at an earlier time in history:

Eliyahu came to people and told them: "For how long will you continue to straddle the fence. If Hashem is God, then follow Him only; if Ba'al is god, then follow him." However, the people could not answer him. (Melachim 1:18:21)

To persuade the people to return to God, Eliyahu arranged a showdown between the priests of Ba'al and himself, on behalf of God, on Mt. Carmel. Both sides built altars, but the priests of Ba'al were unable to elicit any kind of supernatural response, clearly indicating that theirs was a false belief.

Eliyahu, for his part, not only offered up a sacrifice to God, but doused it and the entire altar with water, making them both virtually non-flammable. Then he prayed to God to send down a fire and consume the offering, which He did, and it even dried up all of the water as well. The revelation of God was so powerful that the people jumped off the fence on the side of God, calling out, "Hashem Hu Elokim, Hashem Hu Elokim—Hashem is God, Hashem is God."

Such is the power of the Ohr HaGanuz.

By now, anyone who has been reading my writings for some time now must recall the tremendous

connection between Yosef HaTzaddik and the Ohr HaGanuz. Just as the holiday of Chanukah is a tremendous source of chayn, as the name implies, likewise was Yosef a tremendous source of chayn in his time.

And, just as the chayn comes out of the Ner Chanukah as it burns, revealing, as the Bnei Yissachar explains, Ohr HaGanuz, likewise did Yosef burn like a candle and emit Ohr HaGanuz everywhere he went. For, as the prophet Ovadiah said:

And the house of Ya'akov shall be a fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav will be straw. (Ovadiah 1:18)

As the Talmud states, there are 36 righteous people who receive the Divine Presence on a daily basis (Succah 45b). Thirty-six, of course, is the number of the Ohr HaGanuz, which shown for 36 hours on Erev Shabbos for Adam HaRishon before being hidden a second time (Yerushalmi, Brochos 8:5). Hence, the 36 righteous people are conduits for the Ohr HaGanuz into this world.

Yosef HaTzaddik certainly was, and when he opened his mouth to reveal that he was the one who stood before his brothers, it was not just words that came out. Rather, the words were merely the vehicle to expose the brothers to the brilliance of the Ohr HaGanuz, and it overwhelmed them, and made them speechless, and pushed them to do teshuvah on the spot.

For there is truth, and then there is truth. It is amazing how the same words spoken in a specific setting during a specific mind set at a specific time can hit a person so hard so as to change his life forever. Pure truth can stand on its own, but sometimes it needs back up and props to make it into a person's consciousness, so that they can feel the weight and impact of the words.

When Yosef told to his brothers, "I am Yosef," dressed up as the viceroy of Egypt at a time that they were desperate, after such a charade, after 22 years of being lost to his family, after their father remained inconsolable the entire time, in the depths of spiritual impurity that was Egypt, it was if the seven heavens had opened up and Divine light shone down on them. All they could do was fall back in awe.

Such is the power of the Ohr HaGanuz.

In fact, it says that Ya'akov Avinu sent Yehudah ahead of the family to prepare the way with Yosef. He went to Goshnah, as the Torah calls it, and it is spelled Gimmel-Shin-Nun-Heh, the same letters on the dreidel that stand for Neis Gadol Hayah Shum—a great miracle happened there. An easy allusion to Chanukah in the story of Yosef and his brothers.

There's more. In last week's parshah, it says:

Yosef saw Binyomin with them, and he said to the one in charge of his house, "Bring the men

into the house," and to have meat slaughtered and to prepare—u'tvoach tevach v'hachein ...
(Bereishis 43:16)

The three Hebrew words mentioned above produce two Chanukah allusions. Firstly, the gematria of u'tvoach tevach is 44, the number of candles, including the shamashim, kindled over the course of the eight days of Chanukah. And, the last letter of tevach, together with the four Hebrew letters of v'hachein, are the same letters that spell Chanukah.

Not only this, but Yosef was the son of Rachel, who died in her 36th year, at the end of Ya'akov's 36 years away from home. He was sold into slavery at the age of 17, the gematria of the word tov, which means, good and which is first used in the Torah in reference to the light of the first day of Creation—the Ohr HaGanuz.

There is more, much more. Should we be surprised? History has always been about revealing the Ohr HaGanuz, which is why God asked Adam HaRishon, after he ate from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah—the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—only one question: Ayekah. Translated as, "Where are you?" it is really meant as a gematria, according to the Midrash, totalling none other than 36.

The real question that God asked Adam after he sinned and ate from the forbidden fruit was, "Where is the Light of 36?" To prove just how wrong he had been to break the command of God and eat the illicit fruit, God pointed out to Adam HaRishon that the Hidden Light of Creation was still hidden, perhaps even more so than before, as a result of his act.

While most people do not even know that the Ohr HaGanuz exists, let alone act as vehicles to reveal it in the world, Yosef HaTzaddik was different, very different. He revealed it constantly, and to his brothers, who had lived without it for 22 years, having lived with mistaken notions about Yosef, Jewish history, and Divine Providence, its revelation through Yosef was enough to humble them to the point of speechlessness.

Text

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