

THE SNAKE, LASHON HARA, MOSHIACH AND YOSEF HATZADIK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Ya'akov called for his sons and said, "Gather yourselves and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End-of-Days." (Bereishis 49:1)

In Parashas Mikeitz, towards the very end of the parshah, there is a hint to Moshiach. Actually, it's encoded in the verse, backwards, that says:

Yosef said to them, "What is this act that you have done? Do you not know that that someone like me can foretell events?" (Bereishis 44:15)

Here's how you see it in the Hebrew. If you find the letter Mem in the last word of the Hebrew verse mentioned above, and then count two letters to the right, the third letter will be a Shin. Do that again and the third letter will be a Yud, and after a skip of another two letters to the right, the third letter will be a Ches, which spells "Moshiach" in reverse.

Not impressed? You shouldn't be. Such words show up dozens of times in the Torah encoded one way or another. When it comes to Torah codes, as the experts will tell you, it is also a matter of "location, location, location." It's not just what is encoded, but also where it is encoded, and the odds of that happening.

At first glance, there is nothing significant about the place of this code. The story is special inasmuch as Yosef is masquerading as the Second-in-Command of Egypt, and hoaxing his brothers by pretending to have found out about the stolen chalice in Binyomin's pack through divination. The Hebrew phrase used here for this is nachaish yenachaish.

What is interesting about these words is their root, which is nachash, or snake. And, since Yosef's entire charade was meant to teach the brothers a lesson, not as revenge, it can be assumed that every aspect of the charade was carefully planned to teach a specific lesson. What was the lesson here?

One snake that stands out historically is the first one, *THE snake*, the one that convinced Chava to eat from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, against God's will. Thanks to his ruse and advice, Mankind was sent into the longest exile to date, the one that won't conclude until Moshiach ends it. Hence, the gematria of Moshiach (40+300+10+8) and nachash (50+300+8) are equal, 358, since they represent two opposite sides of the same coin. The snake caused us to go into exile and Moshiach will bring us out of exile.

This intersection of two closely related concepts, the snake and Moshiach, greatly increases the odds that the code is not random. But, we can still do better than this.

In next week's parshah, Shemos, Moshe Rabbeinu will complain to God that the Jewish people are not worthy of being redeemed, since Dasan and Aviram were the ones who spoke lashon hara, derogatory speech, about Moshe Rabbeinu. They were the ones who reported to Pharaoh that Moshe had killed the Egyptian, forcing him to flee for his life.

He also complained that they would never believe him if he tried to redeem them. However, Moshe is bested by God when He points out that Moshe Rabbeinu himself is guilty of the same crime by speaking that way about the Jewish people. How does God make His point? With a snake:

However, Moshe complained, "They will not believe me, or listen to me. They will say 'God did not appear to you.' "

God told him, "What is that in your hand? He said, "A staff."

[God] said, "Throw it to the ground," and he threw it to the ground. It became a snake, and Moshe ran away from it. (Shemos 4:1-3)

Why a snake? There are a couple of reasons, but Rashi focuses on this specific one:

[God] hinted to Moshe that he had spoken derogatorily about the Jewish people (when he said, "They will not believe me") and he [thereby] adopted the trade of the snake. (Rashi)

It was the snake's lashon hara about God that convinced Chava to ignore His commandment not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil . . . and eat. From that point on, lashon hara has been associated with the snake:

Further, said Resh Lakish: What is the meaning of the verse, "If the snake bites before it is charmed, then the charmer has no advantage" (Koheles 10:11)? At some future time all the animals will assemble and come to the snake and say: "The lion attacks and devours; the wolf tears and consumes; but what profit do you have?" But he will answer, "What benefit has he who uses his tongue?" (Erachin 15b)

In other words, just as the slanderer derives no real pleasure from speaking lashon hara, but does it anyhow, likewise does the snake, who derives no physical benefit from biting his victim, bites him nevertheless. Even worse, Yosef was telling his brothers, he delays Moshiach and the redemption. Where do we see this? In last week's parshah, as Rashi explains:

"He sent off his brothers and they went. He told them, 'Do not become agitated along the way.' "
(Bereishis 45:24)

According to the simple meaning of the verse it can be said, because they were ashamed he was worried lest they quarrel on the way over the matter of his sale, by disputing with one another, and saying, "Through you he was sold, because you spoke loshon hara about him and you caused us to hate him." (Rashi)

Hence, Yosef was telling his brothers that the starting point of all their trouble was the loshon hara they spoke about him, and that by speaking loshon hara, they had adopted the trait of the original snake who caused exile in the first place. It caused him to be put into exile, from which he did not escape for 22 years, while they too experienced exile of a sort without him, since as Ya'akov knew, all 12 brothers were necessary for redemption.

But, all of this was really just a warning to his brothers. His real concern was not with the present situation, but with a future situation that would occur if they did not rectify the problem then at its root. If their descendants did not learn the power of loshon hara to hold off redemption, then they too would suffer an even worse fate, and indeed, they did:

The judgment against our fathers in the wilderness was sealed only because of their loshon hara about Eretz Yisroel. (Erachin 15a)

Having said this, the encoded "Moshiach," even in reverse— loshon hara reverses the redemption—in a verse that speaks about the nachash, to brothers who were guilty of the trade of the nachash, a fluke? Impressed yet? You should be, because the odds are extremely high against randomness. Regardless, we can complete Ya'akov's statement about Keitz HaYomim—the End of Days—even though he did not, like this: Do you want to bring them faster? Stop speaking loshon hara already.

Text

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