

BATTLING JEALOUSY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

"You did not send me here, but God, and He made me a father to Pharaoh, a lord over all his household, and a ruler over the entire land of Egypt." (Bereishis 45:8)

Parashas Mikeitz is almost always Shabbos Chanukah. It is, by far the parshah that deals with the topic of Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence— more than any other. As Yosef tells his brothers in this week's parshah:

"You did not send me here, but God, and He made me a father to Pharaoh, a lord over all his household, and a ruler over the entire land of Egypt." (Bereishis 45:8)

Usually it is the other way around. Usually it is the guilt-ridden party that tells the victim, "Look, what happened to you was Hashgochah Pratis. So, if you have a complaint take it up with God! We were just His messengers to carry out His will." Not this time. This time it was the perpetrators who felt completely guilty for having misjudged and then mistreated their brother, and who did not know how to clear their names. This time it was the victim who tried to lessen the culpability of those against whom others would have no problem taking revenge for their role in one of the worse breaches of family trust.

Nevertheless, the brothers still not get it, as we see at the end of Parashas Vayechi:

Yosef's brothers saw that their father had died, and they said, "Perhaps Yosef will hate us and return to us all the evil that we did to him." So they commanded [messengers to go] to Yosef, to say, "Your father commanded [us] before his death, saying, 'Say to Yosef, "Please forgive your brothers' transgression and their sin, for they did evil to you. Now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." ' ' Yosef wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also wept and fell before him, and they said, "Behold, we are your slaves." But Yosef said to them, "Don't be afraid, for am I instead of God? Indeed, you intended evil against me, [but] God designed it for good, in order to bring about what is at present to keep a great populace alive." (Bereishis 50:15-20)

The brothers, of course, had lied. As Yosef well knew his father would never have said such a thing to his brothers because Yosef knew that his father would never have suspected him of taking revenge. Yosef's brothers had fabricated the story because they were afraid what Yosef might do to

them now that their father was no longer there to stop him.

"But," Yosef chided them, "if God wants you to suffer for what you did to me, does it make a difference what I feel? And, if God does not want to punish you for your role in my kidnapping, can I harm you anyhow? Wasn't it you, Yehudah, who not long ago told me:

"What shall we say to my master? What shall we speak, and how shall we exonerate ourselves? God has found your servants' iniquity, both we and the one in whose possession the goblet has been found." (Bereishis 44:16)

What was the fundamental difference between Yosef and his brothers, and what does it have to do with the number 11? (The significance of the number 11 is discussed in a separate essay.)

The answer requires a person to understand what it is precisely that Amalek does to spiritually destroy a person. You can't fix what you don't know broke. Once again the key information is in the Torah itself, elucidated by Rashi.

The Torah says:

And he said, "For there is a hand on the throne of God, [that there shall be] a war for God against Amalek from generation to generation." (Shemos 17:16)

Why is "throne" written Chof-Samech and not Chof-Samech-Aleph? And why is God's Name divided in half? The Holy One, Blessed is He, swears that neither His Name nor His throne will be whole until the name of Amalek is completely eradicated. (Rashi)

Rashi explains the verse rather matter-of-factly. The truth is that this is a very Kabbalistic idea. What does it mean that neither God's throne nor His Name is complete, and how does Amalek affect that?

The Divine Name, of course, to which Rashi refers is, Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh, the Name we are meant to unify by rejoining Yud-Heh and Vav-Heh. In other words, we are supposed to unify the 11, the gematria of Vav-Heh, with the 15, the gematria of of Yud-Heh. Once we do, the World of the Kingdom of Shaddai will have been completely rectified, and Amalek will have been destroyed forever. (The concept of "World of the Kingdom of Shaddai" as mentioned in the prayer "Aleynu" is part of a separate essay.) What does this mean, practically-speaking?

It is easier to see this in action than it is to explain it. After Yosef revealed himself and the brothers made peace, Yosef did something remarkable:

Yosef gave them wagons by Pharaoh's orders, and he gave them provisions for the way. He gave them all, to each one [several] changes of clothing, and to Binyomin he gave 300 [pieces of] silver and five changes of clothing. (Bereishis 45:21-22)

This was remarkable because the Talmud states:

Rava bar Mechasia said in the name of Rav Chama bar Guria, who said it in Rav's name: A man should never treat one son differently from the other children, for on account of the two sela's weight of material which Ya'akov gave Yosef in excess of his other sons, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter resulted in our forefathers going down to Egypt. (Shabbos 10b)

In fact, the Talmud questions Yosef's actions:

Is it possible that this righteous man should fall into the very mistake from which he himself had suffered? (Megillah 16a)

The Talmud answers the question, but rather obscurely, saying that Yosef did it to make a point:

Rebi Binyomin bar Yafes said: "He gave him a hint that a descendant would issue from him who would go forth before a king in five royal garments, as it says, "And Mordechai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue, etc." (Megillas Esther 8:15). (Megillah 16b)

Tell that to Yosef's brothers who may not have caught the hint, or even believed in it. From their perspective, Binyomin was being favored over them. Though they still may have felt remorse for how they had treated Yosef, they may have wondered if what they had done was the reason why Yosef was now antagonizing them.

There is no question that Yosef was making a point to his brothers, but in the larger context of all that had transpired since they first turned against him:

He again dreamed another dream, and he related it to his brothers, and he said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream, and behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were prostrating themselves to me." And he told [it] to his father and to his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Will we come I, your mother, and your brothers to prostrate ourselves to you to the ground?" So his brothers envied him . . . (Bereishis 37:9-11)

Thus, the entire episode began with jealousy. Yosef wanted to remind his brothers of this because jealousy is an important trait when it comes to Hashgochah Pratis. This is also what God told Kayin back at the beginning of the history of sibling rivalry:

But to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn, and it annoyed Kayin exceedingly, and his countenance fell. And God said to Kayin, "Why are you annoyed, and why has your countenance fallen? Is it not so that if you improve you will be forgiven? If you do not improve, however, sin is lying at the entrance, and to you is its longing, but you can rule over it." (Bereishis 4:5-7)

Both Kayin and Hevel had offered sacrifices to God, Hevel from the best of his flock and Kayin from the least. Consequently God acknowledged the sacrifice of Hevel while ignoring that of Kayin, which made Kayin jealous enough of Hevel to want to murder him. So inherent was this in Kayin that his name has letters similar to those of "kinah," or "jealousy."

However, God told Kayin, the situation had nothing to do with Hevel. It had to do with Kayin himself and the sacrifice he had brought. Hevel received what he had deserved as a matter of Hashgochah Pratis, and not at any cost to Kayin. No one can take something away from a person that belongs to the person. He can only take something away from a person that seemed to have belonged to the person.

This is the deeper meaning of what the rabbis say:

Who is a happy person? One who is happy with his portion. (Pirkei Avos 4:1)

This does not simply mean that if life serves you lemons, make lemonade. It means that the moment a person realizes that everything he has, or does not have, has been Divinely orchestrated. He will accept his portion and stop feeling cheated in life—even when it appears that he is being cheated in life.

Thus the secret to happiness in life is not simply accepting one's portion in life, but accepting that it is his portion because God has given it . . . and only it. Even should jealousy drive a person to acquire what his neighbor owns, or worse, steal it, he will never truly own it in the full sense of the term because from God's perspective it is not meant for him. A person may acquire a lot, but he can only truly own what is meant for him.

This was what Ya'akov was teaching us through his confrontation with Eisav. In the end, what could have been a full scale war and fight to the death ended up being a discussion about who is going to keep a gift:

Eisav said, "I have plenty, my brother. Keep what is yours."

However, Ya'akov said, "Please, no! If I have found favor in your eyes then take my presents from me, since I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of [an angel] of God, and you were pleased with me. Please take my offering which was brought to you, for God has favored me, and I have all." (Bereishis 3:1-11)

The rabbis point out the difference in the language that Eisav used to describe his financial position, and that of Ya'akov to describe his:

I have all: All that I need. Eisav, however, spoke haughtily, saying, "I have plenty," [meaning] much

more than I need. (Rashi)

Inherent in Eisav's approach to life is jealousy. Eisav, and his descendants, easily become jealous because they live with the belief that a person has what he does because either he gives it to himself, or fate does. From this perspective a "neighbor" can have something you can want for yourself and make you feel as if you're lacking while you do not have it. Everything else that goes wrong in society stems from this corrupted approach to life and Divine Providence.

This is what Amalek knows and uses to his advantage. He uses the fact that God moves property around through people and events to distract people away from the Hashgochah Pratis behind all of it. He does whatever he can to convince people that it is people who wrong people, even against the will of God, so that the victims will blame the perpetrators and overlook the Divine Providence in the events of their lives.

This is the Vav-Heh of God's Name. It represents the part of Hashgochah Pratis that can become vague enough that people can confuse it for the will and actions of men only. Even though Yehudah told Yosef, who he had still thought was the viceroy of Egypt, that God was behind the bizarre turn of events that were ensnaring them, he acted as if Yosef was in control the situation.

Yosef was telling his brothers, through those very events, that his ruse could only be successful if God was the One making it succeed. If they had seen this back at the beginning when he first had his dreams and his father had shown him favoritism, they would never have come to the point that they could sell him into slavery. Instead of holding Yosef responsible for their troubles they would have turned to God and worked it out.

"Yes," Yosef told them, "I was able to put you through the ringer and turn your lives upside down. But, at the end of the day, am I in place of God? Obviously not. I would not have had the idea to do what I did had God not arranged it, and I certainly would not have been successful if God had not approved it."

When a person reaches this level of understanding, not just on the level of his mind, but on the level of his heart, he acts with the force of 11 and unifies Vav-Heh with Yud-Heh. And, not only does he project the light of the Menorah to the world, he himself, like Yosef HaTzaddik, becomes a human Ner Shel Chanukah. This is the ultimate accomplishment in life, and rectification of Creation.

Text

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