

MICROCOSM OF DESTINY

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The Book of Bereishis has been the story of the family of Avraham. It has focused on their development from the nuclear unit of three-father, mother, and child-to the fundamental family / nation of 70.

However, there is far more to this presentation of national development than the embryonic start of the Chosen People. Inherent in the tale is a microcosm of a world struggling toward responsible identity and eventual redemption.

The Book of Bereishis began with the creation of the world and concludes with the creation of the Jewish nation. Bereishis started with the story of latent potential and ends with the same. At the inception of the world and at the conception of the Jewish people, neither had true value beyond their potential. In both instances it would be up to free willed humans to invest themselves in realizing G-d's intentions and unlocking the universe's inherent power and majesty.

From the very first verse in Bereishis, G-d's focus was the division and separation inherent in the natural order of creation. As we have often discussed in the Rabbi's Notebook, separation is the clearest indication of G-d's intention and the individual worth of every element in the universe. The story of Bereishis then moved from division in nature to the natural and imposed divisions inherent in humanity. Given the politically correct nature of our present times it is very difficult to discuss separation, division and differences within humanity without sounding biased or bigoted. However, regardless of political sensitivities, the Torah presents immutable facts that we must deal with. G-d, Torah, and nature do not change; it is our attitudes and feelings that must change.

The concept of separation and division within the human race was intended to organize humanity into groups of families / nations responsible to themselves, humanity, and above all else, G-d. It suggests a vast conglomeration of individuals working together for the greater good. It suggests a utopian vision of messianic brotherhood and redemption.

The magic number was 70. Seventy nations sharing common moral and ethical values with a singular belief and devotion to G-d and His chosen teachers, the Jewish people.

The purpose of the Jews was to teach by example and share their understanding of G-d and His intentions with all the rest. The Jews were not intended to be superior or inferior. They were intended to simply embrace their designated jobs as humanity's teachers. Through the study of Torah and the performance of the 613 Mitzvos they were to be trained in all nuances of G-d's

revelation within nature and live their lives according to His revealed laws.

Specific commandments were first revealed to the Forefathers through prophecy. However, the final mandate occurred at Mt. Sinai at the time of Revelation. As the Rambam (Maimonides) discusses in the Thirteen Principles of faith, Principles 6 through 9 qualify prophecy as G-d's chosen method for revealing His intentions. Prophecies were at first directed to individuals and did not carry the weight of a national imperative. At the time of Mt. Sinai that all changed. Revelation was a public prophecy shared by the entire nation and it established the irrevocable obligation and destiny of the Chosen People.

Had the Jews done their job and the other nations theirs, our world would have been a much different place. The Jews would have accepted the responsibility and the joy of divine intimacy and the other nations would have shared in the joy by embracing us as their loving teachers and mentors. However, the Jews struggled with their commandments and the other nations struggled with the designated place of the Jew within G-d's organization.

As noted in last week's essay, the story of the Jews changed dramatically with the birth of Yakov's twelve sons. No longer was monotheism the prerogative of the individual. All of a sudden it became a shared value requiring adjustments for individuality and collective destiny.

The Torah turned our attention to the emerging egos and conflicts of Reuven the Eldest, Dina the Curious, Yoseph the Righteous, Shimon and Layvie the Extremists, and Yehudah the Royal. It was the story of siblings struggling to understand their individual place within the family. It was the story of potentially great individuals struggling to understand their responsibility for the legacy of Avraham. It was the story of a family struggling within itself to build a cohesive whole on a foundation of shared devotion and beliefs. It was the story of a family struggling to realize the gift of redemption. It was the story of separation and division embraced, understood, accepted and working.

The last chapters of Bereishis detail Yakov's final instructions to his sons. Yakov had already lived in Egypt for 17 years. From the relative smallness of his family of 70 he had witnessed the geometric progression of four generations. The promise of nationhood was now more real than ever before.

The Medresh relates that the twelve sons stood around their father's death bed and proclaimed, "Hear O' Yisroel! You have succeeded where others did not. You gave birth to a family and all of us are whole and complete in our devotion to each other and G-d! 70 years ago you asked G-d to return you whole to your Father's home. G-d fulfilled your request. You did what you had to do and all twelve of us stand before you as testimony to your hard work as our father and teacher. We are whole and you are whole!"

Yakov responded, "Blessed be the name of His Kingdom!" It is true. I am whole! G-d did protect me! He even watched over my beloved Yoseph and today I can boast grandchildren like Menashe and Ephraim whom I am proud to call my own! Gather around me and I will bless each of you. Gather near and hear my final instructions to you as independent components of the greater whole.

Some of you I will criticize and most I will bless; however, both criticism and blessing will be known in history as "my blessings." My purpose is to neither compliment or to criticize. You all know how much I love you and care for you. You have all been my greatest challenge and my greatest joy. But, I am not just Yakov the Father. I am also Yisroel the progenitor of a nation. In that capacity I summon you to listen carefully to my words of blessing. My propose is to tell you what G-d's intentions are for each of you in relation to all of you.

Each of you must listen as one and as twelve. I am not speaking privately. That I already did with each of you as I did with Yoseph and his sons. Now you must listen to the composition of the nation as a nation."

In summation...

The end of this week's Parsha is the end of Bereishis. The end began with 12 individuals struggling to understand their place and their responsibilities. The process they underwent was deliberate and divine.

Yoseph the dreamer decided that he had to tell his brothers his dream of national and universal stewardship. For Yoseph it was a prophecy that had to be shared.

The brothers moved to protect their positions within the Chosen People misinterpreting Yoseph's insistence as the egomaniacal ravings of an Eisav clone.

Shimon and Layvie, the proven defenders of the family's honor, conspired to remove the threat of Yoseph and save the family.

Reuven, hoping to return Yoseph and their sibling rivalry to the loving embrace and direction of Yakov their father and mentor, failed in his attempt to save Yoseph.

Yehudah made his first executive decision and consigned Yoseph into the relative protection of slavery and G-d's divine plan.

Seduction, imprisonment, dreams, and 12 years climaxed with Yoseph becoming Tzaphnas Paneach and the savior of Egypt and the world.

The brothers descended into the world of Egypt and their perceived adversary directed them through stages of self-discovery and Teshuvah (repentance).

In the end, Yoseph forgave them, not by forgiving their original intentions but by thanking G-d for directing every step of the family's destiny. As far as the Tzadik was concerned, no apology was necessary.

The family soon to be nation of 70 arrived in Goshen. 70 members and 70 nations. 70 individuals with a singular task and destiny. Twelve individuals who had to figure out their places and how to live with each other. Twelve sons who in the end embraced each other and forgave each other. Twelve

sons who like the twelve stones of the Mizbeach (alter) would elevate the world in service to G-d and bring redemption.

The family as a microcosm of the world: struggling to understand each other; struggling to understand G-d; struggling to accept the differences and embrace the divisions; struggling to learn how to forgive, and struggling to attain redemption. That is the story of our people. That is the story of our world. That is the story of the Book of Bereishis.

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