

PASSIVE ACTION, PART 1 PLUS A QUICK REVIEW OF THE LAWS OF CHANUKAH

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The interplay between "Hashgacha - Divine supervision" and "Histadlus - individual effort" has been the topic of discussion and debate since the beginning of time. In the extreme there are those who would like to believe that trust in Divine providence means that they do not have to make any individual effort. In some miraculous manner G-d will provide for them and their families. To the other extreme of the discussion are those who do not believe in any form of providence and depend only on their own efforts for support and sustenance.

Of course, there is a middle ground that integrates both sides of the discussion. This middle position suggests that G-d founded His universe on certain immutable principles. G-d as the Creator and Provider of All is one such principle. Working within the laws of nature and not relying on miracles in another such principle. That means that G-d established and maintains a system of commerce and ecology to deliver the benefits of his largess and provide for all of creation. If we work within the system we will receive G-d's benevolent generosity. He will grant us health, wealth, shelter, and sustenance. If we ignore the framework of G-d's "delivery system" we will be shoeless, homeless, and hungry. Likewise, ignoring the ecological constraints of this world will destroy the richness of our natural resources and compromise our ability to extract G-d's gifts. Rivers and lakes will become polluted, the air will become poisonous, and we will inevitably suffer the consequences. The mere fact that we are good and righteous will not alter the negative consequences of our actions. We must work within the framework of both immutable principles.

How much each of us receives from G-d depends on more variables than we can calculate. Only G-d knows how He arrives at the decisions that dictate our existence from Rosh Hashana to Rosh Hashana. Nevertheless, the degree of our "Histadlus - individual effort" is left up our free will and us.

Part of the free will equation that determines the degree of our Histadlus in acquiring G-d's providence is our values and priorities. Some will decide that they need more material wealth even at the risk of not attaining their spiritual potential. Others will decide that they are content with less material gains and devote their energy and time to spiritual advancement. In either scenario, the material gains will have been determined the previous Rosh Hashana by G-d.

The focus of Sefer Bereishis is different than the other four. The Book of Bereishis is the only Sefer that presents how the Jew interacted with the non-Jew. The other four books describe the Jewish

nation's relationship to themselves and to G-d rather than describing their interaction with the other nations. It is true that in the other four Seforim G-d forewarned us and admonished us against relating too closely with the other nations, but the main focus is still on the nation's responsibility for itself.

As a nation, our mission is to become the kingdom of priests and the holy nation. Ultimately, we must be the light onto the nations. I believe that in order for the Jewish people to accomplish their mission they must model for the rest of the world the integration of Hishtadlus and Hashgacha, individual effort and Divine supervision. I believe that the stories in Sefer Bereishis, especially the story of Yoseph, his brothers, and Yoseph's sale into slavery, highlight the integration of Hashgacha and Hishtadlus.

There are a few end-points I would like to begin with.

1. In the end of Parshas Vayichi, after returning from Yakov's burial, the Brothers confront Yoseph. Yoseph responds to them, (50:20-21) "Am I instead of G-d? You thought to do me evil but G-d made it good. I was sent ahead to sustain this great multitude of people."
2. At the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, after Yoseph reveals himself to the Brothers, Yoseph says to them, (45:4-5) "I am Yoseph who you sold to Egypt. Do not reproach yourselves, G-d sent me here to be a provider for the family."
3. In the beginning of Parshas Miketz, Yoseph is brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams. Pharaoh recounts Yoseph's reputation as an interpreter of dreams and asks Yoseph to interpret his two dreams. Yoseph answers, (41:16) "That is beyond me. It is Who G-d will respond."
4. In this week's Parsha Yoseph is sold to Potiphar, Chamberlain of the Butchers. Potiphar notices that Yoseph is uniquely gifted as an administrator. The verse states, (39:4) "And his master saw that G-d was with him. Everything Yoseph did was aided by G-d." How did Potiphar know anything about G-d? How did Potiphar know to associate Yoseph's administrative successes with G-d rather than with Yoseph alone?

Rashi references the Medresh Tanchumah (8) that states, "The name of heaven was familiar in his mouth." All of 17 years old, exceedingly handsome, very personable, exceptionally effective, Yoseph found himself the center of attention. He was truly the proverbial "Golden Boy." As far as Potiphar was concerned he had struck pay dirt. With Yoseph in charge, Potiphar was free to do anything else he wanted. Not only wasn't he concerned about maintaining his holdings, he was confident that under Yoseph's direction his estate would increase. Yet, whenever Yoseph reflected upon his own success, or if anyone else commented on his success, Yoseph would associate the success with G-d. Soon enough, the entire household had heard about Yoseph's monotheistic beliefs. Soon enough the entire household knew that Yoseph was different.

Yoseph's descent into Egypt and his rise to power is the culminating example of the Jew relating to

the non-Jewish world; therefore, it is important to identify how Yoseph saw himself and how he portrayed himself to the rest of the world. It is clear from the above four examples that Yoseph saw himself as a servant of G-d. He saw himself as a chess piece on G-d's board of creation and time being moved from square to square as per G-d's intentions. He understood that his destiny was not his own. He understood that he existed solely for the sake of G-d, the future of the Jewish people, and the redemption of the world. Yoseph understood that his prodigious knowledge, advanced wisdom, and unique success were all tools granted by G-d in order to accomplish G-d's intentions. However, the gifts demanded of him tremendous effort and self-sacrifice. They were not simply granted to him in the manner of King Solomon awakening from his dream at the age of 12 endowed with greater wisdom than anyone else. Yoseph had spent the first 17 years of his life immersed in the tent of Yakov, drinking thirstily from the fonts of Yakov's wisdom, vision, and faith. He felt empowered to join the ranks of his father, grandfather, and great grandfather as a "first born", leader, and protector. Yakov recognized Yoseph's uniqueness among the brothers and confirmed his tireless devotion and work with a multi-colored coat. Yoseph knew that he was destined by G-d for greatness.

Underlying Yoseph's greatness was the indispensable characteristic of humility. Yoseph knew that all his personal effort and investment was to serve G-d and the Jewish people; therefore, he had the courage to confront his brothers when he thought they were misbehaving or when he felt that there was "national / familial" news of importance. Everything Yoseph did was "for the sake of heaven."

Therefore, as noted in the four examples above, Yoseph always responded by associating events, whether seemingly good or bad, with G-d and G-d's divine intentions.

Yoseph presents a complex example of the integration of Hishtadlus and Hashgacha. He appears to do whatever it takes in order to be successful while never forgetting that it is G-d Who is in charge. The one time he seems to slip is right before the incident with Potiphar's wife. Verse 39:6 states that Yoseph was "handsome of form and appearance." Rashi comments from the Tanchumah, "Once Yoseph saw his own rise to power in the household of Potiphar he began to eat, drink, and play with his hair." The Medresh seems to be saying that the young Yoseph was so overwhelmed by the events of his sale into slavery that he lost sight of who he was and what his mission was. Therefore, Yoseph was thrown into the turmoil and trauma of the incident with Potiphar's wife to force him to remember who and what he was. "The face of his father Yakov appeared before him." (Rashi 39:11)

Given the integration of Hishtadlus and Hashgacha that defined Yoseph's young life, why was Yoseph punished at the end of the Parsha by languishing in prison two extra years? (Rashi 40:23)

To Be Continued..

A Quick Review of the Laws of Chanukah

Chanukah is from Friday night Dec. 19 through Dec. 27. Hallel is said every morning and Al Hanisim is added to the Amidah and the Birkat Hamazon.

1. The Menorah should be lit 1/2 hour after sunset and remain lit for at least 1/2 hr. On Friday the Menorah must be lit before the Shabbos candles and remain lit for at least 90 minutes.
2. Candles should be placed in the Menorah from right to left and lit from left to right.
3. Olive oil or wax candles are acceptable; however, olive oil is preferred. Electric or gas lights are unacceptable.
4. Each family member except should light his or her own Menorah. A wife may light her own (there are differing opinions about whether she should or should not) and if agreed upon exempt her husband if he won't be home.
5. The Menorah should be placed in a location where both family and public can see it. The best height is at 35" to 40", however safety must be a priority.
6. Brochos should be recited before lighting the Menorah. Talking is prohibited between the Brochos and the lighting.

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