

NICE GUYS FINISH SECOND -- SECOND IN COMMAND TO PHAROAH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 125, Hamalbin P'nei Chaveiro. Good Shabbos!

Nice Guys Finish Second -- Second in Command to Pharoah

(Rabbi Frand quotes both insights this week from the sefer Shemen HaTov by Rabbi Dov Weinberger.)

This week's parsha contains four words that changed the course of history. Yosef was arrested and imprisoned. Shortly afterwards, two members of Pharoah's Court were also thrown into jail.

Imagine what it was like to be in jail with two officers of Pharoah's Court. As an analogy, this would be like having a two-bit drug dealer in jail together with two members of the President's cabinet. These were 'Cabinet level' people in the Egyptian government - the person who brought Pharoah his wine was a trusted individual. He was the wine taster, a person in whom the King had implicit trust. These were people who could be compared to the Attorney General and the Secretary of State.

They were sitting in jail with a Hebrew slave - the lowest rung of society, someone who was serving time for a petty crime. We can be sure that there was not a lot of camaraderie and social interaction between Yosef and Pharoah's officials.

The officers had their respective dreams, which upset them. Yosef saw that they were depressed and asked them "Why are you depressed?" The "drug dealer" (Yosef) comments to the "Secretary of State" (Wine Butler), "You don't look so good this morning!" Because of that remark, because of those four words, what happens?

The dreams are related to Yosef. Yosef interprets the dreams. The Butler sees that Yosef has special powers. The Butler is eventually released from jail and, in the time-honored tradition, gets put back on the 'Cabinet'.

Years later, the Butler remembers Yosef. Yosef is brought out of jail. He interprets the dreams of

Pharoah correctly. He becomes the second in command. He feeds the entire world including his own brothers and father. And the rest - as they say -- is history!

What started this entire series of events? Four words: "Madua peneichem ra'im hayom?" (Why are your faces troubled today?) What is the ethical lesson to be learned here? The lesson is that it is incumbent upon us to be a "nice guy." Yosef was concerned about how they looked and how they felt, even though we would need to assume that these were people who did not give Yosef a second look. Merely saying a nice, kind word makes such a difference!

Four words changed history. Two words can change history -- "Good Morning!" "How are you?" "How are you doing?" "How was your holiday?" "How is your spouse?" "How are your kids?" These types of words can make a difference. They made a vast difference in Yosef's life and for Klal Yisrael's [The Jewish Nation's] lives.

The Significance of 'Eight' -- Outside the Forces of Nature

Yosef was seduced by with the wife of Potiphar. Yosef refused. "...How can I do this terribly wicked deed?..." [Bereishis 39:9] Finally, when she cornered him alone and grabbed hold of his garment, Yosef fled and ran out of the house (va'yanos vayetze haChutzah), rather than accede to her will.

There is a very famous Medrash in Tehillim on the pasuk "The Sea saw and fled..." [Psalms 114:3] The Medrash says that when the Jewish people came to the Red Sea, the Sea saw the coffin of Yosef and fled. In the words of the Medrash, "It fled because of the one who fled." In the merit of the one who withheld and did not succumb to his passions, the Sea split for Israel.

What is the connection between the merit of Yosef and the splitting of the Red Sea? If one looks in the parsha, one will notice a peculiar thing. The expression "va'yanos haChutzah" (and he fled outside) is repeated four times in the narrative. What is the significance of this?

The terminology "Vayotze oso ha'Chutzah" (and He took him outside) was used previously in Parashas Lech Lecha during the Covenant between the Pieces [Bereishis 15:5]. HaShem took Avraham -- haChutzah (outside). The Medrash comments that HaShem told Avraham, "Go out from your constellation" -- go out from the normal forces of nature. "You, Avraham, are above nature. You are not beholden to the powers of nature. Even naturally, you should not have children, you will, in fact, be the father of great nations. You are bigger than nature."

The words "Vayotze oso ha'Chutzah" implicitly contain the power to overcome nature. Yosef utilized the ability of a Jew to be superior to nature and nature's dictates.

When everything in nature would suggest that he had to succumb to the seductions of Potiphar's wife, Yosef was able to invoke the power of Avraham, his great-grandfather, who was outside the power of nature. Yosef overcame his particular nature and he too did not succumb.

Therefore, when Yosef's coffin arrived at the Red Sea, whose nature it is to flow, the Red Sea split in

Yosef's merit. Nature was suspended. The sea fled before the one who fled. The one who overcame nature has the power to suspend the nature of the sea.

The Shemen HaTov takes this one step further. He brings a Sefer HaPardes who relates a fascinating insight. (This is delving here on the fringes of Kabbalah, and we can only speculate regarding the meaning of the Sefer HaPardes. The Sefer HaPardes is a Halachic compendium from the school of Rashi.)

The Sefer HaPardes says that there are 112 pasukim in Parshas VaYeishev. Out of those 112 pasukim, every single pasuk begins with a 'vov', with the exception of 8 pasukim! [Note: The count of eight pasukim begins only after Pasuk 3 where the series of Vov pasukim actually begin. Do not count from the beginning of the parsha, but rather from Pasuk 3.] The Sefer HaPardes says that the 8 pasukim that do not begin with a vov correspond to the 8 days between the birth of a boy and his circumcision. They allude to Milah, which is performed on the 8th day.

The Shemen HaTov suggests that all the incidents of Parshas VaYeishev are one big vov. And this happened, and this happened, and this happened... It is all one big story -- one event emerging from the other. It is all one big cause and effect.

The Torah is teaching that this may be the way things work in the outside world. History involves one thing leading to another to another. But the life of a Jew is above nature.

The 8 pasukim correspond to Milah. According to traditional literature, 7 connotes nature -- the number of days in a week; while 8 connotes the property of being above nature. That is why circumcision is on the 8th day, because Milah is l'maaleh min haTeva [above Nature]. Jews are above nature, because that is what G-d told Avraham Avinu. He took Avraham outside and told him "You are above nature."

The 8 pasukim that do not have the vov teach us something about the entire remainder of the parsha. None of it is a 'vov'. Nothing is just cause and effect. It is not just a story. It is not just natural happenstance. It is all above nature. There is, in effect, a grand plan. Nothing in history is just coincidence. Israel has no Mazal -- we are above all that!

One does not have to be a genius to make the connection to the 8 days of Chanukah, which are also supra natural. We all understand that the miracle of the jug of oil was a miracle. But we also have to know that the miracle of the oil reveals that the victory in battle is also not nature - because nothing is nature. The Jewish people live a miraculous existence - outside the forces of nature.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayishlach are provided below:

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