The Rokeach's Enigmatic Link Between Vayeshev and Tehillim 92

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #572, Determining Paternity. Good Shabbos!

The Rokeach (in his commentary on Chumash) makes the enigmatic observation that there are 112 pasukim [verses] in Parshas Vayeshev and there are 112 words in Chapter 92 of Tehillim, Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos [A Psalm for the Sabbath Day]. The Rokeach does not elaborate at all as to any hidden meaning that is suggested by this "coincidence." He is obviously trying to point out some profound link between our parsha and the Psalm of Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos, but he leaves to us the exercise of figuring out what that link might be.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon offers a very elaborate explanation of this Rokeach. The basic idea he develops is as follows:

The Book of Bereshis is the blueprint for Jewish History. It contains within it many strata of insight, all within the rubric of "Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim" -- the actions of the "fathers" foreshadow the events that will befall the "children." Within the parameters of this operative principle throughout the Book of Bereshis, Parshas Vayeshev represents the chapter of Divine Providence (Hashgocha Pratis). It provides the classic historical precedent for the Almighty's manipulation of events and people, actions and governments in order to bring His Master Plan to fruition.

If one looks at Parshas Vayeshev -- even the beginning of the parsha -- one is struck by the fundamental mistakes that the personalities therein have made. Of course, we understand that Yaakov Avinu was a wholly righteous individual -- one of the spiritual pillars of the universe. Likewise, although a simplistic reading of the parsha might mislead us into believing otherwise, each of Yaakov's sons were Tzadikim [holy individuals] and spiritual giants in their own right. And yet all of these great and holy individuals seem to make very basic mistakes in their actions as portrayed by
the Torah’s narration in this week’s parsha.

Anyone fortunate enough to have raised children realizes that the first rule of child-raising is that one must not show favoritism to one child over another. One does not need to be Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] to know this principle. How does Yaakov make such a mistake as to single out Yosef and give the Kesones Pasim [long-sleeved coat] to him? How did the brothers make such basic mistakes vis-a-vis their siblings -- in terms of their attitudes, suspicions, and treatment of one another? If Yaakov in fact was aware of the brothers’ hatred toward Yosef, why did he send Yosef alone to find them? Why were all these blunders made?

There are three words in the parsha that are almost an announcement on the part of the Torah as to what is occurring. The pasuk says "Vayishlacheyhu m'emek Chevron" [And he sent him from the Valley of Chevron] [Bereshis 37:14]. Rashi, citing Chazal [the (Talmudic) Sages], wonders about the term "Valley" of Chevron. After all, Rashi points out, Chevron is in a mountainous region. So why would the Torah use "Valley" to refer to a mountain? The homiletic interpretation, Chazal explain, is that Yaakov sent Yosef based on the "deep counsel of the righteous one buried in Chevron (i.e. - Avraham)."

In other words, "the Valley of Chevron" has nothing to do with topography or location. "Emek Chevron" is a code word to us. This act -- along with the other "mistakes" made by the prime actors in this drama -- are all part of playing out the scenario: "your children will be strangers in a land not their own..." [Bereshis 15:13] foretold to Avraham in the Bris Bain Habesarim [Covenant Between the Parts].

There was a Divine necessity for Yaakov Avinu and his whole family to wind up in Egypt and to remain there, enslaved, for hundreds of years. How was that going to happen? The answer is Parshas Vayeshev. All the "weird" things that happen in this parsha are in order to fulfill the "counsel" of that righteous person buried in Chevron.

Yaakov, Yosef, and the brothers were not making the decisions that appear to us to be such gross errors in judgment. They were merely puppets on the stage of Divinely directed history to enable certain scenarios to play themselves out. All the works in this parsha are the works of the Puppeteer (i.e. - the Almighty).

The same Divine manipulation is apparent in the royal intrigue that occurs years later in Pharoah’s palace. Why did the fly fall into the royal cup? Why were the Baker and the Wine Steward thrown together into the same jail as Yosef? All these little events were part of the Grand Plan being executed by the Almighty.

There are other examples in Jewish history where "mistakes" were made because the Divine Will was executing His Master Plan. One famous example: Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was given the opportunity to ask for three wishes from the Roman General besieging Jerusalem. He asked that Yavneh and its wise men be spared, that the family of Rabban Gamliel be spared, and that a
physician be provided to cure Rav Tzadok. [Gittin 56b]

What happened to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai? Why did he blow this golden opportunity to make a historically substantive request from the future Emperor of Rome? He could have asked that the Roman army leave the country! He should have asked that the Beis HaMikdash be spared! Rabbi Yosef (others say Rabbi Akiva) applied the pasuk: "G-d turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish" [Yeshaya 44:25].

In this situation, the Almighty did not let Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai make the right decision. The Almighty wanted the Temple destroyed!

Parshas Vayeshev teaches us that G-d runs the world. All the "blunders" and the "political agendas" and "military strategies" that we see and think are the determinants of the historical drama are really not the primary causes of the events that take place. The ultimate determinant of history is the Almighty's Master Plan. This is the lesson of Parshas Vayeshev.

In light of this lesson, we can come to understand the enigmatic equation of the Rokeach between the 112 pasukim in Parshas Vayeshev and the 112 words in Mizmor Shir l'yom haShabbos.

Chazal say that the Almighty finished creating the world and took Adam into the Garden of Eden. He showed Adam each future generation and its leaders. Adam was shown the next 6000 years of history. Adam's response was "How great are Your deeds Hashem, exceedingly profound are Your thoughts" [from Tehillim Chapter 92, the chapter of Mizmor Shir l'yom haShabbos].

Adam was impressed with two things - Creation (how great are Your deeds) and History (how profound are Your thoughts). Given the knowledge of how every event led into the next event and how it would all end up, Adam was able to appreciate the depth and profundity of G-d's Master Plan. No one else can fully appreciate it, while it is in the midst of "playing itself out". It appears inexplicable to us, just like the events of Parsha s Vayeshev.

That is the connection between this Parsha and the Chapter of Tehillim -- how deep are Your thoughts, Hashem. Unsophisticated man will not understand this (ish ba'ar lo yeidah), and the fool will not comprehend it (u'kesil lo yavin es zos).

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 Vayeishev are provided below:

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