

DAN AND ROSH HASHANA / G-D WHO SHEPHERDS

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: #1014– Will We Make Pesach When Mashiach Comes? Good Shabbos!

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An Interesting Phenomenon Alluded To In The Blessing of Dan

The Tur cites a custom that each day from Rosh Chodesh Nisan through the 12th of Nisan, we read the Torah section in "*Parshas Nesiim*" (dealing with the inauguration offerings brought respectively by the Princes of each Tribe during the 12-day period inaugurating service in the *Mishkan*) from Parshas

Nasso. This custom is widely practiced in Chassidic minyanim.

The tenth tribe to bring the inauguration offering was Dan, so on the tenth day of Nissan we read the section describing the offering of the Prince of the Tribe of Dan. Rav Zalman Volozhiner relates that whatever day of the week we read the Sacrifice of the Tribe of Dan, that day of the week will be Rosh HaShannah – the coming year.

He notes that this phenomenon is alluded to in this week's Parsha: "Dan, will judge his nation..." [Bereishis 49:16]. This hints at the idea that on "the day of Dan" the Almighty will judge His people. A very interesting observation!

Invoking The Imagery of G-d Who Shepherds in the Blessing to Yosef

I saw the following idea in a write up of a *mussar* talk once given by Rav Matisyahu Solomon.

In the blessing that *Yaakov Avinu* gives to Yosef (at the beginning of the *parsha*) he refers to the Almighty as "...G-d before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked – G-d Who shepherds me from my inception until this day..." [Bereishis 49:15]. The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni on Tehillim says that when Yaakov referred to the Almighty as a Shepherd (*Ro-eh*), this was a revolutionary expression. It had never happened before.

Rav Chama bar Chanina states: "There is no more disgusting profession (*Umnus bezuyah*) than that of a shepherd". The Medrash says that it is an insult to call the *Ribono shel Olam* a shepherd. Today we think, "What is the worst job a person can have?" Perhaps it is that of a septic tank cleaner. In today's society, there is perhaps no more disgusting a profession. However, in the days of *Chazal*, a shepherd was the lowest of the low, in terms of ways to make a living. He must be in the heat of the sun with smelly animals. He is alone. It is cold in the winter and hot in the summer. It is a disgusting profession.

Yet Dovid HaMelech also called the Almighty a Shepherd. As we all know, "A Psalm of David: The L-rd is my Shepherd, I shall not want." [Tehillim 23:1]. The Medrash says that though the profession was an unseemly one and it might seem odd to give the Almighty such a title, Dovid followed the example of Yaakov. "If Yaakov can refer to G-d as 'my Shepherd', so can I". According to the Medrash, Dovid's entire justification for calling Hashem '*Ro-eh*' was because Yaakov called Him '*Ro-eh*'. If not for that precedent, it would be a derogatory title.

The question then becomes, why is *Yaakov Avinu* suddenly the first person to call the *Ribono shel Olam* a *Ro-eh* and why specifically now does he introduce this new depiction of the Master of the Universe?

The answer is that in Parshas Vayechi, *Yaakov Avinu* had an epiphany of sorts -- a revelation. In

Parshas Vayigash, *Yaakov Avinu* described his life as "...few and bad have been the days of the years of my life..." [Bereishis 47:9]. *Yaakov* made a very startling statement when Pharaoh asked him how old he was. *Yaakov* in effect responded to Pharaoh that he was younger than he looked but he looked as old as he did because "I had a miserable life." *Chazal* in fact tell us that he was punished for this. Nevertheless, this is what he said.

However, that was in Parshas Vayigash. In Parshas Vayechi, *Yaakov Avinu* had a revelation that as Rav Chaim Volozhin explains, calls attention to this entire idea. The revelation was that I see now, looking back on my life, that everything that happened to me represented the *Ribono shel Olam* watching over me and manipulating things and maneuvering things. It all turned out for the best. However, a shepherd suddenly decides to move the sheep from one pasture to the other, and the sheep do not understand "Where is this shepherd schlepping us? What's wrong with over here?" The sheep do not know that there is a wolf lurking over there in the first pasture. When the sheep are by a beautiful pond and are drinking sweet water and suddenly the shepherd says "Okay, we need to go!" and he takes them to a place where there is no pond and they cannot drink – the sheep are all thinking, "Why is he doing this?"

The sheep, who have no intelligence, do not understand. But the shepherd, if he is a good shepherd, faithfully takes care of his sheep. They are his "flock". He takes care of them, he loves them, and he empathizes with them. This is what *Yaakov Avinu* realized now. G-d has been my Shepherd. *Yaakov* did have a difficult life, but he now realized that the whole thing – Eisav, Lavan, Dina, the sale of Yosef, and everything else – now that he sees he is in Egypt and he sees why it all happened, he can say "I see now that I made a mistake. I was like the sheep who do not understand what their shepherd is doing to them. Now I understand that G-d was guiding me and shepherding me all along and was interested in my welfare.

It is therefore appropriate that when *Yaakov Avinu* gives the blessing to Yosef, he is inspired to call the Almighty a Shepherd. If there is one person of all the personalities of the *Chumash* that had this attribute of being a *Ro-eh* (and *Ro-eh* can be interpreted in one simple word: empathy), of epitomizing empathy in his life, it is in fact *Yosef HaTzadik*.

The first time the Torah describes Yosef, it describes him as follows: "These are the offspring of Yaakov, Yosef, at the age of seventeen years was a shepherd..." [Bereishis 37:2]. He is referred to as a *Ro-eh*. If we look at his life, it is the life of a *Ro-eh*, a person that cares about somebody else, that empathizes, and has someone else's best interest at heart. When Yosef brings a "report" about his brothers to his father, it is not because he was jealous or wishing to tattletale. He felt his brothers were doing something wrong and they had to be corrected. It would be much easier to have remained quiet and said, "I'm not going to be the snitch." However, he does it anyway because he was a *Ro-eh*.

When Yosef is stuck in a dungeon in Egypt, there were certainly not any big screen TVs, 3 good meals a day, or an hour of exercise. It was literally being in a dungeon. A bunch of lowlifes

surrounded the righteous Yosef. What does he say to his dungeon mates when he sees they are aggrieved? "Why are your faces downcast today?" [Bereishis 40:7]. He could have kept to himself. He did not need to socialize with criminals and lowlifes! But by his nature he was a *Ro-eh* – he was an empathizer.

The Gemara learns [Taanis 11a] that marital relations with one's wife is forbidden during a time of famine. We learn this from Yosef because the Torah says that his two sons were born "before the years of famine" [Bereishis 41:50]. *Chazal* derived that Yosef abstained from relations with his wife during the entire duration of the famine. Although Yosef was not personally suffering, others were and he had empathy for the suffering of others. "When other people are starving, I do not want to enjoy myself." This is the attribute of being a *Ro-eh*.

This is why the Almighty picks Yosef to feed the world. "...He is the provider to all the people of the land..." [Bereishis 42:6]. He kept the world alive. A person who cares about somebody else, and empathizes with somebody else, and has a history of empathy and is a *Ro-eh* – we allow such a meritorious person to bring merit to the world (*Me'galgilin zechus al yedai zakai*). This is why when Yaakov gives a blessing to Yosef, he invokes the name *Ro-eh*, because that is what Yosef is. Just as G-d is a *Ro-eh*, so too Yosef is a *Ro-eh*.

We have a Biblical command to try to emulate any attribute that the Almighty demonstrates to us. "And you shall walk in His ways." [Devorim 28:9]. The Almighty is an empathizer who cares about others, so too, we need to do the same. This is something that every one of us must work on: Think about somebody else. Human beings are by their very nature wrapped up in themselves. They are self-focused. It is man's spiritual challenge to think about others.

When you meet someone, do not just tell him where you are holding and what you are doing. Ask him about himself, his family, where is he holding and what is he doing. Think about the other person!

Rabbi Luban told me an interesting story. There was a rabbi in Pittsburgh in the 1930s who was the Chief Rabbi of the city. I looked him up on a website called Kevanim.com, which has short biographic sketches of Rabbinic personalities who are buried in America. There is a little bio on this Rabbi Moshe Zinnes. Rabbi Zinnes received semicha from Rav Eliezer Gordon; he received semicha from Rav Yitzchak Elchanon; he wrote a sefer on the *Yerushalmi*. Like many Litveshe Rabbanim, he came to America and wound up in a small Jewish community. Rabbi Luban learned in the Kolel in Pittsburgh in his younger years and heard stories about this Rabbi Zinnes.

There came a time when Rabbi Zinnes's family did not let him walk out alone in the winter, because he would invariably see a shivering person who did not have a coat and would take off his own coat, give it to the other person, and walk home without a coat. He would come back frozen. He went through many winter coats this way. The family made up that whenever he went out in the winter someone had to go with him to make sure he did not give away his coat.

This is the attribute of being a *Ro-eh*, having the attribute of empathy. When you see somebody suffering, you feel "I have to take care of him". We are not at the level of giving away our winter coats to every person in the street who is shivering, but to think about somebody else – to at least see his downcast expression and ask "what's bothering you?" – that is something we should all be able to strive for. This is something about which we are not only capable; it is something we all need to do.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayechi is provided below:

- # 037 - Establishing Time of Death
- # 079 - The Yissocher-Zevulun Partnership
- # 128 - The Sandik
- # 175 - Embalming, Autopsies, and Cremation
- # 221 - Exhumation: When Is it Permitted?
- # 265 - Yahrzeit
- # 311 - Funerals in Halacha
- # 355 - Asarah B'Teves
- # 399 - Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuso L'Olam Voed
- # 443 - Aveilus Issues
- # 487 - Determining Date of Moshiach's Arrival
- # 531 - Burial in Eretz Yisroel
- # 575 - Honoring an Older Brother
- # 619 - Fulfilling the Wishes of the Deceased
- # 663 - Belief in the Coming of Moshiach
- # 707 - Fasting on a Yahrzeit
- # 751 - The Rabbi: Master Or Slave?
- # 795 - Hatoras Nedorim - How Specific Must You Be?
- # 839 - Buying Cemetery Plot - Investing in Real Estate for Long Term
- # 883 - Evil Intentions - Do They Matter?
- # 927 - Yissocher - Zevulun Revisited
- # 970 - Being A Sandek - Does It Really Make You Wealthy?
- #1014 - Will We Make Pesach When Mashiach Comes?
- #1058 - Bentching Your Children on Friday Nights

- #1101 – Grandfather or Great Grandfather – Who Should be Sandek?
- #1144 – Supporting Someone To Sit and Learn: Must He Be Altruistic?
- #1187 – Can You Be Sandek More Than Once?
- #1231 – Day of Death or of Funeral? Customs and other Yahrtzeit Issues

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