

PARSHAS MIKETZ-CHANUKAH 5778

A major part of Sefer Bereishis is involved with the story of Yosef. He is a strong individual. He succeeds beyond all the expectations that people had for him. He had dreams about his relationship to his family. One regarding his brothers alone, and another regarding his parents along with his brothers.

Most people's dreams reflect what they are thinking about during the day and can be dismissed. On occasion, dreams have a prophetic quality to them where Hashem is sending the dreamer a message. Yosef was convinced that his dreams were a form of nevuah which had to be revealed and ultimately fulfilled. Yosef knew that he was hated by his brothers and that sharing these dreams would make things worse. But he felt duty-bound to relate these dreams to them since they were a nevuah that involved them.

Why did the Shevatim resent Yosef? It was because he was his father's favorite son. Targum Onkelos explains, Yosef was Yaakov's closest talmid. He absorbed the most Torah from Yaakov and Yaakov recognized that he was destined for greatness. It wasn't a matter of age.

Yaakov sent him on a mission to seek his brother's welfare. Yosef realized that this mission was fraught with danger. Because as long as he is under Yaakov's supervision, he is protected from the hatred of his brothers. By leaving, he is becoming vulnerable. But he obeys his father without hesitation and puts himself in danger.

But Yosef got lost and couldn't find his way until an "ish" points him in the right direction. Chazal say this was an agent of Hashem to make sure he would meet his brothers and fulfill his destiny. The Ramban made a short comment: Even though Yosef could have given up after trying and trying to find his brothers and then return to Yaakov safely, he persevered to find them and jeopardize his safety out of the sense of duty he had to honor his father's command. It shows Yosef's devotion to Yaakov's mission despite the excuses he could have used.

In addition, there is a plan that Hashem wants to bring to fruition and this Divine truth cannot be denied by excuses which are false.

Yaakov had finished with many trials and nisyonos. He endured the tricks of Lovon, the confrontation with Eisav, the rape of his daughter Dina, and now wants to settle in tranquility with his family and build the Jewish people. Immediately, he is thrown into turmoil over Yosef.

Klal Yisroel are not considered the descendants of Avrohom and Yitzchok. Yaakov knew that he was going to be the patriarch of the Jewish nation if he would father 12 children and unify the unique middos of all the Ovos and express them in perfect balance and harmony among his twelve sons. He came to Eretz Yisroel confident that with his twelve sons, he will build Klal Yisroel.

But there is a problem.

Hashem made a Bris Bein Habesorim which required that the family of Klal Yisroel go into golus and would not be able to develop into a nation in tranquility in their own land. They had to go to Egypt. Hashem manipulated all the various personalities and interactions between Yosef and his brothers in order to orchestrate this descent into golus in the best possible way.

Part of the plan was for Yosef to meet his brothers, and it was in danger of failing when Yosef couldn't find his brothers. But Hashem knew that Yosef was a dedicated son and wouldn't give up. So He sends agents to put Yosef on track.

The Ramban states that the plans of Hashem will be fulfilled and all the plans of mortals are shekker. At the end of the whole drama, Yosef spelled this out explicitly to his brothers. "You had designs for evil, but Hashem made it work out for the good."

When does Yosef reach his point of greatness to become Yosef haTzaddik?

Yosef has a powerful, charismatic personality. He was rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery, and fell from his lofty place in his father's house going from the top down to the bottom. But he quickly found himself on top again. His master Potifar saw that Yosef was successful in everything he did, and gave his entire estate into Yosef's trust. Why?

Because even Potifar realized that it was Hashem who granted Yosef success. How did he realize this? Because Yosef was careful to always mention Hashem while conducting his affairs. Yosef could have easily adopted a more cautious strategy of blending in and not sticking out. But Yosef was a strong individual. He made it clear to everyone that he was different and lived by a higher code of conduct. Chazal point out that whenever Yosef is being referred to by others, they identify him as the Ivri slave. This otherness is never lost on anybody who interacted with Yosef. This isn't always easy and pleasant. Especially at the beginning. But when they saw his success and he attributed his success to his religious convictions, it made an impression.

Then we have the nisayon of Eishes Potifar. She promised to make him an Egyptian nobleman if he acquiesced to her demands and remove his slave status. Imagine if Yosef chas ve'sholom would have taken the offer and then looked back. Surely he would have assured himself that had he refused, he would still be that lowly slave enduring untold humiliation. Surely he would have prided himself on making the smart decision to go along with Eishes Potifar and get out of slavery. Never in a million years would Yosef have imagined that not giving in to temptation would have made him even more powerful and wealthy than giving in. But Yosef made no calculations and no apologies. He told Eishes Potifar to her face that adultery is wrong and immoral and there is no way to rationalize it.

Again and again, he resisted Eishes Potifar's advances on a daily basis. He went through an unbelievable nisayon. A young man being promised everything in Olam Hazeh and he refused.

But then the day finally came where Yosef hesitated. His resolve began to weaken. So what happened to pull him out of it? Chazal say Yosef saw the image of his father, and immediately took off. Why didn't he just stay long enough to take back his cloak and remove the incriminating evidence? Because Yosef knew that one more moment of hesitation could possibly make him lose his courage. He has to get out now and not trust himself for even a second. The gevuroh is unbelievable.

Yosef went back to jail and again, Shem Hashem is always on his lips. Hashem granted him success despite his otherness. He rose to the heights of the jail hierarchy. He again did not take credit for his success. He saw two new inmates who looked depressed. Had he simply said to himself "two goyim who are unhappy, who cares?" none of the rest of the story would have happened. But Yosef took an interest. These were two human beings in need and he wanted to help. He asked them what's bothering them. They told him about their dreams and he responded that it is only Hashem Who gives the answers.

He left jail and led Egypt for 9 years, and he saw himself only as a vehicle for fulfilling Hashem's plans. Hashem is running the world. At each step of the way he made this abundantly clear to everyone – Jew and non-Jew alike.

Now he isn't just running an estate or a prison. He is running all of Egypt because he realized that Hashem is sending Pharaoh a message and giving Yosef insight into how to respond and prepare. Yosef never took credit.

When his brothers arrive, he began an elaborate plan. What is the purpose of Yosef playing games and manipulating his brothers? Why is he pretending to be a cruel tyrant bent on torturing them and their poor elderly father? What's the point of it all? The Beis Halevy explained that Yosef knew that, from the beginning, the brothers believed they were acting leshem shomayim. They made a beis din to determine that Yosef was moreid bemalchus against Yehudoh and they even went so far as to include Hashem Himself to be the 10th Judge on the beis din to seal the verdict. The Torah testifies that their true motivation was hatred and jealousy. But that was deep, deep down. The brothers convinced themselves that their motives were completely pure and impartial. Yosef wanted to confront the brothers with the truth and that they should realize that their motives had not been so pure. This was the only way that they could do teshuvah.

This explains the strange statement: "Ani Yosef—is my father still alive?" And the brothers couldn't answer him. What sense does this question make? They've been discussing their father the entire time! The midrash explains that this dumbfounding question to the brothers was a taste of the Yom Hadin that each person endures after he passes away.

The Beis Halevy explains that Yosef wanted to show the brothers that they are the source of the problem—not Yosef. It was their jealousy and hatred. How did he prove this? He challenged Yehudoh who had been bargaining and pleading for Yosef to release Binyomin. He had been trying to invoke compassion and mercy in Yosef by getting him to realize how much Binyomin meant to Yaakov and how devastating it would be for him if Binyomin didn't return home safely. Yosef challenged all this concern and anxiety over Yaakov's well-being with the simple question: "I am Yosef—is my father still

alive?" What did you think was going to happen 22 years ago when you sold me? You must have thought it was necessary to make Yaakov go through the pain and anguish because you were right and I was a threat. Where was all your compassion and mercy for Yaakov back then?

The answer is because then, the problem was getting rid of me. Now the problem is being able to get Binyomin back to Yaakov unharmed and fulfill your own commitment. Yehudoh had taken tremendous responsibility for Binyomin, and he had a deep vested interest in seeing him released. So Yosef confronted him with the accusation that he really didn't care about Yaakov. He really cared about himself. Had you cared so much about Yaakov, you wouldn't have sold his favorite son into slavery.

Yosef wanted to confront them in a way that they couldn't answer. It was like a Yom Hadin and he wanted them to experience deep remorse and do teshuvoh. It was for their own benefit. In Parshas Vayechi, Yosef told them that he has no personal vendetta against the brothers for what they did to him. Hashem is in charge of everything that happens. Yosef explained to the brothers that Hashem had a plan for us to come down to golus in Egypt for the reasons He wanted. He manipulated all your bad middos and circumstances to arrange this particular series of events to produce this particular outcome. I have nothing against you. Yosef had a very clear vision of how the world runs.

Chanukah unfortunately has been co-opted to mean the very opposite of what Chanukah and the Maccabim stand for. There is a national sports competition "The Maccabiah" and there are sports teams "Maccabi". It is for athletes who devote their entire careers building their bodies to be strong and swift, and training to achieve physical prowess in the sports arena.

But let's read the description in Al Hanissim of the Jews who decimated the entire Greek army. We were the weak, few, pure tzaddikim who sat and learned Torah. We took on the Greek legions and we won. That is what Chanukah is about. We are a unique nation. We don't win wars because of our air superiority and hi-tech weaponry. We don't honor the military might of the army. Hashem runs the world and we win wars only because Hashem wants us to. In one way, it made no sense because we were weak, and small in numbers and completely untrained. But it made perfect sense because we were pure tzaddikim who sat and learned Torah. The Greeks themselves understood this more than anyone.

The Greeks knew that the only way to vanquish Klal Yisroel is to weaken their connection to Torah.

Yosef stayed a tzaddik the entire time he was all alone in Egypt. Yaakov suffered a double-aveilus the entire 22 years that Yosef was missing. The first level of aveilus is that he lost his favorite son—who was his favorite only because Yosef was his talmid muvhak. The second level was over the loss of the 12 shevotim unit that was supposed to be the foundation for Klal Yisroel. Without Yosef, there are no 12 Shivtei Koh and no Klal Yisroel. Finding out Yosef was alive would not have been a comfort to Yaakov if he turned out to be this cruel sadistic tyrant who has been torturing them! So Yosef made sure he sent the message to Yaakov letting him know that he stayed connected to the Torah they shared together and he hadn't lost his level and his mesorah through limud haTorah. Not just the emunoh and bitochon - but the limud HaTorah.

The Greeks understood that the key to undermining the resolve of Klal Yisroel to remain different and distinct from all

other nations is their connection to limud haTorah. Once that connection is severed, it won't be too difficult to chip away and tear down their overall commitment to the individual mitzvos which keep them apart.

So our national pride isn't built on producing powerful athletes who win gold medals or producing powerful tanks and advanced missile systems. No. It comes from producing a handful of weak tzaddikim, tehorim, oskim besorosechov fighting for Hashem. Hashem decides who wins and takes elaborate steps based on our merits to fulfill His plan.

The strength Klal Yisroel is based on limud haTorah and not being impressed by Egyptian culture and Greek culture.

We live in interesting times. Jews the world over are jumping for joy that President Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel. What does this really mean? Why is it significant to us for some non-Jew to say that Yerushalayim is important to the Jewish people?

If people think the wars that might ignite in the world between North Korea and the U.S. or between Hezbollah and Iran against Israel are in the hands of these unstable political leaders, they are completely mistaken. Hashem has his plans and the designs people have are all in vain.

The posuk in Tehillim says: If Klal Yisroel would only follow Hashem and learn His Torah and keep His mitzvos, all our enemies would be vanquished in the blink of an eye. It is up to our level in ruchniyos to determine how Hashem will arrange for our survival. That is what the Maccabim understood and that is how they won. If Hashem wants the current society of Israel to continue to exist, it will happen regardless of what the

army does. Whether rockets will fall in Yerushalayim or not is all a matter of the zechus of our limud haTorah.

There are different wars between nations and then there is the war against Klal Yisroel. When we take the Torah out we talk about the enemies of Hashem. Who are the enemies of Hashem? They are the enemies of Klal Yisroel. We represent an idea that evil people cannot tolerate—there is ruchniyus and morality and a higher form of living, and ultimately a din vecheshbon about how we lead our lives. People who want to be free of any conscience and any accounting for living a life dedicated only to physical goals have a deep-seated hatred for Klal Yisroel and they desperately need to get rid of us. It is really a fight with Hashem. This means our biggest defense is from Hashem. The only way we can defend ourselves from this hatred is by standing with Hashem. The outcome of war or peace is not in our hands. The greatest protection for us is the greatest protection that Yosef had and that the Maccabim had. It is being connected to limud haTorah. With that, we can be the smallest and the weakest and still prevail over the greatest and the mightiest of armies.

As we proceed with Chanukah and all the lessons of Chanukah, the main lesson is that success can go to the weak and the few as long as they are tehorim and tzadikim who are osek in Torah. If there is no other lesson you get from Yeshivah, you should take this one away with you. Yosef became the most powerful leader because he kept his mesorah and his connection to his father through limud haTorah.

Hashem runs the world. You have to blind not to see it and understand what Jewish history is all about.