

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash
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Yosef and Chanuka

By Rav Mordechai Friedman

The hopes and dreams of Yosef and his brothers is truly an intriguing topic. What could possibly drive Yosef's brothers to hate him to the point of fratricide? Imagine what it was like to grow up in the house of Yaakov, having a father, grand-father, great-grand-father who had attained the spiritual level of prophecy, the highest level that a human being can reach. The children of Yaakov must have been filled with the burning desire to attain such a spiritual height. They undoubtedly did all they could to learn from their father. Perhaps, they wondered, it was an ability transmitted from father to son. Yet, time went on and nothing happened. When will father reveal the secret? Will there be only one successor? Yosef already appears to be the favored one.

Then it happens: "And Yosef dreamed a dream and told it to his brothers, and they hated him yet the more. And he said to them, 'Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed, for behold we were binding sheaves ...' (Bereishit 36:5)

The brothers "hate him more" before he even relates the content of the dream. The very fact of the dream was enough to drive them to more hatred. This is illustrated further by the wording after they are told the content of the dream, "And they hated him more for his dreams AND HIS WORDS." (36:8) Primarily his dreams and secondarily their content have confirmed the brothers' anxiety - Yosef has been chosen to succeed the lineage of prophecy!

The age of direct prophecy was coming to a close at a time when the children of Yaakov needed it the most. It was now in the young hands of Yosef to be the conduit of the Almighty.

While in jail, dreams gave way to an ability to see them for what they truly were and to accurately interpret their Godly message.

His brothers and father doubted the veracity of his dreams. The two incarcerated courtiers of Par'o would have likewise dismissed their own dreams as a mundane occurrence, had they not coincided with each other. Yosef had the ability to recognize the guiding hand of God behind these events.

Yosef's gift did not end with the semi-prophetic abilities of dreaming and interpretation. While deep in those dungeons, another facet developed. Offering his help to the two courtiers, Yosef explains that "interpretations are God's affair." Two more years in the pit pass. Yosef emerges to aid Par'o. His first words to the king are: "It is not my power, God will tell you what they mean." He subsequently

mentions the name "Elokim" four more times during his interpretation. Thus, he succeeds in instilling an awareness of God in Par'o - to the point that Par'o himself acknowledges God twice in his reply to Yosef.

Yosef's ability at this point was not only to dream and see the hand of Hashem, but to profoundly affect those around him with the sublimity of God.

The events of Chanuka occurred after the period of prophecy and supernatural events.

The war in which "the many fell to the hands of the few," although extraordinary, was not a supernatural occurrence. It was the unique ability of the Chashmonaim to recognize, interpret and more importantly, to effectively relate to the populace that this was truly the workings of God.

More so, bringing the significance of the events to the attention of the people was not sufficient. The Chashmonaim succeeded in affecting the hearts and souls of the Jews enough to stem the tides of the oncoming Hellenism.

In many aspects, the other miracle of Chanuka illuminates this special ability of the Makkabim. A flame burns in each cup of the menorah in the beit ha-mikdash. Nothing out of the ordinary is apparent. How was the miracle of the oil revealed to the casual spectator? The realization of the change in the laws of nature can only come to a person with the vantage point of witnessing the fact that no oil was added to the cups for seven days. In truth, no part of the phenomenon could have been experienced first hand by the vast majority of the people. It must have been communicated by the kohanim and levi'im who were the link to the people of the "outside world."

Like a dream occurring in the sleeping conscience of a person, the glowing flames of the menorah were, at first, a hidden event. And like the dreams encountered by Yosef, the events of Chanuka required interpreters, advertisers and inspirators to act as conduits to the souls of the people. Yosef and the Chashmonaim were illuminators of the will of Hashem.

Today, Benei Yisrael no longer benefit from the advantage of direct prophecy or supernatural signs. We must seek out such inspiration using the tools God has given us. As benei Torah, who, in the words of the Rambam, have volunteered to stand before Hashem, we enjoy a significant vantage point. Events that have occurred in the distant past, in our lifetimes or that are unfolding at the present, can be viewed in many ways. Ours is the perspective of Torah and yir'at shamayim. We are capable of noting the hand of God in the past and experiencing it in the present. However, the profound spiritual effect that such a Torah perspective

affords us is of little consequence to the rest of Klal Yisrael, unless we realize our responsibility to relate these evaluations of events in such a manner as to inform and inspire our people in the most effective way. We must stimulate and educate people in both formal and informal settings, intellectually and spiritually, using the spectacular or the mundane events as opportunities to bring the realization of yad Hashem to the Am Hashem. Ba-yamim ha-hem ba-zman ha-zeh.

(Originally delivered on the fifth night of Chanuka, 5757.)

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