

Vayaishev

Chanukah

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Chanukah is endless, but I'm not. I have been writing Perceptions for exactly 30 years now, *b"H*, and I have always tried to avoid repeating previous *divrei Torah*. Even though the average person tends to forget what they saw just three months ago, it has always felt like cheating on some level to "plagiarize" from previous years.

Overlap is inevitable. It is not like the stories of the Torah change from year to year, or the holidays for that matter. The challenge is always to say something new about something old, which should not be difficult to do given all the very many commentaries, new and old.

Part of the problem is the learning of *Kabbalah*. The vast majority of commentators don't draw from *Kabbalah* but stick to more obvious levels of Torah. This doesn't mean that what they say is not deeply insightful; it usually is. And sometimes the beauty of what they say is not the depth of the idea, but the simplicity of it, especially if you know *Kabbalah*. There is something sublimely divine and profound about a simple truth that may be so obvious, that everyone overlooks it or takes it for granted, but is crucial for life.

For example, *kinab*—jealousy is a big part of the story. Amazingly, it has been a major part of the Torah's narration from day one, or at least day six. It was the snake's jealousy of the relationship of Adam and Chava, that led to his convincing Chava to eat the forbidden fruit. It was Kayin's jealousy of the attention God paid to Hevel because of his sacrifice, that led him to murder his brother.

Later on, we see jealousy as a driving force in the building of Ya'akov's family. Leah is jealous of Rachel, Rachel is jealous of Leah, Reuven is later jealous on behalf of his mother and, of course, it is the brother's jealousy of Yosef that leads them to sell him into slavery. Jealousy gets a lot of air time in the Torah.

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for jealousy, *kinab*, spelled *Kuf-Nun-Aleph-Heb*, has a *gematria* of $100 + 50 + 1 + 5$, which equals 156. Now that might not have meant very much if that wasn't also the *gematria* of Yosef— $10 + 6 + 60 + 80$ —and, of course, *Tzion*: $90 + 10 + 6 + 50$. And that might not have been significant had not *kinab* played such a central role in Yosef's life, and had the *Midrash* not said that all that happened to Yosef will happen to *Tzion*.

The question is, what *is* that significance? Why *is* jealousy such a major thread throughout human history? Why is the story of Yosef so shrouded in envy. . . especially given that he is supposed to be above *ayin bara*, which is all about *jealousy*?

Shabbos Day

THE TEXT BOOK definition of jealousy is: “. . . the thoughts or feelings of insecurity, fear, and concern over a relative lack of possessions or safety.” Psychologically, it is considered to be a complex emotion that, when they're finished explaining it, does not sound like old fashioned jealousy: the feeling of lack that comes from wanting what others have and you do not.

The opposite of jealousy is contentment. It comes from accepting and believing that you have all you are meant to have at any given moment, what the *mishnah* calls being “*samayach b'chelko*,” happy with your portion (*Pirkei Avos* 4:1). When Eisav bragged about all of his possessions to Ya'akov in last week's *parsha*, Ya'akov merely answered, “*yaish lee kol—I have everything*” (*Bereishis* 33:11), which *Rashi* explains to mean “I have enough.”

We can be sure that Ya'akov, who taught Yosef everything, taught him this too. Indeed, Yosef is praised and rewarded for not wanting what does not belong to him, and is free from the *ayin bara* that usually results from jealousy because of his own *ayin tov*—good eye. This is ironic since his very name suggests wanting more. His mother Rachel named him “Yosef” as part of her prayer for another son, and he was born when the rivalry between Rachel and Leah was most intense.

Furthermore, though Yosef may not have been jealous of anyone else, he surely seemed to go out of his way to inspire it in others about him. His father censured him in this week's *parsha*, not because he thought the dreams weren't real, but because he thought that Yosef had unnecessarily incited his brothers. His insensitivity may have been what pushed the brothers past the point of feelings of jealousy to feelings of, “this guy has to go!”

The first thing to know about resolving feelings of jealousy is that it is between the

person and themselves. If someone does something specifically to make a person jealous, that is between them and God. God will see the jealous person's pain, and judge the person who made them feel bad, to see if they have abused their blessing. If yes, they will lose it. If not, they will be left alone.

But God will also judge the person who became jealous, to see if they are "justified" in being discontent with their portion. No one is perfect, and everyone feels some form of jealousy at some point in their life. If it is understandable given who they are, where they have come from, and what they have to work with, then God will help them turn their jealousy into an opportunity for growth. If not, then God may have to teach them to be happy with their portion, the harder way.

Apparently, Yosef was not justified in the way he went about sharing his good fortune with his brothers, though he had never meant to make them jealous. Consequently he had to make up for it through his years of being separated from his family while living the life of a slave.

And his brothers were certainly not justified in their feelings of jealousy, and paid for it from the moment they sold Yosef, if not before. The climax of that "payment" was when Yosef finally revealed himself to them, and they had to come face to face, to their shock and humiliation, with the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams they had balked at 22 years earlier.

Seudas Shlishis

THE ARIZAL WARNS that jealousy rots the bones. Literally? Perhaps, but I don't think you will find the bone mass of a jealous person to be noticeably different from non-jealous people. What did the *Arizal* mean, and why jealousy more than other negative human traits?

It's simple. A *Tzelem Elokim*, someone made in the image of God, does not get jealous of others on their own behalf. They can become jealous on behalf of God, as Pinchas was at the end of *Parashas Balak*, but not on behalf of themselves. The former implies that they believe God has been unjust with them, and the latter means others have been unjust with God, and they are compelled to right the wrong. It's what turns *kinah*—jealousy—into *kana'os*—zealousness.

This is the evolution of a person. We start off as selfish children who believe the world owes us a living, and hopefully grow into selfless adults who believe we owe the world (i.e., God) our living. The goal is to go from thinking only of ourselves to thinking only of others. When we have to put ourselves before anyone else, it should be because the *halachah* says so, not because of selfish tendencies. When we can do

that, we act as the *Tzelem Elokim* we were created to be.

We see this in Yosef's progression from being a simple dreamer to second-in-command of the largest nation in the world. By the time his brothers came down to Egypt looking for food and for their brother Yosef, he had been completely transformed. Yosef was concerned only for his brothers' *teshuva* and how to help it along.

In fact, the *Gemora* says that Yosef died after only 110 years, earlier than the rest of his brothers, because of *rabbanus*. He had become a leader of people and gave his life to his position. Shouldn't that have given him a longer life? Perhaps, but it certainly gave him a miraculous life, 110 being the *gematria* of *neis*—miracle.

And the problem with dying righteous and "early" is not for the *tzaddik* who was taken, but for the people left behind. The *tzaddik* gets credit for a full life even if they didn't get to live it. The people however left behind have to live with the gap in their lives. They remain in this world to deal with it, while the *tzaddik* moves onto the next one and the eternal pleasures that await.

Thus, the *gematria* of *kinab* is equal to Yosef because he was the one who showed us how to go from *kinab* to *kana'os* (Pinchas is considered to have descended from him). And when the Jewish people manage to do the same as a nation, they will go from being only the Jewish people to *Tzion*, our ultimate name as a people in a state of redemption.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 76

THE BATTLE AGAINST the Greeks was a battle of *ain od Milvado*. The Greeks believed in a multitude of gods made in the image of man, and the Jewish people fought on behalf of the Jewish God, in Whose image man was made. Hellenists celebrated the physical excellence of man while Torah emphasized spiritual perfection.

In Mordechai's and Esther's time, Achashveros and Haman both believed in the supremacy of the Jewish God, even though they also worshipped idols. That is why their strategy had to take advantage of the Jewish people's failure to comply with Torah. They knew God would allow them to take advantage of Jewish vulnerabilities.

But the war against the Greeks was a war on behalf of the oneness of God. There wasn't one god who fought wars and one to worship in some temple. There was only one God, and He was the God of everything, the material and the physical. It was God Who led the *Chashmonaim* to military victory, and it was God Who made

the oil burn for seven extra days.

This is why the 25 letters of the *Shema* correspond to the 25th day of *Kislev*, the first day of *Chanukah*. The victory over the Greeks in the battlefield and over nature in the Temple said, “*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.*” And when we light our *menorahs* to recall that and access the energy of that time, we are saying the same thing.

We should certainly have intention for *ain od Milvado* while lighting. It’s how we attract the light that made the *Chashmonaim* successful, to us. It helps to move a person from *ain od Milvado* on the theoretical level to the level of actual, even without actually going to war. It is what history has been working towards ever since Creation.

Afreilichin Chanukah.