

TWENTY-TWENTY VISION

Parshas Vayaishev - Chanukah

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Many commentators dwell on the juxtaposition of the two teachings of Reb Tanchum (Talmud Shabos 22a), one dealing with Chanukah and the other with Joseph being sold as a slave in Egypt. The first law about Chanukah instructs us to place the menorah lower than twenty ells, for if it is placed higher, the people may not notice it. The second teaching of Reb Tanchum expounds the pit into which Joseph was thrown before being sold as a slave in Egypt. The Torah reads "The pit was empty, no water was in it (37:24). This seems redundant, for since it was empty, then obviously there was no water in it. However it comes to emphasize that water was not in it, but there were serpents and scorpions in it. This emphasis implies that they did not notice the serpents and scorpions. For the Torah testifies that Reuben's intent was to save Joseph, not to put him in danger of death. Furthermore, Joseph's survival in such a pit was a heavenly miracle; had the brothers known about this heavenly intervention to save him, they would not have sold him.

The juxtaposition of the two Reb Tanchums comes to prove, according to Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin that the brothers did not know about snakes. The proof is in the word "Hashlichu" which is used only for a distance of 20 ells, as seen in Maseches Tomid, end of chapter 1 (quoted in the current issue of HAMAOR).

The juxtaposition is most profound. In the case of the Chanukah menorah high above twenty ells it would fail to be noticed. In the case of the pit Joseph was thrown into, had it been not so deep, and seeing the danger, Joseph would have been saved.

Seeing the light of the Chanukah is penetratingly symbolic. Whereas every light is lit for the purpose of seeing to work or read, the light of the Chanukah menorah is forbidden to be used for that purpose.

In fact, an additional light, called the "Shamos", is lit to allow any use near its glow.

In fact, immediately following kindling the menorah we declare "And all eight days these lights are sacred, we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them but to look at them, in order to express thanks and praise (to Hashem). Looking and gazing at the Chanukah lights is central to the very mitzvah. "For the mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light" (Proverbs 6:23). Looking at this light with eyes and mind, is seeing 20-20 vision.

One of the illustrations of the impotence of the lifeless man-made idols is "They have eyes but do not see" (Tehilim 115:5). Commentators write that it refers not only to the idols but to the men who fashion the idols.

The lack of clear vision is mentioned in variety of failures. The judge who takes a bribe will not see clearly and thus his judgment will be befuddled. "For the eyes of the judge are blinded by bribes" (Shemos 23:8). The wise man has vision, the fool lacks vision. "The Chochom has his eyes in his head, whereas a fool walks in darkness" (Ecclesiastes 2:14). "A man with a benevolent eye will indeed be blessed" (Proverbs 22:9). The Medrosh comments this is a reference to Moshe, and not only is he blessed but also can bestow blessings.

So central is seeing and looking at the Chanukah lights, that even for seeing alone, someone else's lights (in the case where one would not kindle them himself) one can recite the blessing (Shulchan Aruch 676:3, see Mishna Brura 677:14). Instructing the place for lighting the menorah the Sheiltos states: "The Mezuzah is on the right side of the door, the Chanukah lights on the left, the kindler with a Talis and Tzitzis in the middle". The perspicacious learner understands the propriety of the Tzitzis in connection with Chanukah lights lies in the specific requirement to "see" the Tzitzis, "... the Tzitzis on your garments that you may see it." (Bamidbor 15:39).

The Talmud states: As a reward for kindling these lights, one will be blessed to have Torah scholarly children (Shabos 23b). Rashi comments that this includes both: candle lighting for Shabos and the Chanukah menorah. Wherein lies this enormous blessing in the observance of these Mitzvahs. One conjectures it is the law (regarding Chanukah) not to use the lights, but only gaze at them. What are his thoughts at those precious moments? One's thought turn to himself and his offspring. The word Chanukah, say the Seforim, comes from the word "Chinuch" (education). One concentrates on his own and his offspring's level of absorbing the light of Torah which is symbolized by the Chanukah lights. Thus, as a reward one merits having children Torah scholars.

The similar insight is true regarding candle lights for Shabos. The wife-mother closes her eyes upon lighting the Shabos candles. [This requirement, not applicable to Chanukah, is due to the procedure of reciting the Bracha prior to the mitzvah observance. Upon reciting the Bracha the sanctity of Shabos begins, forbidding to kindle fire on Shabos. The solution is to close the eyes, first enjoying the light after reciting the Bracha.] These precious moments when the eyes are closed, are similar to the Chanukah lights when concentration is inward, on self and children and warm prayer they grow up faithful to Torah and Mitzvahs.

A Kolel fellow relates: It was the custom in his home Friday before Shabos that all the young children would watch mother putting on the candles; after which each kissed mother's hand and said good Shabos. Her hand, he said, was always wet, and he didn't know why. Only when he got older, he realized this was because of tears of prayer to have Torah scholarly children. Such lighting for Shabos, like the Chanukah lights, indeed, deserve the blessing of scholarly children.

Turning now to the other part of the juxtaposition. The brothers did not see the snakes in the pit. This too is symbolic. There was another vital thing they did not see. They did not see the innocence and piety of Joseph. The Torah, however, elaborates on the enticements of sin in

Egypt, which Joseph resisted with all his might. Joseph did have 20-20 vision. In that moment of enticement he did see, he saw DMUS DYOKNO, the image of his father which helped him to resist sin. According to another viewpoint he didn't need that extra fatherly assistance, but looked into himself as one who will one day be called Joseph HaTzadik.

The Barnover Rav writes (Chamra Tovo p.18) that Joseph's name is mentioned in Scriptures 209 times, the numerical equivalent of the word "Hatzadik".

When the Israelites miraculously crossed the red sea the Tehilim credits Joseph, as if the sea had 20-20 vision. "The sea saw and fled" (Tehilim 114:3). What did the sea see that caused it to flee? The sea saw the casket of Joseph. Midrash Tanchuma expounds this vision of the sea as reward to Joseph who sanctified his own vision when he refused to gaze at another man's (Potiphar's) wife.

When Yaakov bestows his blessings upon the tribes, Joseph's sanctified eyesight is given special emphasis "A charming son is Joseph, charming son to the eye" (Vayechi 49:22). The butler and Pharaoh see images in dreams. And Joseph with perfect vision interprets their dream in a way which leads his way to royalty in Egypt.

Joseph possessed 20-20 vision during all the years as viceroy of Egypt, the cognizance that his ascendancy to the royal position was for a higher purpose. As Joseph declared "Thus Hashem sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance" (Beraishis 45:7). "He sent me here to provide for you in honor" (Midrash Lekach Tov).

