

Parashat Miketz

“Macro” and Micro in Human Destiny

Brachot 56: “Bar Hedyā was a dream interpreter. (Hedyā means interpretation.) Bar Hedyā would solve and interpret. Whoever would pay him, he would interpret for him for good. Whoever would not pay him, he would interpret for him for bad. Abayay and Rava each had a dream. Abayay gave him a *zuz*, and Rava did not give him. For Abayay, he interpreted for good, and for Rava not. All his interpretations came true. Rava found Bar Hedyā’s book of dream interpretation, and he found written there: ‘All interpretations follow the mouth.’ He said to him (Rava said to Bar Hedyā): ‘Wicked one, the interpretation depended on you, whether for good or for evil, and you caused me such great sorrow! I forgive you for everything except Rav Hisda’s daughter.’ (Rav Hisda’s daughter was Rava’s wife, and Bar Hedyā interpreted that she would die.)

A perplexed response to this Gemara is already expressed in the book Responsa from Heaven, attributed to Rabi Yaakov of Moroise of the Ba’alei HaTosafot (Reuven Margaliot edition, Chapter 22): “Is it possible that the Creator’s decrees would be changed because of an interpretation by an interpreter? And if the matter is as its plain meaning suggests, that dreams follow the mouth, whether for good or for evil, or if the matter is not as its plain meaning suggests, and that the Creator’s decrees are not changing, and Bar Hedyā was nothing more than the conveyor of the meaning, if this is so, why does the story say, ‘all dreams follow the mouth’? They answered him: ‘Such is the decree...’”

The essay continues: “There are people whose astrology by birth is to be interpreters of dreams, and it will come true whether for good or for evil, and Rava was angered against him despite the fact that his words did not come true because of his merit but because of his astrological predisposition. If so, why [is it recommended that] someone tell his dream to someone who is sympathetic to him? They answered him: ‘Let a man never open his mouth to the satan, and he, that person who is sympathetic to him, must always interpret for good because a heavenly messenger stands at his right, who takes the words from the interpreter’s mouth, and grabs them and says: ‘Thus shall it be.’ And if [the

interpreter] hates him, and opens his mouth for evil, that other [evil] one who stands on his left, grabs the words and says ‘amen’.”

It is difficult to understand the key to the meaning of dreams according to this midrash. After all, if the dream follows the interpretation of Bar Hedyā because it was decreed upon him by supreme Providence to merit the key to dreams, why did he interpret according to the wages he was given? This is aside from the basic difficulty of the absence of free choice, and everything being a decree, dependent on the arbitrary whim of a man who is quite deficient in values and appears to be simply greedy.

It appears that the talent for interpreting dreams that we learned from Yosef’s lesson, was dependent on Yosef’s Godly wisdom of insight. Paro attributes this talent to Yosef’s wisdom. In response, Yosef attributes this ability exclusively to the Creator of the universe: “It is other than me. The Lord will answer for Paro’s peace.” It appears that these two reactions – both Paro’s reaction and Yosef’s reaction – “are one dream.” They are really both referring to the same thing.

The Braid Structure

Thought is influenced by elemental forms; its processes are carried out in the form of structures. There is the circular structure, the triangular – the square. Cognitive dynamics flow along a spiral track, and along parallel tracks, and along tracks that cross one another at the crossroads where outer meets inner: Centripetal force. Cognitive processes also move from the center outward: Centrifugal force.

For the sake of truth we should admit that none of these tracks are accurate except for cognitive theory. In practice, cognition – the thought process – undergoes many mergings. Although it is supposedly subject to these elemental forms, in fact it does with them as it pleases. It behaves like the landlord, operating in its own owned space. It makes its own use of these forms, while plaiting them into braids. The braid is created by a process of plaiting together different and independent tracks, each of which possesses its own unique characteristics. The basic interlacing action is comprised of three elemental tracks, which are compelled by the thought process to unite, for the simple reason that in human experience there is not only one procedure. Human beings find

themselves caught between opposing worlds: The spiritual “world of creation”, the material “world of doing”, and “the world of creativity” – that is the human world, which is comprised of the other two worlds, which are to be found at extreme opposite ends from each other. It is only at the crossroads called ‘human being’ that they meet.

Human beings occupy an existential reality. They occupy the “world of doing”, built upon the laws of physical matter. The “world of doing” has the advantage and the power of tangible reality. It is visible to the eye. This was the mistake made by Yosef’s brothers. They were engrossed in *midat hadin*, the measure of judgement, which is built on justice that is visible to the eye. As we have explained elsewhere, this was a judgment without compassion: Judging the issue according to the “doing” without considering the “being”, without considering the meaning or the inner intention of the doer – almost as though the act could exist as a reality unto itself, rather than as the expression of the acting person.

Yosef fought this. He disputed his brothers’ perception and sought to persuade them that not thus was their father’s teaching. Yaakov’s Torah was a two-sided coin. One side showed truth, and the other side showed – love. Love without truth is no true love but rather “a love dependent on something else.” Truth without love does not settle into the human consciousness, and is really no truth at all but only a cruelty that ultimately destroys. The brothers learn the hard way to connect the track of truth to the human track of compassion and love, which endows truth with flexibility, and with the capacity to adjust to existential experience.

In our parasha we find a meta-track, a supreme track that shelters over human experience – including both of its tracks – and acts as an umbrella and as a guiding line. This is the Godly track. It expresses the progression of human life, including and encompassing all of life’s exhilaration, all of life’s emotional and moving encounters, all of life’s localized events, from a long-range perspective that reflects the supreme historical and beyond-historical plan of the Godly intention. We should point out, parenthetically, that while the non-Jewish (Christian) perception sees apocalyptic collapse and universal destruction at the end of the road, the Torah sees the light at the end of the tunnel – a world that is perfect, and luminous with Divine light, for having accepting Godly truth: “All dwellers

of human habitation will recognize and know” as in Yeshayahu’s prophecy. “And it will come to pass at the end of days,” etc.

The “macro” plan forged by the Creator of the universe for human beings, bestows a dimension that encompasses all the systems of nature and of events. On the surface of things it would seem that an individual incident can have no meaning or influence upon the “macro”. It seems that a private individual is charged with the duty of contributing to or of at least adjusting to this supreme plan, and of activating his own belief and trust in God regarding his own private fate, so as to endow himself with the perspective of this higher vantage point. This high view brings him to an ability to accept God’s judgement, submissively, with an attitude of acceptance, in gratitude for and consciousness of the absolute good that is expressed in the “micro” of his own private fate. In the event of Yosef and his brothers, the supreme plan was leading toward preparation for the exile, in which the children of Israel must leave the Land of Israel.

A consciousness of this sort completely transforms the issue of the brothers’ sale of Yosef. According to this plan – which takes no account of human choice, nor of the human decision-making process – there is no rhyme or reason to such considerations as mitsva versus sin, or reward versus punishment. Everything seems to be “compelled by the Word of God.”

Yosef had an awareness of this supreme plan, for “it peeped through the cracks” of Paro’s dream. Kings’ dreams deal not with their own private affairs, but with the “macro” of the state and the progression of history, as it says: “The heart of kings and princes is in God’s Hand.” Therefore Yosef had no tendency to interpret Paro’s dream as a personal harbinger – “you will beget seven daughters...you will have seven misfortunes,” etc. – as the Egyptian sorcerers had interpreted it.

It appears that Yosef’s insight did not derive only from *ruah hakodesh*, from a sacred prophetic spirit, but also from the perfection of *midot*. These perfected character traits qualified Yosef to catch a Godly glimpse into what was unfolding “behind the curtain” of heaven. Such personal qualifications do not come about arbitrarily. The human ability to impose meaning on a “world of doing” that follows a mechanical, brute-force-based

track, and to control it, and to direct it towards the Godly track, creates an encounter between the track of “doing” and the track of “being”.

The *tsadik*, as we have discussed elsewhere in relation to parashat VaYeshev, delves deeply into the depths of the Godly quality of his own self, and leads the mechanical forces – which flow along the track of the “world of doing” and which direct the action on that track – to accept quality, and to behave according to its dictates. Thus do two parallel tracks interlace into one plaited track, which branches and climbs upward, toward the supreme track – which follows the supreme plan in the Godly “macro” dimension.

The activity of the one who serves God through personal quality, and through devotion, deviates from the private domain, being enriched beyond it, to transcend, to transform into a Godly power that expresses the will of the Creator, as an ally, as a partner with equal rights, as in: “A *tsadik* decrees and the Holy One carries it out” by the power of Torah, for “not in heaven is [the Torah].”

Such activity continues to interlace both tracks, absorbing them, merging them, until they are plaited into one perfect braid containing three plaits: The Godly track, and the track of inner quality, as they revolve around the track of “doing”, which serves as their central axis, and which absorbs and merges itself into a braid that merges the flow that unites heaven and earth around a human being serving God. Yosef the *tsadik* was charged with plaiting this momentous braid, for the duty had been placed upon him: To apply the Torah of perfection taught by his father Yaakov.

This view from a higher vantage point is capable of explaining many difficult issues in our parasha. It explains Yosef’s ability to interpret Paro’s dreams by ascribing them to the supreme plan of the Creator of the universe, with regard to Egypt as the grand dame of all the kingdoms, who has been charged with saving the world from the danger of famine, and also for the longer-range plan, to cause the house of Yaakov to descend to the Egyptian exile, in order to prepare the nation of Israel for serving God in the exiles of all generations to come.

Yosef's innovation/contribution to this supreme plan was to teach the private individual to seize a position of influence in the Godly plan, as is fitting and proper for – and expected from – someone who is an ally and partner to the Creator of the universe.

One who succumbs to the mechanical flow of events has no power to influence fate, being devoid of a destiny – having none of that destiny that breaks out of the depths of a soul yearning to attach to its Godly source, and to express these yearnings by bestowing its quality upon existence.

“And Yosef remembered the dreams he had dreamed for them.” This is how the parasha opens the description of the grim encounter between Yosef and his brothers. What connection do the dreams have with what is happening here? It would have been appropriate had it emphasized the affair of his being sold as the factor that brought about the rift between him and his brothers, and that this rift had caused anger and a desire for revenge.

By presenting the dreams as the leading factor, it is clarified beyond the shadow of a doubt that this conflict was clean of any emotions of hatred or vengefulness, and was all and entirely designed to realize the Godly plan – to plait the various tracks into a braid of perfection. The dreams reflect the track of the Godly “macro”. This view from the higher vantage point illuminates – with the most exquisite light – Yosef's tireless efforts to lead his brothers toward discovering a connection between what was happening to them in the present, and their actions in selling him at a time long past, over twenty two years prior to these events.

“But we are to blame...” was a sign to Yosef that this recognition had successfully taken place: That love had finally been attached to and merged with the truth of *midat hadin*, the measure of judgement. From here, the way is very near, to attaining the third track.

This is the text's intention when it puts these words into Yosef's mouth: “For I fear the Lord.” This expression appears in various forms in the parasha, meaning: Before my eyes stands the Godly track. The brothers too were aroused to ponder this possibility, when they inquired wonderingly: “And each one trembled to his brothers, saying: ‘What

is this that God has done to us?'" And this comes after they have solved the riddle on the plane of the private individual track (21, 22) by saying: "But we are to blame."

Yaakov too keeps the third perspective before his eyes, in order to better understand the peculiar behavior of the "Egyptian" ruler. See Ramban: "And the intention is that Yaakov's going down to Egypt will hint at our own exile in the hands of Edom, as I will explain [in Parashat VaYehi] and the prophet saw the matter from its very beginning, and prayed, both merely for the moment and also for generations. And this scripture, according to their midrash, contains a great mystery, because he said 'E-l Sha-dai,' which is in *midat hadin*, the measure of judgement – will give you the compassion' that is before Him: He will raise you from *midat hadin* to *midat harahamim*, from the measure of judgement to the measure of compassion. *Vehamaskil yavin*, the learned one will comprehend this."

Lulei demistafina, were it not that I dared not say this, I would say that this change, being raised from *midat hadin* to *midat harahamim*, is the very meaning of interlacing the tracks. The brothers' *midat hadin* met with Yosef's *midat harahamim*, to be plaited into a braid of encounter between all three tracks. Only from this triangular position can one continue the narrative of events, without halting in bewilderment at the response of the Egyptian ruler to the money that was returned in their sacks: "...Peace to you, do not fear, your Lord and the Lord of your father has given you a treasure in your sacks. Your money reached me!"

Could the brothers have possibly accepted these words about fear of God from the mouth of an alien and outraged ruler without wondering at it? It could only be that an understanding already existed between them, which recognized the active reality of a track of height, which contained long-range plans that were involved in what was taking place, and therefore there was no point to re-enacting events along the track of the logic of the world of action. It would not even be relevant to the qualitative private domain. It is difficult also to explain the plethora of hints occurring in Yosef's interaction with them, all of which seem to have passed without raising any suspicion on the brothers' part, that this could indeed be their lost brother: The inexplicable interest he takes in their father, and in Binyamin. His expertise in their personal affairs, through a peculiar use of

his goblet. This is an interlacing and merging of human relationships, of emotions, of a peculiarly suspicious attitude on the one hand, and yet a God-fearing attitude on the other hand. These aspects are inexplicable without the three-dimensional perspective.

“‘The Lord has found your servants’ sin.’ We know that we have done no wrong, but it is from the Divine Place that this has come about, to bring us to this. The One Who is owed a debt has found place to extract the document of debt.” (Rashi from Bereisheet Raba) A high-level discussion is taking place, between God-fearers, between believers born of believers – a dialogue in which both sides are well-acquainted, as it were, from bygone days.