

Politics & Mysticism in the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat (Portion) Vayeshev

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This week...

- * *Joseph's arrogance expressed in his dreams.*
- * *God is cruel, there is no denying it!*
- * *Religious philosophy wrongly tries to justify God.*
- * *God wants us to challenge Him and to best Him!*
- * *Those who fight can win, those who don't fight are destined to suffer.*
- * *God is a "man of war," so too must we (created in the Divine Image) be.*

Shalom & welcome all.

This week's Torah portion is called Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23).

Life is always a long road, and only Heaven knows to where the path leads. The Biblical story of Joseph is one of the finest examples of how life can twist and turn, apparently without rhyme or reason. Yet, in the end, the one who marches to life's rhythm finds oneself where life itself directs one to be. All has a purpose, and all has a meaning. It is just that we mortal human beings cannot see the big picture.

All too often, because we cannot see the big picture, we deny that the big picture really exists. How arrogant of the one with poor vision to proclaim, "because I can't see it, it cannot be there." Then again, the one with poor vision must be honest and say, "I just can't see it." Indeed, he is not lying. But what we have revealed here is the need of the one with poor vision to couple up with one with greater vision who can help guide him down life's path.

We do not have to run forward blindly and smash into that which we could not see. We can instead heed the voice that cries, "look out for that tree!" He who pays no mind will crash into the tree and be severely wounded. He who listens will slow down, approach the tree carefully, examine it as best as can be with poor vision, and then partake of its fruit, and be refreshed and revived. But before one with poor vision can eat, he must first listen, slow down, pay attention, and learn. Only then will he live.

The Biblical narrative tells us that Joseph inherited his father's predilection for fantastic dreams. Joseph recounts two of his dreams to his family. The dream symbols in them are rather clear. Their meanings are easy to ascertain. Jacob and Joseph's brothers could clearly see that, in his dream-mind, Joseph considered himself superior to his brothers, and sought dominion over them. Indeed, this is what his dreams tell.

There is no symbol in the dream to represent God. There is no mention or reference to Divine involvement leading Heaven to raise Joseph over his brothers. All the dreams say is that Joseph is to rise. And without any image symbolizing God, even Joseph's

brothers recognized that his dreams were not like those of father Jacob, wherein which God spoke, here it is Joseph speaking, and they did not like what he had to say.

To make matters even worse, Joseph shares these dreams. Even he must have known what they meant, and how such ideas would be received by his older brothers. This willingness to share, when the outcome will be so glaringly negative, indicates a clear character flaw in the young Joseph. Indeed, he was arrogant. It is always the way of Heaven to see the high brought down low, and for the arrogant to be humbled. This happens in the natural world, and is thus natural in the world of men.

Is it by chance that Jacob calls upon Joseph, and not any servant, to head out to find his brothers who are out grazing the sheep? Is it by chance that Joseph is guided to his brothers by a stranger, who accordingly to the commentaries, is an angel in disguise? We must conclude that Joseph is delivered to his fate, to being stripped of his clothes, to being thrown down into a pit, sold as a slave by his very own brothers, and then to have to endure the hardships of a life of slavery, all by Divine design?

What kind of God is this that intentionally subjects an innocent soul to all these indignities, injustices and hardships? Indeed, these events reveal to us much about the Way of Heaven.

A great religious myth, that personally I consider dangerous, is to believe that God, the Creator, loves us, His human creations, with a love that can be compared to human love. Anyone with the least shred of honesty, who reads the Bible cover-to-cover, can in no way conclude that God loves humanity, in any human way. While we might wish to proclaim God's love for us, we must admit that such love, while if it does exist, certainly does not follow any human standards of definition.

I think it is important for us to understand that any application of the emotion of love upon the Divine has to be understood completely outside of any human context. God does indeed “love us,” so then too does “Mother Nature.” Yet, we have no lack of heat, cold, famines and hardships coming to us from the natural world, all directed by Divine design. Life and nature both are always, every single day, filled with hardships, harshness, cruelties and worse. And yet, we still manage to survive, we still manage to get along.

God in Heaven is the author of all the natural laws that enable all of life's hardships to occur. While we often create our own personal messes, nevertheless, we live under very rigid natural laws that cannot be trifled with. And even, if and when, nature cooperates with us to provide us with an easy and comfortable life, something can always arise that can turn our lives upside down, and turn even the best of lives into a pile of stinkin' s***. We all know this to be true, and all talk and words about faith and religion do little to justify the harsh nature of the real world.

God loved Joseph so much that He subjected him to all the indignities that he suffered. A person of religion will immediately respond and say, “yes, God did all these things, so

that Joseph could rise and become leader of Egypt, thus saving his family and the world.” Indeed, this is true, but now let us ask some more, maybe uncomfortable questions.

Why did God have to design nature to follow this precise course? Was there no other way for fate to be accomplished other than through Joseph suffering? Is God unable to direct a course of destiny that does not include suffering, pain and hardships? Cannot the Creator create whatever it is that He wishes? God knew that the great famine was coming, but isn't it God Himself who creates such things? Why did God make the entire House of Jacob suffer? Why did He make the entire world suffer with a famine?

God is God, He could have elevated Joseph over his brothers, or elevate the House of Jacob in general, or give His Torah to them, and/or to the world, in any way He wanted. Therefore, why then does God chose for us mortal humans a path that includes suffering, pain, loss, and hardships? Are these the acts of love, as we humans would define them? I should say not! Try acting to any of your own loved ones as God has acted towards those in the Bible, and our own loved ones would leave us in a heart-beat. Yet, God stays with us and we stay with God. What does this say about God? What does this say about us?

God's Ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). We cannot understand how the Divine operates, and how or why IT does what IT does. Therefore, I find it imperative for us to understand that we must never make the mistake of applying to God human attributes. If we say that “He loves,” then we must understand that we are speaking in the most abstract form. God is not human, and has absolutely no human attributes.

Although God is our Creator, and we are created in IT's image, we also must understand that this image within our deeper unconscious psyche represents a reality as different from that in our conscious minds, as spiritual reality is different from physical reality. While the two are related and integrally so, this relationship is still not to be defined by human standards.

Nature takes a course that we mortal humans do not and most likely never will understand. Religious philosophy does both, nature and God, a terrible disservice when it constantly tries to justify God's behavior and rationalize it in terms of human understanding, even if this understanding is mystical in nature. Over thousands of years all that religious philosophy has managed to do is to blind the eyes from seeing the true harshness with which our world and universe operates.

How can one expect to discover any truth about God and reality when, all the while, one is in denial about reality. When one seeks to use limited mortal understanding to justify the unjustifiable, one is heaping layer upon layer of falsehoods over one's eyes. Doing this only takes one further and further away from God, and never closer to IT.

It is not blasphemy to question or to challenge God. On the contrary, it is the highest level of true worship. If we are created in the Divine Image, then we are not meant to be subjected to slavery, harshness and cruelties. Life teaches us that no matter how bad things are, we have to struggle to make things better.

God/Nature cares not for human weakness. Nature is created by God and nature clearly endorses survival of the fittest. If this is indeed natural, then we can rest assured that it is also Divine. God wants only the fittest and the strongest to survive. That is why God helps the weak. God does not help the weak in order for them to maintain their weaknesses. God helps the weak so that they can get strong. It seems that evolution on Earth follows a pattern ordained by, and practiced by, God in Heaven.

Joseph suffered intensely, and so did his father. God didn't seem to mind or care. But in the end, ask this, did the experience make them all the stronger? If indeed you say yes, and more so, you can actually see it, internalize it, and apply such a lesson to your own personal life, then you have been granted a glimpse into the mind and acts of God.

Looking at life through the limited prism of our personal mortal intellect, we do not see either rhyme nor reason. Why does evil always seem to triumph? Why do good guys always seem to finish last? In Joseph's story, he ends up on top, but for the countless other stories and the countless other Josephs throughout history, they did not end up on top. Indeed, every other "Joseph" has been trodden down, beaten and defeated.

There seems to be no justice. And no religious philosophy will makes things any better. Who cares if the Nazis are all to be reincarnated as Jews so that they can be subject to the next holocaust by the new generation of Jew-haters that took over when the Nazis were defeated? Does that, in any way, make things any better? Millions keep suffering and dying, and what good comes of it all? If there is a good, it is certainly hidden from the eyes of mortal man, no matter how mystically minded he may be.

Those who tolerate too much will always become victims of intolerance. Right or wrong, this seems to be a fact of life. Everyone does a "good-days" talkin' but in the end, all the pompous ideas, all the high and mighty values and beliefs all add up to nothing, all the while that they remain nothing but talk. As the old saying goes, "talk is cheap," and "action speaks louder than words."

In my opinion, it is time we stopped talking and arguing about God and started acting like IT. If we were only to follow the natural order of things, and live like nature/Elohim intended, we would go a long way to improve our world. Then, after this first step we can finally look nature "square in the eye," use our God-given human wisdom, and figure out how best to make our world, and then our universe, the best of places in which to live.

In a fight, when attacked, nature demands that we fight back. We struggle to survive. And it is never enough to just survive, we must also thrive. We must thrive beyond survive! If nature, and even Heaven itself, stands in the way of peace and human

betterment, then it is time that we remind Heaven of its own words, spoken long ago by the wise and bold Sage, Rabbi Joshua that “the Torah is not in Heaven” (Deut. 30:12). “The heavens are heavens of the Lord, but the earth He gave to the children of men.” (Psalm 115:16). If we must obey God's Word on Earth, then God too must obey His Word in Heaven. God gives us rights, thus we have every right to demand said rights, even from the One who gives them to us. Anything less is tantamount to denial and rebellion.

According to the Talmudic legend (Baba Metzia 59a), when man stands up to God, even God laughs and agrees saying, “my sons have bested me.” According to the famous Psychologist Erich Fromm, as recorded in his book, “Ye Shall Be As Gods,” this Talmudic statement is the highest expression of Torah values, where man embraces his full liberties, a liberty, even from God.

It is time that we stop surrendering to fate, and to live as God wants us to. If faith throws us a terrible blow, then we must throw back twice as many. If nature wants to be cruel, then we must respond in doubly strong self determination. Torah does not teach us to turn the other cheek, Torah teaches us to take a metaphorical eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This is the lesson that God is trying to teach us. We have to stand up and fight, with ruthlessness, and not with kindness. The kind, if they are weak, will succumb and be trampled. God allows this, to teach them that kindness must be tempered with strength and severity, but never with weakness.

Survival of the fittest seems to be God's way. The weak are helped by God to become strong, but not to stay weak. Those who refuse to fight are condemned to death by their own refusals. The Kabbalah teaches that Cain sinned by killing Abel, true, but Abel was also held guilty, in that he did not fight back. To atone for this blemish, the Kabbalah teaches that all souls that emanate from Abel are condemned to suffer being murdered. This fate awaits them, to shake them out of their passive weakness, and to fill them with proper Divine rage and indignation, Heaven has ordained this, in order to bring them into the center path, where kindness is properly tempered with severity. This center place is the heart of God (Tiferet) and his “Small Face” (ZA), where God is rightly called “a man of war” (Exodus 15:3). This is the Divine Image in which we were created.

Joseph was a spoiled brat who was beaten into becoming a tough, strong and powerful man. His life is a lesson and role model to us all. When life gets tough, the tough get going. Those who stop to cry and, out of weakness, refuse to move forward, might as well stop living. Those who refuse to quit, and fight with everything they got, at least stand a chance. Those who submit to fate, and accept pain and suffering as some convoluted “will of God,” will never stand a chance.

God Itself will stand against such weakness, to remove it from the earth, either from the individual's heart, or by removing the weak individual himself. Those who learn from nature, will heed nature's call, In this they will find God/Elohim, and eventually discover that Elohim alone is YHWH and that YHWH is Elohim.

Any comments? Please send them to me at koshertorah1@yahoo.com