

Parashat Miketz, 5770, 2009:

*“Now it Came to Pass in the Morning”*

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Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra *aleah hashalom* and the *refuah shlaimah* of Sarah bat Rachel and Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called all the necromancers of Egypt and all its sages, and Pharaoh related to them his dream, but no one interpreted them for Pharaoh. (*Sefer Bereishit* 41:8, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining my own)

This *pasuk* (verse) relates Pharaoh’s reaction to his two dreams of the cows and the grain. In both cases, the sickly and lean devoured the healthy and robust ones. Little wonder that Pharaoh’s spirit was troubled, and that he had a passionate need to comprehend the significance of these frightening dreams. The “necromancers of Egypt and all its sages,” however, were unable to successfully interpret the king’s dreams in a manner that spoke to him. Rashi (1040-1105) clarifies this notion in the following manner: “They did interpret them, but not for Pharaoh, for their voice did not reach his ears, and he had no satisfaction from their interpretation... [*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 89:6]” The failure of the necromancers of Egypt and all its sages,” set up the conditions for Yosef’s release from prison, his successful and prescient interpretation of the dreams, and his consequent elevation to the lofty role of second-in-command (*Mishneh l’Melech*) of Egypt, the greatest and most sophisticated nation of the time.

There are seven other instances of “Now it came to pass in the morning” (“*vayehi b’boker*”) that appear in *Tanach* (the Hebrew canon of holy texts). Each one portends a significant change either for an individual or for our nation, and on occasion, both. The

next instance that I will discuss appears earlier in the Torah than the example with which we began. It is found in the undesired marriage triangle of Yaakov, Leah, and Rachel: “And it came to pass in the morning, and behold she was Leah! So he [Yaakov] said to Laban: ‘What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?’” (*Sefer Bereishit* 29:25) How could this happen? How was Yaakov so radically misled on his longed-for wedding night? As always, we turn to Rashi who brings us the “story behind the story”:

And it came to pass in the morning, and behold she was Leah: But at night, she was not Leah, because Jacob had given signs to Rachel, but when she saw that they were bringing Leah, she (Rachel) said, “Now, my sister will be put to shame. So she readily transmitted those signs to her.” - [from *Talmud Bavli Megillah* 13b]

This is one of the greatest examples of self-sacrifice that appears in World Literature. Rachel wanted to share her wedding joy with her husband with the all the love and devotion of a truly beloved and loving wife. Yet, her sister’s potential embarrassment was even more important to her, and outweighed her legitimate needs and feelings. Therefore, in a very real sense, she altruistically gave Yaakov to her sister for the sake of Leah’s honor and dignity. Leah, in turn, went on to become the mother of the majority of the *shivtei kah* (the Tribes of Israel) and thereby changed Jewish history forevermore.

The next example of “Now it came to pass in the morning” is found in *Sefer Bamidbar*, in the narrative of Balak and Bilam. Balak was the King of Moav, who both hated and feared the Jewish people. He hired Bilam, the world’s greatest necromancer, to curse our nation and halt our seemingly inexorable rise to glory. Little did Balak know, and even less could he understand, that any and all of our people’s grandeur was a direct result of G-d’s desire to have His divine plan fulfilled. As a result, Balak was convinced that he

could bring radical misfortune upon us through Bilam's curses. In fact, Balak was so focused upon the destruction of *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) that he refused to listen to Bilam's multiple protestations that he could only say and do what G-d allowed him:

Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send to you to call for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I indeed incapable of honoring you?" Balaam said to Balak, "Behold I have come to you, do I have any power to say anything? The word G-d puts into my mouth-that I will speak." ... Now it came to pass in the morning that Balak took Balaam and led him up to Bamoth Baal, and from there he saw part of the people. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 22:37-38, 41)

Naturally, like any other absolute monarch, Balak expected his evil desires to be fulfilled. Instead, what began with "Now it came to pass in the morning," eventuated in Bilam's incomparable blessing of the Jewish people:

How can I curse whom G-d has not cursed, and how can I invoke wrath if the L-rd has not been angered? For from their beginning, I see them as mountain peaks, and I behold them as hills; it is a nation that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations. Who counted the dust of Jacob or the number of a fourth of [or, of the seed of] Israel? May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his." (*Sefer Bamidbar* 23:8-10)

Bilam's blessing that we are "a nation that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations," while ultimately from the Almighty Himself, may well be one of the major reasons for our survival - especially in the light of all the trials and tribulations of our storied history.

The last five examples of "Now it came to pass in the morning," are found in *Sefer Shmuel* I and II and *Sefer Melachim* II. *Sefer Shmuel* I: 25:37 is a particularly fascinating example of our phrase, since it has practical ramifications for our daily lives. It appears in the context of the story of the soon-to-be King David (*Dovid*), Avigail, and her husband, Naval which begins in the following manner:

And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel. And the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep and one thousand goats; and he was, while

shearing his sheep, in Carmel. And the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was of good sense and of beautiful form, but the man was hard, and of evil deeds; and he was a Calebite. (*Sefer Shmuel* I: 25:2-3)

At this point in the narrative, Naval was shearing his sheep amid great joy, feasting, and celebration. It should be noted, however, that prior to this revelry, Dovid and his men had protected Naval's shepherds while they were pasturing their flocks in Carmel. Since, however, Dovid had fled from before King Saul, he was now in need of basic supplies. As a result, he naturally turned to Naval for assistance. Instead, he met with the following response:

And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? Nowadays, there are many slaves [i.e. Dovid], who break away, each one from his master [i.e. King Saul]. Now, shall I take my bread and my water, and my meal which I have cooked for my shearers, and shall I give them to people of whom I know not whence they are?" (Ibid., 10-11)

Given these series of insults, and Naval's complete lack of *hakarat hatov* (recognition of the good performed on one's behalf), Dovid prepared for total war against Naval. At this point, however, Avigail intervened, beseeched Dovid with wise and understanding words, and thereby saved her family and fortune from certain destruction. As a result, Dovid did not destroy Naval and praised Avigail's actions with two celebrated *berachot*: "And David said to Abigail, "Blessed is the L-rd G-d of Israel, Who has sent you towards me on this day. Blessed is your advice, and blessed be you, who have restrained me this day from coming into bloodshed, and from avenging myself with my own hand." (Ibid., 32-33)

At Dovid's request, Avigail returned home to her drunken and dissolute husband and found him in the midst of his feast: "And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he had a feast in his house like the feast of the king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, and

he was very drunk. And she did not tell him anything, less or more until daybreak.” (Ibid., 36) Once again, we encounter our phrase: “Now it came to pass in the morning, when the wine had left Nabal, that his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became like stone. And it was just ten days after, that the L-rd inflicted a stroke on Nabal, and he died.” Subsequently, Avigail became Dovid’s wife and the mother of one of his sons. Here, too, personal and Jewish history became inextricably interwoven.

As significant as the above-found events surely are, there is much more to the Dovid-Avigail-Naval story than immediately meets the eye. My rebbi and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known by his students and followers as “the Rav,” used this narrative to analyze the nature of sin (*chet*):

This is the unceasing nature of sin. It takes hold of the individual when he is immersed in the night and darkness of the sin (*b'lail hachet*). Clouds and fog completely cover the inner light of the person. Man is enveloped by the darkness and relentless pursuit of his desires. At that moment, “Nabal's heart was merry within him,” since he was so drunk that he could not see the flashing blade of the sword hanging over his very door. (*Al Hateshuvah*, page 27, this and the following translations my own)

Avigail knew full well that the time of drunken stupor was hardly the moment to reveal to Naval that his life and fortune had all but lay in ruins, and that he had been totally at the mercy of Dovid. As the Rav explained:

At the moment of total intoxication, Avigail refrained from telling [Naval] the news of the near total and bitter destruction she had heard from Dovid. She already knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that at the very moment Naval was steeped in his glorious drinking party that was like that of a king’s – the end was already determined [that is, his life still hung in the balance on account of his deeds]. Therefore: “And Abigail came to Nabal... And she did not tell him anything, less or more until daybreak.” (Ibid. , brackets my own)

Avigail waited patiently for the morning, when the wine left Naval and she was sure he would be able to understand her message and its import: “Now it came to pass in the

morning, when the wine had left Nabal, that his wife told him these things...” The impact of her message on the now sober Naval was nearly instantaneous: “... and his heart died within him, and he became like stone. And it was just ten days after, that the L-rd inflicted a stroke on Nabal, and he died.” The Rav pointed out that this is the nature of sin: When man is engrossed in his forbidden actions, he is drunk with the results of his hedonistic actions. Yet, this cannot last forever, and the wine must eventually leave the drunkard: “It is the rule of drunkenness that it ultimately must attenuate and depart.” Then, too, “... it is the very essence of Nature that after the night, perforce the morning light must burst forth. For then: ‘Now it came to pass in the morning... and his heart died within him.’” (Ibid.)

According to the Rav, we are very fortunate that “an Avigail follows every sinner.” (Ibid., p.28) It is this “Avigail” who relentlessly pursues the sinner, and chooses the ideal time to reveal the folly of his ways. “She” tells us of the potential spiritual destruction contained in pursuing a life of sin. In a word, it is the voice of “Avigail” that motivates each and every Jew to return to the proper path of Torah observance (i.e. to do *teshuvah*).

With Hashem’s help, and our fervent desire, may we have many “mornings” when we will be *zocheh* (merit) to hear “Avigail’s voice” so that we will always keep the Torah in honesty, integrity, and heartfelt devotion. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom