

MERCY FILLING

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Miketz details the continuing saga of Yoseph and his brothers. Yoseph's brothers, forced by the famine that gripped the land of Canaan, travelled to the only country that had food - Egypt. They were placed in front of Yoseph, the Viceroy of Egypt, and he recognized them. They however, did not realize that the Egyptian Viceroy was the brother they had sold some twenty-two years earlier. Yoseph immediately accused them of being spies and when they communicated their familial history to him mentioning that they had left a younger brother behind, Yoseph seized the opportunity. In order to prove their truthfulness, he ordered one of the brothers to be held hostage until the rest of the brothers would return with Binyamin, the youngest sibling.

When the brothers returned home, Yaakov chided them for revealing the whereabouts of Rachel's lone surviving son; he was reluctant to allow them to bring Binyamin to Egypt citing his fears for his son's safety.

But the brothers convinced Yaakov that there was no other option and finally he sent them off with the following blessing: "If it must be so, then do this - Take of the land's glory in your baggage and bring it down to the man as a tribute -- a bit of balsam, a bit of honey, wax, lotus, pistachios, and almonds.... Take your brother, and arise, return to the man. And may Almighty G-d give to you mercy in front of the man that he may release to you your other brother as well as Binyamin. And as for me, as I have been bereaved, so I am bereaved." (Genesis 43:11-14).

The expression, "may Almighty G-d give to you mercy in front of the man" seems strange. Why did Yaakov pray the the Almighty give the brother's mercy? Shouldn't Yaakov have prayed that Hashem give Yoseph the attribute of mercy, saying, "may G-d let the man have mercy upon you." Why is Yaakov asking Hashem to bestow the brothers with mercy instead asking the Almighty to bestow the attribute of mercy upon the antagonistic Viceroy whom they would soon face?

Rav Yoseph Chaim Sonnenfeld would tell the story of the Rav of Shadik, Poland. He was newly appointed when he was warned of a particular Jew who was known as a government informer, who would strong-arm the previous Rabbi and community leaders into giving him high honors in the synagogue and into allowing him to lead the rituals.

The new Rav would stand for none of this. When the man was called for the sixth aliya the first Shabbos, he began making his way from his seat on the eastern wall of the synagogue to the bimah, when suddenly the new Rabbi began to shout. "Where do you think you are going? You are known

as an informant to the government which is of the worst crimes a Jew can commit. How dare you show your face in the synagogue, let alone take a place for an aliyah? Get out of the shul! The man froze in horror. Then, before storming out of the synagogue, he shook his fist at the Rabbi while muttering, "I will teach you all a lesson."

A few months later, the Rav who was also a mohel, was on his way to perform a bris. He was a mile or so outside the city when suddenly a wagon containing the informer overtook his own coach. The informer jumped to the footrest of the wagon, and while the Rabbi's two students recoiled in fear, the man threw himself in front of the Rabbi and began to beg for forgiveness from the entire community.

The Rabbi explained, "Shlomo Hamelech tells us, 'Like a reflection in the water so is the face of man to man'" (Proverbs 27:19). From the moment after I admonished this fellow, all I did was try to find out about his good qualities. Then I concentrated my hardest on creating a deep love for this Jew and that love exuded from my soul. When the alleged informer saw me today, he experienced that love that I had for him and he reciprocated. As he felt the same way about me as I did for him. He understood his terrible misdeeds of his past life and repented with a sincere heart. It is only through that love that he repented and we became endeared to each other.

Rabbi Avraham Chaim of Zlatchov explains: Yaakov explained to his children that in order for the Viceroy to have mercy upon them, they must approach him with mercy as well. Thus he says, "may Almighty G-d give to you mercy in front of the man." Sometimes it is we who must fill our hearts with love in order to get that same love and mercy back in return.

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller in loving memory of Sydney Turkel

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