

TO REVEAL ITS DEEPER MEANING

by Rabbi Label Lam

"And he said, 'I am Yosef your brother whom you sold to Egypt. Now don't be sad or angry with yourselves that you sold me here, for G-d sold me here to preserve life'"(Genesis 44:4-5). From where did Yosef get the abundant generosity of spirit to forgive his brothers? Its hard to imagine that after 22 years of [personal exile that there wouldn't remain some residue of resentment, and yet he grants a sweeping pardon before any personal apologies came forth. How was he able to conquer the overwhelming desire for revenge? Was it simple a case of "all's well that ends well?"

A few months ago my wife had made a routine eye exam for one of our children. A day before the doctor's appointment, my son went to help a friend complete a small building project. He was to be the extra pair of hands for steadying and carrying. In the midst of the thorough eye exam, the doctor discovered that a small sliver of metal had lodged in his eye. It would only have been detectable with the sensitive equipment she was using.

The question arose as to how long this piece had been there an where it had come from. It turns out that just the day before, they had cut some metal pieces, and that was the probable source. We were amazed when we contemplated the fact that the appointment had been set months in advance of the only practical results of the exam; the discovery of a potentially hazardous situation that had happened just the day before. It wasn't just the local timing, but the advanced planning implied that wakened our interest. Yet life is filled with these schedules of events that require years and months of coordination and synchronicity. Once while in the birthing room my wife was really struggling, and near the end of her strength. The very kind birthing coach that the hospital provided, noticing my wife's physical exhaustion and emotional frustration, said a few encouraging words that made a great difference. She said "dear, if you give a little more effort, you'll have your baby!"

At that moment of pause, before the next great wave, my wife looked up at the nurse with a look of stunned curiosity, and said "baby?" I remember thinking to myself at the time "what does she think we're doing here, having a tooth extraction? Of course we're having a baby!" Later it dawned on me that there was perhaps a profound psychological lesson buried in this inane dialog. Sometimes we're so caught up in the pain and struggle of a given episode, that it eclipses even the obvious knowledge that we are producing something. Moments later there was the baby.

The less certain we are that our pain is productive, the less obvious the result. The less likely we will be able to avoid being overtaken by the pain of the moment. It's the lack of meaning in the struggle that makes the difficulty even more unbearable. But the moment we realize that there is a "baby,"

then there is energy for the next mile.

Yosef was the only one who was treated to a prophetic insight about the outcome of the story. He knew that somehow everything needed to work out in some meaningful and productive result. If we would be watching a football game on the VCR that was played yesterday, knowing the results of the game, would we hesitate to bet on the finale'? Even if the game was not "going our way" now, we would not be swayed.

Yosef didn't decide after the fact after years of pain, and doubt, and resentment, to "let go," and "let live" because things turned out OK. NO, all along the agonizing and lonely path of decades of private suffering he had the promise of a positive result to spur him on. The end of the struggle is dramatic, but not surprising for the righteous Yosef. It was the masterful weaving of an intricate tapestry that sometimes takes nine months, or the length of a few lifetimes to reveal its deeper meaning.

Good Shabbos!

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