

NEVER-ENDING MERIT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayigash

Never-Ending Merit

The Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse (45:28), "Yisrael said, 'How great! My son Yosef still lives!'" -- Yaakov said, "How great is the strength of my son Yosef! How many troubles caught-up with him, yet he remained righteous, unlike me [Yaakov] who sinned by saying (in the words of Yeshayah 40:27), 'My way is hidden from G-d' [i.e., G-d has hidden Himself and is not watching over me directly]. I am certain I will share in the reward about which it says (Tehilim 31:20), 'How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You!'"

How did Yaakov know that Yosef had remained strong in his faith during all of his years in Egypt? Also, why did Yaakov expect to be rewarded for Yosef's faith? R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (Yerushalayim; 1843-1917) explains:

Commentaries ask: Why didn't Yosef write to his father during the 22 years that Yosef was in Egypt and let Yaakov know that he was alive? The answer is that Yosef did not write because he understood that what was happening to him was part of a bigger plan. He may not have understood the exact meaning of events, but he recognized that he would be interfering with history by contacting Yaakov. Yaakov now understood Yosef's thinking and recognized that Yosef's decision required tremendous faith and a strong belief that Hashem is directing history. According to the midrash, Yaakov's own faith had not remained as strong.

In Olam Haba, one can receive reward in two ways, R' Yadler writes: either for his own meritorious actions, or for those of his children and students. The latter is what the verse refers to when it says, "How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You!" Unlike the reward for a person's own deeds, which is finite (because he stops earning reward when he dies), the reward that a person earns for being a positive influence on others is infinite (and therefore "hidden"), for he continues to earn it as long as his positive influence continues to bear fruit. (Tiferet Zion)

"Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him because they were alarmed by his presence." (45:3)

Midrash Rabbah quotes Rabbi Abba Kohen Bardela: "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Rebuke! Yosef was the youngest of the tribes [involved in the dispute], yet his brothers could not reply to him. When Hashem rebukes each of us, how much more so [will we be left speechless]!"

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yerushalayim) asks: What is "rebuke" versus "judgment"? He explains that even more than one must fear being judged by the Heavenly Court for his misdeeds, one should fear the shame, the disappointment in himself, that he will feel when he realizes how misguided his words and deeds were. These pangs of conscience will cause man far more suffering than the actual punishment that G-d will mete out.

R' Borodiansky continues: This is what we mean when we say in the Pesach Haggadah: "With great fear - this refers to the revelation of the Shechinah." When Hashem revealed His Shechinah to the Egyptians and they realized the error of their ways, this was far more fearsome than any of the Ten Plagues. (Siach Yitzchak: Geulat Mitzrayim & Shmot p.46)

"Now, do not be saddened, nor be angry, for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you." (45:5)

Commentaries ask: Yosef's words are inherently contradictory, for "sadness" is a trait of humble people, while "anger" is a trait of haughty people!

R' Shlomo Flam z"l (1740-1813; early chassidic leader, popularly known as R' Shlomo Lutzker) explains that Yosef's words were addressed to different people. To Shimon and Levi, who originally hatched the plan to kill him (see Rashi to 42:24), he said, "Do not be saddened." On the other hand, to Reuven, who had previously castigated the brothers for not accepting his advice to spare Yosef (see 42:22) and might do so again, he said, "Nor be angry." [Why? "For it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you." It was all part of His plan.] (Dibrat Shlomo)

"And to his father he sent the following: ten he-donkeys laden with the best of Egypt and ten she-donkeys laden with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey." (45:23)

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) writes: The words "the following" imply that there is something significant about the numbers that follow. Otherwise, the verse would have said

simply, "And to his father he sent ten he-donkeys . . ." He explains: Yosef was conveying to his father that his brothers were not at fault for selling him. Just as a pack-donkey carries its burden with no understanding of what it is carrying or why, Yosef's ten brothers were merely puppets in the Hands of Hashem when they sold him to Egypt. They actually had no idea why they were doing what they were doing. (Gevurot Hashem, ch.10)

"They took their livestock and their wealth which they had amassed in the land of Canaan and they came to Egypt . . ." (46:6)

Rashi z"l comments: But all that Yaakov had gotten in Padan Aram he gave to Esav as payment for Esav's share in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah. He said, "The possessions I obtained outside Eretz Yisrael are of no value to me."

The midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta (ch.19) relates that Yaakov and Esav divided the worlds between them--Esav took this world, and Yaakov took the World-to-Come. Later, when Esav saw that Yaakov had amassed a fortune while living with Lavan, Esav asked Yaakov, "What right do you have to enjoy this world?" Yaakov's answer (found in the midrash) has been given several interpretations. According to some, Yaakov answered that his fortune was a reward for his mitzvah observance and was not covered by their deal. Others explain that Yaakov answered that their deal permitted him to have what he needed to live. In any event, Rashi teaches that Yaakov then turned over those possessions to Esav as payment for Esav's share in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah.

R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes: However Yaakov's answer is interpreted, that "excuse" is necessary only regarding belongings from outside of Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael is Hashem's portion, and we are His flock, so Yaakov was entitled to the wealth of Eretz Yisrael. This is why Yaakov divested himself of all the belongings he had amassed in Lavan's house and turned them over to Esav. He kept for himself only those belongings he had amassed in Eretz Yisrael. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Pninei Rav Chaim Palagi p.381)

Shemittah

We conclude our discussion of the halachic controversy surrounding the "hetter mechirah," the sale of the Land of Israel to a non-Jew for the shemittah year with the following letter written by R' Zvi Pesach Frank z"l (1873-1960), Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim. The letter is undated.

Already at the beginning of the "yishuv ha'chadash" / the "new settlement," when new towns began to be built in Eretz Yisrael [in the late 19th century], the question of shemittah observance was

placed before the great sages of that generation, at the head of whom were the "pillars of halachic decision-making," the sage R' Yitzchak Elchanan [Spektor] of Kovno z"l [1817-1896] and the sage R' Yehoshua [Trunk] of Kutno z"l [1820-1893]. They concluded that it was beyond the realm of possibility to even think that all the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael could keep the shemittah according to the letter of the law. They concluded this for reasons that were known to them, but which are not known to those who don't know what Eretz Yisrael was like in those days. Therefore, they agreed that before the shemittah year, they would arrange the sale of the Land to a non-Jew according to certain conditions such that the sold land would be exempt from the laws of shemittah and no sin would be committed when Jews worked the land during the shemittah.

It is easy for an understanding person to see that this entire arrangement, whose "builders" toiled immensely to "build" it, was meant only to save the workers from the very stringent prohibitions involved in working the land during the shemittah year. The arrangement of this sale is analogous to feeding a dangerously ill person the most lenient prohibition first [if kosher food is not available]. Nevertheless, everyone agrees that the sale accomplishes only "turn from evil," so that one can work and not sin, but it certainly does not accomplish "do good" [paraphrasing Tehilim 34:15], for those who rely on it actively neglect a great mitzvah that is taught multiple times in the holy Torah.

How good and how beautiful is the news that whole groups of people are willing to fulfill this beloved mitzvah and accept upon themselves not to perform any labor on the land during the shemittah year, as we are commanded by the Torah!

I turn to all those who love Torah to lend their hands to this great matter, to provide substantial financial assistance to strengthen anyone who will accept upon himself to take a sabbatical from working the land, to strengthen and sustain him during the Seventh Year, so that he will withstand the test of shemittah observance and to preserve the sanctity of the Land. Fortunate are those who participate in sanctifying the Seventh Year, may they be satiated and have enjoyment from all manner of good things, and may we merit soon to observe shemittah according to the letter of the law. Then, Yaakov will exult and Yisrael will be joyous.

The soul who waits for the close-by redemption and who signs on behalf of the mitzvah--Tzvi Pesach son of Y.L. Frank.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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