

A LIFE WORTH LIVING

by Shlomo Katz

BS"D

Volume 33, No. 9

23 Kislev 5779

December 1, 2018

Our Parashah opens: "Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the chronicles of Yaakov--Yosef, at the age of seventeen, was a shepherd with his brothers of the flock . . ." Rashi z"l writes: "Yaakov wished to live B'shalvah / at ease, but the trouble relating to Yosef suddenly came upon him. When the righteous wish for Shalvah, Hashem says, 'Are the righteous not satisfied with what is in store for them in the World-to-Come, that they want Shalvah in This World too?!' [Until here from Rashi]

Why is it wrong for a Tzaddik to want to live at ease? asks R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok). He explains: "Shalvah," which Yaakov sought, is not the same as "Menuchah" / "rest." A person has Menuchah when he lacks nothing--not because he has everything that one could want; rather, because he does not desire all that other people desire. Such contentment results from having Bitachon / trust in G-d, which imbues a person with the belief that all that was meant for him will come to him. Indeed, such a person feels as if all that is intended for him has already come to him, for he views it as inevitable.

Menuchah, continues the Alter, is not free of Nisyonot / trials. But, trials do not disturb a person's feeling of Menuchah, because he knows that the purpose of a Nisayon is to help him realize his latent potential and to give him the opportunity to practice the trait of Bitachon, accepting Hashem's decrees. A person who is tested and who grows from those tests is "alive," writes the Alter, whereas a life with no tests is not life.

Shalvah, on the other hand, refers to a life of complete ease, a life with no tests. Yaakov and other Tzaddikim are not permitted to have such a life because that is a life without growth, a life not worth living. (Madregat Ha'adam: Nekudat Ha'emet ch.3)

"Behold! We were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when, behold! My sheaf arose and remained standing. Then behold! Your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."
(37:7)

"He said, 'Look, I dreamt another dream! Behold! The sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me'." (37:9)

R' Yitzchak David Grossman shlita (Chief Rabbi of Migdal Ha'emek, Israel; popularly known as "The Disco Rabbi" and "The Prisoner's Rabbi" because of his far-reaching outreach work) observes: The progression of Yosef's dreams--the first, about vegetation, a sheaf of wheat, and the second about a living thing, himself--shows that he was a growth-oriented person. In contrast, Pharaoh also has two dreams (in next week's Parashah), but, in his case, the first was about living things, cows, while the second was about a lower life form, wheat. (Ohr Ha'Shabbat)

"Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work . . ." (39:11)

The Aramaic translation, Targum Onkelos, renders: "It was on that day when he entered the house to review his written accounts . . ." How does Onkelos know what work Yosef was doing that day?

R' Avraham Shrentzel Rappaport z"l (1584-1651; rabbi of Lvov, Poland) explains: Onkelos is bothered by the seemingly superfluous word "his" in the phrase "to do his work." Why doesn't the Torah just say, "He entered the house to do work"? The Torah must be telling us that Yosef went to do the specific work that his master, Potiphar, had assigned to him. But, the Torah never records that Yosef had specific assignments; it says only (39:4), "He [Potiphar] appointed him [Yosef] over his household, and whatever he had he placed in his hand." What then was "his work"?

R' Rappaport continues: How is it possible that Potiphar placed everything he owned in Yosef's hand? The answer must be that Potiphar gave Yosef his account books, which represented everything owned. We find a precedent for this interpretation in the verse (24:10), "Then the servant [Eliezer] took ten camels of his master's [Avraham's] camels and set out with all the bounty of his master in his hand." How could Eliezer carry all of Avraham's property in his hand? Rashi explains: Avraham wrote a deed gifting of all his possessions to Yitzchak so that his relatives would be eager to send him their daughter. Here, too, writes R' Rappaport, Potiphar must have given Yosef documents, such as written accounts, that represented all of his belongings, and it was Yosef's job to review those written accounts.

That is the Peshat, continues R' Rappaport. He adds: In the realm of D'rush / homiletics, one could say that the written accounts referred to are Yosef's notes of the Mitzvot / good deeds he had performed and the Aveirot / transgressions he had committed. It was in the merit of that soul-searching that he was saved from the wiles of Potiphar's wife. (Eitan Ha'ezrachi)

"If only you would remember me with yourself when he benefits you, and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and remember me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building." (40:14)

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni teaches that Yosef was punished with two additional years of imprisonment because of his two requests to the Sar Ha'mashkim / Pharaoh's Cupbearer: "Remember me with yourself" and "Remember me to Pharaoh." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok) asks: Why was this a sin? Surely Yosef's efforts to get out of jail were not because he did not accept Hashem's judgment. Yosef's Bitachon / trust in G-d is evident from the fact that Yosef obeyed when Yaakov sent him to check on his brothers despite Yosef's knowing how much his brothers hated him. Therefore, Yosef's desire to be free could only be because he wanted to return to the spiritual influence of his father, Yaakov!

Furthermore, the Alter continues, a careful reading of the Midrash implies that Yosef's sin was asking twice. If asking to be remembered was wrong, then why was it not wrong the first time? On the other hand, if it was not wrong, then why was it wrong to ask twice?

He explains: A proverb attributed to R' Shlomo ibn Gabirol z"l (Spain; 1021-1058) says, "A stumbling block is a bright light." This means, writes the Alter, that a truth-seeker treats every fall he takes as a learning experience. Some people wander off the straight path, trip, and scrape their knees, yet they continue to insist that the new path they are forging is better than the well-worn way. Not so a truth-seeker! Like every other human, he makes mistakes. But, when he stumbles, he sees it as a reminder that he is off the road and should get back on it.

The Alter continues: It is perfectly understandable that Yosef would have solicited the Cupbearer's assistance to get himself (Yosef) out of jail. Nevertheless, it was wrong, because Yosef had already dreamt that he would be a king, a great person; therefore, he should have held himself to a higher standard and placed his trust completely in Hashem. Also, Hashem wanted to ensure that Yosef would never think that his request to the Cupbearer is what got him out of jail. Of course, the first time that Yosef solicited the Cupbearer's help is easily forgiven. After all, Yosef was in a tough situation, and even great people make mistakes. But, "A stumbling block is a great light." Yosef should have immediately regretted his request to the Cupbearer and repented. Instead, he asked a second time, and for that he deserved to be punished. Moreover, once he failed to learn from his first mistake, he deserved to be punished for that too. (Madregat Ha'adam: Darchei Ha'bitachon ch.4)

The Bet Hamikdash

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: The form of the Menorah in the Temple is specified in the Torah. The stem of the Menorah had on it four cup-shaped decorations, two knob shapes, and two flower shapes, as is written (Shmot 25:34), "On the Menorah shall be four cups, engraved with almond designs, its knobs and its flowers." There was a third flower near the base, as is written (Bemidbar 8:4), "From its base to its flower."

Rambam continues: The Menorah had three legs. There were three additional knob shapes on the

Menorah's stem, out of which the six branches of the Menorah extended--three branches on one side and three on the other side. Each had on it three cup-shaped decorations, one knob shape, and one flower shape. All were engraved with almond designs.

Rambam adds: In total, there were twenty-two cup shapes, nine flower shapes, and eleven knob shapes. All of them are required; if even one of these 42 decorations is missing, the entire Menorah is not kosher.

When is this so [i.e., that the Menorah is unfit unless it has all these decorations]? Rambam clarifies. Only when the Menorah is made of gold. But, if the Menorah is made of another metal, we do not make decorative cups, knobs and flowers. (Hilchot Bet Ha'bechirah 3:1-4)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: In light of the last Halachah quoted above, we can answer the famous question: Why does Chanukah have eight days, instead of only seven? If there was enough oil to burn for one day and it lasted eight days, the miracle seemingly was only for seven days!

He explains: There is a Halachah that one is prohibited from making implements for use at home in the same form as the implements of the Bet Hamikdash. Since, according to the Halachah quoted above, the Temple Menorah could be made of any metal and any form--in fact, that is what the Chashmonaim did when they first recaptured the Bet Hamikdash--it emerges that any seven-branched Menorah that a person would have at home would violate Halachah. To prevent this, the Sages established Chanukah for eight days, not seven. [The "Shamash" does not have to be attached to the Menorah.] (Mitzvat Ra'ayah 670:1)