

# UNDER G-D'S WINGS

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Realizing that their father had died, Yosef's brothers said, "Perhaps Yosef will bear hatred towards us, and repay us for all the evil that we did him." They instructed Yosef: "Your father gave orders before his death, saying, 'Tell Yosef this: "Please forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers and their sin, for they have borne you evil." So now, please forgive [our] spiteful deed...' Yosef said to them: "Fear not, for am I in G-d's place? Although you intended to do me bad, G-d intended it for good." (50:16-20)

We do not find anywhere in Scripture that Yaakov instructed the brothers to issue Yosef such a warning. Rashi writes that it wasn't true; they made it up out of fear of retribution, and to preserve family ties (see Yevamos 65b that one may alter the truth for the sake of peace). Still, if they feared Yosef's wrath, perhaps they should simply have tried begging his forgiveness on their own accord, without making up the part about their father? Yosef's answer, "Am I in G-d's place?" must contain some deeper message—otherwise a simple, "I bear no grudge," would have sufficed.

Before Yaakov dies, he leaves Yosef with instructions to bury him in Eretz Yisrael, not in Egypt. In his instructions to Yosef, he notes with irony that when Yosef's mother, Rachel, died, Yaakov buried her along the path to Bethlehem, and did not even take her into the city. He apologizes to his son, explaining, "I realize this bothers you—especially now that I am asking you to transport me from Egypt to Israel. I want you to know that Hashem told me to bury her there. When the Jewish Children will be lead into captivity by Nebuzaradan, chief general of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, they will pass along that road. The soul of your mother, Rachel, will come out, and weep for them, until Hashem promises her that one day they will return."

Pardes Yosef explains that the brothers weren't sure whether it was necessary for them to apologize to Yosef for selling him into slavery. In theory, their act was cruel, and they should ask his forgiveness. In fact, it was only through their selling him that Yosef ascended to the throne, paving the way for Yaakov's family to descend to Egypt, and setting the stage for the seedlings of the Jewish nation to take root. Where the initial deed was ill-intended, yet the final result was beneficial, should one still apologize?

When they heard their father's final words to Yosef, apologizing to Yosef for burying Rachel on the way—despite the fact that her burial place would one day become a monument bearing the promise of redemption—they realized that they too needed to ask for forgiveness. Your father gave orders before his death—he gave orders to you, to bury him in Eretz Yisrael. In his words, he apologized for the way your mother was buried. Saying—This tells us, 'Tell Yosef this: "Please forgive

the spiteful deed of your brothers"—we must also beg your forgiveness, notwithstanding the benefits we all reaped from our having sold you into slavery.

And this, he writes, explains Yosef's cryptic answer, "Am I in G-d's place?" In order to 'pay you back,' I would have to do what you did to me— i.e. initiate a cruel act towards you, yet the end result would have to be positive. Now perhaps, Yosef argues, I'm capable of acting vengefully, but how can I guarantee it will work out good in the end? Am I in G-d's place— to ensure that what starts off bad will work out for the better?

The Gemara (Berachos 60a) tells of the time the famous Talmudic sage Hillel entered the city on his way home from a trip, only to hear the sound of anguished screams. "I fully trust those are not from my house," he said. Regarding such faith, the Gemara concludes, it is written (Tehillim/Psalms 112:7), "He fears not from bad sounds—his heart is firm with faith in Hashem."

On the surface, this Gemara is difficult to understand. Just because Hillel had great faith in Hashem, how could he be sure the screams weren't coming from his house? Does this mean that nothing bad ever happens to the man of faith? And would it be any better if the screams were coming from someone else's house? Does the man of faith only care about his own loved ones?

Hillel was renowned for his extreme humility (Shabbos 10b). Chovos Ha-levvavos (Sha'ar Ha-kneiah 7) writes that there are five traits through which one can recognize the truly humble: 1) He controls his anger even when he is treated disrespectfully. 2) If something bad befalls him (R"l), monetarily, or something bad happens to him or a family member, he remains calm and quiet and doesn't lose his cool, understanding that everything comes from Hashem. 3) He is unaffected by others' praise, thinking to himself, "Even if what they say is true, were they aware of my sins and shortcomings, they would realize that the little bit of good they praise doesn't even begin to make up for my lack of true dedication to Hashem." If someone insults him, even if the insult happens not to be true, he thinks to himself, "Perhaps he is mistaken, and in fact I am not at fault with regard to what he accuses me of, but I'd better stay quiet lest he find out the far-worse faults he hasn't yet discovered!" 4) If Hashem blesses him with wisdom, wealth, honour, or any other blessings, which usually cause their recipients to become arrogant, he remains simple and humble, realizing that his blessings are the gift of Hashem, and not a result of his own prowess or merit. 5) He constantly rebukes himself and looks for ways to improve his dedication to Torah and mitzvos.

No doubt, Hillel embodied the traits of the humble, and taught them to his family. When he heard the anguished screams in the street, he knew it couldn't be from his house, because in Hillel's house, no matter how stressful the situation nor how great the difficulties, they didn't scream. He taught them to trust that whatever Hashem does is ultimately for our good, so there's never a good reason to lose one's cool. (Reiach Dudaim) He fears not from bad sounds—the screams of one who has 'lost it,' because: his heart is firm with faith in Hashem—that no matter what happens, it was how things were meant to be, and there's no need to get upset.

While it's no easy task to achieve such a level of faith and equanimity, one who strives to live his life after the famous dictum, "Everything Hashem does is for our good," lives a life free of stress and anger. He is constantly aware that he's not running the show, and that there's nothing anyone or anything can do to him that wasn't ordained by the Almighty. Why bother getting angry at so-and-so who did such-and-such—it's not him, it's Hashem!

Perhaps this is what Yosef meant to say to his brothers: "Ha-tachas Elokim Anochi—am I not under Hashem's providence? You fear I harbour anger towards you. That presumes that I view what happened to me as having been perpetrated by you yourselves. Nothing could be further from the truth. I believe with all my heart that Hashem's hand was there guiding you every step of the way. Indeed, what at first seemed so bad, turned out to be such a blessing! But even before I realized how things would work out, I never felt animosity towards you. I am under the guidance of the Almighty, and if in His great wisdom, He saw fit to have me sold, then that's how it had to be.

Life constantly presents us with its ups and downs: Sometimes things go just as planned, and sometimes we have to deal with situations and people we might have done without, given the choice. If we approach each day, each encounter, and each difficulty as a personal gift from the Almighty, we might think twice before lashing out at things beyond our control.

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