

# JUST PASSING THROUGH

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week's parsha, Vayeshev, begins: "Vayeshev Yaakov B'ereitz M'gurat Aviv (37:1)" - and Yaakov settled in the land where his father had resided. The Kli Yakar notes the different terms used in the passuk. In regard to Yaakov, the term used is "vayeshev", whereas in regard to his father the term "m'gurat" is used. He explains that Yaakov wanted to "vayeshev" - settle - in this world. He had already gone through his difficult periods - Esav's murderous intentions, Lavan's treachery, the rape of Dina, the death of Rachel - he now wanted to elevate his service to Hashem by being in a state of tranquility. His predecessors, Avraham and Yitzchak, knew that this world was the place to move! They were in a constant state of "m'gurat" - temporary stopovers during their passage through life.

A story that I've mentioned before is of the wealthy businessman who was passing through the Polish town of Radin. Not wanting to pass up the opportunity of seeing the leader of the generation, he went to visit the Chofetz Chaim. Upon entering, he was struck by his sparsely furnished home. Unable to control himself, he blurted out, "Where is your furniture!?" the Chofetz Chaim responded by asking where was his furniture? The businessman, somewhat surprised, explained that he was only passing through. The Chofetz Chaim explained that he too, is only passing through...

Rashi quotes the chazal that as a result of Yaakov wanting to have this tranquility, the angry episode of Yosef was then cast upon him. Our mission in this world is not to obtain that which we are missing in terms of comfort in order to better serve Hashem, but rather to develop ourselves spiritually under our present circumstances.

What was this episode of Yosef? Yosef would tell his father of any wrongdoings on the part of his brothers. Yaakov felt a special love for Yosef and displayed this love by giving him a "k'sones pasim" - a special coat. This coat was indicative of Yosef's supervisory role over all that transpired both in the house and in the field. Yosef then had two prophetic dreams foreseeing his sovereignty over his brothers. These events all aroused the jealousy of his brothers.

The brothers were tending their father's flocks in Shchem. Yaakov sends Yosef to monitor them and to correct any misdeeds on their part. The brothers see Yosef coming and view him as a 'rodef' - one who was coming to take their lives. They perceived Yosef as one who, by slandering them to their father, was trying to have them cursed and their afterlife destroyed. The law in regard to a 'rodef' is that, in self defense, one must kill him first. They judged Yosef as deserving of death. Yielding to Reuven's pleading, they consented to throw him into a pit, instead of killing him with their own hands. Upon seeing a group of Yishmaelites on their way down to Mitzraim, Yehuda suggests selling

Yosef to them as a slave. This would be a deserving punishment for his wanting to rule over them. Yosef is thus brought down to Egypt.

This whole episode and what it led to affords us a fascinating glimpse into Hashem's hashgacha pratit (individualized supervision and orchestration of events) in this world. The brothers sold Yosef down to Egypt in order to sabotage his ascent to leadership. Ultimately, it was this very act which led to his ascent to leadership as he became the second in command over the entire country of Egypt!

We often think that things we rightfully deserve are taken away from us by the actions of others. We must realize that no one can touch that which rightfully belongs to someone else. No one can interfere with the destiny foreordained for someone else. Any efforts made will, not only be futile in halting Hashem's plan, but will be incorporated into Hashem's plan and will actually lead to the fulfillment of that which one tried to block!

The Steipler zt"l points this out later in the Torah, in regard to Paroah's attempt to destroy the savior of Israel. Having been told by his astrologers that the Jewish savior would be smitten by water, he decreed that all males born must be thrown into the Nile. His own daughter saw a little basket floating in the water and compassionately saved the life of the baby boy inside. Ultimately, Paroah's decree, intended to destroy Moshe, directly led to his daughter finding and adopting Moshe and his being raised in Paroah's own house and being fed by Paroah!

Another intriguing episode contained in this week's parsha is that of Yehuda and Tamar, who had been his daughter-in-law. Tamar, after the deaths of the two sons of Yehuda, that she had married consecutively, resolved to have children from Yehuda himself. This would be a fulfillment of 'yibbum' (levirate marriage). From this union would come the lineage of King David which would ultimately lead to the Moshiach. The court, unaware that Tamar was pregnant from Yehuda, sentenced her to death by burning for her seeming infidelity. Yehuda, also unaware that it was with Tamar that he'd had relations, stood by calmly.

As Tamar was being led to her death she sent to Yehuda his signet ring, his cloak and his walking stick. "L'ish asher ayaleh lo anochi harah (38:25)" - I am pregnant from the man that these belong to. Yehuda immediately recognized that those were his and acknowledged that it was from him that she had become pregnant. Tamar thereby had not committed an act of infidelity but had fulfilled the mitzva of yibbum. Her life and the lives of the twins that she was carrying were thus spared.

Astoundingly, Tamar was prepared to be burned to death along with the twins before pointing her finger and embarrassing Yehuda. Chazal derive from this episode that it is preferable to throw oneself into a fiery furnace rather than to publicly embarrass someone.

Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz makes a fascinating observation. Before the Torah was given, although the forefathers fulfilled the commandments, there was a certain leeway that they were allowed. The decision they faced before performing an act wasn't is it permissible or forbidden but rather, will it be beneficial or detrimental. With this, the Nefesh Hachaim explains how Yaakov was allowed to

marry two sisters. He foresaw that these two sisters would mother the nation through their 'shivtey kuh' - the twelve tribes of Israel. However, once the Torah was given, no benefit can result from any deviation from its laws. Therefore, the decision we face before performing an act is if it is permissible/beneficial or forbidden/detrimental.

It therefore follows that tamar had to decide which would be more beneficial - allowing herself and the twins forbearing the dynasty of kings and the Moshiach to be burnt to death or to embarrass Yehuda by fingering him as the father thereby saving the three lives. She chose to allow herself to be burnt! That would be more beneficial.

In the town of Baranovich there was a gabbai (sexton) whose responsibilities included arranging and igniting the wood burning stove to warm the shul (synagogue) before the morning prayers. Being somewhat lazy, he would try to pass this responsibility over to the poor people who would sleep in the shul. As could be imagined, the shul was often cold and many harsh words were passed.

After an angry, tumultuous period, the stove was finally warming the shul every morning. The congregants thought that the gabbai was finally taking his responsibility seriously... The gabbai thought that the poor had finally gotten their act together...

One morning, the gabbai arrived early and saw a person arranging the wood. The posterior end of this individual was protruding from the oven as he worked. Assuming it was one of the poor, he delivered a not-so-good-natured pat on the rump and congratulated him on a job well done. The rabbi, Rav Yisroel Chaim Lubchansky, who had taken it upon himself to light the stove every morning to prevent any arguments, realized that if he would remove his head from the oven he would totally humiliate the gabbai. Even though, in fact, he would only be showing how the gabbai's action had humiliated himself, he wanted no part in it. He kept his head in the oven until he was sure that the gabbai was out of sight, burning off his entire beard while waiting!

It is more desirable to throw oneself into a furnace than to embarrass someone else.

Good Shabbos.

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