

WEALTH, HONOR & PROPERTY

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Vayeshev, contains many fascinating episodes. Figuring prominently amongst them is the sale of Yosef (Joseph) and the many subsequent hardships he endured.

Yosef was first thrown into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions. From there he was sold to Yishmaelites, who in turn sold him to Midianites, who sold him down to Mitzrayim. In Mitzrayim he was bought by a family where he rose to prominence but, based on the false accusations of the woman of the household, he was imprisoned for years.

We can only imagine the emotional agony that Yosef must have endured, his own brothers tearing him away from his beloved father and his subsequently being subjected to such humiliation.

However, the passuk (verse) teaches us that it wasn't all that bad. "And behold, a caravan of Yishmaelites was coming from Gilaad and their camels were carrying spices, balm and ladanum (a grass root) down to Mitzrayim. [37:25]"

Why did the passuk deem it necessary to detail the merchandise of the caravan that carried Yosef down to Mitzrayim? Rashi explains that such caravans were usually carrying malodorous loads. However, Hashem made sure that this group would be carrying fragrant spices since they would be transporting a tzaddik (righteous individual) such as Yosef. As such, Yosef wasn't harmed or bothered by any bad smells.

Incredible! Yosef is being brought to a foreign country to be sold as a slave--who really cares about the smell of the wagon? Imagine hearing on the news: A tourist fell off the Empire State Building today but we are happy to report that the band-aid on his left pinky did not, I repeat, did not fall off"

From this, the Zichron Meir writes, we can garner a foundation in the way Hashem runs this world. Any pain and suffering that a person endures is precisely measured. Once the measure has been filled, that line isn't crossed even by a hairs-breadth. Many people, he writes, are so overwhelmed with their major problems that they tend to overlook the smaller hardships they're enduring. Hashem doesn't. Yosef needed to endure the humiliation and anguish of slavery but not of a bad smell. Hashem therefore summoned a special caravan to ensure that he wouldn't suffer an iota more than he needed. Nothing gets overlooked.

Nevertheless, the question remains: Why was and is there a need for any suffering?

Let's continue a bit further into our parsha. Immediately following the sale of Yosef, Yehuda leaves

the rest of his brothers and gets married.

The Medrash [Medrash Rabbah 85:1] offers a fascinating glimpse into the heavenly orchestration that accompanies our earthly actions:

"Rabi Shmuel Bar Nachman, when expounding on our parsha would open his words with the following verse from Yirmiyahu [29:11]: 'The thoughts that I'm thinking on them, says Hashem, are thoughts of peace and not evil, in order to give a future and a hope.' The tribes were involved in the sale of Yosef, Yosef was involved in his sackcloth and his fasting, Reuven was involved in his sackcloth and his fasting, Yaakov was involved in his sackcloth and his fasting, Yehuda was involved in finding himself a wife while Hashem was involved in creating the light of the Moshiach [Messiah]."

Fascinating. We're mourning that which appears to be destruction while it is, in fact, Hashem's creation.

The Maggid of Dubno writes that we find two methods through which Hashem deals with the world. At times, Hashem showers down good in the guise of wealth, honor, property, etc. Other times, the blessings come filtered through situations which appear to be for our detriment--difficulties, poverty, pain, etc.

He compares the second method to a tailor producing a garment. Upon receiving uniform pieces of expensive silk, the tailor 'attacks' the silk with large scissors, cutting it into different sizes and shapes. An unknowledgeable onlooker would think that he's performed an act of destruction. A wiser person understands that these preliminary 'destructive' actions are necessary in order to produce a garment that will far surpass the silk material in both beauty and usage.

Through the difficulties and mourning that Yaakov endured, Hashem was laying the foundations for the 'construction' of Klal Yisroel [the Nation of Israel]. An enormous gift and merit was being granted to Yaakov in that the foundation was being laid through him. In order to receive the Torah, enter Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel] and have the Shchinah [Divine Presence] rest amongst us, we first needed to endure the pain of enslavement. Yosef's presence in Mitzrayim brought Yaakov and his family there, allowing the enslavement to begin. The exodus from Mitzrayim [Egypt] is a step along the way to the ultimate redemption. That will come through the Moshiach, the descendant of Yehuda, the result of his having been involved in finding a wife.

We mourn while Hashem creates light...

Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust relates the following story told by a Mr. Slucki.

When the Germans occupied my town, I hid my young sister from them, working hard to provide food for an additional mouth.

One day, as I was returning home, an eerie silence hung over the street, the silence that followed the death wrought by the German Aktions. When I got home, I saw that the door had been broken, the

apartment had been looted and my sister was gone. The neighbors told me that the Gestapo had taken her.

Without thinking I ran to the Gestapo headquarters. Walking in, I was greeted by a young soldier. "What's your wish Jew? To be shot right now?"

"You took my sister!" I said. "Give her back to me."

The German burst into wild laughter. "What strange ideas Jews have these days," he choked. Suddenly he stopped laughing. "You know Jew, I will let your sister go on one condition. If right now you will grow hair on the palm of your hand."

I opened the palm of my hand--it was covered with black hair. The Gestapo man's face twisted into a terrible grimace. He began to shout hysterically, "You Jewish satan, devil, take your sister and run." He went to the next room, brought my sister and pushed her toward me, all the while continuing to scream. We ran out and didn't look back.

When Mr. Slucki had been a young man he had worked in a factory and his hand was caught in a machine. They managed to save his hand by grafting skin from another part of his body. When he reached his teens, hair began to grow on the palm of his hand.

The miracle didn't occur in the Gestapo headquarters. It occurred when he nearly lost his hand. Everyone was mourning as Hashem was creating light..

The miracle of Chanukah was preceded by incredible darkness and persecution. Once again, Hashem was preparing the miracle that was later publicized by our kindling the Chanukah lights.

May we merit seeing how all of our present difficulties are illuminating the path for Yehuda's great, great grandson, bringing to us the ultimate redemption, speedily in our days.

Good Shabbos and a joyous Chanukah,
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