

CAPITAL DECISION

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"A lion cub is Yehudah; from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself..." (49:9)

When the brothers brought Yosef's bloody tunic before Yaakov, he exclaimed "tarof toraf Yosef" - "Yosef has been torn apart".¹ The Midrash comments that Yaakov secretly suspected that Yehudah, who is compared to a lion, was responsible for Yosef's death.² However, in his blessings to Yehudah Yaakov lauded his son for being the driving force behind Yosef's rescue.³

Although in retrospect Yehudah's actions spared Yosef's life, from the account in the verses his motivations seem less than altruistic. After the brothers agreed to kill Yosef, Yehudah stated "mah betzah..." - "what profit is there in killing our brother...Come let's sell him to the Yishmaelites."⁴ If Yehudah was interested in Yosef's salvation, why was it necessary to sell him rather than just give him away? Furthermore, from the simple reading of the text it appears that Yehudah was motivated by greed, not Yosef's welfare. Why did Yaakov see fit to praise Yehuda for his actions?

If a person is given an item gratis, he will not guard it as carefully as he would if he had paid for it. If we do not have to spend money on an object our appreciation for it is diminished. Yehudah convinced his brothers that Yosef's becoming a slave would adequately supplant his death sentence. However, Yehudah wanted to insure that Yosef would be treated well as a slave. Giving Yosef away for free would not have insured this, for if those acquiring him did not spend a significant sum on doing so, they would not have considered his loss or mistreatment to be noteworthy. Therefore, Yehudah attached a price to Yosef's sale, ensuring that his buyer would consider him a commodity which is in their best interest to preserve. Yaakov deemed these actions of Yehudah worthy of praise.

1.37:33 2.Bereishis Rabbah 97:9 3.47:9 4.37:26,27 **An Intricate Plot**

"...in my grave, which I have hewn for myself in the land of Canaan..." (50:5)

Rashi cites a Midrash which says that Yaakov Avinu did not want to benefit from the wealth which he had amassed in Lavan's house. When Eisav made it known that he felt he had a claim to the burial grounds at Me'aras Hamachpeila, Yaakov paid him off with these funds.¹ If Yaakov was averse to benefiting from these funds, how could he use them to pay off Eisav? Was it not considered a benefit when he used the cave which he received in exchange for them?

Although Yaakov did not want to benefit from this wealth, he also did not want to destroy it. This created a dilemma. If Yaakov would give it away as a gift, the recipient would owe him a favor, and therefore, Yaakov would be benefiting from the tainted money. If Yaakov would use the funds in a sale, he would benefit from the item which he received in exchange, and therefore, the tainted wealth as well.

When Yaakov became aware that Eisav claimed to be the rightful heir to Me'aras Hamachpeila, Yaakov had the opportunity to divest himself of these funds. Eisav's claims were based upon his delusional perception, not reality. There are two reasons why Yaakov had the sole rights to the burial plot at Me'aras Hamachpeila; since Eisav had sold the "bechorah" - "birthright" to Yaakov, Eisav's claim to the cave by virtue of his status as the elder brother was invalid, and the land which Avraham possessed was to be used by the Patriarchs, who would continue the Abaramatic legacy leading to the establishment of the Jewish people. Clearly, Yaakov was the heir to Avraham's legacy.

Yaakov did not give the money to Eisav in exchange for the land, which, by right was Yaakov's already, but to placate Eisav. Eisav did not consider the money to be a gift, for he maintained that he sold land which belonged to him. Therefore, Eisav felt no gratitude for the money he received. The land which Yaakov received in the sale could not be considered a benefit, for the land had always belonged to him.

1.50:5

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"And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt..." (47:28)

The manner in which Parshas Vayechi is recorded in the Torah scroll differs from the normal fashion, which allows for a minimum of a nine-letter space between two parshios. This deviation prompts Rashi to comment that Parshas Vayechi is a "stumah" - "closed" or "sealed" parsha, for once our Patriarch Yaakov died, the eyes and hearts of the Jewish people were sealed due to the hardship of the servitude to which they were subsequently subjected.¹ The implication from Rashi's words is that the servitude began with Yaakov's passing. This appears to contradict Rashi's comments on Parshas Va'eira, where he teaches that the servitude began with the death of Levi who was the last of the brothers to die; as long as the sons of Yaakov were still alive, the servitude did not begin.² How do we reconcile both of Rashi's comments?³

In the third paragraph of Krias Shema we are enjoined not to stray after our hearts and our eyes. Rashi comments that the heart and the eyes are the spies which provide the opportunity for the body to sin.⁴ We cannot consider the heart and eyes to have only a negative purpose. Rather, a person chooses whether he will use the energies of his heart and eyes for sin or to facilitate his

service of Hashem; the person's focus determines the path he will choose. If a person is focused on and motivated by the desires of his body, his limbs will function to fuel those desires. However, if his focus is on his soul and the fulfillment of the edicts of his Creator, his entire body will be harnessed to fulfill his desire for spirituality.

A person who is driven to satisfy the basic pleasures of his body has his eyes blinded and his heart sealed by his incessant hedonistic pursuit. Since he focuses only upon that which he desires, he is completely selfish and unable to perceive the needs of others. In contradistinction, a person whose actions are driven by his desire to enhance his relationship with his Creator has his eyes and heart open to sensitivities which were previously dormant. Therefore, he is able to focus upon the needs of others.

It is common that when a person perceives that he might be in danger, his natural desire for the preservation of his body is activated. Self-preservation leads a person to focus upon the needs of his body, very often causing the needs of his soul to be neglected. Although the actual servitude did not begin until after the death of Levi, Bnei Yisroel began to sense the imminent danger of oppression at the hands of the Egyptians immediately following Yaakov's demise. Sensing this activated Bnei Yisroel's need for self-preservation, and since they were so strongly focused on their physical well-being, they became desensitized to their spiritual needs; their eyes and hearts became sealed. The physical servitude had not yet begun, but the fear of its impending doom sparked the beginning of the spiritual servitude.

1.47:28 2.6:16 3. See Da'as Zekainim, Tosefos Hashlem, Maharal among the few who discuss this issue Bamidbar 39:15.