

WHAT DID YOSEF MEAN?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 127, Baby Naming. Good Shabbos!

RavFrand is sponsored this week by David Samet in memory of his grandmother, Gittel Bas Yitzchok Dovid Haleyvei a"h, whose yahrtzeit is the seventh day of Chanukah. Please study this class in her memory.

What Did Yosef Mean by "Al Tirgazu B'Derech"?

We find in this week's Parsha, that before sending his brothers back to Yaakov, Yosef told them "Al Tirgazu B'Derech". The Gemara in Taanis expounds from this verse a number of laws regarding proper behavior while travelling on the road.

Rav Elazar said that Yosef told them not to discuss matters of Halacha amongst themselves on the road, the conversation should be restricted to lighter matters. Another opinion quoted is that Yosef told them not to take large steps. [Taanis 10b]

After the emotional reunion between Yosef and his brothers, what are Yosef's parting words? "Al Tirgazu B'Derech" - either don't get involved in complicated learning or don't take large steps.

Both interpretations are very strange. First of all, these are common laws in Derech Eretz. The brothers knew that one should not get involved in complex intellectual matters while 'driving down the turnpike'. Obviously a person can get into an accident from concentrating on learning instead of concentrating on the road!

Likewise, it was common knowledge that large steps were inappropriate on the road. (The Talmud there continues and says that it can cause a diminishing of one's eyesight.)

The Be'er Yosef suggests that Yosef's parting message to his brothers was much deeper and more significant. Yosef was telling them something far more meaningful and symbolic than that which a

simple reading of the Talmud indicates. Yosef was actually chastising his brothers.

How did the whole event of the sale of Yosef come about? The brothers sentenced Yosef to death for being a slanderer. They believed that Yosef brought bad tidings of their actions back to Yaakov. They judged him as a rodef -- one who was trying to endanger their own lives. Chazal quote that they convened a Beis Din [Rabbinic Court] and had a proceeding and sincerely sentenced him to what they deemed to be a just sentence.

But the question remains -- we are talking here about a Capital issue. Yaakov, their father was the Gadol Hador [Supreme (Halachic) Authority of the Generation]. Why didn't they consult with him? They dealt with an earth-shaking matter out in some temporary camp in Shechem, on the road. What about the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever? What about consulting with the Gadol HaDor?

"Why are you paskening [deciding] Capital Offenses on the 'New Jersey Turnpike' without going to ask a shaylah?"

This is the meaning of "Al Tirgazu Be'Derech" -- Don't occupy yourselves with Halachic matters on the road. Such decisions have to be arrived at with patience, with peace of mind, with seriousness of purpose -- all of which is impossible to achieve haphazardly on the road.

That was your crime. In your zealotry to accuse me, you missed a basic principle of Halacha which is to be patient in executing justice [Avot 1:1]. A judge has a responsibility to be deliberate and patient. That is what "Al Tirgazu Be'Derech" implies.

And "Al Tafsiyu Pesiyah Gassah" does not mean simply "don't take large steps". Chazal tell us [Sanherdrin 7b] that we learn out the principle that a Judge must be deliberate from the juxtaposition of the verse "Do not ascend by steps upon my altar" [Shmos 20:22] with that of "And these are the laws which you shall place before them" [Shmos 21:1].

When the Kohen ascended the altar, he went up a ramp, rather than steps. The purpose of this was to minimize the size of his steps. Just like the Kohanim are not supposed to take large steps, so too Judges have to be slow and methodical in their deliberations. In other words, the expression "Pesiyah Gassa" is a terminology used by our Sages to indicate "Don't be rushed when you pasken a din."

This is the symbolism that a big step diminishes a person's eyesight. It does not mean that a person's eyesight will be worse after taking large steps. The meaning is that if one is too hasty and impatient, his perspective will become diminished -- one's clarity of vision will be lessened.

This is what Yosef was telling his brothers: Don't let this happen again. Your crime was one of being in too much of a hurry, not patient in administering justice. That is why we find ourselves in this situation now.

Don't Second-Guess the Gedolim

The Torah tells us that Yaakov saw the wagons (agalos) that Yosef sent to transport him [Bereshis 45:27]. Up until that point, Yaakov had been skeptical of the news that Yosef was still alive. But at that point Yaakov's spirit was rejuvenated and he joyously prepared to reunite with his beloved son.

There is a famous Medrash that the last sugyah [portion] that Yaakov and Yosef had studied together before they were separated was the sugyah of the decapitated calf (eglah arufah). Yaakov's spirit was rejuvenated because he sensed that Yosef sent the agalos to remind him of what they were learning ('eglah' is a play on words of 'agalah').

The Beis Yisrael explains the symbolism of the section of Eglah Arufa. In the previous verse [45:23] we are told that Yosef sent ten donkeys carrying the best Egyptian produce. The Maharal writes (Gur Aryeh al haTorah) that the 10 donkeys symbolized the 10 brothers that sold him into slavery.

The message that Yosef was sending to Yaakov was, "Don't blame the brothers and don't blame yourself."

The brothers, he intimated, were like donkeys that schlep without knowing where or why they are carrying the load. They are just performing a mission. Yosef was telling Yaakov, there should be no recriminations. Do not speculate as to how this could have been prevented. It could not have been prevented! G-d wanted it this way. The brothers were like puppets in the hands of a puppeteer. They acted without knowing why they acted.

This, says the Beis Yisrael, is the message of the Decapitated Calf: "It was not known who smote him" [Devorim 21:1]. We see a dead body. We don't know why he is dead, where he is from, who he is, why he was killed, or who killed him. Eglah Arufah says, "We don't know." Do not second-guess Providence. Certain things we just don't have answers for. Some things just happen because they were meant to happen. There should be no finger pointing and no recriminations.

Perhaps the greatest complaint people have on Gedolei Yisrael in this century, and why people lack, Rachmana Litzlan, appropriate faith in Torah leaders is because they point to pre-war Europe. Many Jews came to Rebbes, to Rabbonim, to Roshei Yeshivos and they asked if they should emigrate to Eretz Yisroel.

It was the consensus of most Gedolim to stay in Europe. People remained in Europe and there was a Holocaust. Nowadays people point to this period as a challenge to the concept of Emunas Chachomim:

"You see, the Gedolim were wrong! They don't know any better than we do. If the Gedolim were smart, they would have said 'Go to Palestine' and the Jewish people would be better off today."

This is a wrong attitude. This is what Eglah Arufa comes to tell us. "It is not known." We do not know

why it happened. We don't know why G-d wanted a Holocaust, but we know that He must have wanted it to happen. We know that if he wanted a Holocaust to happen, it would happen. We know that if He didn't want His people to immigrate to Palestine, they would not immigrate to Palestine.

The truth of the matter is that a theoretical case could be made that had they all immigrated to Palestine, they would have been killed there also. People forget that there was a German general named Rommel who conquered most of North Africa. People forget about that because Rommel fought against Montgomery and lost. Why did he lose? Rommel lost because he ran out of gas -- literally. Hitler, yemach shmo, did not give importance to the campaign in Northern Africa, so he did not give Rommel the proper supplies. However, Rommel was really a better general than Montgomery was. Montgomery was no genius, as the British want us to think. Rommel ran out of supplies.

Imagine if there were 2,000,000 Jews living in Palestine. In that case, Hitler would have given Rommel the supplies. Rommel would have defeated Montgomery, crossed the Suez, gone into Palestine, and slaughtered the community there.

Don't second-guess Divine Providence. Don't second-guess Chachomim and Emunas Chachomim. Don't think we can figure out Divine Providence. That is what Eglah Arufah is about -- "It is not known". Sometimes we are like donkeys that do without knowing why we do. But this is often the way G-d's plans are fulfilled.

Personalities & Sources:

Be'er Yosef -- written by Rav Yosef Salant, a prominent Rav in Jerusalem in the early part of the 20th century.

Beis Yisrael -- Rav Yisrael Alter (1894-1977); Fifth generation Ger Rebbe (son of Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Imrei Emes).

Maharal -- Rav Yehudah Loewe ben Bezalel (1526-1609); Seminal figure in Jewish thought. Chief Rabbin in Moravia, Posen, and Prague. (Gur Aryeh).

Glossary

Derech Eretz -- Way of the Earth; appropriate behaviour

Beis Din -- Court

Gadol HaDor -- Supreme (Halachic) Authority of the Generation

shaylah -- a question (of halacha)

schlep -- carry a burdent (Yiddish)

pasken a din -- decide a judgment

sugyah -- topical portion of Oral Law

Rachmana Litzlan -- The All Merciful spare us

yemach shmo -- may his name be erased

(Emunas) Chachamim -- (Belief in) our Wise Ones

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and is available through Project Genesis On-Line Bookstore: <http://books.torah.org/>

