

HELP FROM HEAVEN - TO FORGET

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 # 219, Chanukah Issues II. Good Shabbos!

Help From Heaven -- To Forget

The Torah tells us that Yosef had two sons in Egypt. Yosef named his eldest son Menashe, "For G-d has helped me forget all of my trials and tribulations and all the house of my father" [Bereshis 41:51]. Yosef called his second son Ephraim, "For G-d has given me the ability to be fruitful in the land of my misery" [41:52].

The name Ephraim makes a lot of sense. Yosef was in Egypt. Things had been very tough. Yosef offered a note of gratitude to the Master of the World who made him fruitful in the land of his misery. But the name Menashe seems strange. Is it a worthy and appropriate form of praising G-d "for helping him forget his father's house"?

Just imagine... This week (December 1991), 3 hostages were released from Lebanon. The press interviewed the families of the hostages who had been keeping a vigil for more than five years. Their loved ones had been on their minds constantly - night and day. Imagine, if one of the hostages, upon being released had stated to the press, "Thank the L-rd that I haven't thought about my family in the last 5 years." Even if someone really felt that way, he would never speak that way! How could Yosef have given his son such a name?

We could even perhaps understand if Yosef would have said, "for the L-rd helped me forget my brothers". That would mean that even though his brothers sold him into slavery, he has gotten over that, it does not bother him any more. If that is what the Torah would have written, perhaps we could have come up with an explanation. However, for Yosef to thank G-d for helping him to forget his father's house seems incomprehensible.

I saw an answer to this in the sefer [book] HaKesav V'HaKabbalah. There is a very famous question that everyone asks: During the entire time when Yosef was in Egypt, why didn't he send word back to Yaakov that he was, in fact, alive and well? Yosef was aware that his father must have been

mourning over him. Why didn't Yosef send a letter or a message to his father? Even if he was unable to send a message when he was a slave and later a prisoner, why didn't he try to communicate with his father when he became the second in command to the King? Yosef was, after all, the Chief of Staff. He could have done anything he wanted.

The HaKesav v'haKabbalah explains that Yosef had a prophecy that the sun, the moon and the eleven stars would bow down to him. That was more than just a 'dream'. It was a prophecy -- the Will of G-d that the individuals represented by the sun, the moon and the eleven stars should bow down to Yosef. That had to happen.

This also explains why Yosef engaged in the 'cat and mouse' game with his brothers. He was not engaged in a child's game -- trying to make his siblings squirm for what they had done to him. He knew that something had to happen. He knew that this 'dream', which so offended his brothers, had to happen and he therefore, wanted to lessen the blow for them. He did not want them to have to realize that they were in fact bowing down to their brother when they bowed down before this deputy of Pharaoh.

It is for the same reason that Yosef never sent word back to Yaakov that he was alive in Egypt. If he had sent word, perhaps Yaakov would have never made the trip down to Egypt. Yaakov might have said, "Yosef, come home" and the vision of the sun and the moon and the eleven stars would never have been fulfilled.

Yosef thus had a real dilemma. He could have gone out of his mind. From one perspective he very much wanted to inform his father that he was still alive in order to save his father from misery. On the other hand, he could not do this -- because then the prophecy would not be fulfilled. How does a person live with the knowledge that he is responsible for torturing his father in this way?

Therefore, says the HaKesav v'haKabbalah, G-d did a tremendous favor for Yosef. What was the favor? "For the L-rd has made me forget all about my father's house." G-d gave Yosef the internal fortitude to -- in a sense -- forget the house of his father and forget the pain that he was causing his father so that he would be able to survive this ordeal. G-d emotionally removed him from the house of his father and thereby allowed him to not be consumed by this terrible dilemma. It was in response to this favor that Yosef offered the thanksgiving prayer by naming his eldest son Menashe.

Sources and Personalities

HaKesav v'Hakabbalah (1785-1865) [Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg]; Koenigberg, Germany.

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