

EXACT MEASUREMENTS OF PUNISHMENT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 218, Grape Juice and Yayin Mevushal. Good Shabbos and Happy Chanukah!

G-d Measures Out Punishment -- Exactly

The Torah tells us that when Yosef's brothers were about to sell him, they lifted their eyes and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites carrying spices to Egypt [Bereshis 37:25]. Rash"i points out that the reason the Torah went out of its way to tell us the nature of their cargo was to inform us of the reward that G-d prepares for the righteous. Normally, the Ishmaelites would be trafficking in foul smelling commodities, like oil. Why did these Ishmaelites have spices? In order that Yosef need not suffer on the long trip down to Egypt, G-d saw to it that this particular caravan would be carrying spices.

The sefer Zichron Meir raises a simple question on this line of reasoning. After all, where was Yosef headed? Yosef was not going on a vacation or a pleasure trip. Perhaps when on a pleasure trip, one can say that "half the fun is getting there". However, Yosef was going through a major life crisis. Yosef was on his way into slavery! He was on his way to prison! This is not a trip he would be enjoying at any rate. What is the point of going to jail in a "Lincoln Town Car"?

The answer -- and this is sometimes hard for us to accept -- is that when G-d decides that a person deserves a punishment, that punishment is measured down to the dimension of a hair's breadth. The punishment that a person receives -- if he is a righteous person -- will be to the millimeter and to the millisecond of what he needs. He will have no more suffering and no more discomfort than the Master of the World specifically ordains.

A person might have very unfortunate suffering. He might even think that in such a situation, "What difference is there, if he has one more minor ache or pain?" However, that is not the way G-d works.

For whatever reason, Yosef had to go down to Egypt and he had to be sold as a slave. He had to be thrown into jail. This was all terrible. But it was precisely measured out. Travelling in a smelly oil caravan was not part of Yosef's decreed punishment. Therefore Yosef traveled pleasantly.

The Talmud tells us [Chullin 7b] that a person does not even bang his finger unless it is so decreed from Above.

In next week's parsha, the Torah tells us that Yosef was 'rushed' out of the pit [41:14]. What does that mean? Today, when a person is released from prison, he can often remain there for what seems like an eternity until all the paperwork is completed. However, once Yosef's time came to leave the pit 'they hurried him out from the pit' -- not a second longer.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to imagine how a righteous person warrants such terrible suffering. We do not understand it. But the comforting fact is that nothing is just chance. We see from this Rash"i that G-d loves even the righteous person who is destined to suffer.

Sources and Personalities

Rash"i (1040-1105) [Rav Shlomo ben Yitzchak]; France.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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