

IT'S MY BUSINESS

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 # 264, The Bracha for Kings. Good Shabbos!

Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

Yaakov Listens To His Messages: The Wagons Indicate Yosef Is Still Alive

The pasuk [verse] in this week's parsha reads "And they told him (Yaakov) that Yosef was still alive and that he ruled throughout the land of Egypt. But his (Yaakov's) heart rejected it because he didn't believe them" [Bereishis 45:26]. The next pasuk says that they told him everything that they discussed with Yosef. Finally, the pasuk says that Yaakov saw the wagons (agahlos) that Yosef sent him, whereupon, he believed the brothers and his spirit was revived.

Our Sages make a play on words (agahlah / eglah) and explain that Yosef was indicating to his father that when they were last together they were in the midst of studying the laws of the decapitated calf (eglah arufah). This is why the pasuk says "the wagons that Yosef sent", when in fact the wagons were really sent by Pharaoh.

Rav Nissan Alpert, zt"l, gives a beautiful explanation regarding why this specific message revived Yaakov's spirit. The law of the decapitated calf is invoked when a dead body is found between two cities. The elders of the nearest city come and proclaim their innocence in the matter. They never saw this person; they were not aware of and played no role -- directly or indirectly -- in his murder. As part of this ritual a calf is decapitated as a type of atonement offering by these elders [Devorim 21:1-9].

What is the basic theme of this mitzvah? The fundamental idea is the concept of "All of Israel are responsible for one another" (Kol Yisrael areivin zeh l'zeh). After all, why was it necessary for the elders of the neighboring city to bring an atonement offering? Today, one's next door neighbor could, G-d forbid, be murdered without so much as a shrug from the neighbors. People see others being mugged in the subway and they look the other way. "It's none of my business."

The Torah has a different outlook on life. Even if this person was unknown, even if he was from a different city, if his dead body was found near a city, the residents of that city bear a certain degree of responsibility. This is the meaning of Kol Yisrael areivin zeh l'zeh. We each have a responsibility for our fellow Jew. There is no such thing as "It's none of my business."

That is why the elders bring the atonement offering. In truth it is not only an atonement for that neighboring city. It is brought by that neighboring city as an atonement for the entire Jewish people. In some respect, even the far distant Jews share the responsibility for the tragedy. One Jew's murder is the "business" of every single other Jew.

This, then, was the message of the Decapitated Calf (Eglah Arufah). If we look at the life of the righteous Yosef, we see that he was in fact preoccupied with the idea of his responsibility for his fellow brethren. When the Torah tells us that Yosef brought "evil tidings" about his brothers to his father, what was he telling his father? Our Sages tell us that he reported that they were not treating the sons of the handmaidens properly. The sons of Leah were discriminating against the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.

True, he could have ignored the matter. He could have said, "This is not my business". But that was not Yosef. His entire being was dedicated to a sense of responsibility for each of the sons of Israel (Yaakov). He literally lived a life of "Kol Yisrael Areivin zeh l'zeh". It is my business.

When Yaakov sent Yosef to check up on his brothers, Yosef knew very well how his brothers felt towards him. He knew it would be a dangerous mission, as it indeed turned out to be. Why then did he go? Because of the sense of responsibility, the sense of "Kol Yisrael Areivin zeh l'zeh".

This is why Yaakov responded with disbelief when he was told that Yosef was alive and the ruler of all the land of Egypt. He could not understand how it could be that Yosef, who was always so concerned with his fellow man, could be in such a powerful position now and have ignored the plight of his father, never writing to tell him of his whereabouts. "My son Yosef would not ignore his father and family during all the years of famine, not to send them a message, not to send them provisions. The Yosef I knew could not be alive." That is why Yaakov did not initially believe his sons.

But then when they told him "All the words of Yosef," something changed. The brothers told Yaakov that Yosef told them "G-d sent me here for providing you with salvation" (l'michyah shlachani HaShem). When Yaakov heard that Yosef felt that his whole reason for being in Egypt was so that he could take care of his family - even indirectly - then Yaakov began to believe.

And when Yaakov saw the wagons -- when he understood that Yosef still recognized the implicit message of Eglah Arufah - that every Jew is responsible for his fellow Jew - then Yaakov knew for sure that his son Yosef was still alive, and his spirit was revived.

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