

# WE SHOULD NOT ASSUME WHAT HAPPENS IS NECESSARILY 'BAD'

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 485, Miracle Products and Other Chanukah Issues. Good Shabbos!

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## **An Explanation of Yosef's Gratitude For Forgetting His Father's House**

In this week's parsha, the Torah says that Yosef named his eldest son Menashe "for G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household" [Bereshis 41:52]. This is a strange name to call one's son.

The righteous Yosef tried to and was able to keep within him all the atmosphere and holiness that he received in his father's home. What then does it mean that he gratefully called his son Menashe for, among other reasons, the fact that G-d helped him "forget his fathers house"?

On the surface, this seems analogous to a son who drifts away and winds up thousands of miles from the traditions of his religious father's house, who then gives up Yiddishkeit and finally gives his son a Christian name, rejoicing in the fact that he was able to successfully separate himself from his Jewish background. Heaven forbid that this could be Yosef's intention here! On the contrary, we know that Yosef dearly held on to what his father taught him.

I saw a very interesting and poignant insight from Rav Elya Meir Bloch: The house of Pharaoh and the Land of Egypt was not by any stretch of the imagination similar to the atmosphere which Yosef knew in the Land of Canaan. A person might be tempted to say to himself: "That which I have here is nothing. There is no spirituality here. A life of holiness here is impossible!"

A person can become so distressed and distraught at the spiritual loss he has suffered by a change in geographic location that he can give up all hope: "Why go on?"

Yosef expressed gratitude that the Almighty helped him put aside his own pre-conceived notion of what a "Jewish house" should be like so that he would be able to function as a Jew even in Egypt.

Rav Elya Meir writes that G-d's allowing one to "forget one's father's house" is a Divine Kindness that allowed Yosef to maintain his spirituality in Egypt without succumbing to depression and defeatism at having been plucked away from his father's household. "And so too," he poignantly continues, "do we feel in our current situation." This insight was penned by the Telshe Rosh Yeshiva in 1943.

Any person who lived in Lita (pre-WWII Lithuania), the bastion of Torah learning and the home of many famous pre-war Yeshivas in Europe, and then found himself "stuck" in Cleveland Ohio in 1943 would have a tendency to ask: "This is Torah learning? This is a Yeshiva? This is how Yom Tov is celebrated?" The normal reaction would be: "This is nothing!"

Several times, I heard Rav Gifter discuss Lita and how things were in the original "Telshe". He would break out crying each time he described the appreciation for learning and the spiritual exuberance that existed there.

Two things can happen when contemplating such a contrast. One might be tempted to say: "Let's throw in the towel. This is a joke. This is not a Yeshiva. This is not learning. This is nothing. Let's give up!" Alternatively, a person can say "That was Lita, but this is America. If we are ever going to make something out of this country, we are going to need to start over. It is not going to be the same. It is going to be different, but we just need to keep on plugging away."

Every single one of the heads of the transplanted Lithuanian Yeshivas who restarted in American had to take this latter attitude. The same is true for all the other people who came over from Europe and wanted to preserve their Torah way of life - be it the Chasidic Rebbeim from Hungary or the Germans from Frankfort.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, who was stuck on the Lower East Side in the first part of the twentieth century, must have thought back to how it was in Lubaan, when people were posing to him Shaylahs of great sophistication and complexity. Here in the United States he had to worry about people keeping Shabbos and eating kosher.

When Rav Ruderman came to Baltimore, people had no appreciation for the concept of a Yeshiva. They were against the founding of a Yeshiva in Baltimore. He could have asked himself "I need this? I remember Slabodka. I remember Kovna. What do I have over here? Nothing!"

The same is true for all the Roshei Yeshivos. But they kept the flame burning. The reason why they were able to do this is because they were successful in utilizing the blessing that Yosef alludes to: "G-d allowed me to forget my father's house." They were successful in removing Lita from the forefront of their minds and putting it in the back of their minds. They were able to say "Yes, that was Lita, but this is America." Like Yosef the righteous, they were able to make peace with the present time and place where fate placed them and to build from the reality of "what is" rather than just bemoan the gap of the present from "what had been".

**We Should Not Assume What Happens Is Necessarily 'Bad'**

The pasuk says, "Why have you done evil to me?" (lamah ha'reioseem li) [Bereshis 43:6]. The Medrash says (according to the textual reading of the Yefei Toar on this Medrash) that this is the only instance in the entire dialog between Yaakov and his sons regarding Yosef, where the comment of Yaakov was not true in at least some sense.

Although Yaakov makes many suppositions in his dialog with his sons that appear to not be accurate [e.g. - "Yosef has been torn" (tarof taraf Yosef); "a wild beast ate him" (chaya ra-ah acalashu)], at some level they may be interpreted as true statements.

For example "Yosef has been torn" may be interpreted as Yosef was ripped away from his father by his brothers. Likewise the statement "a wild beast ate him" may refer metaphorically to the wife of Potiphar, etc.

There is only one comment that our Patriarch Yaakov made in the whole dialog with his sons that was not true (l'batalah) - namely the statement "why did you do evil to me?" The Medrash comments: "G-d says 'I am busy making his son the ruler in Egypt and he complains about his grief and trouble.'"

G-d questions Yaakov's characterization of the events as "bad". "I am trying to make your son viceroy in Egypt. I am trying to save the world from starvation. How dare you call it 'evil trouble'?"

The practical lesson of this Medrash is much easier to teach than to absorb. Many events appear to us in this life as being terrible. With the passage of time, however, it becomes clear to us that what we deemed to be terrible, was not terrible at all.

This is one of the most difficult ideas for human beings, who are bound by time and space, to accept. We see things happening at the time when they are unfolding and we cannot imagine that they serve any constructive purpose. However, sometimes, with the passage of time, we see that which we perceived to be a tremendous 'rah' [bad thing] turns out to be a tremendous 'tovah' [favor].

According to the Medrash, this was the essence of the Almighty's chastising Yaakov: "Don't tell Me that what I am doing to you is bad. I am trying to do for you the greatest favor."

### **Why Stop At The Most Exciting Part?**

This idea dovetails with another thought that we have mentioned in the past, but which bears repeating: Parshas Miketz ends at a very dramatic moment. We know that at the very beginning of Parshas Vayigash, Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers with the words "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" [Bereshis 45:3]. This climax of the drama is revealed within the first fifteen or twenty pasukim of next week's parsha.

The question begs to be asked: Why didn't the Torah end Parshas Miketz with this dramatic conclusion of the narration? This is not, Chas V'Sholom, like a serial where we want to keep the audience in suspense: "To be continued, next week..." so that everyone will come back to shul next

Shabbos to find out what really happened. This is the Torah!

The lesson is in fact "Wait until next week." There are some things in life that we cannot understand while they are happening. It is impossible to understand certain things in "real time." The only thing that helps us understand some events is patience and the passing of time.

Parshas Miketz ends as it does to remind us that sometimes, in order to see the good of what is in store for us, we must wait a week, a year, or even a lifetime.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Miketz are provided below:

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