

THEY WEREN'T JUST LEARNING EGLAH ARUFah BY COINCIDENCE

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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 # 662, Learning and Davening on the Road. Good Shabbos!

They Weren't Just Learning Eglah Arufah By Coincidence

A pasuk in this week's parsha (right before Chamishi) says: "And they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoke to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." [Bereishis 45:27]

Rashi quotes the Medrash that the wagons were a sign that Yosef was sending to his father of what topic of study they was involved in when they last parted company. They were studying the laws of Eglah Arufah [the decapitated calf, which is an atonement that is brought when a murdered body is found near a city]. This is why it says that Yaakov took note of the Agalos [wagons] that Yosef sent, rather than that Pharaoh sent.

There are literally dozens of interpretations as to the symbolism and the message of the Eglah Arufa in terms of this Medrash cited by Rashi. We have discussed many of them in previous years. This time I would like to share a different perspective on the matter. This idea put forth by both the Sifsei Chachomim and the Kli Yakar. However, I would like to take their ideas and go a step further.

The Sifsei Chachomim is bothered that Rashi's comment that the Agalos were symbolic of the Eglah Arufa is very uncharacteristic of Rashi. Agala and Eglah are two different words with differing vowels and different meanings. They happen to share the same letters but the words are otherwise unrelated. Why would it be obvious to Yaakov by Yosef's sending a wagon that they had been learning about a calf? What if this was too subtle of a connection and Yaakov did not "get it"? Why not send a calf itself, if he was so interested in making that connection?

The Sifsei Chachomim suggests that when Yosef separated from Yaakov, Yaakov accompanied him until Emek Chevron [the valley of Hebron]. When Yaakov told Yosef to go look after his brothers, the pasuk states that Yaakov sent Yosef from Emek Chevron [Bereishis 37:14]. Yaakov escorted him all the way to this departure point. Yosef told him, "Return, please." Yaakov responded, "I cannot go back, for a person is required to accompany a departing traveler, as is taught in the chapter of Eglah

Arufah."

This is how they came to study the section of Eglah Arufah. It was not just some chance study of the Biblical topic. Yaakov taught Yosef a practical lesson in the laws of levayah [accompanying a traveler on the road] from the Eglah Arufah parsha that was rooted in the scenario of their last encounter.

The Kli Yakar echoes the idea that while Yaakov was walking with Yosef, he most likely related to him the law of levayah, whose source comes from the chapter of Eglah Arufah. The Elders of the city testify regarding the dead body "Our hands have not spilled this blood," meaning we did not send him away without proper accompaniment. The Kli Yakar then asks where Yaakov learned this concept and answers that Yaakov learned it from his grandfather Avraham, who accompanied his guests when they departed on their travels.

The Torah states that Avraham planted an Eishel in Beer Sheva [Bereishis 21:33]. Chazal say that Eishel is an acronym for the words Achila [food], Shtiya [drink], and levaya [accompaniment] - the three pillars of the hospitality provided by the paradigm of Chessed, the Patriarch Avraham, to all his guests.

The Rambam in Chapter 14 of the Laws of Mourning enumerates a variety of rabbinic obligations towards one's fellow man that fulfill the underlying Biblical command of loving one's neighbor as one's self. He lists in the first paragraph (Halacha aleph) visiting the sick, comforting mourners, burying the dead, helping brides get married, gladdening grooms and brides, and accompanying guests, among other rabbinic obligations towards one's fellow man. Then in the next paragraph (Halacha bais) the Rambam states that the reward for accompaniment is greater than for anything else.

This is noteworthy. We would not, on our own, out of the entire list of rabbinic commandments enumerated in Halacha aleph, assume that accompanying guests tops the list in terms of reward! But that is exactly what the Rambam writes. The Rambam then cites the source of this custom being the practice of Avraham toward his guests.

Why is this in fact so? It is because when one accompanies a person, he provides him with something that is basic to the human condition - dignity (Kavod). You can give a person a piece of bread,; you can give him clothes on his back. And at times, a person can go hungry and not dressed in the best way. But there is something every human being needs. It is literally water to the soul. Every person needs dignity. Every person must feel that he is appreciated, that people take him seriously.

A person may have a guest in his house and give him the finest room with his own bathroom and a whirlpool bathtub and a fruit basket on the dresser. But if the guest is otherwise treated coolly and the host spends no time with him, all the material comforts provided are not worth anything.

On the other hand, one may give his guest a simple bed and a simple blanket and yet show him

great honor and respect. Such a host has provided his guest with a sense of self-worth. That is the greatest hospitality that can be shown. As the Rambam says, it is "greater than all the rest".

Now we understand the message that Yosef sent to Yaakov. Yosef has been away for 22 years. There was not another Jew within hundreds of miles. He was in a society that was decadent and depraved. He became the viceroy and everyone jumped at his command. What happened to Yosef? Did he leave the ways of Judaism? Did he become perverted? No. He remained Yosef the Righteous.

He sends a message to his father Yaakov asking "How did I do that? How was I able to remain committed to Jewish values despite my surroundings and environment?" He answered his own question. "I did it because you believed in me. You showed me respect and dignity by accompanying me on the road that day. I felt self worth as a result of your levaya. Any time that I was tempted to sin, I asked myself 'How could I - Yosef - do such a thing after my father had so much respect for me and faith in me?'"

This is the great Chessed that Avraham Avinu taught us. Sure, food and drink are important, but levaya - giving a person a feeling of self worth - that is more important than anything!

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 Vayigash are provided below:

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