

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

Vayigash





# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Vayigash

## Ahavas Yisrael

Yosef Hatzaddik's ahavas Yisrael was phenomenal. It states (45:4) **אני יוסף אחיכם אשר**, מכרתם אותי מצרימה, "I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold into Mitzrayim. " The Or HaChaim explains, **אחיכם אשר מכרתם**, "I considered you my brothers, even when you sold me." Yosef reached this level because he believed everything his brothers did to him was destined from Heaven. As Yosef told his brothers (45:8) **ועתם לא אתם שלחתם אתי** הנה כי האלקים, "and now, you didn't send me here, but Hashem..." The Shem MiShmuel said that a Yid should repeat those words every day.<sup>1</sup> Hashem does everything, so there is no room for hatred or hard feelings. Neither was Yaakov Avinu angry at his sons for selling Yosef and for causing him so much pain all these years because he believed that what occurred was destined to be. It states (45:23) **ולאביו שלח כזאת עשר חמרים נשאים משוב** מצרים, "To his father, he sent the following: ten donkeys carrying from the best of Egypt..." The Maharal (*Gevuras Hashem* 10) writes, "Yosef was hinting to his father that he shouldn't punish his children for selling Yosef because it was decreed from heaven. The shevatim who sold him can be compared

to a loaded donkey who doesn't know why it is carrying its load.

Similarly, when the *shevatim* sold Yosef, they didn't know what they were doing. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed that Yosef be sold so that Bnei Yisrael should go down to Mitzrayim. They thought they were selling Yosef because they hated him. However, the true purpose was to bring Yaakov to Mitzrayim."

Yosef's brothers, the holy shevatim, also excelled in ahavas Yisrael, there's no doubt about that, but the Torah tells us that something wasn't perfect. There was hatred and jealousy towards Yosef. The Midrash says that this too was from Hashem. They said to Hashem, "When You want, You give us love, and when You want, You place hatred in our hearts." Hashem caused them to hate Yosef, to bring about Yosef's going to Mitzrayim. So, it wasn't their fault. Nevertheless, there was a seed of *sinas chinam*, which bore fruit and are the roots of *sinas chinam* and *machlokes* that exist throughout the generations.

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, they spoke together in brotherhood and friendship, as it states (45:15) **וינשק לכל אחיו**

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1. The Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* once opened the door of his room and said, "Berke needs *rachamim*."

Berke was the husband of the famous, wealthy Tamer'l, who supported several Chasidic courts. The Kotzer Rebbe saw through *ruach hakadosh* that her husband, Berke, was ill and needed *tefillos*.

The chasidim quickly prepared a wagon to travel to the Chidushei HaRim of Gur *zt'l* and Reb Yitzchak Vorker *zt'l* and to other tzaddikim to ask them to daven for Berke.

But while traveling, a wheel broke, and later, a horse died, and then one of the members of this group fell ill with tuberculosis, and they had to return to Kotzk. By then, Reb Berke was niftar.

The chasidim were discussing the Kotzker's *ruach hakadosh*, that he knew that Berke was ill. One chassid replied, "Yes, our Rebbe showed us a *mofes*, but Hashem performed an even greater *mofes*. Hashem showed us that if someone is destined to die, nothing can prevent it. A wheel broke, a horse died, and one of our group became ill so that the tzaddikim wouldn't daven for Berke. It was time for Berke to leave this world, and nothing could change his fate."

ויבך אליהם ואחרי כן דברו אחיו אתו his brothers and wept on them; afterwards, his brothers spoke with him." This rectified the sinas chinam, but it wasn't corrected one hundred percent, which is why machlokes and hatred exist among us today.

It states (45:14) ויפול על צווארי בנימין אחיו ויבך, "He fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck."

Rashi writes, "Yosef cried over the two Batei Mikdash that would be built in Binyamin's portion and will be destroyed. Binyamin cried over Mishkan Shilo in Yosef's portion that will be destroyed."

Reb Yechezkel of Kozmir zt'l (Divrei Yisrael (ד"ה מא"ז) asks:

(1) Yosef and Binyamin met after many years of separation. Shouldn't that be a time for rejoicing? Why were they crying?

(2) Why did Yosef cry over Binyamin's churban and Binyamin over Yosef's Churban? They should have each cried over their own churban!<sup>2</sup>

(3) Why did Binyamin cry over the churban of Shilo? In a way, that churban seemed beneficial for Binyamin because after its destruction, the Beis HaMikdash was constructed in his portion.

The Rebbe of Kozmir zt'l answers that despite the friendship and closeness they felt at that time, Yosef and Binyamin sensed the joy wasn't perfect, for the seeds of hatred weren't entirely uprooted. They knew that the seeds of sinas chinam would blossom and result in the churbonos of Mishkon Shilo and the two batei Mikdash. They cried for

the churbonos to arouse every Yid to uproot all aspects of sinas chinam from their hearts. They also practiced ahavas chinam. They did so by crying over their fellow man's churban, and not over their own. Binyamin cried over Mishkan Shilo, even though he gained from it because now the Beis HaMikdash could be built on his portion. He cried for his brother Yosef's loss. He was practicing ahavas chinam to amend the sinas chinam, hoping that this would prevent the destruction of the Mishkan and the Batei Mikdash.

Yet, machlokes and sinas chinam still prevails, and because of it, the Beis HaMikdash still wasn't rebuilt. When we attain ahavas chinam, we will be redeemed from galus.

One common form of sinas chinam is between communities because each community thinks they have the correct path for serving Hashem, and the other community is acting incorrectly. Yosef told his brothers (45:24) אל תרגזו בדרך, "Don't quarrel on the path." Rebbe of Kozmir explains, "Don't quarrel over which derech (path) is the right way to serve Hashem."<sup>3</sup>

The Ahavas Yisrael of Viznitz zt'l said: Hashem shows each tzaddik that his path in avodas Hashem is the best way. This encourages the tzaddik in his path and to lead his followers in his approach. However, the Viznitzer Rebbe said that the tzaddik doesn't know that Hashem also shows this to other tzaddikim. Hashem shows each tzaddik that their path is precious and the best, to encourage the tzaddikim and their students to excel in their avodas Hashem.

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2. Perhaps they cried for each other and not for themselves because one shouldn't mope over his failures and losses, and one can't despair. One must move on and rebuild. It is, however, appropriate to cry and feel another person's pain.

3. The brothers wanted to rush home to tell Yaakov Avinu the good news that Yosef was still alive. Yosef told them, אל תרגזו בדרך, don't rush. Yaakov won't hear the news a moment earlier than is destined from Heaven.

The Shlah HaKadosh (Yoma, Derech Chaim 44) writes, מחלוקת אחת דוחה מאה פרנסות, "One dispute banishes a hundred parnasos." This is alluded in the pasuk (44:28) ויצא האחד מאתי ואומר אך טרוף טרף. The Chasam Sofer zt'l (ד"ה ויצא) writes that טרף means parnassah (see Tehillim 111:5, (טרף נתן). The pasuk says ויצא האחד מאתי, when the אחדות, left the brotherhood, we lost our parnassah.<sup>4</sup>

Reb Moshe Betzalal Altar zt'l hy'd (brother of the Imrei Emes zt'l) once said to his wife when she complained about their tight financial state, "The first thing is to avoid machlokes because one machlokes banishes a hundred parnasos."

### Path to Ahavas Chinam

One can do several things to banish sinas chinam and attain ahavas chinam. One approach, which we discussed above, is having emunah that everything is destined from Above.

There are tactics for increasing shalom among people. One approach is to judge your fellow man favorably and to give them the benefit of the doubt. Very often, when there is a dispute between people, the parties involved misunderstand each other, causing them to pass judgment wrongly.

Yosef's brothers judged Yosef wrongly. They thought Yosef was a *rodef*, someone who wanted to harm them. This is why they made a machlokes against Yosef. But it wasn't his intention at all. Yosef told them (45:3), אני יוסף, העוד אבי חי, ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him because they were startled by his presence."

The Maharal translates the words כי נבהלו מפניו, literally: "They were frightened by Yosef's face."<sup>5</sup> They saw a new face, a new Yosef. For the first time, they saw him as he truly was – a brother who loves them and doesn't want to harm them. They realized that they had judged him wrongly all along. They thought Yosef was against them, but Yosef's loyalty to his family was always firmly in place.

This error reoccurs to this day. When there is a dispute, it is often because there is a misunderstanding. When the facts become known, you realize that all your reasons for the conflict were misplaced.

Another method to stop machlokes is to stop thinking about it.

Have you ever wondered why it is called sinas chinam, vain hatred? Isn't there always a reason for the hatred? Is hatred ever for no reason?

The answer is that keeping the machlokes and hatred alive is pointless, even if there was a reason that initially caused the machlokes.

An example is a piece of paper that caught fire. If you leave it alone, the fire will extinguish in less than a minute. But if you add fuel, it can burn for a very long time. The nimshal is that if you don't stoke the fire of machlokes, it will go away quickly. But if you delve into it, you keep the machlokes and hatred alive. This is a fight for no reason, so it is correct to call it sinas chinam.

Sometimes, a machlokes goes on for years, and the people involved have already forgotten how the machlokes began. So, the solution is to stop thinking about the argument as quickly as possible. And if you

4. When one doesn't think sanely, it is called מטורף. So, we can explain the pasuk: ויצא האחד מאתי, when one forgets his emunah in the one Hashem, ואומר אך טרוף טרף, he loses his sanity. Because when he believes in Hashem, he knows that Hashem will help and that everything will be good. But when one forgets Hashem, he has no respite from his worries and hardships.

5. If the *pasuk* means that they were afraid of Yosef, it would say, כי נבהלו ממנו.



stop stoking the fires of the machlokes, the other person will drop his end of the rope, too, because he can't fight on his own.

Someone came to court with a complaint against the moon. He said, "Wherever I go, the moon follows me. When I go right, the moon goes right. So, I turn left, but the moon goes there, too. When I stand still, the moon stops as well. In short, the moon doesn't leave me alone."

The judge replied, "I understand your complaint, but I can't rule on the case without hearing what the other party says. Therefore, please return in a couple of days."

A couple of days later, the judge told him, "I said to the moon, 'Why do you bother this man and follow him wherever he goes?' The moon replied that it was your fault because you were always looking at it. If you stop looking at the moon, the moon promises to stop following you."

Similarly, in regards to machlokes, if just one of them stops the machlokes, the machlokes ends.

Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov zt'l compared it to two people pulling at two ends of a rope. If one person lets go, the battle is over (and the other person will fall). Similarly, when one party backs off, the fight is over immediately.

Another method to end machlokes and sinas chinam is to put into your heart love for your fellow man. Reb Chaim Volozhiner zt'l (Keser Rosh 119) says that if you love your fellow man, he won't be able to hate you. It is impossible to hate someone who loves you.

His son, Reb Yitzchak of Volozhin zt'l, adds that Rivkah told Yaakov to remain in Charan (Bereishis 27:45) עד שוב אף אחיך ממך, "Until your brother's rage subsides from you."

The simple meaning of the pasuk is that he should remain in Charan until Eisav calms down. But it can also be explained that Rivkah told Yaakov to stay in Charan

until Yaakov no longer feels anger towards Eisav. This will be a sign that Eisav doesn't hate Yaakov, either.

A cruel man wanted to harm a certain rav because the rav had dared summon him to a din Torah. Once, the rav was traveling with his students, early in the morning, to attend a bris. From a distance, the students saw the cruel man galloping toward them. The students were terrified because they knew that the wicked man wanted revenge on the rav. Surprisingly, when the two carriages met, the cruel man spoke friendly with the rav, and they departed in peace, each to their way.

The students asked the rav how this happened. The rav explained that he put in his heart to love this cruel man. "I thought it was a pity on him because he was never taught how to behave properly and doesn't know any better. And when I was able to love him, I knew that we were safe because then he would love me as well." (Told by Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l.)

### Treasuring Gems

There was a country that was dark most of the year. The sun hardly shone there. Naturally, the most precious commodity in that country was wax candles.

A resident of this dark country was once voyaging far away from home. He came across a mountain covered with huge piles of precious diamonds. Delighted at his find, he stuffed all his pockets with diamonds and began his journey home.

On his way home, he passed a valley filled with wax. Knowing how precious wax was in his homeland, he emptied his pockets of all the diamonds and filled them with chunks of wax.

When he arrived home, he showed his wife and children all the wax he had brought home, and they were very happy. As he was emptying his pockets, two or three diamonds fell out. He hadn't intended to bring home

any diamonds, but they got caught in one of the folds of the pocket and only came out now.

He brought the diamonds to a jeweler. Only when the jeweler told him their value did the man realize how foolish he was. He could have brought home so many diamonds and become fantastically wealthy. Instead, he wound up with but a few diamonds and a mound of wax.

Rebbe Moshe Savraner zt'l told this mashal to demonstrate people's foolishness. Every good deed is more precious than diamonds; they are so easy to do and available wherever you look. The wise fill their pockets with as many mitzvos as they can. However, we live in this (dark) world and need money for survival. Therefore, working for parnassah is necessary (as wax candles were necessary in the dark country). But in their pursuit of parnassah, some people throw away all the diamonds they collected. But if you value Torah and mitzvos and consider them precious like diamonds, you will do as many of them as possible. But if you don't recognize their value and think money is more important, you will cast away many great opportunities for eternal wealth.

The Beis Aharon (*Chanukah* p.48.) explains the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 119:59), חֲשַׁבְתִּי דְרָכִי וְאִשִּׁיבָה רַגְלִי, אל עדותיך as follows: "חֲשַׁבְתִּי is from the word חשוב, important. Every person – even those on low spiritual levels – must consider his good deeds to be חשוב, special. He must believe that regardless of his level, all his good deeds make an impression in heaven. When one has this outlook, וְאִשִּׁיבָה רַגְלִי אל עדותיך he can change his routines and improve his ways. But when one doesn't consider his deeds significant, he won't be able to change his ways."

Let us understand this: Why is valuing your deeds a prerequisite to changing your ways?

If one knows that his deeds are precious and that Hashem loves them, and that he will earn immense reward, he is inspired to do more. He will change his ways to become a masmid and a person who davens with kavanah, even if he never was that way before. He wants to change his practices because he values what he is collecting. However, if you discount your good deeds, you won't seek out every opportunity to do more mitzvos.

Chanukah has just passed. We said Hallel and Al HaNisim; we lit the Chanukah lecht and celebrated the holiday. Our pockets are filled with precious diamonds, precious mitzvos. Yet, some people say, "What did I do already? It was nothing."

It is terrible to think that way. That means they don't recognize that every mitzvah is a precious diamond, something you never want to lose. And if you don't value diamonds, you won't seek more.

The Beis Yisrael of Gur zt'l told the following mashal:

A shikur entered a store and saw a good bottle of whiskey for sale. It was just the type of drink he wanted. "How much does it cost?" he asked the store owner.

"Two thousand dollars."

He immediately left the store in a fury. There was no way he would pay such an exorbitant price for a drink.

But he very much wanted this drink, so he returned to the store and asked to hear the price again.

"Two thousand dollars," the store owner repeated. Once again, he left the store in a rage.

But after reconsidering, he decided to buy the drink, no matter what. Whatever the price, it was worth it. He sold his table and chairs, borrowed money, and bought the bottle.



After drinking, comes the vomiting, but he held himself back from vomiting. He said, "I paid two thousand dollars for this bottle. I am not going to vomit it up."

The Beis Yisrael zt'l told this story in reference to Chanukah. We gained so much on Chanukah. Value what you accomplished. Don't think it was nothing. Don't vomit it up. Every mitzvah is a diamond, worth far more than we can imagine. Value it, value all mitzvos, and then you will seek to do more and more.<sup>6</sup>

### The Greatest Treasures are Deep in the Earth

Few people want to work in a diamond mine. They are located deep underground, with oxygen scarce, and are exposed to dangerous gasses. In the past, only people on death row or people who didn't value their life worked there.

Yet, from these low places come the rare diamonds, those that are set in the king's crown. The Beis Avraham zt'l says that this represents our lowly generation. We live at a time when there are very difficult tests,

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6. A parable is told about a poor person who couldn't earn a living. Whatever he tried failed. He decided to visit the *sar hamazalos* (the angel appointed over mazel) to ask him where he should go to find his mazel.

As he was walking to the *sar hamazalos*, he passed a beautiful, large tree, but the tree was barren.

The tree requested, "When you meet the *sar hamazalos*, tell him my name as well. Ask him why my mazel is so bad that I can't grow fruit."

"No problem," the man replied. "When I meet the *sar hamazalos*, I'll ask him."

The man walked further and met a princess banished from her palace. She also requested, "When you meet the *sar hamazalos*, ask him why my mazel is to be cast out of the palace. Ask him what I can do to return to my greatness."

"I will do so," the man replied and continued on his way.

Then he met a lion. It was lying on the ground, ill and in pain. The lion said, "When you meet the *sar hamazalos*, ask him what I can do to cure myself."

"I will do so," the man promised and continued and met up with the *sar hamazalos*.

When he returned, he told the tree, "The *sar hamazalos* told me that near your roots lies a box filled with gold and diamonds. This blocks the nutrients in the ground from reaching you. When someone digs up the treasure, you will bear fruit."

The tree pleaded, "Please dig up the treasure. You will become wealthy, and I will be cured."

"No! No!" the man exclaimed. "I don't have time for that. I am busy looking for my mazel."

He walked further and found the princess. "I spoke with the *sar hamazalos*. He said that you would return to your greatness when you get married. Your husband will be king, and you will be the queen."

The princess pleaded, "Please marry me. I will return to the palace, and you will become the king and very wealthy."

"I'm sorry," the man replied, "But I am too busy for that. I need to find my mazel."

Then he met the lion. "Did the *sar hamazalos* tell you what I should do to be cured?" the lion asked.

"Yes, he did," the man replied. "Your remedy is to eat the brain of someone who throws away every good opportunity that comes his way."

The lion quickly devoured him.

Every mitzvah is a fantastic opportunity. Let us recognize that.

particularly in areas of kedushah (such as guarding the eyes, etc.). People don't want these difficult tests. When confronted with such tests, they feel they fell so drastically. Yet, it is from these places that the most precious gems emerge. Hashem takes our successes and creates from them diamonds that become part of the King's crown.<sup>7</sup>

When a person is on a low level, confronted with difficult tests, and he krechts before Hashem, the Beis Avraham says that Hashem loves his krechts. In Hashem's eyes, this krechts is higher than the greatest madreigos. He krechts and moans that he fell so low, and from that low place, from the deepest mine, comes forth the most beautiful diamonds.

Someone yearned to serve the king. The king told him, "I have all the generals and advisers I need. But there is one thing you can do for me. I need a soldier to stand outside, knee-high in the mud, to guard the palace."

Reb Gad'l Eizner zt'l used this mashal to describe this generation. Sometimes we must go down to very unpleasant places, places

and tests we wish we wouldn't know of, but when we act as Yidden there, with kedushah and taharah, we are collecting diamonds that will go into the king's crown.<sup>8</sup>

Even in these unpleasant places, Hashem is with us. This is written in this week's parashah. Hashem told Yaakov Avinu (46:4) *אֲנִי אֶרֶד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם עִלָּה*, "I will go down with you to Mitzrayim, and I will also bring you up." Wherever Yidden go, Hashem goes with them. The Kli Yakar adds that Hashem goes to galus before us, as it states *אֶרֶד* before *עִמָּךְ*.<sup>9</sup> And when we leave galus, we will leave galus first, and then Hashem will leave. This is as Hashem told Yaakov, *אֲנִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם עִלָּה*, "I will bring you up, and then I will also come up, out of galus." The Kli Yakar compares it to someone who must go into deep water, and he doesn't know how to swim. Someone tells him, "I will go into the water with you. I know how to swim, and I will help you."

He will reply, "I request that you enter the water before me and leave the water after me, so as long as I am in the water, you will be there. This is what Hashem does. He

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7. A couple of years ago, a baker from London sold nine thousand donuts for Chanukah but discovered that in his kitchen, the donuts were fried by a non-Jew, and there was an issue of bishul akum. They probably could have found a leniency to permit the donuts, but the owner didn't want to rely on any leniency and announced that he would give back the money to whoever returned the donuts. Most of his clients were large companies, such as yeshivos, nursing homes, and the like, and they all sent back the donuts.

What will he do with nine thousand donuts that no one needs? Someone came up with an idea. "I often go to the hospital to visit the sick," he said, "and I want to express gratitude to the doctors and nurses who are always so helpful. We can send them the donuts. They aren't Jewish. They don't need to eat kosher."

It was a fabulous idea. He explained to the hospital staff that donuts are a Jewish food eaten on Chanukah, and they all appreciated the gesture.

A week later, the hospital ordered another ten thousand donuts! So, by doing what's right, one only gains. This is an example of passing a test and earning diamonds. The diamonds will be in the next world, in addition to the reward in this world.

8. The Imrei Emes zt'l praised the chasidim who danced as they were thrown into the gas chambers. They served Hashem with joy even there. This exemplifies what a Yid does when faced with a difficult test. It is mesirus nefesh, but the Yid accepts the challenge and does Hashem's will with joy.

9. *אֶרֶד* means "I will go down." Hashem will go down to Mitzrayim. This is written before *עִמָּךְ*, "with you," because Hashem goes to galus first.

comes to galus before us and leaves after us, never leaving us alone in galus.

This applies to the difficult tests we must endure. Hashem is with us. We are never alone. With this awareness in mind, we will find it easier to pass these tests.<sup>10</sup>

### **Appreciating the *Din***

When Yosef invited Yaakov to come down to Mitzrayim, Yaakov began his voyage. His first stop was Be'er Sheva, where he brought korbanos of gratitude, as it states (46:1) וַיִּזְבַּח זִבְחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק, "[Yaakov] slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak." Yitzchak represents *midas hadin*, harsh justice. The Be'er Mayim Chaim zt'l explains that Yaakov Avinu was praising Hashem for the *din* because he now saw that

everything that occurred was for his benefit. Yosef was alive in Mitzrayim, and he would support them during the hunger years. Yaakov now perceived the troubles of the past (that Yosef was thought to be dead and having been sold into slavery) in a positive light.

One must thank Hashem while still in the midst of a nisayon because he believes it is all for the good. And then, when one recognizes the good that came from it, he must praise Hashem a second time.

It states (118:21) אֲוֹדָךְ כִּי עָנִיתָנִי וְתָהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה. The simple translation is as follows: "I shall thank You because You answered me, and You were my salvation."

The Be'er Mayim Chaim (46:1) translates עָנִיתָנִי as "affliction." Accordingly, this pasuk includes two praises. אֲוֹדָךְ כִּי עָנִיתָנִי is to praise

### **10. Never lose hope because Hashem is always with us.**

The Gemara (Brachos 10.) relates that Chizkiyahu HaMelech was ill, and Yeshayah HaNavi informed him that he was about to die and there was no hope for him. Chizkiyahu HaMelech told him to leave. He didn't want to hear these discouraging words. He said, "I received a kabbalah from my father's father's house: Even if a sharp sword is on one's neck, one shouldn't despair."

He said that he learned the ideal of not giving up from אָבִי אָבִי, "From his father's father's home." To whom was he referring?

The Sfas Emes zt'l says he was referring to Yehudah (Chizkiyahu was a descendant of Yehudah). Yehudah made a deal with his father that if he didn't bring Binyamin back safely to Yaakov, Yehudah would be in a niduy (ban) forever. And the Torah tells us that Binyamin was taken. Nevertheless, Yehudah didn't lose hope. He pleaded with Yosef to free Binyamin. This taught Yehudah's descendants never to lose hope.

It states (46:27) כָּל הַנַּפְשׁ לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיִם שְׁבַעִים, "All the souls of the house of Yaakov who came to Egypt were seventy." Rashi (46:15) asks that if you count them, you will see that only sixty-nine people went down to Mitzrayim, not seventy! Rashi answers that Yocheved was born as they entered Mitzrayim, and she completed the number to seventy.

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni) gives another answer. It says that Hashem came with the children of Yaakov to Mitzrayim, and Hashem is the seventieth.

Similarly, the Torah tells us that 600,000 people left Mitzrayim. The Midrash says that one is missing. It was actually 599,999 people that left Mitzrayim. But Hashem went out with them, and Hashem completed the number.

There is a hint here. Sometimes a person makes a cheshbon, and things don't add up. For example, as he understands things, he should be married by now, or he should have parnassah by now, and so on. This is called, "It doesn't add up. The cheshbon doesn't seem right."

The response is: Put Hashem into the equation, and everything will be right and correct.

Recognize that Hashem is leading you; everything is precisely as it should be.



Hashem for the yesurim, which we believe are for the good. ותהי לי לישועה is to praise Hashem when we discover the good that came from the pain.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim elaborates:

"This is what happened to Yaakov. He lost Yosef for twenty-two years, and it caused him immense distress. However, this wound was the cure. Since Yosef became the king of Mitzrayim, he could support his father and siblings during the hunger years. Another benefit was that if it weren't for this episode, Yaakov would have been brought down to Mitzrayim like a slave in iron chains, but now he arrived with honor, by invitation of the king of Mitzrayim. Therefore, Yaakov had to thank Hashem again for the tzarah that turned out to be good."

The Lev Simchah (Gur) zt'l makes an interesting observation. Yosef was in jail for two extra years because he said to the sar hamashkim (40:14) כי אם זכרתני... והזכרתני "But remember me...and remember me to Pharaoh." (He was punished for the extra hishtadlus and had to remain in prison for another two years.) It seemed like a punishment but let us consider what would have happened had Yosef been freed from jail two years earlier. He would have gone home to Eretz Canaan. The entire episode of him becoming the viceroy wouldn't have occurred. Often, in retrospect, we recognize the good that comes from hardships.

It states (45:27) וירא את העגלות "[Yaakov Avinu] saw the wagons." The Shem Mishmuel says that עגלות also means wheels. A wheel turns; what was at the bottom will soon be on top. Yaakov saw the wheels and understood that this was a cycle of ups and downs, and although he suffered for many years, things would become good for him again.

Reb Efraim Schwartz was deported to Auschwitz. All the healthy people were sent to the right to work, while the elderly and the sick were sent to the left to the gas chambers. Reb Efraim Schwartz hoped and

prayed that he would be sent to the right, but the Nazis sent him to the left. He pleaded and pounded his feet like a young child, screaming that he wanted to go to the right, but to no avail. He was forced to the left.

And that saved his life. The Germans knew that the Americans would soon come, so they decided to kill the healthy prisoners, so they won't be able to tell the Americans about the atrocities they had witnessed. The Germans weren't as worried about the ill people because they wouldn't be able to speak, or perhaps they wouldn't be believed.

Efraim Schwartz's life was saved because he was sent to the left. The lesson is that thing that seems bad can be proven to be your biggest favor because everything is for the good.

### ***Kibud Av v'Em***

When Yosef and Yaakov met, the *pasuk* (46:29) states, ויפל על צואריו ויבך על צואריו עוד, "Yosef fell on his [father's] neck and continued to cry on his neck." Rashi writes, לשון הרבות בכיה... אף כאן הרבה והוסיף בבכי יותר על הרגיל "[the word עוד] means he cried a lot."

The *pasuk* doesn't say that Yaakov cried. Rashi writes, "Yaakov didn't fall on Yosef's neck, and he didn't kiss him. Chazal say that he was reciting Shema at that time."

The question is if it was time to say Shema, why wasn't Yosef saying Shema as well?

The Steipler zt'l (*Birchas Peretz, Vayigash*) answers that Yosef was performing the mitzvah of *kibud av*, and when one was occupied with a mitzvah, he is exempt from performing other mitzvos. Therefore, Yosef was exempt from saying Shema.

The *Targum Yonoson* (ibid.) writes that when Yaakov met Yosef for the first time וקדם דאשתמודעה אבויסגד ליה, "Before he recognized [that it was Yosef], he bowed down to him. ואתחייב למהוי שנוי קטיען, and Yosef lost years of his life as a result." Yosef didn't have the opportunity to correct his father, to tell him

that it was he, Yosef, and not the king of Mitzrayim, as Yaakov thought. Nevertheless, this was considered a *pgam*, imperfection, in Yosef's *kibud av*, and therefore, Yosef lost ten years of his life. He was supposed to live until 120 but was niftar at 110.

According to the Targum Yonoson, we can explain that Yosef was crying because he lost years of his life. *Pirush Yonoson* on *Targum Yonoson* explains that Yosef lost ten years of his life because just as honoring parents grants a person a long life, as it states *למען יאריכון ימיו*, when one doesn't honor his parents properly, the result is the opposite, *r'l*.

Long life isn't the only reward of this mitzvah. Rabbeinu b'Chaya says that it is clear that those who excel in *kibud av v'em* enjoy success in their life: either long life, tranquility, wealth, or some other form of success because honoring parents brings success to a person even in this world.

A courageous young child once asked the Chazon Ish, "How does one become a Chazon Ish?"

The Chazon Ish replied, "If you will honor your parents as I did, you will become a Chazon Ish." *Kibud av v'em* grants success, to each person in a different way. If your goal is to grow in Torah, it will grant you success in Torah. If your goal is wealth, it can grant you success there. Some people merit good shidduchim in the merit of their *kibud av v'em*.

In 1948/תש"ח, a *bachur* came to Eretz Yisrael, and his parents arrived two years after him. His parents, new to Eretz Yisrael, needed help finding an apartment and a suitable *parnassah*. Their son spoke the language, understood how things worked in Eretz Yisrael and could assist his parents. The *bachur* asked his rebbe, Reb Eizik Sher *zt'l*, whether he should help his parents settle in or continue learning in yeshiva uninterrupted, and his parents would somehow manage.

Reb Eizik Sher replied that he couldn't answer the question because Shulchan Aruch HaRav rules that someone with the potential to succeed immensely in Torah, shouldn't stop studying, not even to perform mitzvos that no one else can do. And this *bachur* had the potential to become great in Torah.

Reb Eizik advised the *bachur* to ask the Chazon Ish *zt'l*.

The Chazon Ish replied, "It is natural that a child should do this for his parents" (מעשה) p.184).

Reb Yaakov Halprin *zt'l* once saw a great *talmid chacham* in Eretz Yisrael in low spirits and asked him what was bothering him. The *talmid chacham* replied that his parents had just arrived from Lodz, and now he must support them. "Until now, I barely earned enough money to support my family. How will I have money to support my parents, too?"

The wealthy Reb Yaakov Halprin replied, "I will support your parents, but on condition that I earn the reward for the mitzvah."

The *talmid chacham* didn't know how to respond. He was worried about the financial strain, but he also didn't want to forfeit the reward of the mitzvah. "I need to think it over," he replied.

He asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l*. The Chazon Ish replied, "What is the question? Of course, you should accept Reb Yaakov's offer. This arrangement will benefit your parents. And if you lose the reward for the mitzvah, so be it. Know, one must be prepared to jump into Gehinom to honor his parents."

The Chazon Ish added, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu has enough reward for both you and Reb Yaakov..." (מעש' א"ש) p.181).

Once, a *bachur* in Brisk received a letter from his father requesting that he come home. The student asked Reb Chaim Brisker what to do because his father didn't attach money for the trip, and *kibud av v'em* doesn't generally require one to use one's

own funds to perform the mitzvah. Reb Chaim replied, "True, you aren't obligated to pay for the trip, so you don't have to pay for the train. But walking doesn't cost money, and you can walk home."

Reb Shlomo Kluger *zt'l* wrote in a letter to his son, Reb Avraham Shmuel Binyamin *z'l*, "My dear son, why isn't *yiras shamayim* upon you? When you write a letter to me (with *chidushei Torah*), send a greeting to your mother, and you will perform the mitzvah of *kibud em*. From now on, send a greeting to your mother."

### Teshuvah – Focus on the Present

Chazal say ועתה, "Now," alludes to *teshuvah*.

This is surprising, because people generally think *teshuvah* is about rectifying the past. They don't typically associate *teshuvah* with focusing on the present.

However, focusing on the *aveiros* of the past can lead to sadness and depression. Furthermore, focusing on past failures often results in the person repeating those bad deeds.

Therefore, Chazal tell us to focus on improving the present – ועתה. That is the ideal approach to *teshuvah*.

Yosef told his brothers (45:5), ועתה אל תעצבו, "But now do not

be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that Hashem sent me before you."

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* explains that Yosef told them, ועתה, "Don't dwell on the past. Don't think about the time you sinned and sold me. Instead, ועתה, think about the present, ואל תעצבו, and then you won't be sad."<sup>11</sup>

A *bachur* was worried about the *aveiros* he had committed and spoke with the Lev Simchah (of Gur) *zt'l* about it. The Lev Simchah told him that according to the Ramban, Yaakov Avinu never knew how Yosef ended up in Mitzrayim. Yaakov never asked Yosef how he got to Mitzrayim, and Yosef never told him because the past doesn't matter. What was, was. What's important is to improve the present and the future.

The Lev Simchah advised this *bachur* to ignore the past because the path of *teshuvah* is ועתה, to focus on the present.

The Yerushalmi (*Pe'ah* 8:8) relates that Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish were traveling to Teveria to bathe in its hot springs. On the road, they encountered a poor person who asked them for a donation.

Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish replied, "When we return from the baths, we will give you money."

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**11.** Rebbe Shalom of Koidenov *zt'l* said that *teshuvah* must be with a broken heart (לב נשבר) but not with depression (עצבות). The difference between a broken heart and depression is that when one has a broken heart, he feels he is the worst person in the world. When one is depressed, he is angry at the entire world.

The hint is in this week's *parashah*. Yosef told his brothers, ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם, if you won't have *atzvus*, then you won't be angry with others.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* once rebuked his son for not being happy. His son asked, "Why do you rebuke me specifically about being unhappy? There are so many other things I do wrong."

The Beis Aharon replied, "All other *aveiros* and bad *middos*, you know they are bad, and you will eventually do *teshuvah* on them. But you don't realize how severe it is to be with *atzvus* and how much it draws a person down. Therefore, I rebuke you specifically in this regard."

The Beis Aharon said, "*Atzvus* isn't an *aveirah*, but it pulls people down more than the greatest *aveirah*. *Simchah* isn't a mitzvah but raises a person higher than the greatest mitzvah."



When they returned, the poor man was already dead. He had died from hunger. Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish said, "We didn't merit taking care of you when you were alive, but we will take care of you after your death."

As they were preparing him for burial, they found a wallet filled with money on his body. They realized that he wasn't really poor. He was tricking others into getting their money.

The Lev Simchah of Gur *zt'l* said that this episode demonstrates how the holy Amoraim would focus on the present rather than mope over the past. Had they let their distress and worry over causing this person's death overtake them, it is likely that they wouldn't have had the willpower and heart to bury him. They would feel responsible and unworthy to do a good deed and live their entire lives with a guilty conscience, thinking they had caused his death. But because they focused on the present, they discovered that he had plenty of money, and it wasn't their fault that he died.

It states (47:8-9), ויאמר פרעה אל יעקב כמה ימי שני, "Pharaoh asked Yaakov, 'How old are you?'"

Yaakov replied, "...They were few and bad years..."

There are thirty-three words in these two *pesukim*, and Chazal tell us that Yaakov Avinu died thirty-three years younger than his father Yitzchak, because he complained before Pharaoh. (Yitzchak lived to 180 and Yaakov to 147.)

Not all the words of the *pesukim* were Yaakov's. Among them is Pharaoh's question, "How old are you?"

So, why was Yaakov punished for Pharaoh's words, too?

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* answers that Pharaoh was shocked by Yaakov's elderly appearance, which caused Pharaoh to inquire about his age. Yaakov explained that he wasn't that old; only his *tzaros* caused him to age early. Yaakov was punished for complaining and for appearing old. We must live joyfully, such that our countenance displays happiness and vitality.

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l* once said, "It states (*Vayikra* 6:6), אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה. This means a fire to serve Hashem should always burn על המזבח, in one's heart. לא תכבה, even if he committed sins, those sins shouldn't cool off his fire and inspiration.<sup>12</sup>

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**12.** An older bachur finally found his bashert on the 11th of Kislev. At the *vort*, his ten-year-old brother approached him and showed him a piece of paper, on which he had written the following: "11th of Cheshvon, I am making a kabbalah that I will say kriyas shema she'al hamittah from a siddur every night for the next thirty days. In this merit, may my brother become a chasan." Exactly thirty days later, his brother got engaged!

A ten-year-old boy saw this story (printed in Be'er HaParashah) and decided to do the same because he also had an older brother who was having difficulty finding a shidduch. He made a kabbalah to say kriyas shmae she'al hamittah for thirty days before he went to sleep.

One morning he came to his father crying because he forgot to say kriyas shema at night.

The father told him that it was ok. Just keep your kabbalah for one extra day, and that will make up for the day you missed.

The child did so, and on the 31st day, his brother became a chasan!

(Heard from the father, a talmid chacham and magid shiur in New York.)

## Tefillah

We received a letter from a Reb Dovid from France. He wrote that he was in a toy store looking to buy a playmobile set for his son, but he did not know which one to choose, so he asked the salesperson for advice.

The salesperson said, "Playmobiles are a collectors' item. Children enjoy collecting the different sets. So, it doesn't make a difference which one you buy. But why not buy a toy car? We have a large car on sale..."

The father was convinced and drove home with the giant toy car in his trunk. He was sure his son would be happy with this gift.

He came home joyously, anticipating his son's happy face when he received the present. But his son had gone to sleep early that night, so he placed the large car beside his bed.

When the mother saw the car, she was astounded. She said, "Every night, I put our son to sleep with a story. Tonight, I told him about an ill woman who davened to Hashem and had a refuah shleimah. Our son asked, 'If I daven for something, will Hashem grant my wish, too?'"

"I told him, 'Yes, Hashem will answer your tefillos. Is there something in particular you want?'"

"He replied, 'Hashem, please give me a car...'"

Reb Dovid writes in his letter, "When my son awakens in the morning and sees the car, he won't be surprised. It will be obvious to him. He davened for it, so of course, he received it. I wish I also had this clear belief in the power of tefillah."<sup>13</sup>

Three months ago, a family gathered in Bnei Brak for a levayah. Afterward, the family and friends got into their cars to drive to the Rishon l'Tzion cemetery, where the niftar would be buried. Most of the family arrived at Rishon l'Tzion, but the niftar's daughter and son-in-law were nowhere to be found. They were at the levayah in Bnei Brak, and everyone wondered where they had disappeared to.

The family waited for quite a while, until the couple finally arrived. The levayah began immediately, as it was erev Shabbos, and there was no time to waste.

After the levayah, the family went over to the couple to find out what caused the delay.

The couple explained that they were almost certain that they set their Waze to Rishon l'Tzion, but for some reason, the Waze directed them to the cemetery in Cholon and not Rishon l'Tzion.

At first, they didn't realize that they were at the wrong location. They looked around

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**13.** There was a couple who were childless for many years. The husband asked his wife to travel to Rebbe Meir of Premishlan to ask the Rebbe for a *brachah*. "Tell him I am even prepared to lose my wealth, if need be, as long as we merit having children."

She traveled to Premishlan and said to the Rebbe, "My husband said that he is even prepared to remain with his wealth as long as we have children."

Rebbe Meir of Premishlan laughed because he understood she slipped with her words.

But the Rebbe said, "You didn't err with your words. You said it correctly because why shouldn't you have both - wealth and children? Hashem can do anything. He doesn't need to take away your wealth to give you children. With *tefillah*, you can have both."

Obviously, they received both because with tefillah, everything can be attained.

the Cholon cemetery for their family and obviously didn't find them.

They thought that perhaps there was another entrance, so they asked around until someone realized the mistake; they were in Cholon, not Rishon l'Tzion.

They tried to reset their Waze, but it wouldn't turn on. The battery was dead.

What should they do now? They didn't know how to get to Rishon l'Tzion.

They stopped their car on a busy street in Cholon and asked someone for directions to Rishon l'Tzion. The person described the directions but realized that they weren't following.

"My office is right here," the person told them, pointing to an upscale office building. "One of the secretaries lives in Rishon l'Tzion. I will dismiss her early today, and she can

ride with you and direct you to your destination."

As they rode, the secretary told them that she prepares the Shabbos food every Friday before she goes to work, but this week hadn't managed to get ready. She was worried because it was Friday, and she ends work late. When would she prepare for Shabbos? She davened for siyata dishmaya. "It was a miracle that my tough boss dismissed me early this week. Hashem answered my tefillos. I will be able to prepare for Shabbos. That's a salvation I wasn't expecting."

We see the power of tefillah. Hashem had this couple lose their way, have a broken Waze, and speak with the manager of an office where a woman from Rishon l'Tzion works, all so this woman could get home in time to prepare for Shabbos.

Because when we pray to Hashem, Hashem answers our requests.<sup>14</sup>

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**14.** A Slonimer chasid wrote a letter to his rebbe, the Nesivos Shalom zt'l, expressing all the hardships he was going through. He wrote in the letter (Tehillim 121) מאין יבא עזרי, "From where will my salvation come?"

The Nesivos Shalom replied, "I don't understand; if you write one pasuk, why don't you also study the next pasuk? The pasuk answers, עזרי מעם ה' עושה שמים וארץ, "My salvation comes from Hashem, creator of heaven and earth" (Nesivos Shalom, Michtevei Kodesh 95).