

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
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פרשת ויגש

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לעילוי נשמת
הר"ר אברהם אלחנן בן
הרה"צ רבי פנחס אליהו שפיגעל זצ"ל
לכבוד היארצייט כ"ח כסלו

פרשת ויגש

אָנִי יוֹסֵף אֶחְיִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרַיִם (בראשית מ"ה ד')

"I am Yosef your brother - it is me, whom you sold into Mitzrayim."

Yosef's Brotherly Love

Yosef is trying to convince his brothers that there is no bad blood between them; he has completely overcome the fact that they had sold him to a caravan of spice merchants. He was attempting to convey this message by saying that he was אחיכם - their brother. He had no intention of taking revenge for what had transpired.

The Ohr Hachaim adds another level to this expression of love: he says that by saying the words אשר מכרתם, Yosef was telling his brothers that even during the time that the sale was taking place - while his brothers were abandoning him, handing him over to strangers and trading him for money - his brotherly love towards them had not faltered.

This is quite difficult to understand. It would be fathomable if he would have told them that after many years had gone by, and he placed himself in their shoes and tried to understand their calculations, he finally managed to forgive them. And even then, it would be hard to imagine that he fully regained his original brotherly love towards the shevatim. But to say that during the time that the terrible deed was taking place, he loved them completely, just as before? How can that possibly be?

My father z"l used to tell us that back in the 1930s, when a parent in Europe used to send their children to Eretz Yisroel, the departure was extremely difficult. The parents knew that although they were sending their children to a better place, and they were going to a very lofty and spiritual environment, they were probably never going to see them again. They wouldn't be able to travel to Eretz Yisroel, and their children would not be able to come back. That goodbye kiss would very likely be the last one ever.

The same thing was true by Yosef. The brothers knew that once he was being sent off to Mitzrayim as a slave, he was probably never going to be seen or heard of again. This was why Yehuda was ready to refrain from killing him; he was very well aware of the fact that once Yosef was sold, he was out of the picture for good. The shevatim felt that they had to stop Yosef from destroying their position in Klal Yisroel, and Yehuda explained to his brothers that selling him would be as good as killing him for that purpose.

Yosef was a source of tremendous nachas to his father. Chazal teach us that Yaakov passed on to Yosef all that he had learned in Yeshivas Shem Va'ever. He even gave him a כתונה פסים. And now, that beautiful life was going to come to an end. Of course, Yosef had more than enough reasons to lose his love for his brothers, at least for a short while!

The meforshim teach us that Yosef knew all too well what a terrible effect the mechira could have on him. He even preferred to remain in the pit, which was crawling with snakes and scorpions, rather than being sent down to Mitzrayim. This was because Yosef knew that although these dangerous creatures could wound his body, the Egyptians had the ability to destroy far more: his neshama.

We can draw an analogy to this from a more recent event: the fact that the Nazis, ym"sh, murdered so many Yiddishe Kinderlach was definitely a horrible atrocity. But when we think about all of those children who were sent by their parents to Christian homes in order to have their lives spared, we may be unsure as to who had a worse fate. Far too many of those holy neshamos never found their way back to Yiddishkeit. They got absorbed into the Christian culture; who knows how many of them are actually ardent anti-semites today, totally unaware of their true descent?

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And yet, Yosef felt intense love towards his brothers, while he was being loaded onto the camels as a slave. How can we understand this Ohr Hachaim?

What Yosef Understood: It's All a Master Plan

We can try to unravel this puzzling mystery by giving the following mashal:

A tzedaka organization had the idea of making a play as a method to raise money. One of the scenes in the play was quite memorable: it began with a landlord asking his tenant for rent. This tenant was a kollel youngster who was barely able to pay his bills. He used to receive HUD benefits from the government, but had just lost them a few weeks before. The landlord tells him, "I will be back tomorrow; if you don't have the money by then, I will personally evict you from this apartment with my own hands."

Sure enough, the landlord arrives the next day, which was portrayed to be a cold and snowy one, and the tenant has not yet come up with the rent. So he very dramatically grabs him by the scruff of his shirt and tosses him out of the apartment.

It just so happened to be that the actors that played these two roles were brothers.

After the play, someone in the audience approached the actor that played the part of the landlord, and asked him: "I don't understand. How did you do it? How were you able to be so cruel to your brother and throw him out into the snow?"

Now, we all understand how foolish that question was. But that is precisely how we have to view Yosef HaTzaddik's perspective.

Yosef fully believed that what was transpiring before his very eyes was a play. Hashem wrote the script; his brothers were just the actors. True, he cried to them, begging for his life; but at the same time, he understood with full *bitachon* that whatever would happen to him would be for a purpose.

Differentiating Between Hashem's Plan and Freewill

Of course, there is a very fine line between *bechira* and *bitachon*. Obviously, a person can't just cut the line at the supermarket and tell the fellow behind him, "What are you getting so worked up about? This is all a play!" The way we can clarify this balance, between freewill and Hashem having everything all planned out, is by using the following analogy:

At the intersection of Kings Highway and Ocean Parkway, it is impossible for one police officer to direct traffic when necessary. The roads are simply too big. The only way to do it is to have two officers, each stationed on the opposite side of the intersection. These officers are in constant contact with each other, and while working in unison, they can functionally control the traffic.

Now, let's say these two officers get into a power conflict. Each one claims to be the one who was officially put in charge of the intersection. They get into a quarrel, and each one decides to start doing things his own way. Clearly, this arrangement will not last five minutes without a serious accident occurring. The officers can't possibly both be in charge; one must be taking orders from the other, at least at some point, in order to help the vehicles flow safely.

This is why we must understand that the balance of freewill and Hashem's plan is a total miracle. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is in total control of everything that takes place, yet he gives us the power to make decisions. With that in mind, Yosef had no ill feelings towards his brothers; he understood that it was Hashem who wrote the script. The fact that his brothers were attempting to harm him was their own *cheshbon* with their *bechira*; it had absolutely nothing to do with his love towards them.

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We must all make a point to solidify this idea in our minds; it is applicable to our lives on a daily basis. Whether we are experiencing a misunderstanding or discord with a spouse, a boss, a coworker - we must always remember that there is another system always present, aside from the other fellow's freewill, that really calls the shots.

Learning to Smile Through Our Struggles

The *pasuk* tells us that Pharaoh asked Yaakov Avinu, "כמה ימי שני הייך", "How old are you?" Yaakov answered that he was 130 at the time, and that his years were filled with difficulties, and that they did not reach the amount of his father and grandfather.

Yaakov ended up living another 17 years, giving him a total of 147 - 33 less than his father Yitzchok Avinu, who lived for 180 years. Chazal tell us that for every word that he spoke to Pharaoh in that conversation led to him losing one year of his life. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asked the obvious question on this: the words of Yaakov's response to Pharaoh only total to 25. Where are the other eight words? The answer is - we also count the eight words of Pharaoh's question to Yaakov.

But Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks - we can understand the *tayna* on Yaakov Avinu for his response - it sounded somewhat ungrateful to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But why does Yaakov lose years for Pharaoh's question?

The answer is as follows: it is very acceptable for children to ask for each other's age on the first day of school or camp. It may even be within social norms to ask that kind of question to a newcomer in the office. But when two world leaders meet for the first time, the questions they ask are more like, "How is your economy doing?" or "What is your opinion on carbon emissions?" and so on. Why was the leader of the great world power known as Egypt asking the illustrious patriarch of the *Shivtei Yisrael* for his age during their first meeting?

Chazal tell us that this was due to the fact that Yaakov had an extremely old and weather-beaten look about him. Therefore, when Yaakov answered Pharaoh, he was essentially telling him, "You want to know why I look so old? It's because of all the pain and troubles I experienced in my life." So in a sense, Yaakov's appearance was the catalyst that prompted Pharaoh's question, which caused him to deserve to lose more years of his life.

We see from here that there is a very high expectation from us: we must learn to absorb our pain; we must learn to not allow our hardships and our worries to weigh us down and cause us to lose the spring in our step. Now that we learned about Yosef HaTzaddik's ability to see Hashem's hand in everything, even during the worst crisis of his lifetime, then perhaps we can utilize this mindset to overcome the challenge that Yaakov faced, and learn to endure and smile through whatever struggles or hardships Hashem may send our way.

The Master Plan Throughout the Ages

The Gemara in Sanhedrin tells the following story:

The people of Egypt came before Alexander the Great and said, "We want to take the Jewish people to an international court case."

Alexander liked this idea. He offered to be the judge. Then he asked, "What is your charge against the Jews?"

The Egyptians responded, "Our claim is that the Jewish people 'borrowed' gold and riches from us before Yetzias Mitzrayim. They never actually returned the money to us. Now, we're ready to reclaim what is rightfully ours."

Alexander liked the charge, and he agreed to preside over the case.

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At the court case, Alexander began questioning the Jewish people's representative. (The Midrash gives some background about who this person was.) He asked him what he had to say about the Egyptians' claim against the Jews.

The Yid responded, "Really, I have a question for you. How do these people know that we obtained all this wealth from them?"

"Well, it says it in your Torah," came the obvious response.

"True. But you know what else it says in the Torah? It teaches of the hundreds of years that the Jews suffered in forced servitude to the Egyptians. It teaches of how the Jews were tortured mercilessly, with no compensation whatsoever. Bearing that in mind, let's do the math - how much is the average salary for a construction worker? Now, let's multiply that by the vast number of Jews that were forced into servitude, and by the 210 years of work that they did. I think the result will be that not only do we not owe the Egyptians anything, but on the contrary, they owe us..."

The Gemara says that Alexander gave the Egyptians three days to come up with an answer to this question. The Egyptians saw where this case was going for them, and they all fled.

The Meshech Chochma asks on this account: Let's say a country leader makes a deal with a group of people, and he doesn't end up following through with his commitment. Can these people now go and steal items out of the citizens' homes? Clearly, the leader's failure to come up with the money doesn't warrant the citizens' obligation to give up their personal possessions! So over here, with the Egyptians - why did the average *mitzri* deserve to sustain a great financial loss because of Pharaoh's cruel decrees against the Jews?

The answer lies in this week's Parsha: Yosef had acquired the Egyptian people, along with their properties, for Pharaoh. So now, a few hundred years later, the average *mitzri's* possessions were really Pharaoh's - which explains how the Yidden had a right to seize the gold and riches before they left Egypt.

We see from here that Hakadosh Baruch Hu always has a master plan for our salvation; a plan that is being prepared for centuries before we finally get to see the glorious outcome. The same will be true when the Geula Ha'asidah comes - we will finally be able to see how all of the puzzle pieces throughout the generations merge together, creating a beautiful masterpiece. Our long and painful history will finally be an open book for us all to comprehend and appreciate the ways of Hashem. May the Geulah come and shine the brightest light speedily in our days.

Self-control, or Control of Others? The Choice is Yours

At the end of the Parsha, the Torah tells us that Yosef purchased the people of Egypt as slaves, along with their properties. The *pasuk* says, "הן קניתי אתכם היום ואת אדמתכם לפרעה", "I have acquired you this day, and your land, for Pharaoh." The Ohr Hachaim notes that the wording here seems to be a bit out of order: the word "היום" is written in the middle of the sentence rather than at the end. This word arrangement begs the question: why is the *pasuk* only referring to the purchase of the **people** as happening "היום", today, while seeming to leave the real estate out of this description? Did the properties only get purchased the next day?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Yosef only purchased the people as a שכיר יום - a temporary servant who offers his services on a day-by-day basis, but he never actually purchased them as full-fledged slaves. This is why the *pasuk* only says the word "היום" after discussing the **people**. However, the properties were purchased fully. Well, why did he do *that*?

The Meshech Chochma clarifies that Yosef himself had experienced the feeling of being a slave, and he did not want others to have to go through the same predicament. We all know how Hillel summed up the entire Torah in one statement: מה דעלך סני, להברך לא תעביד - the things that you hate being done to you, do not perpetrate against another.

But perhaps we can take this idea one step further.

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Did you ever wonder - what exactly is behind the universal desire to become fabulously wealthy? Why is it that people the world over spend hours of their lives daydreaming about being a multi-millionaire? Well, at first glance, the answer may be quite simple - people crave having unlimited access to their needs and wants. If they would have a bank account that seems like a bottomless pit, then nothing would ever get in the way of them attaining the necessities of life, not to mention the additional lavishness that can come along with it. Anything from food and clothing to exclusive hotels and luxury cars - they would have easy access to it all.

However, there may be another factor that drives people to have this extreme longing for prosperity.

A person who has a lot of money has something very valuable in his back pocket: control. He has the ability to force his wishes upon others. A school won't accept his child? All he has to do is write a check, and before he knows it, his kid is in - and he's the guest of honor at the annual dinner. The Shul is making decisions that don't meet his demands? He has the last word, because he sponsored half of the previous year's building campaign. An item he is looking for is out of stock in America? No worries. A couple of bucks later, it's at his doorstep, expedited by air from Japan. It's a wonderful feeling to drive through life always sitting in the driver seat.

The great *baalei mussar* teach us an important lesson about all of this: when a person has control over **himself**, then he doesn't have a major desire to control **others**. The people who crave being the wealthiest man in town - they only yearn for that position because they don't have full control over their actions, their speech, their eyes; they aren't in the best state when it comes to their own *bechira*.

Sometimes you see people driving on the highway at extremely high speeds. Then, they pass a tragic accident scene. Cars are mangled, bodies are being covered in sheets - a real disaster. So, he tells himself, "Wow, I really can't speed the way I do. I can end up like that." But then, ten minutes later, he's hitting 95 m.p.h. Again. How come? Because his mind doesn't have full control over his actions - his body, his instincts, his habits are the ones in charge.

Yosef HaTzaddik had absolute power over the entire land of Mitzrayim. He was totally in control of everything and everyone other than Pharaoh. And now, he was being given the opportunity to obtain even more control over them - they were offering themselves as total slaves! But the desire to control others did not pique Yosef's interest in the slightest bit. Yosef, as we know, had an incredible amount of self-control - look no further than the story about his encounter with אשת פוטיפר. So Yosef resorted to only purchasing them as a שכיר יום; he had no interest in anything more.

May we all learn to put our self-control first, and thereby come to a point where we lose all desire to forcibly control the world around us.

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