

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayigash

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

TIME TO DITCH THE LOGICAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef]..." (44:18)

Although he was begging Yosef for mercy, Yehudah was at the same time intimating to Yosef that he and his brothers were prepared, if necessary, to kill him - as well as Pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptians - in order to free their brother Binyamin (Rashi).

Yehudah and his brothers were extraordinarily strong, but obviously no match for all of Egypt. In fact, the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 93:7) relates that at one point during this face-off, Yosef demonstrated his own might to Yehudah, prompting Yehudah to remark to his brothers, "This one is stronger than me." Furthermore, Binyamin's physical life was not in danger; Yosef was only threatening to separate him from Yaakov's household. Yet, Yehudah realized that leaving Binyamin in Egypt would endanger him spiritually. Because Yehudah had assured Yaakov that he would take personal responsibility for Binyamin's safe return, he was prepared to risk his life for him, notwithstanding any rational considerations.

We learn from Yehudah how to set aside rational caution when it comes to the spiritual safety and education of our children, for whom G-d has made us responsible. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 94-95) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

APPROACHING THE TZADDIK

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, 'If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears and may your anger not flare up at your servant, for you are like Pharaoh...'" (44:18)

Yehudah (יהודה) represents the Yehudim (יהודים - Jews). Yosef represents the tzaddik.

In order to draw close to G-d, the Jews must first draw close to the tzaddik, who will transform their Torah study into blessing. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 464).

Let my words enter your ears. (Rashi)

When the brothers realized their mistake, Yehudah (יהודה) approached Yosef. Similarly, the Jews, who are called Yehudim (יהודים - Jews), display faith in the tzaddikim by approaching them and repenting of their evil ways. This faith must be entrenched in the heart. Thus, "Let my words enter your ears" - for "Hearing is dependent on the heart" (see Berachos 15a; Tikkuney Zohar # 58, p. 92a). One's words must enter the heart of the tzaddik to prove that he is truly interested in serving G-d.

Yehudah also asked Yosef not to get angry. This refers to mitigating all the decrees that were issued before a person repents, and requesting kindness and compassion. The key is to follow the advice of the tzaddikim and not fall prey to extraneous advice and counsel, which is represented by Pharaoh (פרעה) from the same root as le'haphria (להפריע, to confuse). Yehudah said to Yosef, "You are like Pharaoh" - for as much as Pharaoh can cause confusion, you, the tzaddik, are capable of giving counsel to counter that confusion. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 194a)

Let my words enter your ears. (Rashi)

Yehudah represents the individual Jew. Yosef represents the tzaddik. "Let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears" refers to prayer.

Each person must bind his prayers to the tzaddikim, since they are the ones who teach us how to pray properly so that our prayers will ascend Above. "Let my words enter your ears" connotes a person asking the tzaddik for help in rectifying his prayers, so he can pray more intensely and with greater fervor.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, represents the power of illusion that deters a person from proper prayer. But Yosef - the tzaddik - is "like Pharaoh." Just as Pharaoh has the power to steer a person away from G-d by confusing him during prayer, the tzaddik has sufficient powers to help a person combat the confusions and attain proper prayer. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 213a)

HASHEM IS ALWAYS APPROACHABLE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef]...” (44:18)

The first words in Parshas Vayigash are ויגש אליו יהודה - telling us that Yehudah approached Yosef to beg that he allow Binyamin to return home to their father. Yehudah had personally guaranteed Yaakov that Binyamin would return home safely, and so now that Yosef wanted to keep Binyamin as his slave after discovering his goblet in Binyamin's bag, Yehudah set out to plead that Binyamin be permitted to go home, offering to remain as a slave in Binyamin's stead.

The Midrash offers an additional layer of interpretation to the words ויגש אליו יהודה, explaining that ויגש refers to tefilla. As Yehudah approached Yosef to plead on Binyamin's behalf, he also silently offered a prayer to Hashem. Outwardly, he was speaking to Yosef, but in his mind, he placed his faith in Hashem, begging Him to come and help the family in this moment of grave crisis.

The Midrash here teaches us a vitally important lesson about emunah - that even as we perform our necessary hishtadlus, putting in the effort that we need to put in, we must recognize that the outcome always depends on Hashem, to Whom we must always turn for help. Before any meeting, whether it's a job interview, a business deal, parent-teacher conferences, or any other important appointment, we must reflect on the fact that ultimately, the outcome depends solely on Hashem, and we are to pray that He orchestrates everything for the best.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov added that this pasuk, as understood by the Midrash, teaches us about a crucial prerequisite for tefilla. The expression ויגש אליו יהודה, which the Midrash understands as referring to Yehudah's approaching Hashem, alludes that we must always feel comfortable and confident enough to approach Hashem. One of the impediments to meaningful, heartfelt prayer is the sense of unworthiness that many people feel. They think about the inappropriate things they've done and said, all the mistakes they have made, and conclude that G-d is not interested in them, that He does not want to hear from them, that He wants to have nothing to do with them. Rebbe Nachman's most famous teaching is מצווה גדלה להיות בשמחה תמיד - that a person must always be happy (Likutei Moharan I, 282). He emphasized that even if a person has failed and sinned, he should remain joyful and in good spirits, remembering that he also has many virtues, and much goodness within him. It is the yetzer hara, Rebbe Nachman explained, that tries to convince us to feel despondent and worthless after acting wrongly. Alongside our sincere regret for our wrongdoing, we must recognize our redeeming qualities, and all the good that we do. And we must confidently believe that despite our mistakes, Hashem is always approachable. His door is always open. He wants us to come to Him often to ask for what we need. The first step toward meaningful tefilla is ויגש אליו יהודה, to recognize that regardless of what we've done, Hashem invites us to approach Him, at all times.

HOW TO APPROACH PRAYER

Reb Aharon of Chernobyl

“And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, ‘If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears and may your anger not flare up at your servant...’” (44:18)

The word Vayigash shares the same root as hagashah (approach), which refers to prayer.

When one is about to pray he should have these words in mind: “If you please, my Lord - in me there is a bit of the Divine. May your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears - I beg of you, listen to my prayer. May your anger not flare up at your servant - do not be disappointed in me and have pity.”

ROYAL REPENTANCE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, ‘If you please, my lord...’” (44:18)

Yehudah approaches Yosef's throne and begins the hostile negotiations. Threats are implied, and a real danger to the entire Egyptian empire becomes palpable. The Midrash places this epic battle into its proper context: “Reada achazasam - trembling gripped them.’ These are the shevatim who (upon witnessing the showdown) said, ‘Kings are battling one with the other; of what significance are we?’”

In reality, claims R' Yosef B. Soloveitchik zt'l, what we have here in Parshas Vayigash is none other than the future battle for supremacy between the two would-be kings of Bnei Yisrael, as represented by Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid. Yosef, the first-born of Rochel and a favorite son of Yaakov, was actively vying for the right of malchus - kingship, against the one brother chosen by their father for this noble and sacred task, Yehudah. From the moment that Yosef was sold into slavery, upon the advice of Yehudah, until the time that Yosef was unable to contain himself any longer and was forced to reveal himself to his brothers, the two sparred back and forth in a classic conquest to attain the coveted monarchy.

Yosef represented yofi - beauty, in this case, the perfection of his character, as Chazal tell us that Yosef was called “chassid mi'tivo - pious by nature.” He knew not the meaning of sin, and couldn't grasp the nature of one who commits it. Thus, he told the wife of Potiphar, “How can I do this terrible thing and sin against G-d?”

Yehudah, on the other hand, was the embodiment of gevurah - strength, in this context to imply a strength of character. He did know of sin, yet he also knew how to make amends, to do teshuvah. Indeed, he said of Tamar, “Tzadkha mi'meni - she is righteous from me.” It is this middah of gevurah that won out and allowed Yehudah to retain the malchus of Klal Yisrael, and he will ultimately bring forth the melech haMashiach.

TRANSCENDING NATURE

Baal Shem Tov

"And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef]..." (44:18)

Our nation is comprised of two kinds of souls: the ordinary Jew and the tzaddik (righteous person).

An ordinary Jew conducts himself according to the laws of nature. The numerical value of "hateva" (nature) is eighty-six, which is the same value as the Divine name "Elokim," the force that sustains and operates within all of nature. Elokim is also referred to as "Yehudah" because Yehudah embodied the Divine attribute of malchut (royalty), and Elokim is associated with malchut, the attribute through which everything was created.

The tzaddik, by contrast, operates in a supernatural manner and is described as "the righteous who rule through their awe of G-d" (II Shmuel 23:3). They rule over nature because they hold sway over the Divine name Elokim, overriding heavenly decrees that come into effect through that level of Divinity. A tzaddik is referred to as Yosef HaTzaddik (Yosef the Righteous).

The Torah describes Yehudah approaching and drawing close to Yosef. This alludes to an ordinary Jew approaching a tzaddik, whereby the two kinds of Jewish souls are united. The ordinary Jew becomes a throne for the tzaddik, meaning that the tzaddik is able to work supernaturally through the agency of the Jew who operates according to the laws of nature.

CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Alshich HaKadosh

"And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef]..." (44:18)

What argument could Yehudah now have used against Yosef? Hadn't he himself pronounced his own sentence, saying: "Behold, we are my lord's bondsmen, both we and also he in whose hand the cup is found" (44:16)? And Yosef had been kind enough to commute the sentence, saying: "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the goblet is found shall be my bondsman, but as for you, get up in peace to your father" (44:17). Why, then, should Yehudah turn now on Yosef in anger?

At first, Yehudah had believed that he and his brothers were about to receive their just punishment for having sold Yosef into slavery; namely, that they would be taken as slaves themselves. Therefore, he had said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? G-d has discovered the iniquity of your servants" (44:16) - the sin being the sale of Yosef.

But now, when Yehudah heard that Yosef was willing to let them all go free and wanted only Binyamin as a slave, he knew that this could not be a punishment for Yosef's sale, for Binyamin had had no part in that deed. Therefore, Yehudah was convinced that they were being punished on a false accusation, and he lashed out at Yosef in anger.

TAKE YOUR PICK

Rabbi Yehudah Leib Graubart

"And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, 'If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears and may your anger not flare up at your servant, for you are like Pharaoh..." (44:18)

"For you are like Pharaoh - in my sight, you are as important as the king himself." A Midrashic explanation is as follows: "You will ultimately be stricken with leprosy for detaining Binyamin just as [your ancestor] Pharaoh was stricken because he detained Sarah for one night." Another explanation: "Just as Pharaoh issues decrees and then fails to carry them out, makes promises and then fails to fulfill them, so do you." (Rashi)

Yehudah was an astute diplomat. The words he addressed to Yosef - "for you are like Pharaoh" - could be interpreted in various ways. They could be taken as words of respect, meaning: "You are as important in my eyes as Pharaoh himself." Or they could be construed as a threat: "You will be stricken with leprosy just like that other Pharaoh before you." Or else they could be interpreted as an insult: "Just as Pharaoh issues decrees and then fails to carry them out, so, too, are you undependable."

Yehudah had in mind all three of these meanings, and it is as if he had said to Yosef: "Interpret my words in any way you choose, for all the interpretations would be equally correct."

CRISIS MODE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef]..." (44:18)

Yehudah did not shy away from speaking harshly with Yosef; moreover, he began his appeal harshly. He knew that when someone's life is at stake, we must not be diplomatic; our listeners must sense that we are not involved because of ulterior motives, such as political or financial interests. When it is clear that the cause for which we are fighting cuts to the core of our being, it will evoke an honorable and compassionate response.

Today's "Binyamin's" - our Jewish children, are threatened by a different sort of "Egypt" - that of assimilation. To save these Binyamin's, we cannot wait for someone to appoint committees that will conduct lengthy research and then deliberate over what should be done and how much it will cost, etc. When lives are at stake, we must do whatever we can to save them, immediately.

Yehudah's efforts proved unexpectedly fruitful: his presumed enemy proved to be his greatest ally, and even Pharaoh himself provided the greatest possible means for securing the uncompromised continuity of Jewish tradition. So it will be when we follow Yehudah's example, selflessly and vigorously exerting ourselves on behalf of our children. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, pp. 216-217) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

FOR THE GLORY OF HASHEM

Reb Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz

“And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, ‘If you please, my lord...’” (44:18)

Yehudah told Yosef to immediately free Binyamin so that everyone could exalt Hashem. An acrostic of the words גדלו לה' אתי ונרוממה (And he approached him) is ויגש אליו - “Declare the greatness of Hashem with me, and let us exalt His Name together.”

HASHEM’S TIGHT GRIP

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“We said to my master; ‘The lad cannot leave his father, for if he left his father he would die.’” (44:22)

Mashal: A little boy from South Florida decided to go for a swim by himself in the lake behind his house. Gleefully, he dove into the water and was enjoying himself when he heard his mother shriek. The boy's mother had looked out the window and seen that her son was swimming alone. She then saw an alligator quickly closing in on him. Terrified, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son to swim back to shore. He tried, but he couldn't get there in time. Just as he neared the shore, the alligator reached him.

From the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. An incredible tug-of-war between the two ensued. The alligator was much stronger, but the mother loved her son too much to let go. A farmer happened to drive by and heard the screams. He raced from his pickup truck and shot the alligator. Remarkably, after weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred from the vicious attack of the animal, and on his arms were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails had dug into him in her effort to hang on to the son she loved.

A newspaper reporter who interviewed the boy after the trauma asked if he'd show him his scars. The boy lifted up his pant leg. Then, with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, “But look at my arms. I have scars on my arms, too. You know why I have them? Because my mom wouldn't let go.”

Nimshal: Yehudah's clinching argument to Yosef was that his father could never let go of his youngest son, for doing so would kill him. This is how Hashem, up above, guards and protects us here on this perilous earth. The swimming hole of life is filled with peril. There is always a tug-of-war between good and evil. As the yetzer hara scars our legs with aveiros, Hashem is scarring our arms with tzaros, but He only does so to get us out of the yetzer hara's grasp. Therefore, we shouldn't complain that our tefillos concerning our tzaros aren't being answered, because those taros are the answer. We should be very grateful for those scars on our arms, because they portend a message for all times: Just like Yaakov Avinu clung to his son, Hashem will not let us go.

STEPPING CLOSER

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, ‘If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears...’” (44:18)

We are all familiar with the custom of taking three steps forward before we begin Shemoneh Esrei. The Rokeach brings down the source of this minhag as the three places in the Torah where it says the word “vayigash.” One is the opening word of our parshah, when Yehudah came close, and the other two are “vayigash Avraham” (Bereishis 18:23) and “vayigash Eliyahu” (Melachim I 18:36).

Yehudah was already standing in front of Yosef together with his brothers. Why was it necessary for Yehudah to move even closer at this time? This, says Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt'l, is the nature of a person. When one wants to make an important request of another individual, he tries to become closer to him. And this is exactly the nature of tefillah. When a person stands before Hashem in prayer, ready to verbalize an entire list of requests for himself and his family in the Shemoneh Esrei, he should want to move forward, to feel closer to Hashem.

Vayigash connotes the idea of moving another notch closer, raising our level of deveikus (attachment) to Hashem. In the two instances of Avraham Avinu and Eliyahu HaNavi, even before it says the word “vayigash,” they were already in a state of nevuah, which, of course, is the closest a human being can come to Hashem. And yet, explains R' Aharon Leib, the expression of “vayigash” emphasizes that no matter where we are holding, we can always move forward in our deveikus to Hashem.

We daven three times a day, sometimes even more. Each time we daven we must strive to reach the level of “vayigash” by taking three baby steps forward physically, while at the same time taking three giant spiritual steps in our deveikus to Hashem.

STRIVING FOR UNITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, ‘If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my Lord's ears and may your anger not flare up at your servant...’” (44:18)

Vayigash - “and he approached,” implies a physical meeting, one person approaching another to the point where they become one. According to the Zohar, when Yehudah drew near to Yosef, it symbolized the approach of one world to the other, the uniting of one with the other till one entity was attained.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson zt'l, writes that the word “vayigash” stands for the creation of unity in a place of discord and disharmony. Yehudah's offer to sacrifice himself on behalf of Binyamin demonstrated the unity and brotherhood that finally reigned between the sons of Yaakov.

Yosef's revelation of his true identity and his subsequent reconciliation with what his brothers had done to him likewise symbolized the unification of all twelve shevatim, forever granting their descendants the power to achieve true achdus and unity when the ultimate Redemption is finally upon us.

The rest of Parshas Vayigash also expresses this theme, as the whole purpose of Yaakov's descent into Egypt and his children's settlement there for hundreds of years was solely for the purpose of demonstrating Hashem's unity in one of the lowliest places on earth. It was in Egypt, the most corrupt among the nations according to our Sages, that the Jewish people became a holy and unified nation.

Unity is the essential foundation upon which Jewish life is built. Just as the holy shevatim understood that they could not maintain a brotherly status without reconciliation and peace, so we must realize that we cannot maintain the Jewish nation without achdus.

But not only is unity the goal we strive for, it is the objective of all our service to Hashem as well, one that will be fully realized only with the revelation of Mashiach.

TOO HIGH AND MIGHTY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"If your youngest brother does not come down with you, you will not see my face again!" (44:23)

There are people who are very materialistic. They have the necessities of life and are very comfortable and so they have an attitude of superiority.

The same is true on a spiritual level.

There are those who learn day and night. Their demeanor is that of people who are servants of G-d, learned and strict observers of Halachah, whose main purpose is to obtain a place in Heaven. However, some have a superior attitude with little concern for others, sometimes not even for their own children. As long as they can guarantee themselves a place in Heaven, they are happy and satisfied.

About these people the Torah says, "If your youngest brother does not come down with you," - if you are not concerned with your brother, who is not on your level or status - then, the Torah continues, "You will not see My face again."

BINDING LOVE

Rebbe Nachman

"Now, if I come to my father, your servant, the boy will not be with us. His soul is bound up with his soul." (44:30)

When a person attains great love for the tzaddik, he is bound to the tzaddik's soul. (See Likutey Moharan I, 135)

IT WILL ALL MAKE SENSE

Chofetz Chaim

"And he said, 'I am Yosef, your brother...'" (45:4)

The entire sequence of incomprehensible events that led to the brothers standing before Yosef in Egypt, became instantly rationalized the moment he said, אני יוסף - "I am Yosef." Similarly, in the future, when the nations of the world will hear the immortal words אני ה' אלוקיכם - "I am Hashem, your G-d," all the seemingly inexplicable occurrences that shape the world on a day-to-day basis, will become clear.

GROWING THROUGH ADVERSITY

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"And he said, 'I am Yosef, your brother, whom you sold to Egypt...'" (45:4)

When Yosef finally revealed his identity to his brothers, he announced to them, אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אותי מצרימה - "I am Yosef, your brother, whom you sold to Egypt."

The Sefas Emes raises the question of why Yosef emphasized at this moment that they had sold him as a slave. In the very next pasuk, he urged them not to feel ashamed or overcome by guilt over what they did to him, because Hashem arranged that this should happen in order to rescue Egypt and the world from hunger. It was because they sold him as a slave to Egypt that he ended up interpreting Pharaoh's dreams and foreseeing the seven famine years, which in turn led to his storing grain to save the region from starvation. Yosef therefore assured his brothers that this was Hashem's plan, such that they should not wallow in guilt over what they did to him. If Yosef's purpose at this point was to ease his brothers' concerns, and to assure them that they had no reason to feel ashamed, then why did he make a point of emphasizing, אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אותי מצרימה - that they had sold him as a slave?

The Sefas Emes answers this question by offering a fascinating, novel interpretation to this pasuk. He notes that the word אשר can sometimes mean "because of." Accordingly, the Sefas Emes suggests reading Yosef's remark to mean, "I am your brother Yosef because you sold me to Egypt." Yosef was telling his brothers that he became the person he became, the outstanding, righteous figure that Yosef was, specifically because of the ordeals that he endured. It was a result of his struggles and hardship that he grew and developed into Yosef HaTzaddik. Of course, he did not want all this to happen, and it was not pleasant going through everything he went through. But over the course of this difficult, painful process, Yosef became Yosef, the extraordinary figure that he was.

Many of us have many regrets, and we wish that many things which happened in our past would not have happened. We sometimes think, "If only my parents had raised me differently," "If only I had better teachers," "If only I had a better group of friends," and so on. But the truth is that everything in our lives, even that which we would have preferred to have unfolded differently, contributed to building us into the people that we are, and contributed to our growth.

Rav Yehoshua Neubert zt'l, perhaps the most famous disciple of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, was the author of Shemiras Shabbos Ke'hilchasah, which until today serves as the most important compilation of halachos relevant to Shabbos. In the introduction to this work, Rav Neubert gives the fascinating background to this monumental project. His family survived the Holocaust by hiding in an apartment for three years. Throughout this period, they stayed in place, without even approaching a window, to avoid being seen, and somebody brought them food so they wouldn't starve. All Rav Neubert had with him was a Maseches Kesubos and the third volume of Mishna Berura, which discusses hilchos Shabbos. He spent these three years learning this volume numerous times, until he knew hilchos Shabbos backwards and forwards. The knowledge he amassed during these three years of isolation is what put him in the position to write a work on hilchos Shabbos. But the decision to undertake this project was made later, when the family was given the opportunity to emigrate to Israel by ship. The ship left on Shabbos, and the family felt that this was a matter of פיקוח נפש (a potentially life-threatening situation), as their lives would be in danger if they remained. They therefore traveled to Israel on Shabbos. Rav Neubert pledged that although he was permitted to travel on that Shabbos, nevertheless, in order to "compensate" for his inability to observe Shabbos that week, he would author a sefer about hilchos Shabbos.

This story is an inspiring example of אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מרתם - of how adversity and hardship can spur a person to growth and achievement. While we certainly do not hope for difficult challenges and crises, when we face hardship we must embrace it as an opportunity for growth, an occasion to build ourselves into the great people that we are capable of becoming.

ALL FOR THE BEST

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And now, do not be distressed, and do not admonish yourselves for having sold me, for it was to preserve life that I was sent by Hashem ahead of you." (45:5)

Yosef's revelation to his brothers and his self-effacing words to put their minds at ease clearly displays the magnitude of his piety. His realization of the Divine plan for being sent to Egypt caused him to remove any resentment toward his brothers. His words sent a clear message that he totally forgave them for all the suffering that they caused him. Yosef reassured and comforted them by appealing to their emotions and emphasizing that Hashem planned his sale for their benefit.

Rav Avigdor Miller zt'l remarks that one of Yosef's most noble middos was his clear understanding that every event in his life was managed solely by Hashem for his benefit, and there was therefore no room for complaining. Instead of becoming depressed and embittered by the catastrophe that took him from the love and honor of his father's home to being sold and degraded as a lowly slave, he sought to make the best of every step of his life.

JOYFUL RETURN

Mishmeres Itmer

"And now, do not be distressed, and do not admonish yourselves for having sold me..." (45:5)

In other words, "And now that you are repenting your actions on selling me as a slave, do not repent in distress."

The highest form of repentance is with happiness, joy, and love.

SOURCE OF HOPE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And now, do not be distressed, and do not admonish yourselves for having sold me, for it was to preserve life that I was sent by Hashem ahead of you." (45:5)

Once a person is close to the tzaddik, he has every reason to rejoice, and he can overcome depression. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 156a)

Because Yosef resisted temptation, he merited to bring inspiration and life to all those who followed him, even into the darkest exile. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 326)

FOLLOW THE GPS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And he said, 'I am Yosef, your brother, whom you sold to Egypt. And now, do not be distressed, and do not admonish yourselves for having sold me, for it was to preserve life that I was sent by Hashem ahead of you.'" (45:4-5)

Yosef's admission of his true identity to the brothers was quickly followed by comforting words that he bore them no grudge, for he knew that being sent to Egypt was Divinely orchestrated and for a positive purpose. Although the reason might not have been clear when Yosef was sold as a slave or thrown into jail, now that the brothers had presented themselves before him and would begin their family's descent to Egypt, everyone was able to see Hashem's hand in the entire episode.

The message that we never truly know where we are headed, but we are always heading in the right direction is no less relevant for us than it was for Yosef and his brothers.

If we use the analogy of a GPS device guiding our journey, we realize that at times, although it seems to us like the road ahead is clear, that is only because our limited view does not see too far ahead of us. When we trust the GPS device, we are recognizing that it has information about our future journey that we are not privy to.

In the same way, our life view is limited, and we must trust Hashem that whichever route we are being led on is the correct route for us and that it will take us to our intended destination in the quickest possible way. And although it might not always be the most pleasant or scenic route, it is the path we need to be on.

SEEKING THE TZADDIK

Rabbi Chaim Kramer

"...for it was to preserve life that I was sent by Hashem ahead of you." (45:5)

Our sages say that when Yosef's brothers entered the gates of Egypt to search for Yosef, they were willing, with self-sacrifice, to bring him out at any cost, either to be killed or to kill. In this, they atoned for their sin of selling him. They then merited to find him and reach their redemption.

This principle applies to every generation, where individuals need to, with genuine self-sacrifice, seek the Tzaddik.

When they are willing to give of themselves for this purpose, they find him. This personal redemption, finding the Tzaddik, brings life to all the worlds.

This is what the verse implies: "For to preserve life, G-d sent me ahead of you," that through the merit of the Tzaddik, there is life in the world literally, and through his merit, everyone will also merit the complete future redemption very soon, Amen.

RETURNING WITH HAPPINESS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And now, do not be distressed..." (45:5)

Yosef attempted to lift the spirits of his brothers after he revealed himself to them. Rav Avraham of Slonim (Toras Avos) provides a moving interpretation of Yosef's words of comfort. He explains using the Midrash Rabbah in Parshas Bereishis.

The Midrash teaches that the word v'atah - "and now," is a reference to doing teshuvah. Based on this, Yosef is telling his brothers that while they will need to repent for their actions, they must not do so out of sadness. Instead, they must do teshuvah for their sins out of Simchah.

Rav Avraham of Slonim is teaching us that no matter what we have done in our lives, which may have caused distance between us and other people or between us and Hashem, we must nevertheless always make sure that we continue to have simchas ha'chaim throughout it all.

Simchah is a mindset that must serve as the framework for our lives as Jews. With this in mind, we are sure to overcome whatever hurdles may be laid before us.

WORLDLY INFLUENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yosef said to his brothers,] 'G-d sent me ahead of you to ensure that you survive in [this] land.'" (45:7)

When G-d arranged for Yosef to rule over Egypt, this included the mandate to positively influence it spiritually, as well. Therefore, when (in the following verse) Yosef alluded to his position and ability, he made it clear to his

brothers that he was not acting as their emissaries, but as G-d's: "It was not you who sent me here, but G-d. He has made me... ruler over all Egypt."

Egypt is the archetype of all exiles, and Yosef is the archetype of all Jewish leaders. Thus, the ability to positively influence reality, even during exile, is vested in Yosef's heirs, the spiritual leaders of each generation.

When we act as their emissaries - inspired, empowered, and guided by them - we too possess the ability to affect the entire world positively. We do this by encouraging our fellow Jews to embrace the teachings of the Torah, and by encouraging all humanity to embrace the Noahide laws - in order to create a world of justice, goodness, and kindness. (See Mishneh Torah, Melachim 8:10-11; Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 224-228) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HIDDEN TREASURES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"He [Hashem] has made me as a father to Pharaoh, and ruler over all the land of Egypt." (45:8)

Chazal tell us that Yosef hid three treasures in Egypt. One was revealed to Korach; one was revealed to Antoninus; and the last is still buried, awaiting the righteous in future days (Midrash).

Obviously, this cannot be referring to material treasure - gold, silver, and precious stones - since the pasuk tells us when every last resident of Egypt sold himself into the service of Pharaoh, including all his money and possessions, in return for sustenance, "Yosef brought all the money to the palace of Pharaoh." He never kept an extra penny for himself, and he certainly did not hoard Pharaoh's booty.

Rather, says R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt'l, the three treasures that Yosef hid were spiritual fortunes:

The first was Yosef's ability to maintain his purity and tznius - modesty, within the hedonistic Egyptian society. This wealth was revealed during the sad story of the uprising of Korach, when traitorous men rebelled against the leadership of Klal Yisrael; however, when the wife of one of the rebel leaders, Oin Ben Peles, saved her husband by uncovering her hair at the entrance to her tent, even the wicked instigators were compelled to turn away!

The second treasure was Yosef's devotion to Torah while in exile. Many years later, when the Torah was in jeopardy of being forgotten by the Jewish people, due to the harshness of the exile, along came the great Rabbeinu Hakadosh, who revealed Yosef's hidden treasure by recording the main tenets of the Torah for all posterity, thanks to the benevolence of the Roman ruler, Antoninus.

The last treasure hidden by Yosef was the quality of achdus - unity, and as the Navi tells us, this middah can only be revealed when Klal Yisrael will become unified, leading up to the coming of Mashiach.

MINIMIZING DISCIPLINE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Hurry and go up to my father and tell him, ‘Thus says your son Yosef: G-d has made me lord of all Egypt...’” (45:9)

At this moment, Yosef realized that his father had been separated from him for exactly 22 years. He understood prophetically that this was Divine providence's way of rectifying Yaakov's failure to honor his parents during the 22 years he was separated from them. Now that the 22 years were up, Yosef urged his brothers to hastily bring their father to Egypt so that his punishment of separation could end without even one moment of unnecessary delay.

This teaches us that although discipline and corrective punishment are at times necessary (see Sotah 47a, Sanhedrin 107b), we must limit our use of such measures to the absolute minimum. The very moment that they become unnecessary, we must immediately and urgently revert to the ways of kindness and affection. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 389-390)

CROWNING HASHEM

Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin

“Hurry and go up to my father and tell him: ‘Thus says your son Yosef: G-d has made me lord of all Egypt...’” (45:9)

Why should that have been such good news for Yaakov?

The Hebrew word “somani” (has made me) may be rendered as “som ani” (I have put). Thus, the message that Yosef actually sought to convey to his aged father was not that he, Yosef, had come to astonishing power, but that “I put the Lord over all of Egypt,” that Yosef had become the instrument to spread G-d's ways so that G-d would become master of Egypt and over all the world.

MANIFESTING DESTINY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“G-d has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me; do not delay...” (45:9)

The primary purpose of the Egyptian exile was for the Jewish people to liberate the sparks of holiness that were trapped in Egypt. Since Egypt was the economic superpower of that era, the wealth of the whole civilized world was tied to that of Egypt. Thus, when the Jewish people took the wealth of Egypt with them when they later left, they were not only elevating the wealth of Egypt but that of all the nations of the world. This is why Yosef told his father that he was the master of Egypt: He was saying, “Now that I have become ruler over Egypt and gathered the world's wealth, the Egyptian exile can begin, since the fulfillment of its purpose is now possible.”

Similarly, the purpose of our present exile is to elevate the physical world by revealing the G-dliness inherent in it. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 823)

PREPARED FOR THE PEOPLE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Tell my father about all my glory in Egypt and about everything that you have seen. You must hurry and bring my father down here.” (45:13)

Tell Yaakov not to worry about coming down to Egypt, where the impurities of the exile might overwhelm us. Since I have kept my honor and not blemished my soul, I have prepared the way for the Jewish people to remain steadfast during the exile. (Likutei Halakhot II, p. 67a)

ACCORDING HONOR

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Tell my father about all my glory in Egypt and about everything that you have seen. You must hurry and bring my father down here.” (45:13)

The pasuk tells us that Yosef wanted his brothers to describe to their father all the greatness that was attributed to him as the viceroy of Egypt. It appears as if Yosef was showing off in front of them. In reality, though, writes the Apter Rav, R' Avraham Yehoshua Heshel zt'l, Yosef was not bragging at all, as a man of his virtue was not given to such behavior. Rather, in his humility, Yosef was claiming that all the honor that was awarded to him in Egypt was because he was the son of his great and holy father, Yaakov.

In a similar vein, a story is told of the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, R' Yehudah Zev Segal zt'l. He was once returning from his annual summer retreat at the Austrian mountainside. He traveled with one of his close talmidim. Together they flew from Austria to London, and boarded a train bound for Manchester.

As the train was pulling into the Manchester rail station, the young student opened up the curtains and looked outside. He was amazed to see a huge assemblage of Bnei Torah standing on the platform, waiting to greet the Rosh Yeshiva.

The Rosh Yeshiva and his student disembarked from the train. The large crowd broke out into lively singing and clapping. R' Yehudah Zev paused for a moment and turned to his talmid. Amidst the loud noise of the crowd, he said, “Take a look and see what they have done for you!”

The young man did not know how to respond. Finally, he asked, “Why does the Rosh Yeshiva think that all this honor is for me? Surely the people are doing all this l'kavod the Rosh Yeshiva - certainly not for me!”

In all seriousness, without the slightest hint of a joke, R' Yehudah Zev pointed into the crowd, at the large sign that the well-wishers were holding high above their heads. “But don't you see?” replied the Rosh Yeshiva. “The sign says clearly 'Bruchim habaim' in the plural form. Had they only meant to welcome me, it would have just said 'Baruch haba' - in the singular!”

MEANT WHAT WAS SAID

Reb Asher Horowitz

“Behold, your eyes see, as well as the eyes of my brother Binyamin, that it is my mouth speaking to you.” (45:12)

Yosef was in substance saying that both his mouth and his heart were united. “What I am saying to you with my mouth, I feel with my heart.”

ILLUMINATING THE MIND

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Behold, your eyes see, as well as the eyes of my brother Binyamin, that it is my mouth speaking to you.” (45:12)

My master and teacher, the righteous R' Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, taught, “Just as there is light and darkness in the world, so too in the mind of man there is light and darkness.” However, when one hears the speech of a tzaddik, the person's intellect is purified, and his eyes are illuminated.

This is the significance of the phrase in this verse “Your eyes see.” The word for “see” (ראות) is related to the word for “illuminating” (מאירות), allowing this verse to be understood to mean, “Your eyes have been illuminated and your mind has been purified, because it is my mouth speaking to you.”

This is so, for the words of the righteous refine the minds of those who listen to them.

GLORIOUS RESILIENCE

Reb Baruch of Mezhibuz

“Tell my father of all my glory...” (45:13)

The word k'vodi (my glory) can also mean “difficult,” from the word kaved.

Yosef asked that his father be told that amidst all the difficulties of being with impure people, he still clung to the Almighty.

NO NEED FOR CONCERN

Divrei Shaul

“Tell my father of all my glory in Egypt...” (45:13)

Why did Yosef instruct his brothers to say these words to Yaakov? Would Yaakov care about Yosef's glory in Egypt? Yaakov was wary of descending to Egypt, for he realized that this marked the beginning of the exile. Throughout our nation's history, many Jews have fallen by the spiritual wayside either due to their suffering or because they were seduced by the riches they amassed. Yosef told them, “The actions of our forefathers is an omen for their children.’ I experienced both extremes; humiliating slavery and fabulous glory, and I have retained my spiritual standing. Please tell this to my father to alleviate his fears.”

PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And he [Yosef] fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept, and Binyamin wept on his neck.” (45:14)

Rashi comments that Yosef cried because he had a prophecy in which both Batei Mikdash, in Binyamin's designated area in Yerushalayim, were going to be destroyed, and Binyamin cried because he, too, had a prophecy in which the Mishkan Shiloh, in the part of Eretz Yisrael that would belong to Yosef's descendants, would be destroyed.

Rav Yechezkel of Kuzmir asks why Yosef cried because of what would befall Binyamin's descendants and why Binyamin cried due to what Yosef's progeny would experience. Why didn't they cry because of the fate of their own families instead of crying for each other's families?

Rav Yechezkel of Kuzmir shares an incredible lesson. He explains that a Jew must always care more about his brother than he does about himself. It is for this reason that Rashi notes that Yosef cried for Binyamin and Binyamin cried for Yosef. The Torah is teaching us that to be part of Klal Yisrael is to care more about others than ourselves! Now more than ever, we need to internalize this lesson and look out for each other in order to bring our ultimate destiny to fruition.

RECTIFYING BASELESS HATRED

Reb Yechezkel of Kuzmir

“And he [Yosef] fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept, and Binyamin wept on his neck.” (45:14)

Yosef wept for the two Holy Temples that were to be in the territory of the Tribe of Binyamin and would ultimately be laid in ruins, and Binyamin wept for the Tabernacle of Shilo that was to be in the territory of the Tribe of Yosef and would ultimately be destroyed. (Rashi)

Why should the two brothers have wept at this hour of rejoicing, and why should each have wept over the other's misfortune rather than over his own?

Because they were both aware of the tragic consequences of hatred without just cause. We know that it was this evil of baseless hatred that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem's two Holy Temples. When Yosef and Binyamin were reunited, they recalled that their separation had come about because of the baseless hatred of their brothers. Being endowed with prophetic vision, the two men thought of the calamities that would befall their descendants in days to come because of the same sin that had caused their own distress, and therefore they both wept.

The remedy for hatred without just cause is to strengthen the bonds of mutual affection to such an extent that someone else's sorrow will cause more pain than one's own.

That was why Yosef and Binyamin each wept over the calamity that was to strike the descendants of the other. Binyamin knew that the First Bais HaMikdash - which was to stand in the territory of his descendants - could not be built unless the Sanctuary in the territory of the Tribe of Yosef would first be destroyed. Yet he wept at the thought, for he would rather not have the Bais HaMikdash built in his tribal territory if it meant the destruction of the Sanctuary in the tribal land of Yosef. Such a love is great enough to act as a remedy for baseless hatred.

SHARING THEIR BURDEN

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And he [Yosef] fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept, and Binyamin wept on his neck.” (45:14)

Chazal teach us a very important lesson regarding the incident when Yosef and Binyamin cried on each other's shoulders: Each one felt the other's pain - being “nose b'ol im chaveiro” - sharing the burden and anguish of the other. Yosef cried over the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash situated in the portion of Binyamin, while Binyamin cried for the loss of Mishkan Shilo in Yosef's portion. This was not just brotherly love; this is the way every Jew must feel toward his fellow Jew.

Chessed can be done by many people on many different levels. Sometimes we help others because we feel sorry for them; sometimes because we feel sorry for ourselves - there are many ulterior motives. The middah of nosei b'ol im chaveiro, however, can only be achieved with complete sincerity.

R' Yeruchem Levovitz zt'l says that it is not enough to see or hear someone's pain; to truly help another, we must feel and understand their pain. When someone understands another's pain, it automatically becomes relieved somewhat, just as when a person feels another's joy, the happiness is automatically heightened. One cannot always singlehandedly solve other people's problems, but by simply taking the time to listen, to recognize the issues that the other faces, a kind word, an act of sincere kindness - one cannot imagine how much he has helped.

This middah is called “nosei b'ol im chaveiro,” as opposed to “b'ol chaveiro,” to signify that a Jew is not expected to carry the full burden of others. Rather, we are supposed to share the burden, by relating to others as true friends - with concern, love and sincerity.

It is not enough to be just a chaver; we must be “im chaveiro” - compassionate with our friends at all times.

HEARTFELT TEFILLOS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And he [Yosef] kissed all of his brothers and cried on them, and afterwards his brothers spoke with him.” (45:15)

Rashi notes that while the brothers initially refused Yosef's overtures out of fear, their worries dissipated when they saw Yosef begin to cry. Once they saw Yosef's genuine emotion, they were moved to be open to a relationship and began to speak “ito - with him,” in a brotherly type of way.

The Midrash Rabbah shares something very powerful. The Midrash comments that the same way the brothers were appeased and open to reconciling their relationship with Yosef only when he began to cry, so too Hashem will be willing to redeem us only when He sees us cry out to Him with genuine tefillos.

In life, we often fall into the trap of davening without concentration or emotion. We say the words without feeling or thought, and yet, we expect Hashem to fulfill our requests. The Midrash is reminding us that we must focus when we daven. We need to recognize the incredible privilege we have, on a daily basis, to stand before our Creator and connect to Him. We can't take it for granted. With this in mind, we can ensure that our tefillos serve as a powerful conduit to strengthen our relationship with Hashem and allow Him to provide for our every need.

AGED TO PERFECTION

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“To his [Yosef's] father he sent... ten donkeys laden with the good things of Egypt...” (45:23)

Yosef sent Yaakov the old wine that elderly people like very much. (Rashi)

What was Yosef's purpose in sending this gift of wine to his aged father? The gift was to set Yaakov's mind at ease, conveying to his father in allegorical terms the message that while to all outer appearances Yosef had adopted new ways, dressing and behaving like an Egyptian ruler, he had changed neither in mind nor in spirit. The outer trappings were new, but deep within his heart and soul Yosef had maintained intact the tradition he had received from his father Yaakov. (Compare with: “...a new pitcher can be full of old wine” - Pirkei Avos 4:27.)

Wine is unusual in that it improves with age. Hence, a gift of old wine conveys a message of encouragement to elderly people, reminding them that in some cases age can be highly desirable.

RADIATING WITH JOY

Rebbe Nachman

“They told him all the words that Yosef had told them... [then] the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived.” (45:27)

The spirit of Yaakov was revived as a result of his joy. When a person is joyful, he gains life and can attain the Light of the Face - an awesome level of radiating spiritual light that helps subdue the face of darkness.

THINKING HOLY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him. [Then] the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." (45:27)

Mashal: A wealthy resident of Vilna married off his daughter in grand fashion to a man whom they soon realized was unstable. Not long after the festivities settled down, the man took off and left the city. No one had any idea what happened to him or where he went. The rich man spent copious amounts of money trying to locate his son-in-law all over the country.

Quite a number of years later, a man came to town professing to be the erstwhile son-in-law. While the rich man and his family were thrilled that he turned up, the luckless wife was not fully convinced that this was really her husband. He knew every detail of their former lives, but still she was unsure.

They finally asked the holy Vilna Gaon zt'l what to do. He advised the rich man to accompany his "son-in-law" to shul and have him point out where they sat. The rich man followed the Vilna Gaon's advice, and sure enough, the "son-in-law" could not say where their seats were. He was quickly exposed as an impostor, and admitted that having spent time with the real husband in jail, he had heard all about the family and had come up with this scheme.

"Sitting in shul is a *davar she'bekedusha* - a holy act," said the Gaon "and a liar would never think about it!"

Nimshal: When the brothers told their father that Yosef was alive, he didn't believe them, until they showed him the *agalos* - wagons that Yosef had sent, a reference to *eglah arufah*, the last topic in Torah that Yosef had learned with him. Only then did Yaakov fully believe, because only his true son would think to remind him of a holy Torah concept.

HEALTHY REGRET

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d said to Yaakov,] 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for it is there that I will make you into a great nation.'" (46:3)

G-d was not trying to soothe Yaakov's regret over leaving the Promised Land, for a Jew should regret not living in the Land of Israel. Rather, G-d was telling Yaakov that his regret over going into exile was the key to not becoming intimidated by it, and therefore, the key to overcoming it.

Since G-d put us in exile, it follows that He has given us all the strength we need to overcome its challenges. As long as the exile continues, it is the optimal setting for our individual and collective growth and development. Here, however, lurks a great danger. When we realize that we have no reason to be intimidated by exile and that we benefit so greatly from it, we can fall into the trap of becoming habituated to it.

As a consequence, we can become vulnerable to exile's negative effects on us, and it goes without saying that we can no longer elevate it properly.

Therefore, like Yaakov, we should always cultivate regret over the fact that we are not in our proper environment, the Land of Israel in the Messianic Redemption. As long as we remember who we really are and the lives we are really meant to lead, we need not fear exile; we will overcome it. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 234-235) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

KEEP ON STRIVING

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up." (46:4)

Even when a person reaches a high level in his observance, it is still incumbent upon him to continue to strive for new levels.

DESCENT FOR THE ASCENT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up." (46:4)

All descents are for the purpose of ascent. One must learn to strengthen himself during the difficult times - the times of descent - because those times are intended to forge him into a greater person. He can draw strength by contemplating that G-d is always with him, both when things are just beginning to look bad and when the situation starts to look much darker.

Yaakov was about to descend into exile with his entire family, and he foresaw that this exile would continue for several generations. Yet he strengthened himself with the knowledge that G-d is with every person both in the descent and during the duration of his troubles, and He waits with the person for his salvation and ascent. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 286-288)

G-d accompanies the Jews in all their descents; He is found with them in all circumstances. In the phrase "A'alcha gam aloh" (I will also bring you up), the word aloh (above) seems redundant. This word teaches that when G-d begins to elevate us, He does so continually. He elevates us again and again, to ever higher levels. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 25)

Anokhi (I) is the same as "Anokhi (I) am G-d your Lord, Who took you out of the land of Egypt (מצרים, Mitzrayim)" (Shemos 20:2). As long as you remember that "I am G-d your Lord," I will be there to take you out of your suffering (מצר, Meitzar). Not only that, but ve'Anokhi a'alcha (literally, "I will elevate you") - you will merit to go higher and higher, to become greater and greater.

HASHEM IS WITH US

Sefas Emes

"I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up." (46:4)

The Master of the Universe promised the generations beyond Yaakov that no matter where His children were dispersed, He would be with them, as the verse states, "I will descend with you to Egypt."

PAVING THE WAY

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up." (46:4)

There are different types of leaders and different methods of leadership, which can be explained with the following parable:

A king moved to a tower, and the approach to him was very difficult. There were winding staircases, hidden nooks, and corners. A person wanted to reach the king and started going to the tower. He tried every which way but found it very difficult to reach his destination.

Another person tried and each time he made a mistake and took a wrong turn. However, he put a mark so that the mistake should not be made again by him or anyone else who wished to approach the king.

MANY FROM FEW

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"These are the sons of Rochel that were born to Yaakov. And the sons of Dan were Chushim." (46:22-23)

If Dan only had one son, Chushim, why does the Torah use the term "and the sons of Dan" in plural? The Gemara provides a cryptic explanation: For they were numerous like the stalks of reeds (Bava Basra 143b).

The Maharsha, Rav Shmuel HaLevi Eidels zt'l, elaborates on the words of the Gemara and states that, in fact, the tribe of Dan was unique. Although Dan himself only had one son, Hashem blessed his shevet in that they multiplied exponentially far beyond what would have seemed natural.

In praise of Shevet Dan, the midrash writes: "Dan approached his father with his only likeness / only son and was blessed with seventy thousand. Binyamin approached his father with ten [sons] and was blessed with forty thousand." Binyamin bore ten sons and Dan bore only one. But in the long run, Shevet Dan was almost double as populous as Binyamin.

For this reason, the Torah mentions the sons of Dan - to allude to this miraculous and unusual occurrence, whereby Shevet Dan grew from one single offspring to the second most populous tribe.

TEST OF EXILE

Rebbe Nachman

"All the souls of the house of Yaakov who came to Egypt were seventy." (46:27)

It was the beginning of the exile and Yaakov and his descendants were about to enter Egypt, the land of immorality. This descent was necessary because the Jewish people had to pass a test in the crucible of the seventy nations - a test of immorality - before they merited the revelation of Torah.

This test is mirrored in the life of every single Jew as well, for he must endure the "exile of the seventy nations" before he receives his personal revelation of Torah. (See Likutey Moharan I, 36)

TANGIBLE REMINDER

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky

"All the souls of the house of Yaakov who came to Egypt were seventy." (46:27)

Avraham planted acacia trees in Be'er Sheva. When Yaakov went down to Egypt, he transplanted the trees there. He told his sons that Hashem would one day command them to build a Mishkan, and they should use these trees. Surely there were suitable trees in Egypt! Why did the Patriarchs go to all this trouble?

They did so to raise the spirits of their descendants who would be enslaved in Egypt. It was not enough to promise the Jews that they would be redeemed; the groves of acacia trees that Yaakov planted in Egypt were a tangible reminder that their eventual salvation was a reality.

STRENGTH OF FAITH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"All the souls of the house of Yaakov who came to Egypt were seventy." (46:27)

The mission of the Jewish people is to be a light to the 70 nations of the world, and spiritually, they could not begin this mission until they themselves numbered 70 unique individuals. The person who completed the number of 70 persons was Yaakov's granddaughter Yocheved, who was born just as Yaakov's family was entering Egypt.

It was no accident that Yocheved was the one who brought Yaakov's family to this new level, for she and her children later emerged as living examples of the enormous power of faith. She and her daughter Miriam inspired the Jewish people to trust in G-d by defying Pharaoh's command to kill all newborn male Jewish babies (Shemos 1:17). Yocheved's sons, Moshe and Aharon, revived the people's belief in redemption (ibid. 4:29-31). Thus, Yocheved's unwavering faith played a pivotal role in the Jewish people's redemption from Egypt.

The same holds true today: it is our faith in the ultimate Redemption - which we learn from Yocheved's example - that empowers us to fulfill our mission of spreading Divine consciousness to all humanity and thereby hastening the advent of the Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, pp. 218) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TENDER SHEPHERDS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"The men are shepherds, for they are owners of livestock. Their sheep, their cattle, and all their possessions they have brought [with them]." (46:32)

Chazal tell us that Yosef portrayed his brothers as "anshei mikneh - men (who deal) with cattle." This was purposely done in order to avoid their appearance as strong warriors, who might then be taken as soldiers for Pharaoh's army. But it would have been enough to call them people who deal in farm animals; why had Yosef felt it necessary to distinctly call them "ro'ei tzon - shepherds?" This is a less-than-flattering accolade, especially considering the superstitiousness of the sheep-worshipping Egyptians.

R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer zt'l, the Ksav Sofer, explains: There is an obvious and distinct difference between a warrior and a shepherd. The nature of a warrior is one of aggressive, often violent tendencies, in order to better out fox and destroy his enemy. The nature of a shepherd is exactly the opposite - one of caring and tenderness towards the animals, maintaining their well-being and health. Hence, we find that Hashem chose Moshe Rabbeinu and David HaMelech, both shepherds, to lead the Jewish people, since they best characterized the model of what a leader should epitomize.

Yosef, in an effort to shield his brothers from being commissioned into battle, gave his brothers' occupation, but more than that, he described their nature and defining characteristics, as well. The fact that they were "shepherds" precluded any possibility of them being used to fight in wars, since without a warrior's ambition, what good would they be to Pharaoh?

MAKE SURE TO SMILE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Pharaoh said to Yaakov, 'How many are the days of the years of your life?'" (47:8)

When Yaakov and Pharaoh first meet, Pharaoh immediately asks "How old are you?" to which Yaakov answers "few and bad have been the days of the years of my life."

The Daas Zekeinim brings a Midrash that says: for each word Yaakov used to "complain" about his life, he would live a year less than his father - and since there are thirty-three words used here, Yaakov lived thirty-three years less than Yitzchak.

The question, says Rav Chaim Shmuelovits, is that when we actually analyze those thirty-three words, we can ask, why are the words "And Pharaoh says to Yaakov" included in the count? Also included is Pharaoh's initial question "how many are the days of the years of your life?" In total, there are eight words included even before Yaakov has a chance to speak. If so, why does Yaakov lose eight years of his life when he did not even start to complain until the ninth word of this section in the Torah?

Rav Chaim answers that Yaakov was in fact to blame for all thirty-three words. Because were it not for the fact that Yaakov had felt that he was suffering, he would not have looked so old. And if Yaakov would not have appeared so old, Pharaoh would never have asked him this question in the first place. Therefore, since the initial question was a result of Yaakov's lack of gratitude to Hashem for all that He had done for him, it was fitting for him to be punished for all thirty-three words.

The concept that one should not look "downtrodden" to others has been discussed at length by our Sages. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (1:16) quotes Rabbi Yishmael as saying, "receive every person cheerfully." In addition, the Gemara writes "Better is he that shows his friend white teeth than gives him a drink of milk" (Kesuvos 111b), which Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl explains to mean that one who offers someone milk helps him on a short-term basis, only by satisfying his thirst. On the other hand, one who greets him with a smile gives him long-term assistance by improving his whole day.

It is daunting to think that our faces are "public property," as Rav Yisroel Salanter once remarked, but that is the obligation of every Jew - to be aware of his surroundings at all times and see what he can do to make the most out of the situation, as it says at the beginning of Mesillas Yesharim:

"The foundation of saintliness and the root of complete service [of Hashem] is man's [ability to] evaluate and validate what his obligation is in the world and towards what he needs to direct his vision and aspiration in everything that he is working on all the days of his life."

ELICITING ASSISTANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Yaakov blessed Pharaoh." (47:10)

We are taught that Yaakov blessed Pharaoh that the Nile River would overflow and irrigate the country whenever he approached it. The Egyptians viewed the Nile as the source of their sustenance and therefore worshipped it as a deity. By blessing Pharaoh that the Nile would overflow only when he approached it, Yaakov weakened the idolatrous reverence in which the Egyptians held the river by demonstrating that it was controlled by G-d. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, pp. 31-32)

Pharaoh himself, however, proved to be the ultimate ingrate. Instead of thanking G-d for this blessing, he falsely attributed it to his own powers.

This contrasts sharply with Yaakov's own response to G-d's blessings: "I [that is, my sense of worthiness] have been diminished due to all the acts of kindness and trustworthiness that You have done for me, Your servant" (Bereishis 32:11; see Igeret HaKodesh 2).

By learning from Yaakov's example of humility, honesty, and gratitude - rather than from Pharaoh's example of arrogance, vanity, and ingratitude - we will receive, as did Yaakov, G-d's supra-natural assistance in all that we do. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5710, p. 121)

FROM MISDEED TO MERIT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yosef provided for his father and his brothers and his father's entire household." (47:12)

Yosef taught us to repay evil with goodness, just as he did with his brothers, sustaining them for the rest of his life. He was able to forgive his brothers not only because he was a master of self-control, but chiefly because he understood the nature of human evil. As we have seen, the brothers' evil act of selling him into slavery served G-d's plan that Yosef eventually become viceroy of Egypt. Yosef focused on the positive outcome of his brothers' acts rather than on their evil essence.

Similarly, we ask G-d to treat us like Yosef treated his brothers, perceiving our misdeeds as being ultimately for the good and responding to them with kindness. In order to "inspire" G-d to see our misdeeds as being ultimately for the good, we must first do the same ourselves, by utilizing our misdeeds as motivation for self-improvement. The misdeed that fuels this transformation thus becomes a merit, retroactively serving a good purpose.

We can further enhance our ability to transform our own misdeeds into merits by training ourselves to see other people's offenses as potential merits, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, p. 241) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SOWING SPIRITUAL SEEDS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yosef said to the Egyptians,] 'Here is seed grain for you so you can sow the ground.'" (47:23)

Yosef gave the people seed, but they knew that it was not enough to simply eat the seed; they needed to plant it, tend it, and harvest it.

The "Yosef's" of our generation are our spiritual guides and teachers. When we receive spiritual "sustenance" from them - that is, inspiration and knowledge - we must not be satisfied simply to receive it and use it for our own spiritual survival. Rather, we must plant these spiritual seeds and actualize their potential, both for our own spiritual growth and in order to inspire others. (Hitva'aduyot 5711, vol. 1, p. 165) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SUPPORT THE CAUSE

Abarbanel

"And Yosef made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt... that Pharaoh should have the fifth; only the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's." (47:26)

The Torah relates this in order to teach the Jews that they must render gifts and tithes to the Kohanim and Leviim so that they would be free to devote all their time to G-d's worship.

If even the Egyptians did not object to their pagan priests' receiving their food from the nation's storage places even during a terrible famine, it surely obligates the Jews to perform the same service willingly for their own priests who worship the true G-d.

HAFTORAH

LESSON IN REPENTANCE

Reb Yonasan Eibeshutz

"And My servant Dovid shall be king over them..." (Yechezkel 37:24)

In days to come all the Jewish people will be moved to repentance for their past sins so that they will be completely cleansed of evil. However, many people will be ashamed to repent because they have sinned terribly and often. At that time, Dovid HaMelech will be their guide and inspiration, teaching them that repentance can accomplish all things, as the Sages put it: "Dovid was considered worthy to perform this deed only in order to teach the many how to repent."

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