

# PARSHAS VAYEISHEV

תשפ"ה

Yosef is called Yosef HaTzaddik. He has unusual dreams. He was Yaakov's ben zekunim, which Onkelos translates as his wisest son. He decides to tell his brothers these strange dreams about his dominance over the other shevotim, because he believed these were prophetic dreams and he has no right to suppress them. This made his brothers hate him. Yosef has another dream of a similar theme and he tells them about it, and this time it includes his father and mother. Yaakov outwardly tries to dismiss it as meaningless in order to deflect the anger of his other sons away from Yosef, but inwardly, Yaakov is anticipating the time when these dreams will come true.

At this point, the shevotim really resent Yosef's special status with their father and his ambitions to rule over them. The brothers go somewhere to shepherd their flock, and Yaakov, for some reason, sends Yosef to find out what they are up to. Yosef knows this is a dangerous errand, but he has an amazing sense of kibbud av, and he goes anyway. He looks for them and gets lost, and Hashem sends the maloch Gavriel to put Yosef back on track. But Yosef gets lost again and again, and malochim are sent over and over to keep him on track. What is this all about?

The Ramban explains that Hashem's ultimate plan is to have Yosef go to Egypt to become the ruler there and prepare the way for Klal Yisroel in golus Mitzrayim. Hashem is going to get Yosef to Egypt no matter what. But Hashem works within the bechiroh of people. Hashem knows that Yosef has a tremendous sense of kibbud av, and that the shevotim have this tremendous resentment towards Yosef. Through both of these things, Hashem arranges for Yosef to be sold as a slave in Egypt. But this doesn't absolve the brothers for being jealous and acting improperly – because they weren't forced to behave this way. Hashem used their free-will to fulfill His plan, just as Hashem used Nevuchadnezzar and Titus to destroy the Beis HaMikdosh, and they still deserve severe punishment for doing so. Being used by Hashem's plans doesn't excuse the free-willed exercise of bad middos. The plan could be carried out in a different way if they would choose differently.

We look at the Holocaust and see clearly that Hashem orchestrated events to allow Hitler to rise to power and carry out his conquest of most of Europe. But that doesn't absolve Hitler and the Nazis for all the evil they perpetrated with their free-will. They are being severely punished because they were evil, even though they were used in Hashem's plan.

We believe that Hashem is the cause of everything that happens in the world – on an individual level and on a global level. This is what we mean by שמוע ישראל ה' אלוֹקֵנוּ ה' אֶחָד, אין עוד מלבדו. There is only one absolute power which controls the universe and everything that happens in it. But this does not negate free-will. It is a subtle idea: "הגזירה אמת והחריצות שקר".

Even though the Rambam writes that in a few isolated cases, Hashem takes away a person's free-will, but this is because he doesn't deserve the opportunity to do teshuvoh. Pharaoh had total bechiroh up to a point, and he used his bechiroh to do evil until Hashem decided his punishment is to lose the possibility of teshuvoh. But it only happens in rare cases. The average person has bechiroh to do teshuvoh the entire time he is alive. And Hashem maneuvers and incorporates our free-will to get the results He wants in the end.

The posuk in Parshas Mishpotim talks about a person who kills by accident because Hashem arranged it to happen. What is this about?

Chazal explain that one person killed by accident and was supposed to go to the Ir Miklot, but there were no witnesses. Another person murdered someone intentionally and was supposed to be executed by Beis Din, but there were no witnesses. So Hashem arranges that these two people come together, and the one who needs to go to golus climbs a ladder, and the one who is supposed to be executed walks under the ladder, and there are witnesses who see the person falling from the ladder and killing the person underneath. Each person gets his proper punishment. This one goes to golus for his crime, and that one is killed for his crime. Chazal say that although we have no execution by Beis Din anymore, Hashem arranges natural means by which to carry out the proper death sentence. Everything that happens in this world is managed by Hashem to the final detail. But He doesn't remove our free-will in order to accomplish what He wants.

This is what the Ramban says: Hashem sets up the situation where Yosef's sense of kibbud av and the brothers' resentment work together to achieve Hashem's result of bringing Yosef down to Egypt without tampering with anyone's free-will.

The Torah testifies that the shevotim hated Yosef and this is what motivated them to want to get rid of Yosef. Chazal are bothered by this – how could such tzaddikim conduct themselves this way? Chazal explain that they convinced themselves that Yosef was guilty of being moreid b'malchus of Yehudoh and they convened a Beis Din to pass judgment on him. But only nine shevotim really participated in this Beis Din. Not Yosef, Binyomin, or Reuven. They needed a minyan, so they included Hashem! This means they were absolutely confident that Hashem was in full agreement with their judgment! They thought they were acting l'shem shomayim, and on one level, they thought Yosef was genuinely guilty. But the Torah reveals to us that on a much deeper level, they were acting out of personal resentment and jealousy and were covering it up. This is how human beings live – on multiple levels. But Hashem judges us on our core, deepest level.

Yehudoh tells his brothers not to kill Yosef because he is our brother, but instead to sell him as a slave in Egypt.

Later in the parsha we read about Yehudoh and Tomor. Yehudoh's two sons die soon after marrying Tomor, and Yehudoh tells her to wait until his third son grows a little older. Tomor waits, and waits, and she sees that Yehudoh is just trying to get rid of her, so she takes matters into her own hands. She seduces Yehudoh by disguising herself, and becomes pregnant from the encounter. Yehudoh discovers this, and confronts her for her infidelity. Tomor is condemned to death, but she sends a message to Yehudoh saying she became pregnant from the person who gave her these items as a security.

Chazal learn many important things from this exchange. First of all, Tomor doesn't come out and accuse Yehudoh directly in public – even in order to save herself. She sends a message with a round-about description of Yehudoh's participation in order to save Yehudoh from public humiliation. He is left to choose not to admit it if he doesn't want to. Chazal learn from this that public humiliation is so severe that it is tantamount to spilling blood, and one must be prepared to give up one's life to avoid it!

Earlier, Yehudoh tried to pay this mysterious disguised woman, but after he was unsuccessful, he decided to drop it because of the embarrassment of trying to track down a harlot for payment. He is the leader of this area and Tomor is not making a public accusation.

Yehudoh could easily keep quiet about his involvement and let Tomor be executed to retain his honor – and no-one would be the wiser. But he decided to admit it and humiliate himself in public. Chazal say a Bas Kol came out and declared that with this act, Yehudoh merited to receive the malchus of Klal Yisroel and Moshiach comes out of this union.

The middas ho'emes of Yehudoh is very strong – it overcomes this urge to save himself from tremendous embarrassment. But when it came to Yosef, Yehudoh wasn't capable of being completely honest with himself to realize that he is really motivated by jealousy. People are very complex creatures. We need to use these stories to realize how important honesty and forging honest relationships are in life.

When he was sold, you can imagine Yosef's emotional state – feelings of betrayal and abandonment by his family, and total despair about his future. Hashem arranged that the caravan that transported him down to Egypt was filled with fragrant spices instead of the usual foul-smelling petroleum products. But what's the point? Would Yosef think that such a minor improvement in his surroundings would be any comfort compared to what he was going through? After being the favorite of his father and one of the most important shevotim, he is now headed for a life of total obscurity as a slave in some Egyptian household?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz answers with an incredible insight. Hashem was sending a subtle message to Yosef that in the midst of this betrayal and abandonment, Hashem is still there with him, looking after him and sparing Yosef even from minor discomforts. It showed Yosef that Hashem didn't forget about him and that He is orchestrating everything that is happening to Yosef – down to the smallest detail. So there is no reason to despair about his future. Hashem is in control, and Yosef is taking comfort in that realization.

Yosef is sold to a noble household in Egypt and he immediately starts to move up the ladder of success. This could have easily gone to Yosef's head – thinking he was so talented and capable. But the Torah says that his master realized through Yosef's demeanor and speech, that Hashem was giving Yosef all the success. Even in Egypt – where no-one worships Hashem like he does, and with people who resent Ivrim, Yosef made sure everyone around him knew that it wasn't due to his talents or efforts. He didn't adjust his identity to be less conspicuous and try to conform to his surroundings. He was proud to acknowledge that Hashem is in charge of everything that happens to him and be scorned because of it.

Then we have Potiphar's wife attempting to seduce Yosef. Why is Yosef being tested so sorely? Because Hashem knows that Yosef's destiny is to rule over his brothers and take care of Klal Yisroel in Egypt. But in order to earn that position, Yosef has to prove himself worthy by passing test after test. He needs to be proud of his identity and not be ashamed of his Ivri background. He has to never take credit for his success. And he has to overcome incredible temptation. She makes Yosef a very tempting offer – wealth and nobility instead of being a nobody slave. Chazal say Yosef was on the brink of breaking down and giving in.

Imagine if Yosef had given in to Potiphar's wife, and took her up on

the offer to make him a nobleman. Yosef would probably look back afterwards and think how foolish it would have been to refuse her and be condemned to rot in a dismal prison for the rest of his life. He would have probably complimented himself on how smart he was to take the opportunity presented to him to advance his station and not suffer the consequences of being too pious. But that alternative Yosef would have been completely wrong! Because by choosing to resist and not take the easy way out, Yosef was catapulted to even greater heights than nobility – he became second to Pharaoh and he effectively ruled the entire Egyptian empire! And it was only because Yosef remained Yosef and ran out of the house immediately. He didn't hesitate for a second to retrieve the incriminating evidence, because he didn't trust himself to stay in her presence one second longer.

One final point. Yosef was sold as a slave. He was put in a very compromising situation which tested him from every angle on a daily basis. He was a social outcast who would naturally want to change his identity to fit in. Yosef didn't care. He was fabulously successful which would naturally lead to boosting his ego and taking credit. But Yosef attributes all his success to Hashem and doesn't highlight his talents. And he was offered freedom and nobility by a powerful woman who desired him, but he runs away, leaving himself vulnerable to being framed. And here he is in prison, and he could have easily been too preoccupied in his own miserable situation to care about anyone else, but he notices someone else in pain and reaches out to try to help. And this middoh of caring becomes the seed of his eventual salvation! He tells them that only Hashem can properly interpret their dreams – not him!

This is Yosef HaTzaddik, overcoming test after test and developing his character, his bitochon, his faithfulness. Hashem puts us through all these tests in order to pull out of us all the latent potential we have to achieve greatness. Yosef doesn't know in advance how things are going to turn out in the end. He doesn't know that by passing these tests he will rise to even greater heights. He comes to every situation without cheshbonos of what's good for him in the moment. He is completely dedicated to the will of Hashem and attributing everything that happens to Hashem's hashgocho. That is how he succeeds again and again. He says this to the fellow prisoners in jail and he says the same thing to Pharaoh. There is no difference in Yosef's mind – Hashem is giving him success in every situation – this is who he is. Hashem was preparing Yosef to become the person who can interpret Pharaoh's dreams and rise to power, to prepare for Klal Yisroel going into golus.

We are living in an upside-down world which makes no sense. The only thing that is clear is that Hashem is running everything. We have no clue about where this is all going. Hashem is putting everyone through nisyonos to bring out their true character. This is how Yosef becomes worthy of being the ruler over Egypt, and this is how Yehudoh becomes the father of Moshiach. Yehudoh could have given a million excuses to ignore Tomor's message and keep quiet to preserve his dignity. The fact that he admitted it, against his best interests, is exactly what made him worthy of malchus.

Hashem puts us through tests and runs the world to achieve the results that He wants.