

In this week's *Parashah*, Yosef is sold by his brothers and ends up as a slave in Egypt. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Shekalim* 2:3) teaches: "Hashem said, 'You sold Rachel's son for twenty silver coins, which equal five *Shekalim*. Therefore, each of you must redeem his firstborn son for five *Shekalim*.'"

Commentaries ask: If redeeming the firstborn is a punishment for the sale of Yosef, why must the tribe of Yosef redeem its firstborn? Moreover, why is the redemption money given to a *Kohen*--a descendant of Levi who, with Shimon, instigated the brothers' plot against Yosef?

R' Shlomo Fisher z"l (1932-2021; *Rosh Yeshiva* and rabbinical court judge in Israel) explains: We read in our *Parashah* (37:14) that Yosef was "sent from the depth of Chevron." *Rashi* z"l asks: Was not Chevron situated on a hill (see *Bemidbar* 13:22)? Why then does the verse state that Yaakov sent Yosef from the depth of Chevron? *Rashi* answers: The verse means that Yaakov sent Yosef because of the necessity of implementing the deep thought of the righteous man (Avraham) who was buried in Chevron, i.e., that his descendants would be exiles in a foreign land (Egypt).

Of course, Yosef did not know this at the time. Ultimately, however, the sale of Yosef was the catalyst for his family being saved from famine, for the miracles of the Exodus--including the striking of Egypt's firstborn because they enslaved Hashem's "firstborn" (see *Shmot* 4:22)--and for the Giving of the Torah. The *Mitzvah* to give the descendant of Levi five *Shekalim* to redeem one's firstborn is an expression of thanks for Levi's role in bringing about these great events, so even Yosef's descendants must participate. (Quoted in *Mi'darchei Ha'kerem* II p.313)

Shabbat

R' Eliyahu E. Dessler *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, the author of *Michtav M'Eliyahu*) writes: If we wish to know what our task is on *Shabbat*, we need only look at the chapter of *Tehilim* that discusses *Shabbat*, a chapter that the *Midrash* says was recited by Adam Ha'rishon and which we recite three times every *Shabbat*. That chapter opens (*Tehilim* 92:1-2), "A psalm, a song for the *Shabbat* day. It is good to thank Hashem and to sing praise to Your Name, Exalted One."

Clearly, writes R' Dessler, we are being told that the essence of *Shabbat* is that it is a "Day of Thanksgiving." R' David Kimchi z"l (*Radak*; 1160-1235; Narbonne, France) writes in his commentary to *Tehilim*: "It is better to give thanks on *Shabbat* than on other days because, on *Shabbat*, one is free of worldly matters and his soul is purified from worldly distractions and is engaged in wisdom and the service of G-d." Likewise, R' Menachem Ha'meiri z"l (1249-1306; Provence; author of widely-used Talmud commentaries) writes: "*Shabbat* is a good time to give thanks and to meditate on Hashem's wonders, because it is a time when one is free."

R' Dessler continues: Early commentaries write that all of the *Shabbat* prayers are "thanksgiving," a fact that has *Halachic* consequences. On weekdays, when our prayers are "requests," one is allowed to add his own voluntary prayers (i.e., to recite *Shemoneh Esrei* twice), but not so on *Shabbat*. R' Dessler notes further that the work *Shibbolei Ha'lekket* (R' Tzidkiyah ben Avraham Ha'rofeh; Italy; 13th century) records that the custom in the author's community was to recite "*Mizmor L'todah*" / "A psalm of thanksgiving" (*Tehilim* 100) only on *Shabbat*, not on weekdays--the opposite of our custom today--"because *Shabbat* is the day of thanksgiving."

(*Sha'arei Ha'zmanim: Shabbat Kodesh* II p.5)

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"Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work--no man of the household staff being there in the house." (39:11)

According to one opinion in the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 36b), Yosef entered the house to sin with Potiphar's wife, but a vision of his father's face appeared to him, and he resisted temptation and did not sin. On this occasion, Yosef saw that his brothers were destined to have their names inscribed on the *Ephod* stones that the *Kohen Gadol* would wear on his shoulders, while his name would not be inscribed there if he sinned with Potiphar's wife.

R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l (1910-2012; Yerushalayim) asks: As far as Yosef was concerned, his brothers had tried to murder him by throwing him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions! Surely when he heard through *Ruach Ha'kodesh* / Divine inspiration that his brothers were destined to have their names inscribed on the *Ephod*, while his name would not be inscribed there if he sinned, it made no sense to him. Nevertheless, R' Elyashiv explains, the fact that he received a warning through *Ruach Ha'kodesh* was enough to dissuade him from sinning, whether he understood the warning fully or not. R' Elyashiv adds: There is a lesson here for us. (*He'arot: Shabbat* 49b #6)

"If only you would think of me with yourself when he benefits you, and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building." (40:14)

Midrash Rabbah (on the beginning of next week's *Parashah*) applies to Yosef the verse (*Tehilim* 40:5), "Praiseworthy is the man who has made *Hashem* his trust, and did not turn to the arrogant and to strayers after falsehood." Says the *Midrash*: Because Yosef said, "If only you would think of me . . . and mention me," he had to remain in prison two more years. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

Many commentaries ask: The *Midrash* seems, at first, to be praising Yosef ("Praiseworthy is the man who has made *Hashem* his trust") and it further says that he "did not turn to the arrogant." Then the *Midrash* seems to do an about face and criticize Yosef for turning to Pharaoh's chamberlain for help in getting out of prison.

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) offers a novel explanation: There was nothing wrong with Yosef's asking for help, and doing so does not show a lack of trust in *Hashem*. The problem was the timing of Yosef's request. Specifically, the *Mishnah* (beginning of *Avodah Zarah*) teaches that one must avoid engaging in certain transactions with idol-worshippers within three days before their holidays--including the king's birthday--so that they do not give thanks to their idols. But Yosef's interaction with Pharaoh's chamberlain took place within three days of the king's birthday. The *Midrash* is saying, "Praiseworthy is the man who has made *Hashem* his trust, [however, he] did not turn to [look at the calendar of] the arrogant and the strayers after falsehood." Therefore, he was punished. (*Avodat Avodah*: Introduction)

"So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father *Shamar* / kept the matter in mind." (37:11)

Rashi z"l writes: "He awaited and looked forward to the time when this would come to pass."

R' Avigdor Nebenzahl *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* and former Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Yerushalayim) asks: Our Sages teach that there is a *Mitzvah* to anticipate and await the coming of *Mashiach*. Where is this *Mitzvah* found in the Torah?

He answers: We read (*Bemidbar* 28:2), "My offering, My food for My fires, My satisfying aroma, *Tishmeru* / you shall take care to offer to Me in its appointed time." When there is no *Bet Hamikdash*, we cannot fulfill this commandment in the literal sense. However, as *Rashi* on our verse notes, the word "*Tishmeru*" (from the root שׁמַר) can mean "to await and look forward to." Thus, the verse in *Bemidbar* can be read: "My offering . . . you shall look forward to offering in its appointed time"--i.e., when *Mashiach* comes and the *Bet Hamikdash* is rebuilt.

(*Shiurei Maran Ha'gra Nebenzahl Al Hilchot Bet Ha'bechirah* p.11)

"They saw, behold! --A caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilad, their camels bearing spices, balsam, and lotus--on their way to bring them down to Egypt." (37:25)

Our Sages note that Ishmaelites typically transport foul-smelling hides and kerosene. As a result, Ishmaelites themselves are usually unpleasant to be around. In Yosef's case, however, *Hashem* caused the Ishmaelites who purchased him to be carrying pleasant smelling items to mask any bad odors and lessen Yosef's suffering.

R' Eliezer Ben-Zion Brok z"l (1904-1985; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Novardok-Bet Yosef Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) writes: We cannot imagine Yosef's suffering at this moment. He was being separated from his beloved father who gave him everything he could desire, his teacher who transmitted to him the Torah of Shem and Ever, and he was being sold into slavery in Egypt, the world capital of spiritual impurity, a place full of idolatry and immorality. Under these circumstances, it would seem to be insignificant that *Hashem* lessened Yosef's suffering by masking the Ishmaelites' foul odors!

R' Brok explains: Our Sages are teaching us here how precise *Hashem's* Judgment is. The degree of suffering to which Yosef was subjected was exactly what was decreed upon him, not one iota more. Specifically, it was decreed that Yosef would be sold as a slave in Egypt; it was not decreed that he would suffer from bad smells. To the contrary, it was decreed that he would smell pleasant things to ease his journey. The same thing is true whenever suffering is decreed upon a person: he suffers only to the extent that was decreed and no more. Moreover, *Hashem* sends him the equivalent of "pleasant smells" that give him the strength to endure his suffering. (*Hegiyonei Mussar* p.15)