

פ' ויגש תשפ"ג

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RAISING ORPHANS

During Chanukah, Rav Sternbuch met with the heads of an organization dealing with orphans and answered some questions.

Question: When doctors in a hospital tell the family that the head of the family is in a critical situation, should one tell the children that the situation is not good at all and that the father might die G-d forbid soon, and that they should pray very hard, or is it preferable not to tell them anything?

Rav Sternbuch: If the children would change their ways as a merit for their father or would pray better, than they should certainly be told, but, if not, there is no need to tell them that their father might die.

Question: But what about the need to prepare the child?

Rav Sternbuch: He should certainly be told that his father's state of health is not simple, but he need not be told that his father is likely to die.

Question: Some families don't tell the children that the father is going to die, and afterwards the children think that the father hated them, because he did not share with them how sick he was.

Rav Sternbuch: As I say, the children should be told that the situation is not simple, and if G-d forbid the father passes away, one should explain to them that they were not told the situation more explicitly, because one did not want to worry them for nothing.

Question: If the mother remarries, should the children be told that "another father is coming to replace your father", or should they be told that your father is remaining in heaven, but another father is coming to be with you?

Rav Sternbuch: They should be told that their father is happy in Heaven that another father is coming to replace him.

Question: Do they have an obligation to respect their new father?

Rav Sternbuch: There is an obligation, as the Rambam sets out. Moreover, without this the children will not accept their stepfather's authority, and they must necessarily honor him.

Question: How can *gedolei Torah* grow from bereaved families, as happened in the case of the Rov's family?

Rav Sternbuch: My mother shed countless tears for her children to become *talmidei chachomim*, to the extent that people in the *Shul* where she was praying in the ladies' section complained that she was disturbing their concentration with her loud crying.

[The *Rov* of the *Shul* in Stamford Hill, London, Rav Dunner *zt"l*, ruled in favor of Mrs Sternbuch, stating that her heartfelt prayers were an inspiration for the entire congregation, including the men].

ETERNAL COVENANT

Then Yosef said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me," and they drew closer. And he said, "I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold into Egypt (44:3). Rashi: He called them with a soft voice and pleadingly and showed them that he was circumcised

Why was the fact that Yosef was circumcised proof that he was their brother, seeing that the Egyptians also circumcised themselves (see Rashi on 41:54)?

The proof was not the actual circumcision, but rather the fact that he was not embarrassed to show that he was circumcised, unlike the Egyptians who were embarrassed of it. They had asked Paroh to annul Yosef's decree that they had to be circumcised (see Rashi *ibid*) since they considered it to be a defect. The Jew, on the other hand, is proud of the sign of the covenant, which connects him to Hashem.

Bris milo is an eternal sign engraved on our bodies, and every father should tell his sons from an early age that Hashem has made a covenant with us through the *bris milo*, and we have to do our utmost to refrain from sinning.

JEWISH RULERS

Let your servant speak a word in my master's ears. (44:18). May my words penetrate your ears. (Rashi, ibid.)

The Brisker Rov related that in inter-war Poland, the government enacted a decree requiring everybody to learn Polish and mathematics. The *Rabbonim* considered this to be a grave interference by the government in their internal affairs, and convened a meeting that was attended by all the *Rabbonim* and *Admorim* to discuss ways to abolish this decree. The *Rabbonim* decided that the best way to proceed would be to send a delegation of *Gedolei Yisrael* to the Minister of Education, and explain to him why this matter was of such deep concern to them.

None of the *Rabbonim* spoke Polish except for one *Rov*, and it was proposed that he be sent as a spokesman. However, the Chofetz Chaim opposed this, arguing that the authorities would be likely to respond: "You see, you can produce enlightened Polish-speaking rabbis, so why are you opposed to our new law?"

Instead, the Chofetz Chaim, who like all the others only spoke Yiddish, offered to be the spokesman himself. When he appeared for the interview with the Minister, he started to speak in Yiddish but quickly burst into uncontrollable tears. Although he did not understand a word of what the Chofetz Chaim was saying, the Minister was very moved, and said that he had not realized that this issue was so important to the rabbis. He assured them that he would issue instructions for the decree to be abolished.

Similarly, Yehudah thought that Yosef did not speak *Loshon HaKodesh*, but he decided to speak it nevertheless in the hope that his words would penetrate Yosef's heart.

Although the language of emotion may work for non-Jewish rulers, in the case of our coreligionists who have been ruling over us here in *Eretz Yisroel* in recent times, and have discarded the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*, their decrees cannot be annulled either with the "language of the mouth" or the "language of the heart". They are testimony to Chazal's statement (*Pesochim* 49b) that the hatred which an ignorant Jew harbors against a *talmid chochom* is greater than the hatred harbored by the nations of the world against the Jews, and that "when a Jew stoops, he stoops all the way" (see *Megilla* 15a and *Medrash Shochar Tov Tehillim* 120).

Happy is our lot that we are completely removed and detached from them. We have to realize and internalize how low a person can stoop without Torah and *mitzvos*, and to be grateful and praise the Creator for having planted the Torah in our midst.

PRAYING AT GRAVES

"It will come to pass, when he sees that the boy is gone, he will die" (44:31)

Yehudah's argument was that even if Binyomin had sinned, his father did not deserve to be punished, it being a general principle that Hashem does not punish a person if this causes suffering to others such as his family members, unless they also deserve to be punished. For this reason Rav Elya Lopian would say that a person should engage in as many activities as possible that benefit the public, because if his absence would harm others, Hashem affords him special protection from misfortune, so that those who benefit from his activities will not suffer.

Similarly, the *Sde Chemed* (in *Hilchos Rosh Hashono*) says that it is customary to visit graves and pray to Hashem that the deceased should be made aware of one's troubles. Since this makes the deceased upset and they do not deserve to suffer, that itself can be reason for canceling a decree. It is considered a *segulo* in order to get a deceased to become aware that someone has come to his grave, and to get him to take action in favor of the supplicant, to undertake immediately upon coming to the grave to donate a certain amount to charity and say: "I hereby donate to charity *leiluy nishmas* the *tzadik* or family member". If the visitor does so, there are certain *neshomos* which notify the deceased that someone has come to his grave and tell him about the contents of the prayers. (See also *Teshuvos Vehanhogos* Vol. 2 sections 64 and 65).

NOT EMBARRASSED TO PERFORM HASHEM'S WILL

And Yosef could not bear all those standing beside him, and he called out, "Take everyone away from me" (45:1). Rashi: *He could not bear that Egyptians would stand beside him and hear his brothers being embarrassed when he would make himself known to them*

If Yosef would have revealed himself publicly, it would have become known that he had hidden his identity from his brothers, and defamed them claiming that they were spies, so why was he only worried about embarrassing his brothers, and not about embarrassing himself?

Yosef's actions were dictated solely by *daas Torah*, and he knew that it had been Hashem's will for him to have behaved in that manner towards his brothers (so that their dreams would be fulfilled, and not out of revenge, *chas vesholom*: see Ramban on 42:9). Therefore, he was not at all embarrassed of his own behavior, and would have been completely indifferent to be considered strange or cruel by the non-Jews around him. His sole consideration was to fulfil his duties towards Hashem. His brothers, on the other hand, would be embarrassed for having sold him when they did not need to according to the truth, and he therefore asked everyone to leave the room to save them from being embarrassed.

TEACHING CHUMASH AND NACH

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

The Or Hachaim *hakodosh* explains that Yosef wanted to tell his brothers that he loved them completely like a brother, and that they had no reason to be afraid of him. That is what he meant when he said "I am Yosef your brother", I am acting towards you in a filial manner as if nothing had happened. He also added "your brother Yosef whom you sold into Egypt", to show that even while the sale itself was going on he did not stop loving them like a brother.

The Maharal adds that Yosef knew that the tribes had not sold him out of bad intentions in order to harm him, but they rather thought that it was the will of Hashem that he be sold as a slave. They had sold him without any personal hatred, and so there was no reason for him to hate them.

Similarly, the commentators explain that Yosef did not send a message to his father to tell him that he was Viceroy of Egypt, because he knew that it was Hashem's will that his father should not know about it.

This is a good example of how *chumash Bereishis*, and especially the *parshios* of *Vayeshev*, *Mikeitz* and *Vayigash*, which deal with the sale of Yosef, should be taught. Each and every action of Yosef and his holy brothers was made solely for the sake of Heaven, and was not intermingled with any other intention *chas vesholom*. We have no notion of the greatness of the holy forefathers, whose every decision and conduct stemmed solely from the desire to give pleasure to Hashem.

Rav Moshe Schneider spoke out strongly against those who taught *Tenach* as if it were a storybook, and interpret the events surrounding Yosef and his brothers, or those of Dovid and Shoul, as if they were some secular tale. He therefore only permitted *Tenach* to be taught to children by G-d-fearing *talmidei chachomim* who conveyed Torah in its sanctity based on commentators such as *Rashi*, *Redak* and *Malbim*.

The Vilna Gaon already said that the *chamisho chumshei Torah* are like a "globe". Each little dot on the globe represents an entire nation. Similarly, the entire Torah and *Tenach* are holy of holies, Each letter, and each dot, allude to an infinite amount of messages, which we cannot even begin to fathom, as it says, "Hashem's Torah is perfect, restoring the soul".

STORIES OR TORAH

On a related note, Rav Sternbuch recalls that Rav Moshe Schneider would often relate stories of *tzaddikim*. Dayan Abramsky, on the other hand, was opposed to this, arguing that only through Torah learning can one attain fear of Heaven, and our obligations is to learn Torah, not to relate stories. Rav Schneider responded that the holy Torah contains a complete section, *chumash Bereishis*, which is full of factual descriptions and a treasure house of moral teachings. Dayan Abramsky rejected this response, claiming that this was no proof, because *chumash Bereishis* is full of halachic teachings, and the factual aspects contained therein are not only there to teach moral lessons, but also to convey fundamental halachic rulings. However, Rav Schneider did not change his mind, and continued relating stories to strengthen fear of Heaven, such as many incidents about the Chofetz Chaim and other *gedolim*.

BENEFIT OF SUFFERING

And now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that Hashem sent me before you. (45:5)

How could Yosef comfort his brothers by linking his sale to the subsequent preservation of life? At the time they threw him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions and sold him as a slave. What justification or comfort could be found in the fact that he was now the source of their sustenance?

Yosef had to undergo severe spiritual trials in Egypt, the source of *tumoh* and needed a lot of *siyata dishamaya* and fortitude to overcome them. He attributed his success in overcoming those trials to the experiences he had to endure from the time of his sale to slavery onwards. Hashem is close to the broken hearted and it was only due to those hardships which were successfully endured by Yosef that Hashem assisted Yosef by granting him exceptional powers and *siyata dishamaya* to overcome the trials posed by his situation in Egypt.

It therefore turns out that there was indeed a direct connection between his sale into slavery and his subsequent ascent to power in Egypt, because were it not for the suffering he had endured after the sale, he would not have enjoyed exceptional *siyata dishamaya* during his trials in Egypt, and consequently would not have become a Viceroy, and would not have been able to arrange for his brothers' sustenance during the time of famine.

IMMERSED IN TORAH

"He said to them, "Do not be troubled along the way" (45:24); Rashi: "Do not become involved in halachic discussion lest the road become a menace to you"

Anyone else in the tribes' situation would most likely have discussed the latest astonishing developments of the discovery of Yosef all the way home, but Yosef knew his brothers and their great love of Torah, and that they would not waste their time with stories, but only talk (it says *al tisasku* – do not delve) in learning. That was why he had to warn them of the perils on the road.

The Brisker Rov expressed amazement at the righteousness of the tribes, but added that if we appreciated the great sanctity of our forefathers, we would not be so surprised, because they were totally immersed in Torah, and learnt from Yaakov *Ovinu* not to divert their minds from it at all.

The Brisker Rov's brother-in-law, Rav Hirsch Glickson would stay with Rav Sternbuch's parents in London before the War, and Rav Sternbuch recalls how he would utter *divrei Torah* each moment. He knew the whole of *mishnayos* orally, and did not walk four *amos* without Torah. Even when he was dealing with other matters, talking with other people, he would mutter *mishnayos be'al pe* in order not to lose even one moment of Torah learning.

There were about 15 houses separating Rav Schneider's Yeshiva from the dining room. Rav Schneider would sometimes stand on the pavement and encourage his students to talk in learning on the way to the dining room and not waste their time. He told them about a *godol* who made a point of wearing shoes without laces in order to save the *bitul Torah* involved in tying up his shoes every day. The time saved accumulates during one's lifetime to significant chunks of time.

On a related note, when the Tshebiner Rov, Rav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, went to visit the Brisker Rov for the first time in Yerushalayim, the Brisker Rov was very impressed that the Tshebiner Rov did not say a word about his suffering in Siberia during the War, where he lost several of his children and students, but instead reminded the Brisker Rov about a question the latter had asked him at a wedding about thirty years earlier, and he now suggested an answer to that question.

CHEERING UP THE DEJECTED

"And they told him, saying, "Yosef is still alive," and that he ruled over the entire land of Egypt... and the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived" (45:26-27)

Osher's daughter Serach was rewarded by going straight to *Gan Eden* in her lifetime accompanied by 600,000 angels for telling the news to Yaakov, especially since she did so gently and gradually (*Targum Yonoson* on 46:17 and *Bamidbor* 26:46). In return for reviving Yaakov's spirit, she merited eternal life for her own spirit.

Similarly, anyone who cheers up the dejected, reviving their spirits, receives eternal rewards for their efforts.

FAITH

"I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes" (46:4)

The same Hashem who took us down to Egypt also took us out of it and gave us the Torah. Life often seems like one big mystery. Why do the righteous suffer? Why do some people suffer from poverty, health problems etc., when less righteous people seem to have less problems? Why were millions of Jews torn away from their religion in Russia, and then 6 million killed in World War II? Why were hundreds of thousands of Jews torn away from their religion in the early days of the state by their coreligionists?

Yosef placed his hands on his eyes. He asked no questions. Instead of becoming embittered at his fate, or bearing a grudge against his brothers, he went out of his way to assure them that everything had turned out for the good and that they should not be upset. Hashem wants us to place our hands on our eyes, and trust that He knows what is best for us, even if we cannot understand it. We will be rewarded for our faith and patience when all the intricacies of the divine plan will be revealed in the future.

YEHUDAH

He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef. (46:28). Rashi: To establish for him a house of study, from which teaching would emanate.

Why did Yaakov send Yehudah ahead to Egypt?

The Ponovezher Rov said that Yehudah was chosen, since he had agreed to act as a guarantor to ensure the safe return of Binyamin. Someone who manages a yeshivah must act with complete dedication like Yehudah, even to the extent of offering personal guarantees to financing entities to ensure that the construction of the yeshivah is completed.

In addition, Yaakov sent Yehudah, who symbolized the kingship of someone who acts through persuasion and not coercion. Yaakov wanted his descendants to love learning and join the yeshivah voluntarily and with enthusiasm.

ACCUMULATING MERITS

“And Yisroel said to Yosef, “I will die this time, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive” (46:30). Rashi: “I thought that I would die two deaths, in this world and in the next world, because the Shechinah had left me, and I thought that Hashem would hold me responsible for your death. Now that you are still alive, I will die but once”.

On Yom Kippur the dead are also judged (that is why we light candles for them). In this judgement, the actions of descendants or students of the deceased are examined to see whether they are following the proper path. *Mitzvos* and good deeds are accounted as a merit for their ancestor or teacher, and the opposite for *aveiros*.

Yaakov feared that Yosef, who had spent so much time in Egypt, the source of immorality and witchcraft, had descended to low spiritual levels, and that after his own death he would have to endure another death as a punishment for his son's sins. Once he actually saw him, he realized from the features of Yosef's face (see the *Or Hachayim*) that he was still the same Yosef, and was therefore overjoyed that he would not have to endure an additional death after his time came.

Those who educate their children properly, or who have disciples who continue their praiseworthy activities after they die, accumulate merits even when they are no longer in this world physically, and are guaranteed a blissful existence in eternity.

FACE MIRRORS SOUL

In this world only exceptional individuals such as the Arizal can detect a person's spiritual state by examining their face, but in the Afterlife it is evident for all to see. The Chofetz Chaim would dwell on this point, and note that it is worthwhile to repent and amend whatever needs to be amended while one still can, instead of suffering eternal embarrassment in *Olom Habo*, where one can no longer do *teshuva*.

ENVIRONMENTS

“So that you may dwell in the land of Goshen” (46:34)

Despite their yearning to be with each other after all these years, Yaakov and Yosef decided that it would be best for Yaakov and his descendants to live far away in Goshen as outcasts in the company of shepherds, even though this meant that Yaakov and Yosef would not see each other again until just before Yaakov's death. Yaakov and his sons could easily have lived comfortably in the city next to Yosef, but decided instead to say that they were shepherds, who were hated by the Egyptians. Yaakov reasoned that the only way he could be saved from the *tumoh* of Egypt was by secluding himself in Goshen and learning Torah day and night.

The Rambam talks about the powerful influence of the environment, and we too should not underestimate its pull. The precedent of Yaakov demonstrates how important it is to get our priorities right, and live in the vicinity of religious people, rather than living a life of luxury amongst non-Jews or Jews who do not share our values or lifestyle.