



RELATING TO THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF YOSEF HATZADDIK

I AM STILL YOSEF, STILL YOUR BROTHER

In this week's *parshah*, there are a lot of powerful lessons to be learned. Yosef comes face to face with his brothers, and he reveals himself to them. Now, the *passuk* (Bereishis 45:4) says, **אני יוסף אחיכם**, *I am Yosef your brother*, **אשר מכרתם אותי מצרימה**, *whom you sold to Mitzrayim*.¹ My Rebbi (HaRav Meir Halevi Soloveichik, zt"l) asked the following question: what was Yosef coming to add when he said **אני יוסף אחיכם**?

Yosef already introduced himself to his brothers in the previous *passuk* (ibid 45:3) and said **אני יוסף**, and they didn't say, "No, you're not."² They were *mekabel* his words. It says, **נבהלו מפניו**, they became confounded. So what was the message he wanted to relate now when he said, **אני יוסף אחיכם**, "I am Yosef your brother"?

Another thing that needs to be understood, my Rebbi said, is why did he have to say **אשר מכרתם אותי**, that you sold me to Mitzrayim? Isn't that obvious that they sold him? Don't they know that?! Once he said 'I'm Yosef,' then obviously, I am the one 'whom you sold to Mitzrayim!'

Now, Rashi in *Parshas Vayechi* (Bereishis 47:31) says that Yaakov Avinu bowed down at the head of the bed, and he thanked Hashem, first, for having a family that none of them were *reshaim*, and second, that even though Yosef was taken captive amongst the *goyim*, he still remained whole in his righteousness. My Rebbi pointed out that Rashi (Bereishis 47:31) doesn't say **שהוא צדיק**; Rashi uses the language **והרי הוא עומד בצדקו** - he [Yosef] remained righteous.³

My Rebbi explained that Yosef wanted to teach his brothers a phenomenal lesson, and that is, in spite of everything that transpired to Yosef on account of the sale and their *sinah*, in spite of all that, he said, "From my perspective, I am completely your brother. I have nothing in my heart against you."

PEOPLE WHO MAINTAIN THEIR PAIN

Now, naturally, if someone would try to take his brother's life or sell him as an *eved* because he doesn't like him, that brother would bear tremendous *sinah*, tremendous hatred against him. Today, you find children who feel hatred toward their parents. I've met so many people who feel they weren't treated properly by their parents, and because of that they detest their parents. They hate their parents. They don't talk to their parents. And their parents never sold them into slavery, and never put them to work delivering papers and then taking the money from them.

I met people who hate their siblings. Usually, it's over money. One of the siblings got the better, the upper hand, over the other one. Or one of them feels disrespected and looked down upon by the others because they're not so *matzliach*. The nature of hate is that when you are angry at somebody, it doesn't dissipate over time. The anger builds up, and it fills the heart. It overpowers the heart, and it becomes an integral part of people's lives. I can't begin to tell you how many people I have spoken to who have this issue.

If the Torah put it in, I assume it's not that uncommon - even though maybe selling to slavery is extreme - but the fact that you got thrown 'under the bus,' or you feel you were thrown 'under the bus' by somebody in your family, is not that uncommon. The nature of a person is if somebody wrongs them, they get ticked off, they get angry. They believe that their parents were the cause of their downfall. They believe their brother or their sister was the cause of their downfall. They believe people have hurt them.

A BA'AL BITACHON KNOWS IT'S ONLY HASHEM

You have to know that Yosef Hatzaddik understood there is nothing else in the world that has any power aside from Hashem. He was a tremendous *ba'al bitachon*. He was **מבטחו ולא פנה אל רהבים** שם ה', he never turned to nonsense.⁴ He never imagined that people, or boogie men, or monsters, had any power to challenge him.

¹ ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו גשו נא אלי ויגשו ויאמר אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אתי מצרימה

² ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אתו כי נבהלו מפניו

³ ויאמר השבעה לי וישבע לו וישתחו ישראל על ראש המטה (רש"י ד"ה **על ראש המטה**: הפך עצמו לצד השכינה. מכאן אמרו שהשכינה למעלה מראשותיו של חולה (שבת י"ב, נדרים מ'); ד"ה על ראש

המטה - על שהיתה משתו שלמה ולא היה בה קשע, שהרי יוסף מלך הוא, ועוד שנשבע לבין הגוים, (הרי הוא עומד בצדקו)

⁴ אשרי הגבר אשר שם ה' מבטחו ולא פנה אל רהבים ושטי כזב (תהילים מ': ה)

It was clear to him that whatever happened was done *al yedei Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Who controls the world with all its details, אין אדם, נוקף אצבעו, a person doesn't knock his little finger למטה, down here, עליו מלמעלה.⁵

People detest their spouses because of imaginary or real abuse. They think that the spouse has an ability to actually bring upon them hurt and pain. They don't. Only Hakadosh Baruch Hu has that *koach*. And since everything comes from Hakadosh Baruch Hu there's no place for a *ta'annah* on the human being who brought this upon me because this is what the *chochmah* of Hashem was *gozer*. Therefore, in the heart of Yosef, there did not sprout or grow any bitterness and *sinah* toward his brothers because of the sale, or because of anything else that resulted from that sale. He *pashut* felt the same way he felt toward them before the sale took place.

That's what Yosef meant when he said: אני יוסף אחיכם, I am Yosef your brother, in the *zelbe* (*same*) *matzav* that was before you sold me. I'm the *zelbe* brother that you sold to Mitzrayim. And I am just like when I was in my father's house before the sale.

The brothers hated him. He already knew that before they sold him. It didn't start at the time of the sale. [How bad was it?] *Ad kedei kach*, the Torah testifies that the brothers couldn't talk to him. They couldn't talk to him *beshalom*. Yosef himself had no *ta'anot* against them. His *achvah*, his brotherhood, had no *pegam* and no *chisaron*. *Achvah gemurah*. Even when the man said to Yosef, "Who are you looking for?" Yosef said, "I'm looking for my brothers." You know what the man said? נסעו מזה, they went away from here. What does Rashi (Bereishis 37:17) say over there? הסייעו עצמן מן האחורה, they had made a decision: He's not our brother anymore. נלכה דתינה, they said let's go to Dosan, and over there we're going to plot his death.⁶ Nevertheless, after the man told him that, what was Yosef's response? וילך יוסף אחר אחיו, Yosef went after his brothers, and he treated them with *achvah*. He was *pashut* going *bemesiras nafsho* to find out how they were doing, so he could report back to his father. But, as we know, they took him, and put him in the *bor* with *nachashim v'akravim*. Afterwards, they took him out, and they sold him to Yishmaelim. If this would continue happening in this sequence to any normal person, the guy would have had a heart attack. He'd blow his brains. *Pashut* he'd be burning mad. How could you do this to me? Could you imagine what would happen if somebody did just a tiny bit of this to you? You'd go berserk. And then the brothers take Yosef out of there, and they sell him to the Yishmaelim! The *medrash* says that Yosef laid down in front of each brother separately and pleaded with them for *rachamim*. And they didn't want to have *rachmanus* on him. Could you imagine that? And his *achvah* wasn't diminished *ki hu zeh klal*. (You see a *peledike zach*. Even though he had tremendous *bitachon*, he still was *mevakesh rachamim* from them) And he didn't get full of bitterness. It doesn't say once he was bitter. It doesn't say the guy was walking in a cage in Mitzrayim thinking, "Shrek! How can I pay them back?"

A UNIQUE MIKVAH EXPERIENCE

I once had a kid I took in, who stayed in my house. He was a problem kid. This was many years ago. He misbehaved. He gave me a very hard time. He was a challenging child. He was a challenged child. His older brother was watching how he was behaving towards me and my family. One day he told him, "I'm giving you a warning. You better shape up. I'm telling you. The person gave you his life! He opened his home to you. He gives you everything. He supports you. He's raising you. You better behave."

One night, his older brother took him for a walk. He said, "I want to talk to you." He took him downstairs to the *mikveh* in Telz. This guy also thought he was Mr. Macho man. His brother was a *tzaddik* of a guy. I don't know how his brother did it, but his brother managed to push him over the wall of the *mikveh* and to hold him by his feet, and start to make a *tevilah* with him, with his head down. He dipped his head in. I guess that was the first form of waterboarding. He put him in there, pulled him out. He said, "Are you going to change?" "No." Finally, after the boy had enough, he said, "Okay, I'm going to change." He told me the next day, "When I grow up, I'm going to kill him."

And with Yosef, this thought didn't even enter his mind. There was no bitterness. Just like before the *mechirah* he had nothing against them, after the whole *gilgal* to Mitzrayim and after what he suffered in Mitzrayim with Eishes Potiphar, and in the jail, he had nothing against them. He should have been a raging bull in that jail. He should have been a person who was so angry in that jail, that *pashut*, you wouldn't be able to get near him. I don't understand him. Could you imagine that? Could you imagine what a raging bull he should have been? I can't imagine.

But Yosef Hatzaddik, not only was not raging, he wasn't a bull. Hashem was with him and he was with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and he had no *sinah* toward his brothers. He says to them, "I'm Yosef, your brother, whom you sold to Mitzrayim. Despite that, I am still your brother." He wasn't coming to cause them pain and hurt. *Lehepech*. He wanted to tell them, just like I never divested myself of the brotherhood, I never had against you any *sinah* and any *ka'as*, so too, now I feel like that also, without hatred and without *ka'as*. It's *ke'eelu* nothing happened. So don't feel bad. Don't feel sad. Don't get angry. Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu was *mesavev hadevarim* and I don't have any *shaychus* to being upset because of what happened. לא אתם שלחתם אותי הנה, it wasn't you that sent me here.

The *emes* is that even though Yosef went through so much because of his brothers - not only did he not have any hatred [towards them], he wasn't even bitter against Hashem. You know why? Because *tzaddikim* understand that you don't live for *olam hazeh*. Our condition in this world is not the end game. Our situation in *olam haba* is the end game. *Tzaddikim*, my Rebbi used to say, they laugh off all the *olam hazehdike* challenges, because they understand what *olam hazeh* is. Even when Yosef became the *melech* in Mitzrayim, and he went from the depths of the depths, to the heights of the heights, it doesn't say he got excited. The Torah should have written 'and Yosef was very happy on that day that he finally saw sunlight: ויטב הדבר בעיניו מאד. But it doesn't

⁵ ואמר ר' חנינא אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמעלה אלא אייב מכריזין עליו מלמעלה שנאמר (תהלים לו, כג) מה' מצעדי גבר כוננו (משלי כ, כד) ואדם מה יבין דרכו (חולין ז' ב) ⁶ ויאמר האיש נסעו מזה כי שמעתי אמרים נלכה דתינה וילך יוסף אחר אחיו וימצאם בדתן (רש"י ד"ה נסעו מזה: הסייעו עצמן מן האחורה)

say that in the Torah. You know why? Because for Yosef it didn't make a difference, because he understood.

TWO APPROACHES TO YESURIM

I want to tell you a *machlokes* in *hashkafah* of how to view *yesurim*. Most people in the world are aware of the famous story with the Rebbe Reb Zushe (Rabbi Meshulam Zusha of Hanipol, 1718-1800), a famous 'chassidic master,' as they call it today. One time, a *chassid* came to the Rebbe who was known as the Mezritcher Maggid, and he said to the Mezritcher Maggid (Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezrich, 1704-1772), "What's the *pshat* in the *gemara* in *Brachos* (54a) that says: חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שהוא מברך על הטובה - a person is obligated to bless Hashem for the bad just as he blesses Him for the good. The *gemara* says, "Do you know what that means? חייב לקבלינהו בשמחה. Just like *tovah* one is *mekabel besimchah*, so so too *ra'ah* you're *mekabel besimchah*." So the *chassid* asked, "How is it possible for a person to thank Hashem for the *ra'ah*, like he's *modeh al hatovah*. How is the simchah *shayach*?" So the Mezritcher Maggid told him, "Go to Reb Zushe and ask him the *shaylah* and he'll give you the *teshuvah*."

So the *chassid* went to Reb Zushe, and he asked him the *shaylah*. Reb Zushe said, "I can't answer this *shaylah* because I never experienced any *ra'ah* in my life. You have to go to somebody who experienced *tzaros veraos*." You hear? The *chassid* came back to the Mezritcher Maggid and he told him, "I was there. There must be some mistake. I came to ask him, and he told me some answer that had no *shaychus*." "What did he tell you?" "He told me that he never experienced any *ra'ah*. I never experienced anything bad in my life." The Maggid said to him, "Reb Yid, that was the *teshuvah*. He did answer you. That's why I sent you to see Reb Zushe. All his life he lived *bedachkus*. He lives *beaniyus*, poverty, terrible poverty. He suffers from *yesurim noraim* and all kinds of pains. And *im kol zeh* he doesn't see any *ra'ah* in his life. Everything is *tovah be'einav*. That person could be על הטובה כמו על הרעה. It means, if a person has the proper *emunah*, everything that happens in his life is *tovah*. He doesn't see any *ra'ah*. That's a famous thing in the world that everybody says.

But in Brisk they say it a little differently. They say over from Rav Chaim Volozhiner that to be מקבל יסורים באהבה - to accept suffering with love - does not mean that you don't feel the *tzaros* and the *yesurim* at all, and you see them as pure *tovos*. You know why? Because Dovid Hamelech said וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הַמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי, *Your rod and Your staff - they comfort me* (Tehillim 23:4).

שבטך means Your stick that you hit me with, ומשענתך, Your staff that You let me lean on, both of them give me comfort.⁷ That means the *yesurim*, the *tzaros* that Dovid Hamelech experienced were considered a stick. He didn't feel that they were *tzukalach*. He didn't feel they were candies. They weren't *mamtakim*. But in spite of the fact that they weren't *mamtakim*, Dovid Hamelech said, "They're equal in my eyes, המה ינחמוני, they both comforted me. Because even though I'm *makir* the great *tzarah* and the *yesurim*, I know יצא הדבר שמה, and it's a comfort. I know it's for my best, and I accept it just like I accept the *meshenes*, the support. That's the *chiyuv levarech*. This approach can also be found in the *kisvei* of the *tzaddik* Rav Yosef Zundel of Salant.

A MODERN-DAY YOSEF BECOMES AN ISH MATZLIACH

A person has to know, this is something to work on all your life. I met one person in my life that I'm in awe of. He was a young boy who suffered from his mother like you can't imagine. The mother wouldn't call him by his first name. The mother called him *mamzer*. Can you imagine being called *mamzer* by your mother from when you were a little child?! I can't. I hate to say it, but if you ever tried that on me, you'd be a big member of the dentist. The abuse that he got was so unimaginable, when he described it to me, I *pashut* burst out crying. I couldn't help myself. My wife came into the room. It was on Shabbos afternoon. She said to me, "Why are you crying?" She said, "What's today, Tisha B'Av?" I said, "Today is Tisha B'Av *shechal lehiyos beShabbos*." She said, "You're not supposed to show the *aveilus*." I said, "I just can't help myself."

I'll give you a little example. He told me his mother would drive him to school. She would tell him, "Make sure you don't talk to one boy in the school." When she picked him up, she would ask him, "Did you talk to anybody?" "No, of course not." He did, but he lied to her. He couldn't come into the room when his family was eating supper, or any other meal. If only the family was there, he had to stand by the door, knock on the door and say, "May I enter?" When he sat down by the table and everybody took food, he had to say, "May I take chicken? May I take meat? May I take the peas?" He had to ask for it. If he didn't ask, it would be taken away from him and he wouldn't get food. In the morning, he had to come to his mother when he became of age, to get sprayed with antiperspirant. He had to lift his hand up, *pashut*, and get humiliated. He told me, he was once in the car and his mother was driving. His mother made a joke. She started laughing. His mother stopped the car. His father was laughing, and he was laughing. The mother said, "What are you laughing about?" So his father said, "You made a funny joke." "Get out of the car. Both of you get out of the car!" On the highway, she kicked them out of the car! I can't imagine [how they managed]. If his mother wasn't feeling well, she made him sleep next to her bed, on the floor, like a servant, like a dog, and whenever she needed things, she'd tap him, "Go get this, go get that." For some crazy reason, every night when he did his homework, she would come and say "Did you finish your homework? Let me see it." She would take it and tear it to pieces. I mean, she was crazy. He said he learned what to do. He would start his homework. He would sit there with a piece of paper, and just write crazy lines. Then he did his real homework on the bottom. She came in and he gave her those papers, and she would tear up the wrong papers. You can't imagine this! I can't imagine a person being tortured in that way. He told me stories that didn't make any sense. I said, "I would throw her out of an airplane." And he called her up every birthday, "Mom I want to wish you a happy birthday. I want to wish you the best." When she went on a trip, "Mom, I hope you're having a good time on the trip."

⁷ שבטך ומשענתך. יסורים שבאו עלי ומשען שאני בטוח על חסדך שניהם ינחמוני שיהיו לי לסלוח עון ובטוח אני שתערוך לפני שלחן היא המלכות (רש"י)

I remember asking, “How do you do it?!” I told him, “After the suffering you had, you shouldn’t be allowed legally to walk in the street. What you should do is you should build yourself a cage, and get a big lock, put the key in from the outside, break the key and throw it away because you’d go nuts. You’d be shooting people up the street.” So he says, “I know it’s from Hashem.” I said, “How could you know that?!” He said, “You don’t think it’s from Hashem?” I said, “I do, but I don’t understand how you could know that, how you could possibly know that.”

On his own wedding - you can’t imagine - he learned until 2 o’clock in the afternoon straight! On the day of his *chasunah*! The *chasunah* was one of the most *leibedike chasunos* that I have experienced. Everybody put their *lev* and *nefesh* into the dancing! Not everybody knew what his story was. But I remember, I was *shikur* with simcha at the *chasunah*. The only thing that disturbed me was looking at his mother. I said to her a couple times during the *chasunah*, “I hope you’re having *nachas*.” I remember her gritting her teeth. I remember thinking, “How can this be?!”

When he brought his *kallah* for the first time to meet the family, he said, “Ma, my *kallah* is afraid of dogs. Could you please put the dog in the basement?” The mother said, “This is our family. You understand? We don’t put our family in the basement.” But he understood 100%, it’s from Hashem.

When I hear of a guy who went through such *tzaros*, and passed the test with flying colors, I say he’s an *איש מצליח*. That’s the way I look at it. If he never would have talked to his mother, I would have understood him. If he would have fed her rat poison, I would have understood it 100%. And if he would have watched her go and smiled and waved, “Have a nice trip”, I would have understood the guy 100%. But actually, he doesn’t have a *ta’anah* on her. “It’s from Hashem. I don’t know why, but Hashem knows what he’s doing.”

And this continued. It never stopped. Hashem finally, at one point took him out of Mitzrayim. Hashem let him go. One day Hashem put it in her mind to say to him, “Would you like to go away to *yeshivah*?” He was about 20. He said, “Yes.” “You can go.” That’s when he got his first reprieve. He was able to breathe air. He was the most personable, most wonderful, most special young man. I believe he had a very *heilegeh neshamah* to have to endure such things. Today, he’s already established, he’s *matzliach*, he has a wonderful family. He’s *more matzliach* than most people that you know, and it’s only because this person understood beyond a shadow of a doubt that what he endured was from Hashem.

IT’S YOUR CHOICE HOW YOU LOOK AT YOUR YISSURIM

How many people go through *tzaros* and they don’t understand that Hashem is preparing them for great things. But while they’re going through the *tzaros* they lose their will. They lose their strength to live. They lose their awareness that it’s Hashem putting them through the washing machine, and Hashem is making some challenges for them. When the washing machine water drains out, they climb out the pipe and go out with the water right down the drain. And their lives are embittered. They spend the rest of their lives as members, *chassidim*, of therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and all other kinds of shrinks, and they never get themselves fixed up. That’s the big tragedy.

Any terrible challenge that you have. If you get fired, or you get something nasty and it’s not fair. You get disrespected or ‘thrown under the bus’ by your family. You have two choices: You can become a member of the ‘tissue club.’ You can walk around with a box of tissues, always sniffing and blowing your nose and looking for more tissues. You can spend your life doing that. Or you can strengthen yourself and say, “Hashem, You know what You’re doing and I accept it. I know that at the other end of this tunnel, there’s *malchus* waiting for me. There’s *hatzlachah gedolah* waiting for me.”

And all those people who experience these difficulties, and don’t have the strength to stay with the program and don’t turn the lemons into lemonade, never in their life enjoy a glass of cold lemonade. All they have is bitter lemon rinds - with no chocolate on the outside. They end up just bitter, broken people. So, if you think you had it bad, study the *parshah* of Yosef. Look at the *parshah* of Yosef, and learn from Yosef, and turn it around, because - if you are being challenged - you should know one thing, it’s all from Hashem!

THE BOTTOM LINE

The nature of people who are wronged, mistreated, abused, or proverbially, ‘thrown under the bus’ is to become angry and resentful at the offending party, and often even at Hashem, r”l. Yosef Hatzaddik understood that Hashem alone orchestrated all of the events surrounding his sale, and used his brothers as *shluchim*. As such, he didn’t feel an iota of hatred or bitterness towards his brothers, as the Torah testifies for us when he told them, “Am I Yosef, your brother,” meaning, “I am the same brother now as I was before, despite all of the hardships that I’ve experienced.” Like in the story of Reb Zushe, Yosef’s supreme bitachon enabled him to accept and understand that all of his trials and tribulations were ultimately directed from Above and were for his good in the Olam HaEmes. We, too, should learn this lesson from Yosef, and on our own level, attempt to find an inner peace and accept that our own challenges are from Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and from Him alone. And if we could endure these darker times with this attitude, we, too, could become ‘Melachim,’ and be zoiche to turn our lemons into a lemonade, IY”H.