

In this week's *Parashah*, Yaakov and his family descend to Egypt to be reunited with Yosef. *Midrash Rabbah* teaches: Sometimes, one tries to lead his cow somewhere, but it refuses to budge. What should one do? Lead its calf in front of it, and the cow will follow willingly. Similarly, it was necessary for Yaakov to descend to Egypt, even if it meant being led there in chains. What did *Hashem* do? He sent Yosef ahead so that Yaakov would go willingly. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (1895-1974; *Mashgiach Ruchani* in the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai and the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) explains: Yaakov's sons were holy men whose names were engraved on the *Choshen* / breastplate that the *Kohen Gadol* wore. Moreover, our Sages say that it was in the merit of Yaakov's sons that the *Kohen Gadol* was able to enter the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*! It is inconceivable to attribute the sale of Yosef to their free will. Rather, the *Midrash* is teaching, Yosef's brothers were merely carrying out *Hashem's* will when they sold Yosef! In fact, *Rashi* z"l (to *Bereishit* 37:14) says this quite clearly.

However, R' Levenstein notes, this requires explanation. If Yosef's brothers had no choice, why were they held accountable for the sale, as we read (*Amos* 2:6), "Should I not exact retribution . . . for their having sold a righteous man for silver and a destitute one for the sake of a pair of shoes?!" [See the *Yom Kippur Machzor* regarding the "Ten Martyrs" (Artsroll p.586).] - **Continued in box inside** -

Tefilah

This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. For several weeks, we have been focusing on the definition of 'Tefilah / prayer offered by R' Moshe ben Yosef Trani z"l ("Mabit"; 1505-1585; rabbi of Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael): "Tefilah is a person asking from Hashem something the person needs that he cannot obtain on his own."

He continues: What we mean by "something the person needs," is that one should not pray for things that are not necessary. If he does, he is, so-to-speak, troubling *Hashem*. [Of course, nothing is "trouble" for *Hashem*, Who is All-Powerful. However,] *Hashem* created the world intending it to run according to the laws of nature, and every time He answers our prayers, His is "forced" to "change His plan" and override nature. [See also *Ramban* quoted on page 3 of this issue.]

(*Bet Elokim: Sha'ar Ha'Tefilah* ch.1)

Does this mean that a person who is living comfortably, in good health, has no need to pray?

R' Menachem di Lonzano z"l (late 16th century; Italy, Turkey, and *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: When a person needs something, he will concentrate well while praying. The greater the need, the greater his concentration. Certainly, if one's child is sick or he himself is sick, or if he is in a storm on the high seas, he will have no trouble pouring out his heart to *Hashem* with tears and with genuine feeling. But, if one thinks that he does not need what he is praying for, he will have trouble concentrating. This is why we see so many people who do not concentrate during *Davening*. They live in peace, their businesses are prospering, and their children are healthy--for what do they need to pray?

The solution, R' di Lonzano writes (quoting *Devarim* 8:18), is to "remember *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, for it is He Who gives you strength to make wealth." If a person is prosperous, it is because *Hashem* makes it so. One should think of all of those who were living comfortably amidst great wealth but lost it overnight. There are even such people whose collapse was so complete that history has forgotten them. When one reflects on this, he will realize that he always has needs about which to plead before *Hashem*.

(*Derech Chaim*)

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“These are the sons of Leah whom she bore to Yaakov in Padan-Aram, in addition to Dinah his daughter. All the people -- his sons and daughters -- numbered thirty-three.” (46:15)

“All the people of Yaakov’s household who came to Egypt -- seventy.” (46:27)

R’ Avraham *ben Ha’Rambam* z”l (son of Maimonides; Egypt; 1186-1237) writes: Much has been said to explain the Torah’s statement that Leah’s descendants number thirty-three, when the detailed list in the Torah (verses 8-14) actually numbers thirty-two. Some say that Yocheved [mother of Moshe Rabbeinu] was born on the way, completing the count to thirty-three. If that is a tradition, writes R’ Avraham, we accept it. However, he continues, the best explanation on the level of *P’shat* is that of R’ Avraham ibn Ezra z”l (1089-1167), who writes that Yaakov himself counts as the thirty-third person. This interpretation is supported by the verse (46:8), “These are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt--Yaakov and his children.” This shows that Yaakov is counted with them.

Regarding the Torah’s statement that a total of seventy people descended to Egypt, though the detailed list includes only sixty-nine names, R’ Avraham quotes “my father and teacher” [*Rambam*] as explaining that the Torah frequently rounds up. For example, the Torah commands us to count fifty days of the *Omer*, though it really means forty-nine.

(*Peirush Ha’Torah Le’Rabbeinu Avraham ben Ha’Rambam*)

R’ Moshe ben Nachman z”l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: R’ Avraham ibn Ezra z”l (cited above) rejects the *Midrash* that Yocheved was born on the way to Egypt because that would have made Yocheved 130 years old when Moshe Rabbeinu was born--a miracle that, according to R’ ibn Ezra, should have been mentioned in the Torah.

However, *Ramban*, continues: R’ ibn Ezra’s rejection of the *Midrash* does not resolve the difficulty he identifies. Even if Yocheved was not 130 when Moshe was born, a miracle still occurred. Specifically, it is undisputed that Moshe’s mother (Yocheved) was the daughter of Levi, and that 173 years passed between the births of grandfather and grandson. No matter how one apportions those years, the result is a miracle: either Levi was exceptionally old when he fathered Yocheved, or she was exceptionally old when Moshe was born, or both.

In reality, writes *Ramban*, the reason the Torah does not mention Yocheved’s age when Moshe was born is that only miracles foretold by prophets are recorded in the Torah. When *Hashem* performs a miracle to aid a *Tzaddik* or destroy a *Rasha*, but that miracle was not foretold, it does not warrant mention in the Torah. In truth, *Ramban* continues, virtually everything in the Torah is miraculous. For example, the Torah decrees death at the hands of Heaven on a person who commits adultery or eats *Cheilev* / prohibited animal fats. Can such death be attributed to nature?! Likewise, the Torah foretells drought if the *Shemittah* / sabbatical year for the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is not observed. Is that natural?! Certainly, the fact that praying or reciting *Tehilim* / Psalms changes the course of nature is miraculous.

(*Peirush Ha’Ramban Al Ha’Torah*)

“And He said, ‘I am the *Kel* -- the *Kel* of your father. Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there.’” (46:3)

Rashi z”l writes: *Hashem* said this to Yaakov because Yaakov was saddened that he was compelled to leave *Eretz Yisrael*. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Yaakov Perlow z”l (1931-2020; *Novominsker Rebbe* in New York) writes: Yaakov knew that his children had to descend to Egypt because of G-d’s decree in his covenant with Avraham (*Bereishit* 15:13). Perhaps Yaakov thought that, nevertheless, he would be permitted to remain behind in *Eretz Yisrael*. “No!” *Hashem* told him in our verse, “I will establish your descendants as a great nation in their land of exile, just as I promised Avraham, but only if you go with them and ensure that their lives are rooted in holiness.”

This, R’ Perlow writes, is why we read (*Shmot* 1:1): “And these are the names of *Bnei Yisrael* who were coming to Egypt with Yaakov.” It was crucial to the outcome that they arrived in Egypt “with Yaakov.” This is further emphasized by the *Haftarah* for *Parashat Shmot* (*Yeshayah* 27:6): “Those who were coming -- Yaakov will lay down roots; *Yisrael* will bud and blossom and fill the face of the earth like fruit.” Only because of the roots that Yaakov laid down can [*Bnei*] *Yisrael* blossom.

(*Adas Yaakov: Pesach* p.196)

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R’ Levenstein explains: Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z”l (Spain; early 11th century) writes in *Chovot Ha’levavot* (*Sha’ar Ha’bitachon*, ch.4) that every deed, good or bad, takes three steps to come to fruition. First, a person makes a choice to want good or bad. Second, he makes up his mind to translate his choice into action. Finally, he acts. The first two of these steps, writes R’ Bachya, are completely within man’s free will. In contrast, whether man is able to complete the third step--the action itself--depends on whether it fits into *Hashem*’s plan. If it does, the person will be rewarded or punished, as the case may be, for all three steps. If not, so the action never happens, he still will be rewarded or punished for the first two steps.

R’ Levenstein continues: As noted, Yaakov’s righteous sons were not capable of selling their brother into slavery of their own initiative, something even the most degenerate low-life would not do. But, when *Hashem* chooses agents to carry out his plans, He chooses people who have a leaning in a certain direction. In this case, Yosef’s brothers had made a choice to hate Yosef, and that choice made them worthy agents to carry out *Hashem*’s plan to sell Yosef. It is for that choice and its consequences that they were held accountable.

R’ Levenstein concludes: There is a practical lesson here. Even a leaning towards sin makes an impression Above. Therefore, we must be very cautious even with our thoughts.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Roshei Yeshivat Mir* p.131)