

Our *Parashah* begins, "Yehuda approached him and said, 'If you please, my master, may your servant speak a word in my master's ears . . .'"--i.e., Yehuda asked the Egyptian viceroy (Yosef) for permission to speak firmly to him about Binyamin.

Separate from the verse's literal meaning, *Midrash Rabbah* comments that the verb "approach" in our verse alludes to prayer. And R' Yaakov Yosef Hakohen of Polnoye z"l (1710-1784; author of the earliest *Chassidic* works and a primary source for the teachings of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*) writes that this verse contains the "secret of prayer." What does this mean?

R' Shmuel Berezovsky *shlita* (*Slonimer Rebbe* in Yerushalayim) explains with a story: A certain *Chassid* had an illegal still in his house. One day, he learned that someone had informed on him to the Russian Czar's police, and he knew that a harsh punishment awaited him. Immediately, he ran to the *Shul*, threw open the *Aron Ha'kodesh* and began to recite *Tehilim* tearfully. Eventually, he reached the verse (63:2), "My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You; in a parched and thirsty land with no water," and he began to scream it over and over again with such enthusiasm that he could be heard in the street. The local rabbi heard and came to investigate. The *Chassid* told him, "At first I was praying about my troubles, but when I reached this verse I was possessed by an incredible longing just to speak to *Hashem*, just to be close to him, and nothing more."

This explains the *Slonimer Rebbe*, is what the *Midrash* is teaching: True, prayer is a way that we ask *Hashem* for our needs. The highest form of prayer, however, the "secret of prayer," is one that is about a desire to be close to *Hashem*, to speak to Him for the sake of having a relationship. "May your servant speak a word in my Master's ears . . ." (*Darchei No'am* 5764)

## Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 10b) teaches: *Hashem* said to Moshe, "I have a good *Matanah* / gift in My treasury, and its name is 'Shabbat.' I wish to give it to the Jewish People; go inform them!" [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Gedaliah Eisman z"l (1910-2011; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshiva Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) notes that the Torah itself calls *Shabbat* a "*Matanah*," as we read (*Shmot* 16:29), "See that *Hashem* 'Natan' / has given you the *Shabbat*." (The words "*Matanah*" and "*Natan*" share the same root.) True, we are required to observe *Shabbat*, but something about *Shabbat* is a gift. How so?

R' Eisman answers: When a gift is given, it leaves the control of the giver and enters the control of the recipient. This is why a gift has meaning; the giver gives up something that is his and turns it over to the recipient. When *Hashem* gave us the *Shabbat*, He gave us a gift. *Shabbat* became ours.

In what way? What did *Hashem* "give up" by giving us the *Shabbat*? There is an expression, "A candle for one is a candle for one-hundred," i.e., a person does not have less light because others benefit from the same candle. Seemingly, the same is true of *Shabbat*!

R' Eisman explains: There is something else that the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 5a) describes as a gift to us--the Torah. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 89a) relates that the angels objected strenuously to the Giving of the Torah. This indicates clearly that something was being turned over from Heaven's control to the control of the Jewish People when the Torah was given.

We read about the Torah (*Devarim* 30:12), "It is not in heaven." When *Hashem* gave us the Torah, He relinquished all control over it. When we are uncertain what *Halachah* requires, we may not ask a prophet to tell us what *Hashem* says; we must ask a Torah scholar, who will give us an answer based on his best understanding of the relevant Torah texts.

Similarly, says R' Eisman, *Shabbat* was given to us. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 119a) teaches, "Anyone who prays and recites *Kiddush* on Friday night becomes a partner with *Hashem* in Creation." *Hashem* made *Shabbat* the source of all blessings, but we--not *Hashem*--control whether those blessings will materialize. We exercise this control by choosing how we observe *Shabbat*. (Quoted in *Yalkut Lekach Tov: Shabbat* p.82)

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**“And He said, ‘I am the *Kel--Elokim* of your father. Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes’.” (46:3-4)**

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercav Harav) writes: Yaakov was afraid that his children would assimilate into the immorality and decadence of Egyptian society. *Hashem* told him, “Have no fear . . . Yosef will place his hand on your eyes,” meaning: If you want to know what the exile will look like, Yosef is the picture and model of the Jewish People in exile. Through all his ups and downs, Yosef said (42:18), “I fear *Elokim*,” and so it will be with Yaakov’s descendants.

In addition, R' Charlap writes, *Midrashim* record that there were two laws in Egypt--one that prohibited a slave from becoming the viceroy, and another that prohibited a slave from being freed. *Hashem* told Yaakov: Look at Yosef--just as he went from slavery to becoming ruler, so your descendants will go from slavery to freedom.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.107)

**“So they brought their livestock to Yosef, and Yosef gave them bread in return for the horses, for the flocks of sheep, for the herds of cattle, and for the donkeys; *Vayenahalem* / thus he provided them (literally, ‘he led them’) with bread [in exchange] for all their livestock during that year.” (47:17)**

R' Naftali Hertz Weisel z"l (1725-1805; German banker, and prolific author of works of Torah commentary, Hebrew grammar, and *Mussar*) writes: The root of “*Vayenahalem*” (*Nun-Heh-Lamed*) means to lead gently. Thus, for example, when Yaakov told Esav that he needed to travel slowly for the good of his young children and flocks, he said (*Bereishit* 33:14), “I will lead / *Etnahalah* at my slow pace according to the gait of the flock before me and the gait of the children.” Likewise, King David said (*Tehilim* 23:2), “Beside tranquil waters *Yenahalaini* / He leads me.”

The Torah is teaching, writes R' Weisel, that Yosef’s management of Egypt’s resources, including taking as payment for food all the Egyptians’ livestock and land, was not cruel, as one might think from a superficial reading of the verses. Yosef redistributed Egypt’s wealth because that was *Hashem*’s Will. [*Rashi* to *Bereishit* 47:21 explains that causing every Egyptian to be a stranger in his own land was intended to put the Egyptians on the same footing as *Bnei Yisrael* and take away the former’s ability to call *Bnei Yisrael* “strangers” in Egypt.] Nevertheless, our verse’s choice of a verb that hints at “gentleness” teaches us that Yosef did not allow any Egyptian to starve, even one who had nothing with which to pay for food.

(*Imrei Shefer*)

**“He cried in a loud voice.” (45:2)**

*Midrash Rabbah* comments: Just as Yosef appeased his brothers with tears, so *Hashem* will redeem *Yisrael* only through tears, as it is written (*Yirmiyah* 31:8), “With weeping they will come, and through supplications I will bring them.” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Yedayah Ha’penini z"l (13<sup>th</sup> century; Provence) explains: The *Midrash* is teaching that the greater the good to which we look forward, the greater the pain required to attain that good. That is why our Sages say things about the “*Chevlei Mashiach*” / “birth pangs of *Mashiach*,” such as (*Sanhedrin* 98b), “May *Mashiach* come, but let me not witness it.”

(*Be’ur Haggadot*)

**“And they told him, saying, ‘Yosef is still alive,’ also that he is ruler over all the land of Egypt; but his heart skipped a beat, for he did not believe them.” (45:26)**

R' Yosef Konvitz z"l (1878-1944; rabbi in Newark, NJ; President of the Agudath HaRabonim of the United States and Canada) asks: If Yaakov did not believe his sons, why did his heart skip a beat? Conversely, if his heart skipped a beat because he was so moved by the news that Yosef was alive, why does the Torah say that he did not believe them?

R' Konvitz answers: The Torah (*Bereishit* 37:34-35) relates that, when Yosef was sold, Yaakov “mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.” *Rashi* z"l explains that *Hashem* designed the world such that one’s attachment to someone who has passed away will lessen over time. But Yosef was still alive, so Yaakov’s attachment to him never lessened, and therefore Yaakov could not be comforted. [Until here from *Rashi*]

Presuming that Yaakov was aware of this “decree” of *Hashem*, it would follow, continues R' Konvitz, that Yaakov knew that Yosef was alive. This would explain why his heart only skipped a beat when he was informed that Yosef was alive, whereas most people would faint upon hearing such news. This also explains our verse. It does not mean that he did not believe his sons that Yosef was alive. To the contrary, “His heart skipped a beat”--instead of stopping entirely--“for he did not believe them”--22 years earlier when they said that Yosef had died.

R' Konvitz adds: Perhaps this is what King David had in mind when he said (*Tehilim* 130:5), “I hoped for *Hashem*, my soul hoped, and I longed for His word. My soul [yearns] for *Hashem*, among those awaiting the dawn, those awaiting the dawn.” The exile has been so terrible, writes R' Konvitz. What keeps us longing for redemption? The very fact that we continue to await the dawn, the redemption, is what assures us that there will, indeed, be a redemption.

(*Divrei Yosef*)