

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 241

Miketz | Master of Self, Master of Nature



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת מקץ | אנגלית

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Miketz

Money, Void of Purpose

A devout Jew recounted the following story in his own words:

It was a Monday morning about twenty years ago. I owned a ten-seater Hyundai van. The seating was arranged as a double bench in front (next to the driver) and eight seats in the back.

For my livelihood, I used this van as a taxi. When I bought the van, I took it upon myself, with an informal vow, never to seat women in the front. If there was no choice, then at most one woman would be allowed to sit there, and on the far side from the driver. I tried to be really strict about this, thanks to my rabbi, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, may his merit protect us.

That morning, we arrived—two vehicles—from a children's preschool in Ashdod to the Beit Chalomotai (lit. "My Dream House") facility at Kibbutz Givat Brenner.

On the return trip, the other driver was in a hurry and had left behind a female passenger who was supposed to ride back with him, but by then, he was already significantly far ahead.

I buckled the children into the back seats. I returned to my place to begin the drive, and suddenly I saw two women sitting on the front double bench. I didn't know what to do. They just laughed and said, "Oh, it's fine." During the drive, there was a bit of frivolity on my part as well. We reached the entrance to Ashdod, when suddenly I remembered that it was Monday...

For nearly thirty years, Rabbi Yoram would give a lesson on Monday in Ashdod. Suddenly, I was seized with fear: how could I go to see the Rabbi after I had fallen like this? At first I thought not to attend the lesson

Parshat Miketz - The Purity of Joseph the Righteous

at all, because I knew our Rabbi sees everything. And for that very reason, I was just as afraid *not* to go to the lesson.

I thought of a compromise. I decided not to touch the money from that job, to donate all the money from that ride to a yeshiva. That way, G-d would atone for me, and I wouldn't be ashamed to see the Rabbi. So there I was, completely tense, wondering what would happen that evening. The Rabbi arrived, as per his holy routine, at ten o'clock that evening. I had been sitting in the front rows for about twenty years, and throughout the entire lesson, I kept looking at the Rabbi, but the Rabbi did not look at me at all. I wanted to sink into the ground from the shame that overtook me.

After the lesson, I would never leave without kissing the Rabbi's holy hand. I waited for

the Rabbi to leave, but when the Rabbi exited the venue, he suddenly hurried to get into the car. I ran up to the Rabbi, but the Rabbi did not let me kiss his holy hand. I thought to myself: at least I can give the Rabbi the money I earned from that ride. I took the money out of my pocket and said loudly, "This is for the yeshiva," and I placed the money into the Rabbi's hand. The Rabbi took the money and gave it back to me, saying: "Whoever needs such money..."

I went home crying. I couldn't sleep all night. But I knew with absolute certainty that everything the Rabbi did was in order to remove the heavenly accusation from me. Whoever was privileged to know the Rabbi knows that he was entirely an embodiment of the divine attribute of mercy, truly like a father...

The Purity of Joseph the Righteous

In Parashat Vayetze (and again in Parashat Vayishlach), we learn that 12 children were born to

our forefather Jacob—twelve righteous and holy sons, the Tribes of G-d.

Parshat Miketz - The Purity of Joseph the Righteous

Yet out of those 12 children, it seems that the one who took center stage in the subsequent portions was Joseph the righteous.

In the portions of Vayeishev, Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi, Joseph appears over and over, until at the end of the Book of Genesis, the Torah concludes with the verse: "And Joseph died at one hundred and ten years old; they embalmed him and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt" (Genesis 50:26).

As we continue into the Book of Exodus and reach the splitting of the Red Sea, we encounter Joseph again. As the Midrash says¹ on the verse "The sea saw and fled" (Psalms 114:3) – it was in the merit of Joseph's bones that the sea split for Israel!

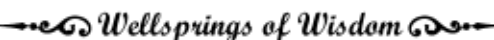
With regard to the future Redemption too, Joseph the righteous appears, as it is said: "And the house of Jacob will be

fire, and the house of Joseph flame, and the house of Esau straw; they shall ignite them and consume them, and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau – for the L-rd has spoken" (Obadiah 1:18).

Fittingly, we shall delve a bit into the sacred divine service of Joseph the righteous. First, we bring the words of my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, of saintly memory (*Imrei Noam* – Sukkot, Essay 6):

As is well known and publicized in many holy books, the attribute of Joseph the righteous was the attribute of *Yesod* (Foundation), which symbolizes a person's maintenance of his own sanctity and chastity.

Joseph merited this attribute thanks to his unwavering stand in the tremendous trial he had with the wife of Potiphar, his master. She tried with all her might to seduce him to sin, over



1. Genesis Rabbah (Parashah 87, sec. 8).

the course of an entire year, yet Joseph overcame it and did not stumble, G-d forbid. As a result of this triumph, Joseph earned the title “Tzaddik” (righteous), as explained in the holy Zohar (Noach 71b). He also merited to reign over all of Egypt for eighty years—corresponding to the numerical value of “Yesod.”

Even after the bitter trial with Potiphar’s wife was over, the tests continued in general, and with regard to guarding the eyes in particular.

Joseph did not gaze at the Egyptian women who surrounded him when he became king in Egypt, as the Midrash relates (Genesis Rabbah, Parashah 98, sec. 18): “At the time Joseph went out to rule over Egypt, the daughters of kings were peeking at him through the lattices. They threw tiaras, necklaces, rings, and signets at him so that he would lift his eyes and look at them. Even so, he did not look at them.”

He did not look at them even after he was firmly established on the throne...

His awe-inspiring dedication to guarding his holiness was so thorough and pure that he managed to “pave the way” for the entire nation of Israel, who would later descend to Egypt, imparting to them strength and fortitude of spirit to overcome any trial that would befall them in matters of holiness. As the Midrash says (Vayikra Rabbah, Parashah 32, sec. 5), it was in the merit of Joseph’s guarding his own sanctity throughout all his years in Egypt in general, and in the trial with Potiphar’s wife in particular, that all the Children of Israel had the strength to guard their own sanctity in Egypt...

But this was not his only trial that he merited to withstand bravely!

Joseph faced another difficult and bitter trial, and he succeeded in that one as well!

In our discussion, we will focus on that trial. But first, a story...

A Blessed Revenge

Rabbi Mordechai Gerlitz Shlita told the following:²

Rabbi Bunim, the devoted attendant of the holy Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger—the famed Chiddushei HaRim—had stood at his post since first light. Hour after unrelenting hour, he guided an ever-swelling river of chassidim into the Rebbe’s private chamber, his shoulders aching, his legs stiff, yet his eyes intent on order. Years of service had taught him every nuance of this demanding stewardship, but routine did not blunt the fatigue that overcame him like an ocean tide after each long reception day.

The faces before him mirrored the full spectrum of human struggle. A scholar in crumpled gabardine came first, begging insight to expand his grasp of the Talmud and kindle his prayer. A silver-bearded merchant followed, heart

gnawed by dread of insolvency—an empty purse, hungry children, impatient creditors. Soon after, a husband, hollow-eyed from sleepless nights beside a wife whose doctors had surrendered hope, appeared. Then, lingering on the threshold, a couple married two decades without a child stood silent, their home an echoing void the Sages likened to death itself. Still others arrived bearing woes less dramatic yet no less real: a bridegroom seeking purity of heart, a widowed mother craving courage, a youth paralyzed by doubt. All funneled toward the Rebbe’s door—yet without Rabbi Bunim’s firm yet fair hand, that vestibule would dissolve into bedlam.

He likened his task to a baker shaping a single unruly mound of dough into neat loaves: he separated the line, assessed

Parshat Miketz - A Blessed Revenge

urgency, maintained dignity, and admitted each soul at the proper moment. Only thus could every petitioner reach the “oven”—the tzaddik’s chamber...

More than once, he had resolved to relinquish this crushing burden. He drew neither salary nor public honor, and, in addition to the toil, he absorbed all manner of calumny. Some murmured, “He favors the wealthy,” if a benefactor slipped in early; others hissed, “He delays the ordinary folk.” Each barb pierced him, yet the elders—men who knew the Rebbe’s high praise for Bunim’s simplicity and impeccably clean hands—prevailed upon him to remain. When the Rebbe himself repeated the plea, Bunim bowed his head and resumed the load of his position.

On this particular afternoon, a well-dressed stranger arrived from a distant township. Unknown to Bunim, the newcomer ruled his own community with a mixture of fear and bluster; a single glare

from him usually silenced meetings. After waiting scarcely an hour, he erupted—hurling curses that darkened the air, and then, in a sudden flash of rage, slapping Bunim twice across the face. Gasps rippled through the courtyard; no one had dared such violence in Ger.

The uproar reached the Rebbe. He stepped onto the threshold radiant and composed, his voice gentle yet unmistakably firm: “What transpired?” Once apprised, he declared, “You may not enter my chamber until Rabbi Bunim forgives you completely. I will not lend an ear until his heart is satisfied.” The line resumed; the offender, however, neither apologized nor stirred. When his turn arrived, he brazenly strode in as though the decree did not pertain to him. Summoned, Bunim confirmed no reconciliation had occurred. The Rebbe turned his face away and dismissed the man without a word.

Only then did the stranger’s pride shatter. Outside the chamber, he wept bitterly.

“Fifteen years of childlessness!” he sobbed. “From one end of the continent to the other, we have sought deliverance, and here I wrecked my last hope with my own hands!” The raw pain in his voice struck Bunim like the blows of a hammer. Without deliberation, he gripped the man’s lapel and dragged him back inside. The crowd froze, every ear tilted not to miss a syllable.

“Rebbe,” Bunim declared, his voice resonant, “I shall not forgive him—neither in this world nor the next—save on a single, immutable condition.”

The tension tightened. “And what is that condition?” the Rebbe asked.

“That the Rebbe blesses him with a son,” Bunim replied, “within this year!”

A warm, luminous smile spread across the tzaddik’s face. “May the Almighty grant it

exactly as you have spoken,” he pronounced. He clasped the broken man’s hand and showered him with heartfelt benedictions.

Before that year concluded, the man embraced his newborn son at a jubilant brit milah celebration. At the same time, the foreskin of his heart fell away: arrogance gave place to humility, harshness to gentle resolve. For the rest of his days, he would mention Rabbi Bunim in reverent tones: “He is the one who raised me up, and placed me upon my feet.”

Our Sages extol “those who are insulted yet do not insult, who hear their shame and do not reply, who act out of love and rejoice in suffering; of them Scripture says, ‘And His lovers are like the sun when it emerges in its strength’ (Judges 5:31).”³

We now continue with our discussion...

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

3. My revered father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, once related the following (Imrei Noam, Parashat Miketz, Discourse 8):

Once the saintly Rabbi Yisrael of Salant, of blessed memory, traveled by train to visit his son-in-law, Rabbi Eliezer. In those days the trains were rather heavy and

Parshat Miketz - A Blessed Revenge

the journey took three to four days. Rabbi Yisrael was accustomed to smoke from time to time, and—so as not to trouble those who did not smoke—he chose to sit in the carriage reserved for smokers. In that carriage sat a young scholar whose sensibilities were greatly offended by the smoke. Possessed of an arrogant spirit, that scholar treated Rabbi Yisrael with marked disrespect and demanded that he refrain from smoking in the carriage.

“But this is the smokers’ carriage,” Rabbi Yisrael protested; yet the young man held his ground. In his boundless humility Rabbi Yisrael deferred to him and stopped smoking.

Presently the air in the carriage became stifling, so Rabbi Yisrael opened the window to draw a little fresh air. The young man again turned to him and, with brazen insistence, demanded that he close the window because he was cold. Rabbi Yisrael at once closed it.

The journey was lengthy, and Rabbi Yisrael dozed off for a while, but he was suddenly startled awake when the young man awoke him, claiming that Rabbi Yisrael had snored slightly and that the noise disturbed him. Rabbi Yisrael could find no other seat; thus he remained where he was and continued to endure the young man’s harassment until the train reached its destination.

When the young scholar alighted, he saw a large crowd gathered at the station. Upon asking the reason, he was told that Rabbi Yisrael of Salant was due to arrive that day and everyone was waiting for

him. The young man declared, “In that case I too shall wait here and merit to greet the greatest sage of the generation.”

Within minutes he discovered that Rabbi Yisrael of Salant was none other than the elderly gentleman he had tormented throughout the journey. Overcome with shock and shame, he did not know where to hide. He approached Rabbi Yisrael, apologized for his dreadful behavior, and asked forgiveness. “I did not realize that Your Honor was Rabbi Yisrael of Salant; I thought you were just an ordinary man,” he pleaded. Rabbi Yisrael replied that this was no excuse at all, for one must not harass even an ordinary person.

Seeing the young man’s profound distress, Rabbi Yisrael asked why he had come to the city. “I have thoroughly studied all of the laws of shechitah, and I came to be examined by your son-in-law, Rabbi Eliezer, and to obtain a certificate as a shochet,” he replied.

Rabbi Yisrael looked kindly upon him, as though nothing had transpired on the train, and directed him to come to him personally; he would examine him, and if he found him competent he would shorten the process and obtain the certificate for him immediately. Rabbi Yisrael examined the young man and found that he knew nothing whatsoever of the laws of shechitah.

Addressing him gently, Rabbi Yisrael said, “You are not yet sufficiently versed in the halachah to be a shochet; it would be best for you to review all the laws with someone knowledgeable.” He

The Story of Joseph

When our matriarch Rachel gave birth to her firstborn son, she looked at the infant and decided: the name that suits him best is Joseph!

The Matriarchs possessed *ruach ha-kodesh* (divine inspiration). They would first perceive the nature and type of soul of the newborn, and only then would they give him a name. If so, we must consider: why did she call him by this name?

We find that my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel ZY"A, explained as follows:

When Rachel looked at the baby born to her, she saw that embedded in his soul was

genuine, sincere concern for every Jew, no matter where he might be – a concern to bring him close and bring him under the wings of the Divine Presence. Even if that Jew was distant and cast off “at the end of the heavens,” Joseph would care to bring him back to G-d. Therefore, she called him Yosef – “*Vatikra et shemo Yosef lemor: Yosef Hashem li ben acher*” (“And she called his name Joseph, saying: ‘May G-d add another son for me’,” Genesis 30:24) –

“She called his name Yosef,” meaning that through the power of his life’s work, he will add and bring to G-d “*ben ha-acher*” – the “other son.”

~Wellsprings of Wisdom~

then summoned his son-in-law Rabbi Eliezer and told him that the young man wished to become a shochet in his town and that he recommended him highly. Because the young man had forgotten part of the laws, Rabbi Yisrael asked, as a personal favor, that Rabbi Eliezer himself sit with him, review all the laws of shechitah, and examine him on them.

Rabbi Eliezer patiently taught the young man all the laws, reviewed them with him until he mastered them thoroughly, examined him, and finally granted him a proper certificate of competence as a shochet, sending him home with honor. When people heard that the certificate bore the recommendation of Rabbi Yisrael of Salant, they all wished to eat only meat from his slaughter...

Parshat Miketz - The Story of Joseph

Since Joseph had a special sensitivity toward each and every Jew, when he saw his brothers transgressing three sins – namely: eating the limb of a live animal, belittling the sons of the maidservants by calling them slaves, and being suspected of illicit relations – he could not tolerate it, and he brought their bad report to their father...⁴ The brothers, for their part, felt that he was “pursuing” them.

In addition, Joseph held a very honored position in the house of Jacob. As it is stated: “Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, since he was a son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many colors” (Genesis 37:3).

At first, they thought this love stemmed from two reasons:

First, that he was the son of Rachel, who was Jacob’s [primary] wife.⁵ And the second reason was that he was a “son of

old age” and, by nature, a person loves the youngest child more.

But they soon discovered that both reasons were incorrect. For if Jacob loved him because he was Rachel’s son, why did Benjamin (her second son) not receive the same love? And if the love was because he was a child of Jacob’s old age—well, Benjamin was even younger than he.

Furthermore, Jacob’s love for Joseph did not remain only a feeling in his heart; it was tangibly demonstrated. Jacob entrusted Joseph with the secrets of the Torah, and in addition, he prepared for him a “coat of many colors,” which was a divine garment—akin to the “coats of skin” that G-d made for Adam...

Because of all this, a feeling of hatred and envy was born in their hearts. And since they were

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

4. In truth Joseph was mistaken in this, and they had not sinned; it only appeared so to him. Therefore he was

punished for the suspicion he harbored toward them.

5. Meshech Chochmah (on Genesis 37:4).

Parshat Miketz - The Story of Joseph

men of truth and sensed that their heart was not at peace with him, they did not want to lie to themselves, and so they could not speak to him [peaceably].

Days passed, and the brothers went to tend their father's sheep in Shechem and were delayed in returning. Jacob grew very worried about his sons, so he asked Joseph: "Please go and see whether all is well with your brothers and with the flock" (ibid., v.14). Even though Joseph knew that his brothers hated him, he wanted to perform the mitzvah of honoring his father.

Joseph searched for his brothers but did not find them. A man found him wandering in a field and asked what he was looking for. He said to him: "I seek my brothers" (ibid., v.16), and the man told him they had moved on from there to Dothan.

Joseph arrives in Dothan and, from afar, sees his brothers. The holy tribes lift their eyes and see him from a distance, and they say: "Behold, that dreamer is

coming!" (ibid., v.19). They decide to kill him...

Among the brothers, Reuben intervened and resolved to save him. He therefore suggested to them: Let's not kill him outright, but rather throw him into a pit...

At long last, Joseph reaches his brothers, his heart filled with joy. "Blessed be G-d! After such a long journey of searching and wandering, I've found them!" Covered in dust and exhausted from the winding route, he approached them excitedly—now he would get to gladden his father by fulfilling his mission, and also bring joy to his brothers with various delicacies from their father's kitchen...

To his surprise, instead of being received with a smile and warm welcome, they grabbed him forcefully and stripped off the coat of many colors that his father had made for him...

The brothers took him and threw him into a pit. This was no ordinary pit, but a pit full of

Parshat Miketz - The Story of Joseph

snakes and scorpions... From great fear, all of the blood drained from Joseph's body; he looked pale and miserable...

There, at the bottom of the pit, Joseph stood pleading with his brothers. But they, with supernal insight, believed this was in accordance with divine justice. So they distanced themselves from the mouth of the pit so as not to hear his voice, and sat down to eat bread. As they were eating, behold—a caravan of Ishmaelites⁶ passed by near the pit. They saw that many birds were flocking around one particular pit, which told them there must be water there, so they approached it. When they came near, they saw inside the pit a youth, almost naked, sitting there. “We didn’t find water, but surely we can get a few coins if we sell this pale boy as a slave”...

When the brothers saw that the Ishmaelites had taken him, they approached the traders and said to them: “This boy is our slave. Since he doesn’t behave nicely toward us, we threw him into the pit.” But the Ishmaelites did not believe them and were unwilling to give him back. When Shimon saw that they refused to return Joseph, he let out a great shout so that the whole earth quaked. The Ishmaelites were very frightened and said to the brothers: “You said he doesn’t behave with you—if so, sell him to us.” The brothers rejoiced at this suggestion and sold him for twenty pieces of silver.

The Ishmaelites loaded him up and continued their journey to the land of slaves—Egypt. And the Torah notes that those Ishmaelites were carrying with them “gum, balm, and ladanum, going down to bring to Egypt” (ibid., v.25).

Wellsprings of Wisdom

6. Nachmanides (Ramban) wrote (Genesis 37:25) that the Ishmaelites were the caravan leaders of the camels, and they were transporting the Midianites with their wares to Egypt. The ones who

purchased Joseph were the Midianites, the merchants. Therefore it later says: “And the Medanites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, chief of the slaughterers” (ibid., v.36).

Parshat Miketz - The Disaster of Loneliness

Here, let us pause a moment and consider the persecutions endured by the righteous from the beginning of the Book of Genesis:

Abraham was persecuted by Nimrod and by the four kings. Isaac was persecuted by Abimelech. Jacob was persecuted by Esau and Laban. The common denominator is that these persecutions were at the hands of people with a “dark soul” – impure, abominable people. But here, with Joseph the righteous, a new phenomenon appeared: people with a soul of Atzilut (lofty emanation) – whose holy souls were hewn from the highest heavens, who would not make a single move without permission from the heavenly court – were inflicting pain upon him. If *they* do such an action, one must fear that perhaps they are right.

Joseph developed the feeling: “Maybe they are right about me. Maybe I am not worthy to be counted among the Tribes of G-d. *I have no significance, I have no importance. I’ve always been lonely in spirit* (‘and they envied him,’ ‘and they hated him’), *and now I am lonely also in body – without brothers, without a father or mother, without a warm home... all alone !”*

The Midrash (Genesis Rabbah, Parashah 84, sec. 24) says that Joseph was sold five times! With each sale, his sense of isolation intensified and grew stronger, until he arrived in Egypt. There, standing on the platform in the slave market, the dreadful feeling of absolute loneliness swelled within him...

The Disaster of Loneliness

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler ZY"A, he said (*Michtav MeEliyahu*, vol. I, p. 692):

Every Jew is obligated to believe in the 13 principles of the holy Torah, and the 11th principle is: “That the

Parshat Miketz - The Loneliness Intensifies

Holy One, blessed be He, rewards those who obey His commandments and punishes those who transgress them.” The place of reward for the righteous is Gan Eden, and the place of punishment for the wicked is Gehinom. Our Sages explain in understandable terms what “*Gehinom*” is, and we find that the Maharal (*Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 18) explained that Gehinom is the feeling of loneliness.

To explain further, a person’s experience of self is essentially the awareness of his own existence, the awareness of his “I.” And G-d implanted and ingrained in every person a great yearning to be connected with the reality around him. If he is not allowed to belong to anything outside himself, he cannot bear the loneliness. Therefore, the

harshest punishment one can give a person is to put him in solitary confinement.

Thus, the sinner—whose interest is only in matters of this world—even when he is separated from them against his will, his interest remains in worldly matters. And in the place he will come to, he will not find any connection to anything. He will feel only his own “I,” and nothing else whatsoever. Everything will be absent, everything – all the things he was interested in will be gone !

He will be aware of and feel only his own existence—his desolate existence, forever and ever.

And Joseph, through the terrible course of events that his brothers put into motion, entered into this reality of loneliness...

The Loneliness Intensifies

Joseph was still standing on the slave-auction block when along comes one of Pharaoh’s officers, whose name was

Potiphar, and sees the slave being offered for sale. Potiphar approaches and inspects him from every side, and in the end

Parshat Miketz - The Loneliness Intensifies

decides to buy him... The seller approaches Joseph, fastens an iron collar around his neck, and hands him over to Potiphar.

Joseph asks the seller, “Who bought me?” The seller replies, “Him? That one is Pharaoh’s executioner – he is the official appointed by the king to carry out executions!”

It is easy to imagine how Joseph felt – *Joseph, the great champion of caring for others*, now having to be a slave to a man whose character traits were the polar opposite of his own. What darkness and gloom must have filled his heart! One can almost hear the storm winds and the claps of thunder roaring through his mind. What grief and discouragement circled and dwelled within his soul!

Suddenly, out of all the torment in his soul, a beautiful, prominent woman appeared – the wife of his master – and she drew him toward her. Now, he was no longer alone and abandoned; there was someone who “loved” him, who wanted his closeness.

Yet Joseph held firm in the trial and pushed her away.

But at night, lying on his bed, the feeling of loneliness would surge back. And the next day, again her attempts at intimacy, and again his refusal. And so it went, day after day, for a whole year – struggle after struggle: whether to remain a meaningless slave in terrible loneliness, or finally to find a respite, a relief for his isolation.

Then came the great trial. No one was in the house: “He came into the house to do his work” (Genesis 39:11). All those dark emotions, all those nights of feeling alone and rejected – it all rose and flooded him. Everything was storming inside, threatening to drown him. Joseph entered Potiphar’s house...

In Heaven above, angels quaked and trembled; seraphim pleaded anxiously. All the battalions of the Hosts on High raged and roared: would Joseph withstand the test or not? In all the heavens, there was an uproar and nervous anticipation as they

Parshat Miketz - Deep Inside A Pit

watched Joseph enter Potiphar's house. Even his father Jacob, in the land of Canaan, who was not aware of his whereabouts, was gripped by fear and sent his own image through the window, hinting to him: "If you sin in this matter, you will be lost forever—one who does this, his transgression will never be erased for all of eternity."

Amazingly, Joseph withstood the trial and fled from there. In that moment, all of the angels and seraphim stood in wonder at the greatness of his strength. In that moment, a new light was revealed in all the worlds—a great, awesome, exalted light descended. By virtue of this

light, the men of the nation of Israel who were destined to be in the land of Egypt would merit to be saved from all sin and would succeed in guarding their purity.

In the words of the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah, Parashah 32, sec. 5):

"Rabbi Huna, in the name of Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba, said: Our matriarch Sarah went down to Egypt and *fenced herself off* from immorality, and so all the women [of Israel] were fenced off in her merit. Joseph went down to Egypt and fenced himself off from immorality, and so all Israel were fenced off in his merit..."

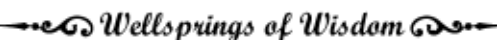
However, Joseph's trials were far from over...

Deep Inside A Pit

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Dan Segal Shlita, he said:⁷

The trials that Joseph endured are terribly astounding: "And it

was, as she spoke to Joseph, day by day..." (Genesis 39:10). Our Sages say⁸ she tried to seduce him for a full year and employed



7. Kuntres Mi Yerapeh Lecha (p. 94).

8. Midrash Tanchuma (Parashat Vayeishev, sec. 8).

every stratagem to defile him. It was she who said to put him in prison—for Potiphar wanted to kill him immediately, as it is written, “his anger flared” (ibid., v.19), which echoes “*My anger shall blaze and I will kill you*” (Exodus 22:23). Only she said to put him in prison.

Why? Because she was sure that if he remained alive, she would still succeed in making him stumble! And there, in prison, she began a campaign of threats:

“If you don’t obey me and don’t look at me, I will blind your eyes!” Joseph answered her: “Hashem pokeach ivrim”—*G-d gives sight to the blind.*

“If you don’t obey me, I will keep you in prison forever. Here you will die, here you will be buried, and here your flesh will rot!” And what did he answer her? “Hashem matir asurim”—*G-d releases the bound!*

This is difficult: Is that an answer to this wicked woman? She spoke logical threats, and

he responded with words of faith—are words of piety going to help fend her off?

However, I once heard that Joseph’s reply to her went like this: *You* claim that my limbs are in your hand—that you can gouge out my eyes, cut off my hands, and comb my flesh with iron combs—and since my limbs are in your power, I must listen to you. So know that this is all just imagination— you cannot do anything without the will of the Holy One, blessed be He! If G-d wants me to see, no one can take that from me. Therefore, my limbs are *His*, and I am obligated, first and foremost, to the will of G-d!

King David summed up all of Joseph’s sufferings as follows: “He sent ahead of them a man, Joseph, sold as a slave. They tortured his feet with fetters; his soul was put in iron” (Psalms 105:17–18) – *she* ordered that a spiked iron collar be fastened around his neck, so that if he lowered his head and refused to look, it would

Parshat Miketz - Joseph's Tears

stab him. And he lowered his head, wounding and cutting his neck—anything to avoid looking at her defilement...

After 12 years in prison, the time of deliverance arrived. Pharaoh dreamed two dreams

and underwent a “crisis,” and that crisis knocked him to the ground, and as a result, he decided that Joseph was the right man to assume the responsibilities of the throne...

Joseph's Tears

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, summoned his servants and commanded: Quickly, quickly—prepare everything needed for the coronation ceremony!

Tailors scurried about with fabrics and measuring tapes. Jewelers whispered together by the treasury, awaiting the precious metals they would receive to craft the ornaments...

In the royal kitchen, hundreds of chefs labored—baking, cooking, frying, and roasting... The wine steward ran with dozens of assistants to select the choicest casks of wine...

Then the coronation ceremony began. “And Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand. He

attired him in robes of fine linen and placed the golden chain around his neck” (Genesis 41:42).

The banquet concluded, and Joseph went out to tour throughout the kingdom: “Joseph left Pharaoh’s presence, and he passed through all the land of Egypt” (ibid., v.46).

The news spread like wildfire...

The Torah tells us what happened on that tour. It says: “Daughters stepped forth on the wall” (Genesis 49:22). When Joseph went out to rule over Egypt, the daughters of kings and the governors were standing on the rooftops, longing to see Joseph’s face. But Joseph, who guarded his purity, sat in his chariot

Parshat Miketz - Joseph's Tears

with eyes downcast. The girls, who wanted him to look at them, were throwing tiaras, necklaces, and all kinds of golden jewelry toward his chariot, hoping that when he saw the costly ornaments, he would be impressed and lift his eyes to see who had tossed them...

But it was all of no use. Joseph did not lift his eyes... Once again, even on the royal throne, he was subjected to years of severe, bitter trials, far, far away from his father's home...

As Joseph had predicted before Pharaoh, after seven years, the famine began.

Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to purchase food, and Joseph the righteous put them through a harrowing experience until he revealed himself to them and wept with them, as it says: "And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and afterward his brothers talked with him" (ibid. 45:15).

Here, Rabbi Yosef Yehuda Leib Bloch ZY"A posed a great

wonder (*Shi'urei Da'at*, vol. II, p. 110, new edition):

We must be astonished at Joseph's behavior toward his brothers. True, they sinned against him, and their sin was terrible. But was it impossible for Joseph the righteous to rise above his traits and forgive them, without punishing them with such anguish and troubles as he dealt to them?

Indeed, people say that since he knew their sin was before G-d, and because of his love for his brothers, he wanted them to be punished in this world so that they would be found worthy in the World to Come. But this does not sit well with the heart. Is he in G-d's place, to call them to account for their sins?! Especially that *he* should be the one to punish them?!

The punishments by which a person is punished for his sins are administered by other beings—completely other beings; that is, by destructive angels created for that purpose. But under no circumstances does

Parshat Miketz - The Human is an Amalgam of All Creation's Forces

a righteous person commit an evil act, except in a case where the Torah explicitly commands execution or lashes to the guilty party, and no further. But more so: to cause terrible suffering to his elderly father?! It is easy to imagine the great agony and heartache about which Jacob said: *"It is i whom you have*

bereaved: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and you would take Benjamin – upon me are all these !" (Genesis 42:36).

Above, we brought the words of the Gemara praising those who are insulted and do not insult back, etc. If so, why did Joseph not behave in that manner?

The Human is an Amalgam of All Creation's Forces

Rabbi Yosef Yehuda Leib Bloch ZY"A is answer his question, but first prefaced with an important introduction, which is as follows:

When a doctor prepares a healing medicine for one who has been bitten by a snake, he mixes into it a small measure of the snake's venom as a remedy—of course, he adds only a tiny amount, so it won't harm the body. Only then will it bring the intended benefit, since it is blended together with the rest of the necessary ingredients.

Now, if an unlearned pharmacist were to omit that

component, or if he were to add a counteracting antidote to neutralize it, this would be foolish. For the physician, in his medical wisdom, knows that this ingredient is necessary, and he undoubtedly mixed it in such a way that it will not cause harm.

So too the Creator, blessed be He, created man with a mixture of forces in just such a way. Man is a *microcosm* – whatever exists in the world exists in man. The snake's venom is in him as well, but it must remain blended according to the measure the Creator willed, so that it will not cause harm.

Heaven forbid for a person to “kill” or remove any one power of his faculties, because then his soul will be lacking, and the complete faculties with which the creator has endowed him will be missing.

Since the Creator in His supreme wisdom specifically created him thus, it follows that He desired and deemed it very good to have a world like this and a creature like this !

This is what our Sages meant when they said (Yoma 22b) that *“their words are like fiery coals”*, and *“any Torah scholar who is not vengeful and wrathful like a snake is not a true Torah scholar.”* In truth, one should not, and indeed cannot, completely kill off any faculty within a person. If we see a Torah scholar who is not vengeful, who easily forgives an affront, know that he is not a true Torah scholar ! Do not believe that the venom of the snake has been uprooted entirely from within him, for it

must, by the Creator's will, exist within a person !

After the Gemara brings this statement—“any Torah scholar who is not vengeful and bears grudges like a snake is not a true Torah scholar”—it asks: But isn't there an explicit commandment in the Torah: “You shall not take vengeance and you shall not bear a grudge against the children of your people” (Leviticus 19:18)? The Gemara answers: “That is written regarding monetary matters.” In other words, in monetary issues, a person can—and must—weaken the snake-like power within himself, not to be particular at all, and not to give that power free rein. But regarding bodily or personal anguish, one is not required to forgive; indeed, it is impossible to uproot that [vengeful feeling] from within completely.

The Gemara continues to challenge: How can you say that for bodily suffering, one should be vengeful and bear a grudge ? Behold, it is taught in a baraita: *“Those who are*

insulted but do not insult back, who hear their disgrace but do not respond, who act out of love and rejoice in suffering, about them the verse says: 'And His lovers are like the sun coming out in its might'" (Judges 5:31)...

The Gemara answers: "That [praise] is referring to [the feeling] remaining in one's heart" – meaning, the required virtue is to only keep the feeling of resentment internally, and not for the person to burst forth outwardly to insult or respond. To that extent, indeed, a person must strengthen himself and illuminate the light of his intellect within the darkness that is in a person, to weaken the snake-like power inside to a balanced state.

About this, it is said: "and His lovers are like the sun coming out in its might" – for he too caused his mind, which illuminates like the sun, to shine within the darkness present in a person. But to eliminate [the snake-like power] entirely – that is not necessary, and in fact impossible !

The Gemara continues to ask: But didn't Rava say, "Whoever overlooks his measures (i.e. lets offenses go) is forgiven all his transgressions"? ! The Gemara answers: "That is when people seek his forgiveness and he allows himself to be appeased" – meaning, if they appease him, he accepts; but if they do not appease him, then he will hold on to the feeling of vengeance in his heart.

To summarize: Regarding monetary matters, one should not become vengeful at all, nor bear any grudge whatsoever in one's heart. And even if his fellow caused him personal harm, nevertheless, one should not let it go so far that the feeling of vengeance breaks out externally. And if the offender seeks his forgiveness, he should be appeased. Consequently – whereas others, when the feeling of revenge is aroused in them, will refuse any appeasement and all they want is to carry out the revenge – one who conducts himself according to the path of

Parshat Miketz - Joseph the Righteous Wrestles with the Snake's Venom

the Torah, will desire, on the contrary, that his friend appease him, in order to calm the storm of the vengeful feeling in his heart. Then the person will remain in his most desirable state, according to the Creator's will, balanced with a pleasant temper and subtlety !

Rabbeinu Yonah writes so explicitly in *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (Gate 3, sec. 38):

“Our sages have said, may their

memory be a blessing, that the warning against bearing a grudge applies to monetary matters. But regarding matters of pride, insult, and ill intent, one is permitted to take these things to heart. Our Sages of blessed memory said about this: Any Torah scholar who is not vengeful and bearing [anger] like a snake is not a true Torah scholar – but if they ask his forgiveness, he must yield and forgo the offense.”

Joseph the Righteous Wrestles with the Snake's Venom

Rabbi Yosef Yehuda Leib Bloch continues:

Now we can understand why Joseph acted with his brothers as he did:

In truth, even after Joseph forgave his brothers for their dreadful sin, he was not able to uproot the resentment from his heart completely. For human nature is rooted deep, deep down in the soul. Even though his heart melted toward them and he wept many times privately, even so, he knew very well that it was

impossible for him to entirely hold back his heart and uproot what they had done to him, such that he could bestow abundant good upon them, as his good heart desired. He knew and sensed that there would always be something in the way, blocking full loving-kindness and complete benevolence...

Therefore, in order to cleanse himself from this residual stain, and so that he would be able to treat them as brothers—for the time being and for

future generations—he was compelled to perform an “operation” in his heart and in theirs, against his own wishes: namely, that they come to recognize and feel how they had wronged him, and also pay back for it.

Only then would he be able to bestow upon them abundant goodness, and genuine, complete love would prevail between them now—and among the entirety of Israel afterward, forever—without any lingering resentment dividing brothers...

Purity of Heart – A Lifelong Labor

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto ZY"A wrote (Mesilat Yescharim, ch. 11):

Hatred and vengeance are very hard for the deceitful heart of man to escape, for a person keenly feels his humiliations and suffers great pain, and vengeance is sweeter than honey to him, for it is the only thing that brings him rest!

Therefore, to have the strength to abandon what his nature compels him to and to *overlook his traits*—not to hate the one who aroused hatred in him, and not to take revenge when the opportunity arises for him to avenge, and not to bear a grudge, but rather to forget it all and remove it from his heart

as if it had never happened—that is truly mighty and brave. This is easy only for the ministering angels, who have none of these traits, but not for those earthly beings who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust.

Nevertheless, it is the decree of the King, and the verses are explicit and clear, needing no interpretation: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17); “You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge against your people” (ibid., v.18). The idea of vengeance and bearing a grudge is known, meaning: *vengeance* is to refrain from doing good to someone because he did not

want to do you good or because he already harmed you; and *bearing a grudge* is to mention to him the harm while you are instead doing him good.

For example, if someone refused to lend you when you were in need, and later he needs to borrow from you and you lend to him—but you tell him, “See, I am not like you; I’m lending to you even though you wouldn’t lend to me”—this is bearing a grudge.

Since the evil inclination keeps agitating the heart and always seeks to leave at least some mark or memory of the incident—if it cannot leave a big reminder, it will try to leave a small one—it will say, for example, to a person:

If you want to give to this man what he refused to give you when you were in need, at least don’t give it with a pleasant expression.

Or: If you don’t want to harm him, at least don’t do him an

enormous favor or help him too much.

Or: If you even want to help him with a big favor, at least don’t do it in his presence.

Or: Don’t resume a close friendship with him. If you forgave him so that you won’t appear like an enemy to him, that’s enough, or at least, if you want to befriend him as before, still don’t show him as much affection as at first.

And so on with all such stratagems of the evil inclination, with which it strives to seduce the hearts of people.

Therefore, the Torah includes a rule that comprises everything: “You shall love your fellow as yourself” (ibid.) – “*as yourself*,” with no difference; “*as yourself*,” with no distinctions, no stratagems or schemes; *exactly* like yourself!

Since Joseph attained this trait in complete perfection, the Redemption will come in his merit!

The House of Joseph a Flame !

To quote Rabbi Yekutiel
Yehuda Halberstam ZY"A
(*Shefa Chayim* – Ra'ava DeRa'avin,
vol. II, p. 282):

In the future to come, "The house of Joseph flame, and the house of Esau straw; they shall ignite them and consume them, and no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau – for the L-rd has spoken." The reason Esau will fall by the hand of the House of Joseph is that Esau, the wicked, is the progenitor of the impurity of bearing hatred. He bore hatred against Jacob over the birthright that he sold to him willingly, when Jacob

gave him food and drink to satisfy his hungry soul.

Even though Jacob took the blessings from him, it in no measure can compare to the insults and harm that were inflicted upon Joseph...

Therefore, it is precisely Joseph, who elevated himself to this level and forgave even someone whom he had every right to hate, who has the power to burn the wicked ones of Esau's house.

May this happen speedily in our days, Amen !



Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Our world is a very complex place. As a result, it sometimes happens that a person feels that someone else hurt him—his feelings, his standing, his honor, his money and gold, or his body. When that happens, inevitably feelings of hatred and a desire for revenge are aroused in the heart. We must recognize that this is human nature. As the Mesilat Yesharim wrote: *“Vengeance is very hard for the deceitful heart of man to escape, for a person keenly feels his humiliations and suffers great pain, and vengeance is sweeter than honey to him, for it is his only rest!”*

2. The holy Torah commands us to subdue this nature—to *overlook one’s measures*, to forget and remove from his heart any trace of resentment, as if nothing had ever happened! Thus it formulated the rule that encompasses everything: *“You shall love your fellow as yourself”* – *“as yourself,”* with no difference; *“as yourself,”* with no distinctions, no stratagems or schemes; *exactly* like yourself!

3. Although the Torah commands a person to purify his heart, we find distinctions in the law: If the harm was in monetary matters, one should not become vengeful at all, nor bear

any grudge in one’s heart. If his fellow caused him bodily or emotional pain, and did not ask for forgiveness, he is not obligated to forgive his friend. However, even so, he is forbidden from taking revenge in action or deed. And if the offender has asked for forgiveness, one is obligated to forgive! Therefore, one who conducts himself according to the path of the Torah will desire that his friend appease him, in order to calm the storm of the vengeful feeling in his heart.

4. When a person merits attaining this exalted trait – to forgive everyone who causes him suffering, and to hold no grudge in his heart toward any fellow Jew, but on the contrary to strive to love each and every Jew – through this he will merit that the Holy One, blessed be He, will perform for him miracles and wonders far, far above the natural order, and all of nature will be subjugated before him. For just as he completely nullified his own nature, so too, measure for measure, the Holy One will nullify all of creation on his behalf!

5. In the future to come, the House of Joseph will be a flame and the House of Esau straw... and thereby

Parshat Miketz - Summary and Practical Conclusions

the end will come for the house of Esau! The reason Esau will fall to the hand of the House of Joseph is that Esau, the wicked, is the father of all impurity of bearing hatred. He bore hatred against Jacob over the birthright, which he sold to him willingly when Jacob gave him food and drink to sate his hunger. Even though Jacob took the blessings from

him, it does not come close to the pain and anguish that Joseph forgave his brothers for... Therefore, it is precisely Joseph, who elevated himself to this level and forgave even those whom he had every right to hate, who has the power to burn the wicked ones of Esau's house.

May it be speedily in our days,
Amen!

Shabbat Shalom !





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Shabbat Times Miketz

30th of Kislev, 5786



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:13 pm	5:17 pm	5:43 pm
Miami	5:16 pm	6:12 pm	6:46 pm
Los Angeles	4:29 pm	5:29 pm	6:00 pm
Montreal	3:55 pm	5:03 pm	5:25 pm
Toronto	4:25 pm	5:31 pm	5:55 pm
London	3:34 pm	4:52 pm	5:05 pm
Jerusalem	4:23 pm	5:14 pm	5:45 pm
Tel Aviv	4:19 pm	5:11 pm	5:41 pm
Haifa	4:16 pm	5:11 pm	5:41 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:21 pm	5:15 pm	5:46pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

Our Sages said: "The blemish that is in you—do not ascribe to your fellow" (Bava Metzia 59b).

The Baal Shem Tov explained: Keep this secret in mind—if you find a flaw in someone, that flaw is not really in him but in you; it's only that in the other person it appears more clearly. That's all it truly is.



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