

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he told them: "You are not the ones who sent me here, rather it was Hashem. He appointed me as the ruler over the entire land of Mitzrayim. Quickly go to my father and tell him to come down here to me."

The descent of Yaakov and his sons to Mitzrayim marked the beginning of *golus Mitzrayim*. Yosef's words describing this descent imply that in order for the Jewish nation to be successful in fulfilling the objective of this *golus*, it was necessary for Yosef to be the ruler over Mitzrayim.

What is the connection between these two ideas?

WEALTH OR FREEDOM?

At the *Bris Bein Habesarim*, Hashem promised Avraham that after his sons will be persecuted in a foreign land, "they will leave with great riches." Indeed, before leaving Mitzrayim, Moshe commanded the Jews to borrow precious vessels from their Egyptian neighbors, until the land was as empty "as an ocean without fish and as a trap without grain."

On a simple level, Yosef's status as the Egyptian ruler enabled the fulfillment of this promise. In this position, he was able to collect money from all the neighboring lands during the years of famine, bringing great wealth to the land. This wealth was then passed on to the hands of the Jewish people.

However, this itself requires further explanation. Why was it so important for the Jews to leave Mitzrayim with great riches?

Indeed, the Gemara says that the Jews would have preferred to be redeemed earlier, even at the expense of obtaining these riches. The Gemara demonstrates this with a parable: If a person suffering a harsh imprisonment is told that if he waits one more day he will be given a large sum of money, he will respond: "Forget about the money. I want to leave today!"

"He believes that the purpose of his trip is to pull off a better business deal; however, the truth is that he is being sent there from Above."

RICHES AND SPARKS

The Gemara explains that Hashem wanted the Jews to borrow their neighbor's belongings so that Avraham shouldn't say, "Hashem fulfilled his prediction that my sons will be enslaved, but he did not fulfill his promise that they will leave with great riches!" However, wouldn't Avraham himself been willing to forgo the fulfillment of this promise to spare his sons the sorrow of an extra day in *golus*?

SPIRITUAL RICHES

Chassidus explains that the Jews did not just amass mere material wealth. Within the material wealth lay a great spiritual wealth—high, sublime sparks which they elevated to *kedushah*. In fact, these *nitzotzos* were the primary wealth the Jews obtained; as a result of this spiritual wealth, they acquired material wealth as well.

This is why Hashem made sure the Yidden would borrow their neighbor's possessions, even if it meant staying in Mitzrayim a bit longer, so that they would elevate these *nitzotzos* and acquire this spiritual wealth.

FINDING YOUR SPARKS

"A person cannot detract from the livelihood of his friend." Why is this so? The Baal Shem Tov explains that each person has *nitzotzos* that are exclusively his to elevate, and no one can elevate the *nitzotzos* that "belong" to someone else.

"Man's steps are directed from Hashem." A person does not know where his *nitzotzos* are waiting for him, so Hashem gives him the idea of traveling to a specific location. He believes the purpose of his trip is to pull off a better business deal; however, the truth is that he is being sent there from

Above, to elevate the *nitzotzos* awaiting his arrival.

When a person acquires fish to eat, he has the choice to eat it



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Iekavod Shabbos—in which case he will elevate the *nitzotzos* in the fish and the river that nurtured it—or to eat it to satisfy his desires. However, the fact that this specific fish made its way to his table was arranged from Above.

When a person makes his way to a certain place, he has the option of thinking or speaking words of Torah or to waste his time on useless *narishkeiten*. However, the reason he is walking along this path is because he is being directed there from Above.

THE BAAL ESEK'S MISSION...

This is the inner meaning of the statement of Chazal, “The reason the Yidden were exiled among the nations was so that converts should be added to them.” A convert possesses a spark of holiness even before converting. This spark is extremely concealed—to the extent that he is halachically considered a full-fledged non-Jew—but when it becomes aroused, he is inspired to convert. (This is why the Gemara commonly uses the term “a convert who has converted,” and not “a non-Jew who has converted,” because he possesses a spark of holiness from before.)

Additionally, this statement can refer to the *nitzutzei kedushah* concealed within the physical elements of this world, which we reveal by utilizing *lesheim shamayim*. By doing so, we elevate not only the spark itself but ourselves as well. In fact, if he is a *baal esek* whose primary focus is on business, perhaps this is the entire purpose his *neshamah* descended to this world.

This applies both to the *baal esek's* primary dealings as well as to the transitory ones; both are arranged from Above and are opportunities to acquire spiritual assets, thus achieving a personal elevation. These two types of dealings are alluded to in the *possuk* describing the acquisition of the Egyptians' possessions: “A woman should request [precious vessels] of her neighbor”—i.e., a *permanent* resident—“and of the one who resides in her house,” i.e., one who resides there *temporarily*.

...AND WHY HE NEEDS THE YOSHEV OHEL

In addition to defining the mission of the *baal esek*, our *parshah* addresses the other side of the coin as well—the importance of the *yoshev ohel*, whose days are preoccupied with Torah study.

Before Yaakov arrived in Mitzrayim, he sent Yehudah to establish a *beis talmud*, a house of study. Why was this necessary? Wasn't the whole purpose of *golus Mitzrayim* to acquire the great wealth of the *nitzutzei kedushah*?

“From time to time, even a *baal esek* must devote himself to Torah study, so that nothing else exists at that time—now he is a *yeshiva bochur!*”

This teaches us that there are two equally important aspects in Jewish life: involvement in worldly matters—with the intent of elevating the *nitzotzos* found within them—and the *beis talmud*, detachment from worldly matters and complete devotion to Torah study.

Both components are interdependent on each other. Just as Zevulun supports Yissachar, Yissachar supports Zevulun, giving him the proper focus so that his business pursuits will be performed in the proper manner.

This similarly applies within every individual. From time to time, even a *baal esek* must disengage himself from his materialistic pursuits and devote himself to Torah study, so that nothing else exists at that time—now he is a *yeshiva bochur!* This will ensure that his involvement in worldly matters will be done with the right intent.

This will prepare us for the coming of Moshiach, when we will have both aspects together: sublime levels of *Elokus* that transcend the world will be revealed, and the world itself will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem.

For further study, see *Lekutei Sichos*, Vol. 3, *Parshas Vayigash*

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