

לעילוי נשמת
מרת עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה וסרטל
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



עניני דשעה

ALIEI DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur

Wiles of the Yetzer Hara

ויקח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל בֵּית הַסֵּהר מְקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר אֲסִירֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲסוּרִים וַיְהִי שָׁם בְּבֵית הַסֵּהר:

Yosef's master took him and placed him in the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were held, and he was there in the jail. (Bereishis 39:20)

The pasuk here seems to be repetitive.

This shalsheles, this chain that connects us to our Avos hakedoshim, makes a Yid's heart burn with desire for avodas Hashem, and this is what helps us overcome our yetzer hara and free ourselves from his nets.

If Yosef was placed in jail, obviously he was, then, there, in the jail. What is the pasuk teaching us?

The pasuk (Koheles 9:14) states, עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעט ובא אליה מלך גדול וסבב אותה ובנה עליה מצודים גדלים – *There was a small city, with few people; an important king came and surrounded it, and built traps over it.* The Gemara (Nedarim 32b) explains that this pasuk is speaking about the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* surrounds a person with temptations, and the person becomes locked in the jail of the *yetzer hara*.

Upon Yosef's arrival in Mitzrayim, he immediately landed in the *yetzer hara*'s jail. He was in Potifar's house and would have to face the hardest of *nisyonos*. Later, our pasuk describes Yosef's being there *in the jail* — because he was now in the physical jail of Potifar, not the jail of the *yetzer hara*.

It is very difficult to extract oneself from the traps the *yetzer hara* builds all around. The proverbial drunkard says, "There are seventy reasons (*taamim*) why one should not drink wine, but the taste (*taam*) of the wine is better than all the *taamim*." There are many good reasons to overcome the *yetzer hara*'s temptations, but the *yetzer hara* insists that his *taam* is much sweeter than all those *taamim*. As Chazal state (Kiddushin 30b), the *yetzer hara* tries every day to overpower us. We must wage a daily battle against him.

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A Discerning Prophet

וּתְקַרְא לְאִנְשֵׁי בֵּיתָהּ וּתְאמַר לָהֶם לֵאמֹר רְאוּ הֵבִיא
לִנּוּ אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֵק בְּנֹו.

She called to the people of her house and said to them, "See, he brought us a Hebrew man (איש עברי) to laugh at us." (Bereishis 39:14)

Rashi provides two possible explanations for the term *Ivri*: one, he was from *across* the river; two, he was a descendant of Ever. However, the pasuk in Parshas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 14:13) also refers to Avraham Avinu as *העברי*. Rashi there only gives one explanation: he hailed from across the river. Why are two explanations given here?

The story of Yosef Hatzaddik is the story of perseverance in the face of a daunting *nisayon*. When a challenge arises, there are two distinct tools that we must put to use. One is the fact that we are descendants of Avraham HaIvri, "Avraham from across the river." The Midrash¹ relates that Avraham was called *HaIvri* to signify that he was not 'on the same side' as the rest of the world. The world acted one way, while Avraham was acting quite differently. We must recognize that we, just like our forefather Avraham, do not belong to all the pursuits of this world. They are not for us; they belong to those "on the other side." This

1 Bereishis Rabbah 43:6

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Wiles of the Yetzer Hara

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Standing against the mighty chains of the *yetzer* are chains that can save us from temptation. The pasuk (Bereishis 39:8) tells us, וַיִּמְאָן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיו הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא יָדַע אֶתִּי מִה בְּבֵית, – He refused, and said to his master's wife, "Behold, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, all that is in the house he has placed in my hands." The trop on the word וַיִּמְאָן is *shalsheles*, a chain. Chazal (Sotah 36b) describe how Yosef was able to fight the *yetzer hara*: while the wife of Potifar was persuading him, the image of his father, Yaakov, appeared in the window. This *shalsheles* — the knowledge that he was connected to the chain of generations, the *shalsheles* of the *Avos* — gave him strength to overcome his *nisayon*.

When the *yetzer hara* comes to trap us in his chains — then our chain, connecting us permanently to the Ribono Shel Olam, can save us from temptation.

Dovid Hamelech writes (Tehillim 112:1), – הַלְלִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁרִי אִישׁ יִרָא אֶת ה' בְּמִצְוֹתָיו הִפְּךָ מֵאֵד – Praiseworthy is the man who fears Hashem

and greatly desires His mitzvos. Chazal (Avodah Zarah 19a) read this as a reference to overcoming the *yetzer hara*. Praiseworthy is one who overcomes his desires while he is still "a man," in his prime; while his desires are still strong.

Accordingly, the rest of the pasuk — אֲשֶׁרִי אִישׁ יִרָא אֶת ה' בְּמִצְוֹתָיו הִפְּךָ מֵאֵד — should provide the strategy to be used against the *yetzer hara*.

What does אֲשֶׁרִי אִישׁ יִרָא אֶת ה' mean? It describes a person who becomes so engrossed in Torah that the Torah and *mitzvos* become absorbed in his blood. With this we can overpower the *yetzer hara*: learning Torah with *hislahavus* and serving Hashem with a *bren* will cool our burning desires, so that it may be said of us, אֲשֶׁרִי אִישׁ יִרָא אֶת ה'.

This *shalsheles*, this chain that connects us to our *Avos hakedoshim*, makes a Yid's heart burn with desire for *avodas Hashem*, and this is what helps us overcome our *yetzer hara* and free ourselves from his nets.

At this point our *avodah* takes off. Once we are free from the *yetzer hara*'s traps, we can become engaged in our true desires and feel a powerful desire to serve Hashem.

Chanukah is approaching. We will say in *Hallel* (Tehillim 116:16), אֲנִי ה' כִּי אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ, – Please Hashem, for I am your servant, your servant the son of your maidservant; you have released my bonds. The *Chassid Yaavetz* explains that there are two types of slaves. Most slaves are in bondage because they were captured. Those slaves regret that they're forced to serve their masters, and will escape at the first opportunity. However, there are slaves who were born into the household: a servant, the son of a servant – עַבְדְּךָ בֶן אֲמִתָּה. These slaves serve their master joyfully. Dovid Hamelech tells Hashem that he is a slave born into *avodas Hashem*. There is no need for Hashem to shackle him; he serves Hashem out of his own will.

(בנאות דשא פרשת וישב – ימי חנוכה תשכ"ג)

Vayeishev Collection

בן זקנים הוא לו

He was the son of his old age. (Bereishis 37:3)

The Ba'al HaTurim³ writes that זקנים serves an acronym for five of the *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah*: זרעים, קדשים, נשים, ישועות, מועד. This hints that Yaakov taught Yosef these five *sedarim* of *Mishnayos*.

The Pnei Menachem⁵ asked his father, the Imrei Emes, why *Seder Taharos* was not included. The Imrei Emes answered that

one does not learn *Seder Taharos* with a *bachur*.

The Pnei Menachem understood that his father meant something deeper. The *sefarim* teach that at a time of *nisayon*, a person's *madreigos* are all taken from him. The Gemara (Yoma 35b) states that Yosef obligates *reshaim*. People who failed to stand up to a *nisayon* will be asked, "Why were you not like Yosef HaTzaddik?" The Sfas Emes⁶ asks: how can anyone dream

of comparing regular people to Yosef HaTzaddik? The answer: At the time of the *nisayon*, all of Yosef's *madreigos* that he had reached were taken away; he was no more than an ordinary person. It is written that Yosef's *nisayon* was harder than those of the *Avos*. If Yosef, who was now ordinary, was able to withstand such a tremendous *nisayon*, certainly *reshaim* can withstand easier *nisayonos*.

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3 Bereishis 37:3.

4 A reference to *Seder Nezikin*; see Shabbos 31a.

5 *Pnei Menachem* p. 222.

6 5647.

A Discerning Prophet

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special tool gives us great power against the temptations of the *yetzer hara*.

Yet, this alone is not sufficient. The *yetzer hara* adds complications to confuse

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us; he leads us to believe that the *aveiros* we would like to do are really *mitzvos*. If we think a temptation is a mitzvah, why

would we try to resist? For this, we have to add another tool.

Chazal tell us² Ever was a great *navi*; he named his son Peleg, because the year Peleg died would be the same year that the nations became scattered across the world during the *Dor Haflagah*. We may ask, why do Chazal call him a great *navi*? We have discussed in the past that the actions of the *Dor Haflagah* seemed to them as a great mitzvah. They wanted to create a spirit of *achdus* among all the nations of the world and ascend to the highest levels. What they didn't realize was that this ambition would cause people to become distant from Hashem. A person who can recognize that must be more than an ordinary *navi*. Chazal call Ever a great *navi*.

R. Baruch of Mezhibuzh taught that just as Potifar's wife had proper intentions for enticing Yosef — Chazal tell us she had intentions *l'shem Shamayim* —

so too, Yosef thought this might be the will of Hashem. The only way Yosef was able to overcome this *nisayon* was with the second tool. He was from the descendants of Ever: he was very discerning. He knew how to look into the depth of the matter, and he realized that this was not a mitzvah but an *aveirah*.

With two definitions for איש עברי, Rashi is hinting to these two tools. Yosef was able to overcome his challenge because he realized the temptations of this world were not for him. However, he also needed to be shrewd enough to realize that this was no mitzvah.

This is signified in the name Yosef was given after marrying Potifar's wife's daughter. He was called Tzafnas Pane'ach — the Uncoverer of Secrets. It was this special power of his that enabled him to discern a mitzvah from an *aveirah*.

(בנאות דשא פרשת וישב - ימי חנוכה תשפ"ג)

2 Bereishis Rabbah 37:7

Vayeishev Collection

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Yaakov did not want to teach Yosef *Seder Taharos* because it would not stand by him at the time of his *nisayon*. Yosef would learn *Taharos* himself, at the time of his *nisayon*, and it would stand him in good stead.⁷

(בנאות דשא וישב שבת חנוכה תשפ"א)



וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן. אֵלֶּה תְּלִדוֹתַי יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף וְגוֹ'.

Yaakov lived in the land where his forefathers lived, in the land of Canaan.

These are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef... (Bereishis 37:1)

Rashi here relates a parable from the Midrash.⁸ A blacksmith once came across camels carrying many bundles of flax. He was amazed: “Where can there possibly be a place to put all that flax?” There was a wise man there who offered advice. “Why are you so worried,” he said. “One spark from your smithy can destroy all those bundles of flax.” The Midrash continues: When Yaakov saw Esav with all his generals, he became

frightened. “How will I survive against all of them?” he thought. Hashem told him, “There is no need to worry. One spark from you can destroy them all.” The Midrash tells us this spark is Yosef; it is written (Ovadiah 1:18) וְהָיָה בֵּית יַעֲקֹב אֵשׁ וּבֵית יוֹסֵף לְהִבָּהּ וּבֵית עֵשָׂו לְקֵשׁ – *The house of Yaakov will be a fire, and the house of Yosef will be a flame, and the house of Esav straw.*

The parable in this Midrash is quite difficult to understand. What is so clever about the wise man's solution? One would

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7 See *Likutei Yehudah*.

8 *Tanchuma Vayeshev* 1.

assume that the flax the camels were carrying was intended to be stored and used to make clothing or the like. This is implied from the blacksmith's question as well. It seems ludicrous to suggest burning it to the ground as a solution! The question of the blacksmith seems to remain. The *nimshal* is understandable, but the *mashal* remains obscure.

The Sfas Emes⁹ explains: the blacksmith was worried the owner of the flax might wish to store the flax with him, and he could not fathom where he would find the room. The wise man suggested that he need not worry. The owner of the flax would certainly not want to even go near the smithy, for one spark from the smithy could destroy all his merchandise. It is written about Esav (Bereishis 36:6) – וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל אָרְצוֹ מִכְּנִי יַעֲקֹב אֶחָיו – *He went to a (different) land because of his brother Yaakov.*

As soon as the inner reality of Yaakov and Yosef become clear, the *satan* retreats. The wise man tells the blacksmith, “There is no need for you to worry; the owner of the flax is more scared of you than you are of him. He will make sure to stay far away.” Yaakov was scared of Esav and his entourage. Hashem told him he had nothing to worry about, for one spark from Yosef will destroy all of Esav. Esav is more scared than you are. He will stay far away.

This Midrash can be explained in another way as well. The blacksmith was looking in amazed admiration at the tremendous wealth of possessions in the caravan. The wise man, who was able to see past the glitter, pointed out: “There is nothing to admire; in an instant, it can all come crashing down.” In mere moments, buildings many stories high can be destroyed and disappear. Stop gazing at things that are empty and worthless,

and focus your attention on things that are important! This *mashal* teaches us that *ruchniyus* overpowers *gashmiyus*. Through one small spark of *ruchniyus*, through recognizing the essence of truth, the fake glory of this world becomes nullified in an instant.

(נר ב' דחנוכה תשס"ב בישיבת שפת אמת)



וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חָטְאוּ מִשְׁקָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
וְהָאֶפֶסֶת לְאֹדִינֵיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם.

And it was after these events, the butler of the king of Mitzrayim and the baker sinned to their master, to the king of Mitzrayim. (Bereishis 40:1)

Rashi¹⁰ states two reasons this story had to take place. The first reason is that Potifar's wife had been spreading gossip about Yosef. Hashem caused a new story to take place so people would gossip about the butler and the baker instead. Rashi's second reason is that Hashem wanted to bring about Yosef's salvation through these two.

It would seem that the first reason is the more trivial of the two. Why, then, did Rashi write them in this order? What's even more perplexing is that the Midrash Rabbah¹¹ only mentions the first reason and ignores the second reason altogether.

The pasuk (Bereishis 45:9) states, כֹּה אָמַר – בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף שָׂמְנִי אֱלֹקִים לְאֹדוֹן לְכֹל מִצְרַיִם – *So said your son Yosef, “Hashem made me master over all of Mitzrayim.”* Tzaddikim¹² explained this pasuk another way: “שָׂמְנִי – *I placed Hashem as the master over all of Mitzrayim.*” Yosef was telling his father, Yaakov: “I, Yosef, made Hashem the master in Mitzrayim, proclaiming that Hashem is the Master and the ruler over Pharaoh and all of Mitzrayim.” Yosef accomplished this by subjugating the powers of *tumah* to the powers of *kedushah*.

Before Yaakov and his children could come to Mitzrayim, Yosef told Yaakov that

even in Mitzrayim, the *ervas ha'aretz*, it was possible to hold onto *kedushah*. The way Yosef was able to accomplish this — making it possible to have *kedushah* in the midst of ultimate *tumah* — was by overcoming *nisyonos*.

Now we can understand Rashi. Rashi did not mean simply that Hashem made this story occur to prevent gossip. Why should Yosef care if the Egyptians, swamped in their pursuit of *gashmiyus*, were gossiping about him? But Yosef had an influence even over the gentiles. He wanted to introduce among them this foothold of *kedushah*. They had to recognize the *kedushah* of Yosef; they had to learn that he could remain holy even in the *tumah* of Mitzrayim. It was for this reason that the gossip had to be stopped. Although Yosef had withstood the *nisyonos*, the gossip detracted from his influence over the people. This influence had to be established to enable Bnei Yisrael to come to Mitzrayim.

We are all called sons of Yaakov and Yosef (Tehillim 77:16). We must all realize we have the *koach* within us to influence our surroundings — even to the lowliest gentiles.

The Gemara (Pesachim 113a) relates a story about R. Chanina and R. Oshia. They were shoemakers who sat and made shoes for harlots.¹³ The harlots would look at them, but they would never look up. The Gemara states that the harlots were so impressed that they took an oath that these were the holiest rabbis in Eretz Yisrael.

Why is this story important? Why does it have to be recorded for all generations that a few lowlives were impressed by R. Chanina and R. Oshia? The Gemara is telling us that through their *shemiras einayim* they were able to lessen the *tumah* in these people.

Each one of us has our own *nisyonos*, and by overcoming our *nisyonos*, we create an imprint of *kedushah* in the world.

(בנאות דשא וישב - שבת חנוכה תשכ"א)

9 5660. See explanation of *Imrei Emes* in *Likutei Yehudah*.

10 Bereishis 40:1.

11 *Bereishis Rabbah* 88:1.

12 *Yismach Yisrael Vayigash* 7; *Shem MiShmuel* p. 273.

13 They made shoes for the harlots because shoes prevent lowliness and sin. See *Otzar Midrashim U'Mamarim* II pg. 133.