

# עַל־הַשָּׂמַיִם

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

## Living Olam-Haba'dig

יעקב אבינו לא יָרָאוּ אָחֵי יוֹסֵף כִּי מֵת אָבִיהֶם – *Yosef's brothers saw that their father had died* (Bereishis 50:15).

The phrasing is unusual and requires explanation; indeed, Rashi addresses it. The Sfas Emes<sup>1</sup> explains it this way: *only Yosef's brothers saw that their father had died*. Yosef himself was on a higher level than they<sup>2</sup> – as *Targum* translates (49:26) פְּרִישָׁא דִּאֲחוּיָא אֶחָיו as נִזִיר אֶחָיו (the most righteous among his brothers) – and so Yosef perceived that Yaakov was not dead, יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ לֹא מֵת (Taanis 5b).<sup>3</sup>

Having overcome difficult *nisyonos* in the filth of Mitzrayim, Yosef had learned to live a life of *Olam Haba* while in this world. He understood clearly that Yaakov's life, too, was a life of *Olam Haba*, focused on *ruchniyus*, and that this life would live on forever. As descendants of Yosef, we too can achieve this disconnect from *Olam Hazeh* and elevate ourselves to a life of *Olam Haba*.

Based on this, we may understand the pasuk (50:14) וַיָּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף מִצְרָיִמָה הוּא וְאָחָיו וְכָל יוֹשְׁבֵי מִצְרָיִם יוֹסֵף רָתַר לָקֶבֶר אֶת אָבִיו – *Yosef returned to Egypt – he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father – after he buried his father*. The words – *to bury his father* seem unnecessary; the pasuk could have simply said ...*he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him – after he buried his father*. It seems to imply that only his brothers and those who accompanied them

went to *bury his father*; Yosef himself didn't see it that way לא יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ לֹא יָרָאוּ אָחֵי יוֹסֵף כִּי מֵת אָבִיהֶם – *was merely the physical act of burial, after which Yosef returned to Egypt*.

Rashi in our parshah<sup>4</sup> states that Yaakov instructed that Yosef should not carry his *aron* because of his status as king. This seems hard to understand. When Yehudah spoke with Yosef before Yosef revealed himself, Yehudah referred to Yaakov as (44:24) – אֲבִי עַבְדְּךָ *your servant, my father*. Because Yosef didn't protest this disrespectful reference to his father, he lost ten years of life. Clearly, even a king must display *kibbud av*. So why shouldn't Yosef carry Yaakov's *aron*?

On Yaakov's deathbed, he told Yosef (48:22) – וָאֲנִי נָתַתִּי לָךְ שְׂכֶם אֶחָד עַל אֶחָיִךְ, – *And as for me, I have given you Shechem – one portion more than your brothers*. The Sfas Emes<sup>5</sup> understands שְׂכֶם as in the pasuk (Shmuel I 9:2) מִשְׁקְמוֹ וְיַמְעֵלָה גְּבֹהַּ – *From his shoulders (משקמו) and up, he was taller than any of the people*. Yaakov placed Yosef on a higher plane than the other *Shevatim*; why? Because

Yosef was a king; he ruled over himself, triumphing over his *nisyonos*. Yaakov did not want Yosef to carry his *aron* because he knew that at his high level, Yosef would recognize that Yaakov had not died.

This point is made by the Malbim. Pharaoh asked Yaakov (47:8) בְּכַף יָמֶיךָ – *How many are the days of the years of your life?* Yaakov responded (47:9) – יָמֵי שְׁנֵי מִגְרֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה – *The days of the years of my*

“  
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1 5641

2 Although we have no understanding of the *madreigos of the Shevatim*, we may repeat what we are taught by Chazal and sefarim.

3 See Sfas Emes 5635 (הא) במדרש ד"ה האספו 5642 and ד"ה במדרש (הא) 5635

4 50:13

5 Ibid

לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמַת  
מֵרַת  
עֵקַב עֲדֵנָה  
צְפוּרָה ע"ה  
בַּת מֹשֶׁה מִנְחֵם הַלּוֹי ז"ל

*dwelling*<sup>6</sup> have been a hundred and thirty years. Yaakov was asked about the years of his life ; (שני חייו) why did he answer with the years of his dwellings ? (שני מגוריו) The Malbim explains that life is truly lived only when one is productive in *avodas Hashem*. When one lives on a physical, animal level, his years can be termed *שני מגוריו*, for he resides in this world, but he does not truly live. Pharaoh, not understanding this distinction, asked Yaakov how many years he had lived. But what answer could Yaakov give Pharaoh? He therefore replied that while he had *dwelled* in this world for one hundred and thirty years, *מעט ורעים היו ימי שני חיי ולא השיגו את ימי שני חיי אבתי בימי מגוריהם* – *Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the life spans of my forefathers in the days of their dwellings* (ibid). My years of true life, resplendent with *ruchniyus*, have been few and bad, and fewer than those of my forefathers. Yet although this was how Yaakov viewed his life, the Torah testifies (47:28) – *Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt*. Even in the impurity of Mitzrayim, Yaakov continued to live true life – life of *ruchniyus*. Since this was how Yaakov lived his life, ; *יעקב אבינו לא מת* his spiritual life would continue forever.

We, too, must view ourselves as merely dwelling in this world, as *Chovos Halevavos* instructs.<sup>7</sup> *Chovos Halevavos* also writes<sup>8</sup> that it is impossible for one's heart to contain love and yearning for both physicality and spirituality

6 Rashi explains *שני מגוריו* as “the years I sojourned in the land.”

7 *Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh* 30. See *Sfas Emes, Behar* 5651. ד"ה בפסוק.

8 *Shaar Ahavas Hashem, Pesichah and other locations*.

at the same time. Only once the heart is cleared of this-worldly desires can one have love for Hashem.

These two directives of *Chovos Halevavos* are co-dependent. When one achieves awareness of his temporary existence in this world, he can free himself of this world's pleasures and pursuits. But how can he get to this point? By tapping into Yaakov's *koach*; remembering what true life is that he must live. Commenting on the pasuk *וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם*, the Chiddushei HaRim<sup>9</sup> said that through Yaakov's *bechinah* (spiritual essence), a Yid can thrive in whatever constricting circumstances (- *boundaries*) he finds himself. One who lives true, spiritual life is unlimited; he can overcome any hurdle by remembering his purpose on this world. Yaakov's portion is *–an inheritance without boundaries*, a heritage of boundlessness.

May Hashem help us live *Olam-Haba'dig* in this world, bringing Him *nachas ruach*. Although we may not be on the *madreigah* to maintain a feeling of *Olam Haba* while in this world, at least let us sense the falseness of this world and its *gashmiyus*, recognizing that they do not represent true life.

(ס"ג פרשת ויחי תש"פ)

9 See *Sfas Emes* 5635

## Teshuvah and Ma'asim Tovim

After Yaakov Avinu passed away, the *Shevatim* told Yosef (Bereishis 50:16-17): *אביך צוה לפני מותו לאמר וגו' שא לא פשע אחיך וחסאתם כי רעה נמלודו. ועתה שא לא לפשע עבדי אלוקי*: *–Your father gave orders before his death, saying... “Kindly forgive the spiteful deeds of your brothers and their sin, for they have done you evil”; so now, please forgive the spiteful deed of the servants of your father's G-d.* The pasuk concludes, *–And Yosef wept when they spoke to him.*

The *mefarshim* wonder about this: the brothers cried for fear of retribution, but why did Yosef cry? He had already cried and conciliated with his brothers when he first revealed himself to them years earlier.

It seems that Yosef's cry was a cry of emotion-laden *teshuvah*.<sup>10</sup> He was aroused by his brothers' cries. If they were crying in fear and remorse although his anger was limited by his own mortality, and although they had already expressed remorse and been forgiven with the recognition that the ordeal had been for the good – how much more must a person who angers Hashem, whose anger is eternal, cry out in pain and remorse!

Following this Shabbos, the period of *Shovavim* begins. The Navi proclaims (Yirmiyahu 3:14), *–Return, wayward sons – the word of Hashem*. The *mefarshim* explain the word *שׁוֹבְבִים* as 'rebellious'; Hashem calls out to those who have rebelled against Him to return. However, *Targum* explains it to the contrary: *–Return, sons who endeavor to do teshuvah*. Hashem encourages those who want to do *teshuvah* but feel that it is beyond them; they have attempted *teshuvah* in the past, only to return to sin. Who's to say that they can now truly let go of their *aveiros*? Perhaps they have even committed sins that the *Zohar hakadosh* declares beyond *teshuvah*. To every one of these people, Hashem says: *Return, sons who strive to do teshuvah!* The prophecy of the Navi cannot be undone by anyone; not a Tanna nor an Amora, nor the *Zohar hakadosh* – no human can override a *nevuah*. Hashem wants us to scrub our hearts clean with tears of true remorse, tears of *teshuvah*.

10 This idea is discussed a great deal by *Beis Yisrael on our parshah*.

The Mishnah in Avos<sup>11</sup> teaches: יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה מכל חיי העולם הבא – *One hour (שעה) of teshuvah and good deeds in this world is more valuable than all the life of the next world.* The Sfas Emes<sup>12</sup> wonders whether שעה refers to a full hour – one twenty-fourth of a day – or to a mere moment.<sup>13</sup> Taking an alternate approach,<sup>14</sup> he explains שעה as ‘desire,’ as in (Bereishis 4:4-5), וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל הַבַּל וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ, וְאֶל קַיִן וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה – *Hashem desired Hevel and his offering, and Kayin and his offering He did not desire.*<sup>15</sup> In other words, one desire for teshuvah and *ma'asim tovim* is more valuable than the entire *Olam Haba*. What does this mean, and why is this?

In *Olam Haba*, too, *tzaddikim* grow continuously closer to Hashem, as the Gemara (Berachos 64a) teaches: צדיקים אין להם מנוחה לא בעולם הזה ולא בעולם הבא – *Tzaddikim have no rest; neither in this world nor in the next world.* *Sefarim* teach that just as Hashem Himself is infinite, so is the *deveikus* that *tzaddikim* experience in *Olam Haba*. But this world has one advantage over the next: yearning. While we are in this world, amid all the *gashmiyus* that this world has to offer, we can reach up and long to come close to Hashem. But in the next world, there is no *gashmiyus* for us to look past and yearn for Hashem's closeness. This is why one שעה –longing – in *Olam Haze* is more precious than all of *Olam Haba*.

The pasuk in our parshah (47:29) states: וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת – *The days of Yisrael approached for him to die.* The *Zohar hakadosh*<sup>16</sup> explains that all the days of one's life come before Hashem and must be shown to have been properly used. It is told that R. Chaikel of Amdur once passed out while reciting *krias shema al hamitah*. When he recovered, he explained that he had said the words בידך אנפיד רוחי – *In Your Hand, I entrust my soul*, and envisioned the following scenario: A king decreed that all his subjects must contribute their possessions to the royal treasury. Among the many people coming to the palace was a poor man who held a small rag, a remnant of his worn-out clothing. Looking around, he saw the jewels and valuable items that the upper class were bringing, and, overcome with feelings of inadequacy, he fell into a faint. R. Chaikel explained, “Since I was about to entrust my *neshamah* to Hashem, I had to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, and sensing my inadequacy, I fainted.”

May Hashem help us indeed be aroused to teshuvah and *ma'asim tovim*. Teshuvah means returning to the root, to the inner depth of our actions, as the Sfas Emes explains. And *ma'asim tovim* means performing good deeds: not merely in order to fulfill an obligation, but deeds that are *tovim* – bound to Hashem, the true Good. During the weeks of *Shovavim*, some people take care to learn uninterrupted hours, שעות. One must take care as well to awaken in himself יפה שעה אחת, an undistracted, uninterrupted yearning for closeness with Hashem.

(ס"ג פרשת וחי תש"פ)

11 4:17  
 12 Ad loc.  
 13 How far are we from true kedushah! The Sfas Emes and those with him had already achieved טובים, and only wondered what amount of time the Mishnah refers to. If only we could reach this level even for an instant.  
 14 Emor 5636, cited in *Sfas Emes to Avos, and other locations*.  
 15 See Targum and Radak, and Sfas Emes, Avos 4:3 בו אל תהי ד'ה אל תהי ד'ה במכתב ד'ה אל תהי ד'ה אל תהי ד'ה  
 16 Vol. 1 99a, 222a

## A Tale of Two Oaths

Our parshah relates (Bereishis 50:6): וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרְעֹה עֲלֵה וְקַבֵּר אֶת אָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבַּעְתָּ: – *And Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father as he had you swear.”* Rashi explains that Pharaoh only let Yosef bury his father because Yosef had sworn to do so; he worried that otherwise, Yosef would violate his oath to Pharaoh and reveal that Pharaoh didn't know *Lashon HaKodesh*, once he had been forced to violate his oath to his father.

*Rosh* and *Moshav Zekeinim* wonder about this: suppose Pharaoh didn't allow Yosef to bury his father; what good would it do Yosef to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of *Lashon HaKodesh*, thereby breaking two *shevuos*? They answer that if Yosef were able to keep one of the two *shevuos*, he would have chosen to keep the one sworn to Yaakov. This *shevuah* was likely more binding; it was to his father, a *ben bris*, as

opposed to the uncircumcised Pharaoh. Now, once he would break his oath and reveal his lingual supremacy over Pharaoh, Pharaoh would be deposed and replaced by Yosef. Yosef would then be able to keep his oath to his father and bury him; thus he would not need to break both *shevuos*.

In *Pardes Shaul*, my grandfather, the Viershover Rav, asks the above question of the Rishonim. He suggests that Yosef could have broken his oath to Pharaoh as fulfillment of *kibbud av*. However, he remains unsure why *kibbud av* would allow violating a *shevuah*. He suggests that perhaps according to the principle of עשה דוחה לא תעשה, the positive mitzvah of *kibbud av* would override the negative mitzvah of violating a *shevuah*.



However, it is noteworthy that the above Rishonim do not mention *kibbud av*, even as a reason Yosef would prefer to keep his father's oath over Pharaoh's. Even if we suppose that the *Shevatim* were considered *Bnei Noach* and thus not obligated in *kibbud av*, it is clear from many sources that they did keep this mitzvah. And although some Acharonim consider that after the father's death, the remaining obligation is only *mid'Rabbanan*;<sup>17</sup> it is clear from the Midrash<sup>18</sup> that even this form of *kibbud av* was kept.

*She'elos U'Teshuvos Shevus Yaakov*<sup>19</sup> wonders why Yaakov felt it necessary to bind Yosef with a *shevuah*; why didn't he simply give him a command, which would obligate him by *kibbud av*? *Shevus Yaakov* derives from this that although after one's father's death he is obligated in *kibbud av*, he does not need to obey a command his father made during his lifetime. Perhaps for this reason *kibbud av* was not a factor in Yosef's choice between his oaths, as at that time his father was no longer alive.<sup>20</sup>

*Maharil Diskin* says that Yaakov specifically requested, and did not command, to be buried in Eretz Yisrael, in order that Yosef not be bound by *kibbud av*. This, too, would explain why *kibbud av* was not a consideration for Yosef.

In any case, it is clear from the Rishonim that had Pharaoh refused Yosef permission, Yosef would have broken his *shevuah* to Pharaoh in order to fulfill his *shevuah* to his father. This seems difficult for three reasons: 1. One need not fulfill an oath if he is forcibly restrained from doing so (אניס). Yosef was restrained from keeping his father's oath, but not Pharaoh's, 2. Yosef's oath to Pharaoh preceded his oath to his father, 3. Violating his father's oath would be passive (שב ואל תעשה), while violating Pharaoh's would be active (קום ועשה).

Perhaps these Rishonim maintain that the *Shevatim* were considered *Bnei Noach*, and were thus not forbidden to violate their *shevuos*.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, out of respect for their word, they would not break their oath.<sup>22</sup> However, since this was of their own volition, they could disregard it when called for, such as when there was a choice between keeping an oath to a *ben bris* and one who is uncircumcised.

It should be noted that the question posed by the Rishonim – what good would it have done Yosef had he broken both *shevuos* – is worded tersely. After all, Yosef wouldn't necessarily have needed to actually break his oath to Pharaoh; he could have simply threatened to do so. The intent of the Rishonim is, how could Yosef have even threatened Pharaoh with breaking his oath; Pharaoh certainly knew that Yosef wouldn't break both of his oaths.

We may suggest that although Yosef couldn't have threatened Pharaoh with breaking his oath to him – as is the premise of the question of the Rishonim – nonetheless, Pharaoh himself had reason to avoid compelling him to break his father's oath. Had he been forced to not uphold an oath, the importance of keeping his word may have become lax to him,<sup>23</sup> resulting in him eventually violating his *shevuah* to Pharaoh.

(בנאות דשא – וחי תשפ"א)

This world has one advantage over the next: yearning. While we are in this world, amid all the gashmiyus that this world has to offer, we can reach up and long to come close to Hashem. "

17 See *Sfas Emes, Yoreh Deah 240:2; Sefer Hamafteach to Hilchos Mamrim 6:5*

18 *Bereishis Rabbah 94:5*

19 Vol. 1, 168

20 In regard to *Shevus Yaakov's* proof from the fact that Yaakov compelled Yosef by *shevuah*, we may suggest that he did this to forestall an attempt by Pharaoh to prevent Yosef from fulfilling his request, as in fact occurred. See *Hagahos Machaneh Chaim to Shevus Yaakov* (printed in *Kovetz Nezer Hatorah, Tammuz 5771*); *She'elos U'Teshuvos R' Akiva Eiger, Mahadura Kamma 68*; *She'elos U'Teshuvos Noda B'yehudah, Even Haezer 45*.

21 See *Avnei Miluim 1:2*

22 See *Avnei Nezer, Yoreh Deah 306:16-17*

23 Although it would seem that *aveirah goreret aveirah* does not apply in a case of coercion (see *Bnei Yissaschar, Sivan 5:26*), nonetheless, he may have developed a general permissiveness toward *shevuos*. Additionally, Pharaoh had the mindset of a non-Jew, who would repeat a sin even if he was originally coerced (see *Avnei Nezer, Even Haezer 125:4; Derashos Chasam Sofer, p. 166 column 2* ד"ה והנה).

