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עֵלֵינוּ

AL EI DESHE

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

Opening Our Ears

Sefer Bereishis concludes with Parshas Vayechi, after which begins Sefer Shemos. Bereishis is the *sefer* of the Avos, while Shemos is the *sefer* of the *banim*, the children, as they make their way through *galus*.

What do we take with us from the Avos as we traverse our *galus*?

One of the words the Torah uses for

ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים – Yaakov called for his sons and said, “Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you at the end of days.” (Bereishis 49:1)

Rashi cites Chazal: Yaakov intended to reveal to his sons the time of the *geulah*, but the *Shechinah* left him, so he began speaking of other matters. The *Zohar hakadosh*¹ says that nevertheless, Yaakov did reveal what he intended, but in a concealed manner. Indeed, hidden in our *pasuk* is the secret of survival through *galus*.

הָרָצוּ אַחֲרַי – Draw me after you, we will run! (Shir Hashirim 1:4). *Tiferes Shlomo*² states that this *pasuk* is the *tefillah* of Klal Yisrael to Hashem: Please Hashem, draw us near with *chesed*, and we will run after You!

The Gemara (Kiddushin 22b) states that there are two ways to acquire a living being by *kinyan meshichah*: one can either hit it with a stick until it runs before him, or one can call out to it until it comes toward him. Throughout our *galus*, we have repeatedly been treated to the first form of *kinyan meshichah* –

United Hearts

הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב ושמעו אל ישראל אביכם
Gather yourselves and listen, sons of Yaakov, and listen to Yisrael your father. (Bereishis 49:2)

The Midrash³ relates that as Yaakov took leave of this world, he called his sons over and said, “Listen to your father Yisrael who is in the heavens; perhaps in your hearts there is disunity with Hashem?” Yaakov’s sons replied, “שמע ישראל – Listen, our father, Yisrael: Just as your heart contains no disunity with Hashem, neither do our hearts. Rather, ה' אלקינו ה' אחד – Hashem, our G-d, is Hashem Who is the One and only.” Yaakov responded, “ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.”

When relating Yaakov’s question, “perhaps in your hearts there is disunity with Hashem?” the Midrash uses the word *לבבכם* for “hearts.” This is the plural form, implying that his sons each had multiple hearts. What does this mean? Why doesn’t it use the singular form, *לבבך*?

The *pasuk* states (Divrei Hayamim I 28:9), ואתה שלמה בני דע את אלקי אביה ועבדהו בכל שלם ובנקש חפצה, כי כל לבבות דורש ה' וכל יצר מחשבות מבין, אם תדרשנו ימצא לה – And you, my son Shlomo: Know the G-d of your father and serve Him with a perfect heart and a willing soul, for Hashem searches all hearts, and discerns every product of

Hashem keeps up a tremendous love for Bnei Yisrael because we drew near to Him even before we received the Torah, when we lacked proper insight

‘desire’ is אָבָה.¹ The root of this word is אב, father. The main strength we inherit from our forefathers is our *ratzon*, our desire to connect to Hashem. This is what we hold onto as we conclude Sefer Bereishis.

1 Shemos 10:27 and other locations
2 234b
3 Bereishis 49:1

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10 Bereishis Rabbah 98:3

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Opening Our Ears

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we have been hit with sticks until we ran before Hashem. We ask now, as Mashiah approaches, **אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם** – for Hashem to draw us near to Him with **קְרִיאה**, by calling out to us to follow Him. This is the *tefillah* of **מְשַׁכְּנֵי אַחֲרָיִךְ** – perform upon us a *kinyan meshichah* in which You stand in front and *draw us after You* by calling out to us to follow You.

In actuality, Hashem's call toward us has rung out throughout our history – even as the stick has rained down upon us. Only that our hearts have been closed to true *ratzon*, preventing us from perceiving Hashem's call. Our *tefillah*, then, is that our hearts be opened wide with *ratzon*, so that we will hear Hashem's call and draw close to Him.⁴

However, there is a problem with this. The Gemara is clear that this second form of *meshichah* – calling out – can be performed only on animals. A human, such as a slave, cannot be acquired this way, since a person walks of his own accord; his walking is not seen as induced by the calling. Only a *kattan*, a minor, may be acquired this way, since he has no mind of his own. If so, how can Klal Yisrael daven **נְרוּצָה אַחֲרָיִךְ** *נְרוּצָה*, that Hashem should acquire us with His call toward us?

The Midrash⁵ cites the pasuk (Tehillim 36:7) **אֲדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה'** – *You save both man and animal, Hashem!* The Midrash expounds: “Klal Yisrael says: ‘Ribbono Shel Olam, we are like people; nonetheless, save us like animals, since we are drawn after You like animals, as is written, **מְשַׁכְּנֵי אַחֲרָיִךְ נְרוּצָה**.’”

Where do we find that Bnei Yisrael drew after Hashem like animals? The Sfas Emes⁶ explains that this describes the Avos, who followed Hashem even before receiving the Torah. Because of this, Hashem praises us, **זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלְתֵיךָ, לְכַתֶּרָה, אַחֲרֵי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה** – *I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your marriage, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land* (Yirmiyahu 2:2). Hashem keeps up a tremendous love for Bnei Yisrael because we drew near to Him even before we received the Torah, when we lacked proper insight.⁷ The only real difference between man and animal is in our possession of the Torah, which imbues us with true wisdom. It was at that stage in our history – when we were like an animal, lacking understanding – that we “we were drawn after You like animals.”

The Sfas Emes adds: At the end of days, we will once again be without understanding, like animals. Our job will be to inspire ourselves with pure *ratzon* to follow Hashem like an animal, drawing upon the *ratzon* we inherit from our Avos, who did the same. As the pasuk says (Tzefanyah 3:12), **עַם עֲנִי וְדָל וְחָסוּ בְּשֵׁם ה'** – *a humble and destitute people, they will take shelter in the Name of Hashem.*

This is the *tefillah* of Klal Yisrael to Hashem: Please, inspire within us the *ratzon* of our forefathers, who sought You out even without the proper understanding that came at *kabbalas haTorah*. We, too, lack understanding, and are like animals without a mind of our own. If You allow us to hear Your call, we will run toward You, so You can acquire us as one does an

animal – by calling out to it. We will “draw after You like animals.”

One must know, however, that becoming inspired to pure *retzonos* is not simple. One first has to remove from himself all impure desires. This requires hard work. People sometimes complain that davening or learning is not enjoyable for them. Tzaddikim pointed to the following *pasuk* as the answer: **עַל מְשַׁכְּבֵי בְּלִילוֹת בְּקִשְׁתִּי אֶת שְׂאֵהְרָה נִכְפְּשִׁי, וְלֹא מְצָאתִי** – *Upon my bed during the nights I sought the One my soul loves; I sought Him, but I did not find Him* (Shir Hashirim 3:1). The reason that **לֹא מְצָאתִי**, that a person may have difficulty connecting to Hashem, is because **בְּקִשְׁתִּי אֶת שְׂאֵהְרָה נִכְפְּשִׁי** – he has sought out affections other than Hashem, following foreign drives and desires. Hashem gives us the gift of *ratzon*; it is our inheritance from our Avos. It is up to us to channel it properly. If one abuses it, his sense of taste can become corrupted, so that true spiritual enjoyments become distasteful to him.⁸

It is only through intense toil that one can develop a positive sense of desire, a longing to draw close to Hashem. The Sfas Emes⁹ explains that because we live in a world of falsehood, we typically feel only small fragments of *ratzon*. It is our task to overcome the falsehoods of this world and slowly, laboriously, build up our positive desires, until we achieve a measure of *ratzon emes*.

(וִיחִי תשפ"ב – ס"ג מאמר ב)

4 See *Likutei HaRim*, Pesach – Shir Hashirim, 1:4, citing the Beis Yisrael in the name of the Chiddushei HaRim.

5 Vayikra Rabbah 27:1

6 Sukkos 5654 s.v. *Aravah*

7 See *Sfas Emes*, Sukkos 4649 s.v. *Mitzvas*; 4658 s.v. *Ksiv*

8 See *Tiferes Shlomo*, *Likutim* to Shir Hashirim

9 See Mattos 5634

Rising Above

וַיִּשָּׁבַע יוֹסֵף אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר כְּקֹדֶד
אֶלְקִים אֲתֹכֶם וְהֵעֲלֵתֶם אֶת עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה

Yosef made Bnei Yisrael swear, saying, "G-d will indeed remember you, and then you must bring my bones up out of here." (Bereishis 50:25)

The *Ba'alei HaTosafos*¹⁴ cite a Midrash that reads the *pasuk* (Tehillim 80:2) נִהְיֶה כְּצֹאֵן (You Who leads Yosef like a flock of sheep) as *he who leads Yosef as a sheep*. The Midrash explains that when Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Moshe placed Yosef's bones inside a sheepskin, which then came to life and walked on its own.

This Midrash is difficult to comprehend. The Torah relates that Yosef's bones had been placed in a coffin: וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם – *and he was placed in a coffin in Mitzrayim*. Why would Moshe have removed them from the coffin and placed them inside a sheepskin? Let us ponder this statement of Chazal, so that we can understand its meaning and derive its lesson.

The Gemara (Chagigah 16a) teaches that people share three characteristics with *malachim*, and three with animals. My father would often comment on this: Chazal certainly didn't mean to denigrate mankind, the finest element of Creation, by comparing it to animals. Chazal's intention was to reveal to us our makeup so that we could fine-tune ourselves, raising up even the animal-like parts of ourselves to be like *malachim*.

Let us explain this in more depth. When Hashem instructed Noah to bring animals into the *teivah*, He said (Bereishis 7:8) מִן הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִן הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנָה, טְהוֹרָה – *Of the pure animal; of the animal that is not pure*. As the Gemara (Pesachim 3a) famously comments, the Torah here

used eight extra letters to avoid speaking an unclean word: the Torah could have referred to a non-kosher animal simply as הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּמֵאָה. And yet, when teaching which animals are and are not kosher for consumption, the Torah repeatedly states טְמֵאָה הוּא לָכֶם – *it is unclean to you*,¹⁵ seemingly without regard for the negative-connoting language. Why is this? Because when teaching the laws we must live by – *halachah l'maaseh* – there is no place for delicate and allusory speech. Halachah must be taught in the most straightforward way possible.

This is true not only of *chovos ha'eivarim*, the halachos of our actions; it is true also of *chovos ha'levavos*, the halachos of our internal strengths and characteristics. These, too, must be spelled out clearly. For this reason, Chazal compared man in part to an animal – unpleasant as that may be – to teach us what to strive for: to elevate and refine our entire beings to be like *malachim*.

On the *pasuk* נִהְיֶה כְּצֹאֵן יוֹסֵף, Rashi comments that "Yosef" is a reference to Klal Yisrael. Since Yosef sustained Bnei Yisrael during the famine, all Jews are called by his name. This has ramifications elsewhere. The Gemara (Berachos 55b) instructs that one who fears *ayin hara* should state, "I, *Ploni* son of *Ploni*, am a descendant of Yosef, over whom *ayin hara* had no power." The Maharsha writes that even one who descends from a *shevet* other than Yosef can say this, since all Bnei Yisrael are called by Yosef's name, as we see from the *pasuk* of יוֹסֵף כְּצֹאֵן.

There is greater depth to this. Yosef "sustained all of Bnei Yisrael" by subduing the *ervas ha'aretz*, the depravity of the land, and thus enabling every Jew to

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14 *Tosefos Shantz*, Sotah 13a; *Peirush Ba'alei HaTosafos*, Shemos 13:19
15 Throughout Vayikra 11 and Devarim 14

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[one's] thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let Himself be found by you. Rashi comments: "The *pasuk* does not say בללב שלם, which would imply two hearts; rather, בלב שלם. This means that you should have only one heart to our Father in Heaven... Similarly, the *pasuk* states (Melachim I 8:61), וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם שְׁלֵם עִם ה', אֶלְקֵינוּ – *May your hearts remain perfect with Hashem our G-d*. The word שְׁלֵם, *perfect*, is written in the singular form. Every pair of two hearts should unite as one complete heart."

David Hamelech was instructing his son, Shlomo, to transform the diverse leanings of his hearts – his various desires and inclinations – to good: to place both his *yetzarim* at the service of Hashem. Indeed, the Targum renders כִּי כִלְהוֹן יִצְרִיא דִלְבָא תַבַּע כָּל לְבָבוֹת דּוֹרְשׁ ה' – *all the inclinations of the heart does Hashem demand*.

Yaakov did not suspect his sons of anything less than perfection in their *avodas Hashem*. He asked them whether לַבְּבָכֶם, their hearts, contained any disunity with Hashem. He meant, *Perhaps each of your disparate hearts are not yet united toward Hashem? Perhaps they contain other wishes and desires as well?* Yaakov's sons replied, "Just as your heart is united to Hashem, so are ours united to Hashem."

(בנאות דשא – ויחי תשפ"ב)

Harmonious Differences

וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם, אִישׁ אֶשְׁרֵךְ
כְּבִרְכָתוֹ בְּרַךְ אֹתָם

And this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them; he blessed each according to his appropriate blessing. (Bereishis 49:28)

Rashi cites the Midrash,¹¹ which comments on the pasuk's wording: אִישׁ אֹתָם, אֲשֶׁר כְּבִרְכָתוֹ בְּרַךְ אֹתָם, *them*, used, and not *him*? The Midrash explains that although Yaakov blessed each of his sons with an individual quality – lion-like strength for Yehudah, capture of prey for Binyamin, swiftness for Naftali – nonetheless, Yaakov included all his sons in all the *berachos*. This is the meaning of אֹתָם בְּרַךְ, *he blessed them*.

This leads one to wonder: If so, why did he bless each one individually at all? Why didn't he simply give one all-encompassing *berachah* to all of them together?

The answer is that each *shevet* was blessed with its unique character traits, through which it would shine. However, when Klal Yisrael would co-exist in peace and harmony, with true *achdus*, the *Shevatim* would learn from one another, so that all Bnei Yisrael would gain the qualities of all Yaakov's *berachos*.

After Yaakov's death, the *Shevatim* sent a message to Yosef: אֲבִיךָ צִוָּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ, אֲשֶׁר לֵאמֹר. כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף, אֲנָא שָׂא נָא פְּשַׁע אֲחֵיךָ לֵאמֹר. כִּי רָעָה גְּמִלוֹךְ – *Your father gave orders before his death, saying: Thus shall you say to Yosef: "Please, kindly forgive the offense of your brothers and their sin, for they have done you evil."* (50:16-17) Rashi writes that this message was sent with the sons of Bilhah, Dan and Naftali. Why?

Let us explore the natures of the *shevatim* of Dan and Naftali. The Gemara

(Pesachim 4a) states that one who excessively seeks adjudication by *dayanim* is surely from Shevet Dan, as the pasuk says (49:16), דָּן יִדִּין עַמּוֹ – *Dan will judge his nation*. Clearly, Shevet Dan were sticklers for justice. Regarding Naftali, the pasuk says (Devarim 33:23), נִפְתָּלִי שִׁבְעַת רְצוֹן – *Naftali is satiated with favor*. Rashi explains that his land inheritance completely satisfied its inhabitants. Although Naftali's territory certainly contained lands of both richer and poorer quality, and although people generally appraise others' properties as better than their own, the people of Shevet Naftali were fully satisfied with their plots. They were clearly easygoing in nature and happy at another's good fortune. They were also pleasantly spoken to others, as the pasuk states (49:21), הִנְתַּן אִמְרֵי שִׁפְרָה – *who delivers beautiful sayings*.

Although, as we have seen, the characters of Dan and Naftali were very different from each other, they remained in total harmony and brotherhood. In fact, in Moshe Rabbeinu's *berachos* to the *Shevatim*,¹² Dan and Naftali were blessed together; there is no *samach* separating their *berachos* in the Torah. This is why they were sent to deliver the brothers' entreaty to Yosef. Brothers who live in such harmony despite their differences can truly ask, *Please, kindly forgive the offense of your brothers and their sin – even though they have done you evil.*¹³

As Yidden, we generally must compromise and concede on our differences. And even when a person must seek litigation, he must remain in שִׁבְעַת רְצוֹן – his speech and demeanor must remain in keeping with אִמְרֵי שִׁפְרָה.

(בְּנֵאוֹת דֶּשָׁא – וִיחֵי תִשְׁכִּי"ב)

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remain aware of Hashem and overcome their *nisyonos* even while in *galus*. Yosef did this in *galus Mitzrayim* – the first, most fundamental of the exiles – and his achievement remains potent throughout all the subsequent *galuyos*. For all time, a Yid can summon up the *koach* of Yosef and remain steadfast to Hashem and His Torah.¹⁶ Thus, all Klal Yisrael is called by Yosef's name.

When Yaakov blessed Yosef and his sons, he said (48:20), בְּרַךְ יִבְרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֶר, בְּרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמֶיךָ וְכִמְנַשֶּׁה – *By you shall Yisrael bless, saying, "May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe."* Targum Yonasan renders it thus: "By you, my son Yosef, shall the Jewish nation bless their children on the day of their *bris milah*, saying..." What is the meaning of this?

Bris milah takes place on a child's eighth day. The number eight represents the transcension of nature. Yaakov's *berachah* was that for all eternity, Bnei Yisrael should be empowered by Yosef's ability to rise above nature, so that they could elevate their entire beings to be like *malachim*.

This is why Moshe saw fit to place Yosef's bones inside a sheepskin. Moshe was imparting that although we are born into a physical body which partially resembles an animal, the *koach* of Yosef within us can counteract that, infusing our bodies with a spiritual life-force. With this vitality we can transcend our natural selves, overcoming all our obstacles, until even our animal-like characteristics become raised to the level of *malachim*.

(בְּנֵאוֹת דֶּשָׁא – וִיחֵי תִשְׁכִּי"ג)

11 Bereishis Rabbah 99:4

12 Devarim 33

13 See *Tanya*, end of *perek* 12, citing *Zohar hakadosh*

16 As the Gemara (Yoma 35b) states, "Yosef obligates the wicked."