

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter IX: Vaveishev (Gen. 37:1–40:23)

Essay 13. The rewards for avoiding temptation

מדרש "וַיְהִי כַּדְּבָרָה אֲלֵי-יוֹסֵף יוֹם יוֹם" וכו', אָמַר רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל, יוֹסֵף מִשְׁלוֹ נִתְּנוּ לוֹ, פִּיּוֹ שָׁלָא נָשַׁק בְּעֵבֶרָה, "וְעַל-פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק כָּל-עַמִּי". גּוֹפּוֹ שָׁלָא נָגַע בְּעֵבֶרָה, "וַיִּלְבַּשׂ אֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי-יִשׁוּשׁ". צָנָאוּ שָׁלָא הִרְפִּיּוֹ לְעֵבֶרָה, "וַיִּשָּׂם רֶבֶד הַזָּהָב עַל-צְנָאוֹ". יָדָיו שָׁלָא מִשְׁמָשׁוּ בְּעֵבֶרָה, "וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל-יַד יוֹסֵף". רַגְלָיו שָׁלָא פָּסְעוּ לְעֵבֶרָה, "וַיַּרְכֵּב אֹתוֹ בְּמַרְכָּבַת הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ". מַחְשָׁבָה שָׁלָא חָשַׁב בְּעֵבֶרָה, תָּבֵא וְתִקְרָא חֻקָּה עַכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash**:

“And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.”¹ Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: Joseph was given what he deserved: His mouth [פִּיּוֹ] [piv] did not kiss [נָשַׁק] [nashak] in transgression, [thus] “and by your mouth, all my people will be directed [וְעַל-פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק] [ve'al pikha yishak].”² His body did not touch sin, [thus] “and he dressed him in garments of fine linen.”³ His neck did not bend toward sin, [thus] “and he placed a gold chain on his neck.”⁴ His hands did not handle sin, [thus] “Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand, and he put it on Joseph’s hand.”⁵ His feet did not walk toward sin, [thus] “and he had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command.”⁶ [Regarding] his thought, which did not think of sin, let it come and be called wisdom.

- Gen. Rabbah 90:3

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¹ Gen. 39:10.

² Gen. 41:40.

³ Gen. 41:42.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gen. 41:43.

צריך עיון וכי לא הנה חייב יוסף לשמור עצמו מן כל אלה הדברים על צד הדין, ולמה זכה לכל השכר הגדול הנה שגראה שזכה בו ממדת חסידות. ויש לומר שבכל אלה הדברים לא די שלא עשה האיסור ושמר עצמו מן החטא, אלא אף זו עשה שבאברים האלה תיקן ועשה חסידות בעצמו יותר מהגראה מפשט הדברים.

This requires examination: was Joseph not obligated by law to guard himself from all these things? Why then did he merit all this great reward, which it appears he merited from a trait of piety? One may say that in all these matters, it was not enough that he simply refrained from transgression and guarded himself from sin, but he also performed an additional act. That is, with these limbs he perfected himself and practiced piety beyond what is apparent from the simple reading.

ומתחלה אמר, פיו שלא נשק בעבירה, "ועל-פיך ישק כל-עמי", דאיתא במדרש ילקוט "ויבא הביתה לעשות מלאכתו" ומה מלאכה היתה לו, אלא קורא ושונה מה שלמד עם אביו ע"כ, וכן פתוב נמי בספר הזוהר הקדוש. ולא די שלא נשק בעבירה אלא נתעסק בתורה דכתיב בה "ישקני מנשיקות פיהו", בכונה זו שזכות התורה תועיל לו להצילו שלא יבא לעשות נשיקה בעבירה, ולתשלום הגמול הנה "ועל-פיך ישק" וכו'.

At first [Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel] said: “His mouth did not kiss in transgression, [thus] ‘and by your mouth, all my people will be directed.’ ” For it is stated in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni: “ ‘And he came into the house to do his work,’⁷ and what work did he have there, other than that he would read and review what he had learned with his father,”⁸ and this is also written in the holy Zohar.⁹

Not only did he refrain from kissing sinfully, but he involved himself in Torah. As it is written of it, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” with this intent: that the merit of Torah would help save him so that he would not come to a sinful kiss. As the payment of this reward, “and by your mouth, all my people will be directed.”

וקודם לזה אמר הפתוב "אין-נבון וחקם כמוך" ופולי עלמא מקשים שהיה לו לומר "אין-חקם ונבון כמוך" שהרי מתחלה נעשה אדם חכם ואחר כך נבון, שמבין דבר מתוך דבר. אמנם זה רומז מה שאירע ליוסף, שבועודו אצל אביו היה לומד בכל יום ויום והנה מתדש איזה דבר ומבין דבר מתוך דבר והנה שאיל ליה כל ספיקא דהגוי ליה. אמנם פשנתרחק מאביו לא היה אלא קורא ושונה מה שלמד עמו כדי לזכרו, ולא היה יכול בעצמו לתדש ולהבין דבר מתוך דבר כי לא היה רוצה לומר דבר שלא שמע מרבו.

Prior to this, the verse states, “There is none as discerning and wise as you.”¹⁰ The world asks: it should have said, “There is none as wise and discerning as you,” for first a person becomes wise, and afterward discerning, one who understands a matter from within a matter. Rather, this alludes to what happened to Joseph: that while he was with his father,

⁷ Gen. 39:11.

⁸ Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Vayeshev, 146:2.

⁹ Zohar I:190b, “When the sons of men ‘come into the house to do their work,’ that is, to repent of their sins or study the Torah and carry out the commandments of the Torah,”

¹⁰ Gen. 41:39.

he would study every single day, and each day he would innovate something, and would understand a matter from within a matter, and would ask him every doubt that he had. But once he was brought to Egypt and thus distanced from his father, he would only read and review what he had learned with him, to remember it, and he was not able on his own to innovate or understand a matter from within a matter, for he did not wish to say anything he had not heard from his teacher.

ומדה כנגד מדה בא לידו פתרון החלום ואמר "ועתה ירא פרעה איש נבון וחקם", וקשה למה הקדים "נבון" ל"חקם", וצריך לומר משום דקיימא לן אינהו חקם, הרואה את הנולד. ובכאן אינה חכמה להיות רואה הרעב העתיד לבא, שהרי כבר כל העולם יודעים זה מחמת החלום, אלא החידוש הוא שיהיה לאיש הזה בינה להבין ולהשכיל ולעשות כל מה שצריך, למלאות האוצרות בעגן שיתקיימו ולראות מרחוק שלא יתעששו ויבקבו אחר כך, ומשום הכי הקדים "נבון" ל"חקם".

Measure for measure, the interpretation of the dream came to his hand, and he said, "Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man."¹¹ This is difficult: why did he place "discerning" before "wise"? One must say: it is because we have established: "Who is wise? One who has foresight."¹²

But here there was no wisdom in foreseeing the coming famine, for the entire world already knew this from the dream. I.e., the knowledge of the coming famine was a Divine message transmitted to Pharaoh in his dream. Joseph correctly interpreted the dream, but it's not as though he would have otherwise predicted the famine through his intellect. Furthermore, Joseph himself downplayed his interpretation, telling the cupbearer and the baker, "surely G-d can interpret; tell me [your dreams]."¹³ Rather, the novelty was that this man would possess understanding to comprehend and to act in all that was necessary, to fill the storehouses in such a way that they would endure, and to foresee from afar that they would not decay and rot afterward. For this reason, he placed "discerning" before "wise."

ולכן, "אתה תהיה על-ביתי ועל-פיך ישק", כלומר בזכות התורה שאתה לומד בפיך יתקנים כל עמי. וזה שאמר הכתוב "לכו אל-יוסף אשר-יאמר לכם תעשו". ופרש רש"י ע"ה שאמר להם פרעה הרי גזר על התבואה והרקובה, ושם יגזור עלינו ונמות עכ"ל. וקשה מי אמר לפרעה שיוסף גזר על תבואתם, שמה הם לא היו כל כך חכמים ונבונים כמו יוסף לאצור ולטמון התבואה כדי שתתקיים, אלא נדאי שפרעה הכיר בו שהיה לו זכות הרבה ובטח בזכותו שיעמוד לכל בני עירו בשעת הרעב, וכמו שאמר מתחלה "אין-נבון וחקם כמוך".

Therefore, Pharaoh said: "You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed," as if so say: "In the merit of the Torah that you learn with your mouth, all my people shall be directed. This is what Scripture says: " "Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do."¹⁴ Rashi, of blessed memory, explained that Pharaoh

¹¹ Gen. 41:33.

¹² Tamid 32a, based on Pirkei Avot 2:9.

¹³ Gen. 40:8.

¹⁴ Gen. 41:55.

said to them: “Look—he decreed concerning the grain, and it rotted. Perhaps he will decree upon us, and we will die.”¹⁵

This is difficult to understand: who told Pharaoh that Joseph had decreed concerning their produce? Perhaps they were simply not as wise and discerning as Joseph in storing and burying the grain so that it would endure. Rather, certainly Pharaoh recognized that he had great merit, and trusted in his merit that he would stand for all the people of his land in the time of famine, just as he initially said: “There is none as discerning and wise as you.”

גופו שלא נגע בעבירה, "וילבש אתו בגדי־שש", דאיתא במדרש שלשה הם שתקף יצרם עליהם ונשבעו ליצרם, יוסף שנאמר "והטאתי לאלהים", דהאי "לאלהים" היינו שבועה שנזדרז וגדר את עצמו להרחיק ממנו יצרו הרע. ומשום הכי הנה לו לתשלום שָכרו, "וילבש אתו בגדי־שש", וידוע אצלנו שמי שהוא לבוש בגדי שש אין פל מזיק ומסטין יכולים לקרב אצלו, שהפשתן סגולתו להרחיק המזיקין.

“His body did not touch sin, [thus] ‘and he dressed him in garments of fine linen.’ ”
For it is brought in the Midrash:

Rabbi Yosei said: **There were three whose evil inclination attacked them and they took an oath against it; Joseph, David, and Boaz.** Joseph, from where is it derived? **As it is stated:** “How can I perform this great wickedness and sin against G-d?”¹⁶

- Ex. Rabbah 23:11

This phrase “against G-d” means an oath, that he hurried and fortified himself to distance his evil inclination from him. Therefore, as reward for this, “and he dressed him in garments of fine linen.” It is known among us Kabbalists that for one who is clothed in garments of linen, no destructive forces or accusers can approach him, for linen has the property of repelling destructive forces.¹⁷

צנארו שלא הרפין לעבירה, "נישם רבד הנהב על־צנארו", דאיתא במדרש תנחומא פֿרשה זו כשהיתה באה להשיח עמו הנה מרפין פֿניו למטה שלא להביטם בה ועשתה לו שרטוע של ברזל מתחת זקנו שאם ירפין פֿניו ינהה השרטוע מפהו ואף על פי כן "ולא־שמע אליה" עכ"ל. ולפי שסבל יסורין קשים של אותו השרטוע פֿדי שלא להביט בה, משום הכי לתשלום שָכרו במקום אותו השרטוע וישם רביד הנהב על צנארו.

“His neck did not bend toward sin, [thus] ‘and he placed a gold chain on his neck,’ ”
for it is brought in Midrash Tanchuma on this *parasha* (Vayeshev 5): **When she would come to converse with him, he would lower his face downward so as not to look at her. She fashioned for him an iron spike beneath his beard, so that if he lowered his face, the spike would strike him, and nevertheless, “he did not listen to her.”**¹⁸ Since he bore such painful

¹⁵ Rashi on Gen. 41:55, based on Gen. Rabbah 91:5.

¹⁶ Gen. 39:9.

¹⁷ Abraham Azulai (c. 1570–1643), Kabbalistic author and commentator, *Chesed le-Avraham* (Amsterdam, 1685), Even Shetiya, Maayan 4, Nahar 52.

¹⁸ Gen. 39:10.

suffering from that spike in order not to look at her, therefore, as payment of his reward, in the place of that spike, “he placed a gold chain on his neck.”

יָדָיו שֶׁלֹא מִשְׁמָשׁוּ בַעֲבִירָהּ, "וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל-יַד יוֹסֵף", דְּקִשָּׁה עַל הַפְּסוּק "וַתִּתְּפֹשֶׁהוּ בַבְּגָדוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׂכָבָה עִמִּי", מֵה עֲנִיָּן תְּפִיסָת בְּגָד זֶה. וַיֵּשׁ לֹמֵר שְׁפֹנוֹנְתָה הִיְתָה שְׂיֹסֵף יָבִיט בָּהּ, וְכִינּוֹן שְׂרָאָתָהּ שָׂאָה בְּאוֹתוֹ שְׂרָטוּעַ לֹא הוֹעִילָה כְּלוּם תְּפִיסָתוֹ בַבְּגָדוֹ, שָׂאָם יִרְצָה יוֹסֵף לְהַצִּיל בְּגָדוֹ בְּעַל כְּרָחוּ צָרִיד לְהַפְּוֹד פָּנָיו אֲלֵיהָ וְכִינּוֹן שְׂמַבִּיט בָּהּ מִיָּד הָעֵינַי רֹאֶה וְהַלֵּב הוֹמֵד וְכָלִי הַמַּעֲשֵׂה גוֹמְרִים.

His hands did not handle sin, [thus] “Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand, and he put it on Joseph’s hand.” For there is a difficulty concerning the verse: “And she grabbed him by his garment, saying: ‘Lie with me.’”¹⁹ What relevance is there to her grabbing his garment? One may say: her intent was that Joseph should look at her. When she saw that even that spike accomplished nothing, she grabbed him by his garment, for if Joseph wished to save his garment, he would be forced to turn his face toward her. She thought: once he looked at her, immediately the eye sees, the heart desires, and the instruments of action enact.

אָבֵל יוֹסֵף, "וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ" וְאָמְרוּ ז"ל כָּל הַמַּרְצָה מְעוֹת מִיָּדוֹ לְיָדָהּ אוֹ מִיָּדָהּ לְיָדוֹ כְּדִי לְהַסְתַּפֵּל בָּהּ אֲפִילוּ קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה כְּמִשָּׁה לֹא יִנְקָה מְדִינָה שֶׁל גִּיהֵנָם, שְׂנֵאָמַר "יָד לְיָד לֹא-יִנְקָה רַע". וְלֹא רָצָה לְהַתְּזִיק הַבְּגָד מִיָּדָהּ לְיָדוֹ כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא לְהַסְתַּפֵּל בָּהּ אֵף עַל פִּי שְׂהִיָּה יוֹדֵעַ שְׂבָאוֹתוֹ הַבְּגָד תַּעֲלִיל עָלָיו עֲלִילוֹת דְּבָרִים הַפֶּה הָאֵמֶת. וְלִמְשָׁלוֹם שְׂכָרוֹ, "וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל-יַד יוֹסֵף", וְקִשָּׁה "עַל-אֲצָבַע יוֹסֵף" הִנֵּה לוֹ לֹמֵר, דָּהָא הַטְּבָעוֹת דְּרַף נְתִיבְתָם הוּא בְּאֲצָבַע, אֲלֵא וְדָאֵי שְׂרָצָה הַכְּתוּב לְרַמּוֹז שְׂיֹסֵף זָכָה לְטַבְעַת זֹו בְּשִׁבִיל יָדוֹ שֶׁלֹּא תִפְס הַבְּגָד.

But Joseph, “he left his garment in her hand.”²⁰ [The rabbis] of blessed memory said:

One who counts out money for a woman from his hand into her hand, or from her hand into his hand, in order to look upon her, even if he had received the Torah like Moses, he will not be cleansed from the punishment of Gehenna, as it is said: “Hand to hand, the evil man shall not go unpunished.”²¹

- Eruvin 18b; Berachot 61a

He did not wish to take the garment from her hand to his hand, in order not to gaze upon her, even though he knew that with that garment she would accuse him with false accusations contrary to the truth. As payment of his reward, “Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand, and he put it on Joseph’s hand.” There is a difficulty: It should have said “on Joseph’s finger,” for rings are given on the finger. Rather, certainly Scripture wished to hint that Joseph merited this ring on account of his hand that did not take hold of the garment.

¹⁹ Gen. 39:12.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Prov. 11:21.

רגליו שלא פסעו לעבירה, "נירפב אתו במרפכת המשנה אשר-לו", וקשה דמה שבח הוא זה והלא כף חובתו וכו' יפה לו לברוח מן האש של העבירה. ועוד דאמרין במדרש "נינס ניצא החוצה", קפץ בזכות אבות, דמה צורך לו לזכות אבות בכריחה זו.

“His feet did not walk toward sin, [thus] ‘and he had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command.’ ” A difficulty is what praise is this? Wasn’t it his obligation, and was it not proper for him, to flee from the fire of sin? Similarly, it is said in the Midrash, “ ‘and he fled and went outside’²²: he jumped by the merit of the patriarchs.”²³ What need did he have for the merit of the patriarchs in this flight?

ונש' לומר שמדרש המוסר לא היה לו לברוח כששמע שאדונתו הרימה קולה ותקרא לאנשי ביתה והעלילה עליו עלילה, שהרי כשהוא בורח נראה שמודה לדבריה והוא בורח מפני הפסד והבושה, מה שאין כן אם היה מתעכב שם והיה מכחישה אז היה הדבר ספק לעין שכנייה ובני ביתה שלא ידעו אם האמת אתו והיא משקרת או שמא הוא הדבר להפך. אבל יוסף הכניס עצמו בחשד נסמך על זכות אבות שלא תאונה אליו רעה כדי לברוח לגמרי מן העבירה, ולא פסע פסיעה בינונית, ובזכות זה, "נירפב אתו במרפכת המשנה" וכו', וידוע שהאבות הן הן המרפכה.

One may say that ethically, he should not have fled when he heard his master's wife raise her voice and call the members of her household and accuse him falsely; for when he was fleeing, it appeared that he admitted her words, and that he was fleeing out of fear and shame. That would not be the case if he had remained there and contradicted her; then the matter would have been doubtful in the eyes of the neighbors and the household members, who would not know whether the truth was with him and she was lying, or perhaps the matter was the reverse. But Joseph allowed himself to fall under suspicion and relied on the merit of the patriarchs that no harm would befall him, in order to flee completely from sin, not taking even a moderate step. In this merit, “and he had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command.” It is known that the patriarchs themselves are the [Divine] chariot,²⁴ and thus Joseph was rewarded for relying on their teachings.

מחשבה שלא חשב בעבירה, תבא ותקרא חכמה, לפי שיוסף היה מתקן בשערו וממשמש בעיניו כדי שיהיה נראה יפה, כמו שפרש רש"י על פסוק "והוא נער" שהיה עושה מעשה נערות וכו'. ולעיל בתחלת הפרשה פירשנו שכל זה היה עושה במחשבה טובה לשם שמים, לפי שהיה בטוח בעצמו לעמוד בנסיונו.

“[Regarding] his thought, which did not think of sin, let it come and be called wisdom.” Because Joseph would fix his hair and touch up his eyes so that he should appear good-looking, as Rashi explained on the verse, “while he was still a youth,”²⁵ that he engaged in youthful behavior, etc. Earlier in this parasha, Essay 1, we explained that all of this he did with good intention, for the sake of Heaven, because he was confident in himself that he could withstand his test.

²² Gen. 39:12.

²³ Gen. Rabbah 87:8.

²⁴ Gen. Rabbah 47:6.

²⁵ Gen. 37:2.

וְהִשְׁתָּא אֶתִי שְׁפִיר לְמָה בְּמַחְשָׁבָה לֹא אָמַר הַמִּדְרָשׁ שֶׁזָּכָה לְשׁוּם שְׂכָר כְּמוֹ הָאֲחֵרִים, בִּק אָמַר, תְּבוּא וְתִקְרָא תְּכֻמָּה, לְפִי שֶׁבְּכָל הַשָּׂאָר הָיָה בּוֹרֵחַ מִן הָעֲבִירָה אֲבָל בְּמַחְשָׁבָה אֲדַרְבָּא הָיָה מִתְקָרֵב אֶל הָעֲבִירָה, אֲבָל לְכוּנָה טוֹבָה דְּהֵיִינוּ לְעֵמוּד בְּנִסְיוֹנוֹ, וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי אָמַר תְּבוּא וְתִקְרָא תְּכֻמָּה עַל דְּרַף אִינְהוּ תְּכֻם הַרוּאָה אֶת הַנּוֹלָד, שֶׁהַמַּחְשָׁבָה רְאָתָה מִרְחוֹק שְׂיֵישׁ לוֹ כֹּחַ לְעֵמוּד בְּנִסְיוֹן.

Now it is understood why regarding thought the Midrash did not say that he merited any reward like the others, i.e., his mouth, his body, his neck, etc. Rather, it said only, “let it come and be called wisdom,” because for all the others he was fleeing from sin, but regarding his thought, on the contrary, he was approaching sin, albeit with good intention, namely to withstand his trial. Therefore, it said: “let it come and be called wisdom,” in the manner of “Who is wise? One who has foresight,” for his thought foresaw from afar that he had the strength to withstand the trial.

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