

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XI: Vayigash (Gen. 44:18–47:27)

Essay 8. Joseph remained righteous

פסוק "רב עוד יוסף בְּנִי" וכו'. יש לדקדק מהו "רב". ומצאנו במדרש ילקוט "רב עוד" וכו'. רב פחו של יוסף בְּנִי, שפמה צרות הגיעוהו ועודנו עומד בצדקו, ואני הטאתי שאמרת "נסתרה דרכי מה" ובטוח אני שיש לי ב"מה רב טובה אשר צפנת" עכ"ל.

There is a verse, **“Enough [רב] [rav]! My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die.”**¹ We need to check what is the meaning of this word **“rav.”** The word is typically translated as the adjective “great,” much,” “many,” or the adverb “enough.” We find in the midrash Yalkut Shimoni:

“Enough! My son Joseph is still alive.” Great [רב] [rav] is the [spiritual] strength of my son, Joseph; for how many troubles befell him and he still stands in righteousness.

But I sinned, for [during Joseph’s absence,] I said, “My path is hidden from the L-rd; my cause is ignored by my G-d.”²

Now [that I have learned that he is still alive,] I am certain that I have “abundant [רב] [rav] goodness that You have in store for those who fear You,”³ [i.e., a reward in the World-to-Come].

- Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Vayigash, remez 152

קשה דמדקאמר "רב עוד יוסף" וכו' שועודנו עומד בצדקו, נראה שהנה שום סלקא דעתא לומר להפך שאינו עוד עומד בצדקו, ואם כן היאך הבין יעקב שעדיין יוסף בצדקו.

A difficulty is that from what it says, “Enough! My son Joseph is still alive,” where the Midrash interprets “that he still stands in righteousness.” It appears from this word “still” that something could enter your mind to say the opposite, that he does not still stand in righteousness. If so, how did Jacob understand that Joseph was still standing in

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¹ Gen. 45:28.

² Isaiah 40:27.

³ Ps. 31:20.

righteousness? I.e., Jacob had thought Joseph was killed by a wild animal, and now has learned that he is alive, in Egypt. He understands that he has been through a lot, but what has made him decide that he is still righteous?

ואיתא במדרש אחר על אותו פסוק עצמו "מה רב טובך" וכו', אמר ר' אבא בר כהנא אמר הקב"ה לישראל "אשר צפנת לי תורה ומצוות בעולם הזה" בלבי צפנתי אמרתך צפון לישראל תושיה הריני צופן לה מאותו הטוב הצפון לצדיקים עכ"ל. ולמעלה אמר הכתוב, "וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף לשאת אתו", ששלח לו יוסף הסימן שהיו עסוקים בפרשת עגלה ערופה קשפירש ממנו. אם כן אמר יעקב "רב עוד יוסף בני חיי" ודאי שהוא מזומן לחיי העולם הבא, שצפן בלבו דברי תורה וזכר במה היה עוסק קשפירש ממני.

It's brought in another midrash on the same verse:

"How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear You"—Rabbi Aba bar Kahana said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel, "that you have in store" for Me: Torah and mitzvot in this world.

"In my heart I treasure Your teachings; therefore, I do not sin against You."⁴—**Stored away for Israel is wisdom, here I store away for you from the same goodness reserved for the righteous.**

[I.e., because Israel learns Torah and stores it in our hearts, G-d has reserved a place for us in the World-to-Come.]

- Yalkut Shimoni on Psalms, remez 717

Immediately **above** our verse, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive," **the Scripture said**, "But when they recounted all that Joseph had said to them, **and when he saw the wagons** [עגלות] [*agalot*] **that Joseph sent to transport him**, the spirit of their father Jacob revived."⁵ This means **that Joseph sent [Jacob] a sign that when he separated from him, they had been busy learning Torah in the section of the heifer** [עגלה] [*egla*] **that had its neck broken.**⁶

I.e., the words for cart [עגלה] [*agala*] and heifer [עגלה] [*egla*] are spelled with the same Hebrew consonants, though they are pronounced differently and have different origins. The midrash interprets "when he saw the wagons" homiletically as "when he saw [in his mind] the heifer [that had its neck broken]," Jacob remembered the last Torah section he learned with Joseph.

This was Deut. 21:1–9. If a murder victim was discovered in open land between cities in the Land of Israel, and authorities could not determine the killer, then the elders and judges were to measure the distances from the corpse to the nearby towns. The elders of the nearest town were to take a heifer that had never worked down to an ever-flowing wadi and break its neck. The priests were to come forward, and all the elders were to wash their hands over the heifer.

If so, Jacob said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive," and it's enough that he is destined for life in the World-to-Come, that he has treasured in his heart the words of the Torah and remembers what he was engaged in learning when he parted from me.

⁴ Ps. 119:11.

⁵ Gen. 45:27.

⁶ Rashi on Gen. 45:27, based on Gen. Rabbah 94:3, discussing Deut. 21:1–9.

ועקר כוונת יוסף ששלח לו סימן זה, הנה להודיעו שעדיין הוא צדיק, שהרי העגלה ערופה באה על הרוג הנמצא בדרך והוא סימן ששום אחד מבני עירו לא לוו אותו בנסיעתו מן העיר, כדתנן ולא ראינוהו ופטרונוהו בלא לונה. ואמרינן בסוף סוטה כל המלנה את חברו אינו נזוק באותו הדרך. ובנדאי שיעקב לונה את יוסף כשפירש ממנו, שהרי מצנה רבה היא, כדאמרינן התם בפסין לונה, וכן יש לדקדק מהכתוב "לכה ואשלחך אליהם" כמו שכתב הפלי יקר בפרשה זו.

The primary intent of Joseph when he sent him this sign was to let him know that he was still righteous, for the heifer that had its neck broken came from the death of one found on the path, and it was a sign that no one from the inhabitants of the city accompanied him on his journey from the city. This is as we learned in a Mishnah, “We did not see him and let him take his leave without accompaniment.”⁷ As discussed in the previous essay, the robbers saw that he was unaccompanied and reached the conclusion that no one would expend great effort to bring them to justice. Thus, they robbed and killed him. In contrast, if they had seen someone accompany him as he started on his journey, they would have assumed that he had family, friends, or other connections who would seek revenge if anything happened to him.

It is said at the end of tractate Sotah, “Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Anyone who accompanies his friend . . . [his friend] will come to no harm on this path.”⁸ Certainly Jacob must have accompanied Joseph when he last parted from him [to go check on his brothers], for this is a great commandment, as it is said there in Sotah 46b, “It is taught [in a Baraita]: Rabbi Meir said: There is coercion with regard to accompaniment [i.e., one who does not want to accompany another should be compelled to do so].” Thus, we should check the Scripture, “Israel said to Joseph, ‘Your brothers are pasturing at Shechem; go, I will send you to them,’”⁹ as the author of the *Kli Yakar*¹⁰ writes in this parasha, i.e., that the apparently superfluous words “I will send you to them” indicates that Jacob accompanied Joseph at the start of this trip.

ואם כן יעקב שהיה יודע שכבר לונה את יוסף לא הנה לו לומר "סיה רעה אכלתהו", דנה אי אפשר, שהרי אינו נזוק באותו הדרך, ואף כי יוסף אינו ונאבד ונעלם מפניו, הנה לו לחשוב שבנדאי ינה זה לטובתו ולא לרעתו, שהקב"ה שולח ייסורין לצדיקים בשביל לגדלם בעולם, כמו שכתבנו בפרשה הקודמת על ההיא דכל שהקב"ה תפץ בו—מדכאו בייסורין.

If so, Jacob—who knew that he had already accompanied Joseph—would not have said that, “a savage beast devoured him,”¹¹ for this was impossible, for he would not have been harmed on the same path. Even though Joseph was gone and lost and disappeared from his sight, [Jacob] would have thought that it would surely be for [Joseph’s] good and not for his misfortune, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was sending suffering to the righteous in order to aggrandize them in the world. This is as we wrote in the previous parasha (Chapter

⁷ Mishnah Sotah 9:6; Sotah 46b.

⁸ Sotah 46b.

⁹ Gen. 37:13.

¹⁰ Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz, *Kli Yakar* (1602) on Gen. 42:9.

¹¹ Gen. 37:20.

X, Miketz, essay 15) **on the fact that anyone in whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, delights, He oppresses him with suffering.**¹²

ומעתה אין לחוש שהגדולה שקיבל יוסף בעולם הזה תגרום לו חסרון לעולם הבא, שהרי הגדולה הזו לא באה אלא לאסור הייסורין שסבל. ואדרבא מזה מוכח שהיה צדיק גמור, אבל יעקב חטא שאמר "נסתרה דרכי" וכו' ומכל מקום הוא בטוח עתה לזכות לחיי העולם הבא, שלא ימות עוד שום אחד מבניו בחייו, שהרי יוסף כפה צרות הגיעוהו ולא די שלא מת אלא שעדיין הוא צדיק ונקרא חי.

From now, there is no reason to fear that the greatness that Joseph received in this world would cause him any lack in the World-to-Come, for this greatness did not come until after the suffering he experienced. To the contrary, this proves that he was completely righteous, but Jacob sinned when he said, "My path is hidden."

In any case, [Jacob] was certain now to merit life in the World-to-Come. In fact, none of his sons would die in his lifetime, for Joseph had many troubles, but it was not enough that [Joseph] did not die from these troubles, but that he was still righteous and was called "alive" by Jacob.

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¹² Berachot 5a.