

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah in this week's portion Vayigash tells us about the emotional reunion between Yosef and his brothers. During his opening remarks to his brothers, Yosef refers to the divine intervention which brought about the unusual set of circumstances of the reunion, namely, that Yakov's sons had come to Egypt to ask for food from their long-last brother whom they had sold into slavery many years earlier.

The verse quotes Yosef as saying, "Thus Hashem has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance." (Bereishis 45:7) We see from here Yosef's recognition of the concept of Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention, which is one of the foundations of Jewish belief. As the Rambam teaches us in the first of his 13 Principles of Faith: "I believe in perfect faith that the Creator blessed is His Name, is the Creator and the Guider of all creations..."

Believing in Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention means believing that Hashem guides even the minutest details of the universe. From this belief stems the belief that life is not random. Rather, everything that happens in life is for a purpose.

Once, one of the Baal Shem Tov's students noticed that a leaf had fallen from a tree in the distance. The student asked the Baal Shem Tov about the significance of this occurrence; why did Hashem cause the leaf to fall? The Baal Shem Tov instructed his student to lift up the leaf, which the student did. Under the leaf was a caterpillar. Now the student understood the reason why the leaf had fallen; the leaf fell in order to provide shade for the caterpillar.

Another outgrowth of our belief in Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention, is that everything that Hashem does is ultimately for the best. Although this belief may at times seem hard to internalize, it is a belief that is basic to Judaism. Because, if everything that happens in life is not for the best, then what is the purpose of Hashem creating this world? Hashem could have saved us the anguish and not created the world in the first place.

Let us now tell a moving story which illustrates the exact calculations with which Hashem guides the world.

The young man's name was Lazlo, or as his father called him, Ezra. His father was one of the most famous maggidim (Jewish inspirational speakers) in Budapest and traveled throughout Hungary holding drashos (inspirational speeches) in every Jewish community.

One day, in the maggid's home town, the tailor died. He had been a simple but deeply religious man, yet his son Moshe, who worked alongside him, had no religious convictions at all. Nevertheless, out of respect for his father, Moshe sat shivah (the mourning period of seven days).

During the week of shivah, Ezra's father, the maggid, went to pay a condolence call on Moshe. Little nine-year-old Ezra tagged along. When the maggid walked into the room where Moshe was sitting alone, Moshe was stunned. Everyone knew that Moshe was a rebellious lad and few in the community had much to do with him. That the esteemed maggid came and consoled him during his time of mourning, and then spent time chatting with him, was truly remarkable.

A day later the maggid came again. Moshe sat and listened attentively as the maggid said softly, "I think, for your father's honor, it would be nice if you would come to shul to say Kaddish." To everyone's surprise, Moshe agreed.

Throughout the months, as Moshe continued coming to shul, the maggid slowly began having a calming influence on the young man. At first they discussed Jewish concepts and attitudes and then they began to study together.

By year's end Moshe had become a religious man. With a rekindled spirit that burned enthusiastically, Moshe began performing mitzvos with a fervor that left very little tolerance for those less committed than himself. In shul it was he who would demand that others refrain from talking during the services, unlike past years, when people had silenced him constantly on the few occasions that he came to shul with his father. Eventually everyone got to know Moshe the schneider (tailor) as a man in whose presence one would dare not violate a mitzvah.

Two years later, the German barbarians overran their Hungarian town, and the Jews were taken to forced-labor camps. Moshe the tailor was swept off the streets as were the maggid and his son Ezra.

Together with multitudes of other frightened Jews they were crammed into the tightest quarters imaginable. With calculated cruelty, the Nazis tore children from parents — and that was the last time little Ezra, now twelve years old, ever saw his father. Ezra was placed in bunks together with other children his age, and soon began to pick up their bad habits and corrupt behavior, in the daily struggle for survival. Any religious commitment that he had before the war slowly began to ebb away as he battled to stay alive in any way he could, even if it meant cheating, lying, or stealing. Like everyone else he suffered from malnutrition and indecent living conditions, but together with a tight group of friends, managed to persist and survive.

When the horror finally ended, the feeble remnants of the Holocaust had to be taken to rehabilitation areas where they were slowly re-acclimated to normal foods and regular living conditions. Many could not eat solid meat, and it had to be ground so that their bodies could slowly relearn the process of digesting heavy foods.

The facility in which Ezra found himself was located high on a hill overlooking the city. The only way to get to the downtown area was to take a trolley down the long hill. One Friday night, Tomas, a friend from another camp, suggested to Ezra (now called Lazlo) that they go downtown to enjoy themselves. They had begun to feel like human beings once again and Tomas said it would be interesting to see nightlife in the city. Ezra was in a dilemma, for in the rehabilitation camp he had begun to think about going back to the religious practices of his father.

In the labor camps it had been an insurmountable challenge for Lazlo to be observant, but now that he was back in civilization, perhaps it was time to return. He knew that the trolley was the only feasible way to town but that was an open violation of Shabbos. True he had been very lax these last years, but now that he was on his own, he was trying to become observant again.

"Have a cigarette," Tomas said, offering one to Lazlo. In an automatic reflex Lazlo stuck out his hand to accept it. The cigarette trembled in his hand. He wondered if Tomas noticed it. He wanted to throw it away because it was Shabbos, but he could not do so, not in front of his good friend Tomas. He thought that if he inhaled his first puff, he would surely choke on it. He was going to have to make a decision: would he make the return to a religious lifestyle now, or never?

Before he could organize his thoughts, Tomas lit a match and held it to Lazlo's cigarette. Lazlo put the cigarette in his mouth, bent forward, squinted as the flame caught on the tip, and inhaled slowly. It felt good. He was going downtown. Laughing nervously, they both got onto the trolley and began planning their night out.

The trolley rolled into the brightly lit town, while Ezra stood away from the window, hoping that no one he knew would see him. And then he saw him. It couldn't be! But it was, Moshe the schneider - tailor, walking alone!

Ezra's stomach tightened. He recalled the first visit he and his late father, the maggid, had made to Moshe's home on a shivah call. Then he remembered Moshe reprimanding people in shul to be more respectful during prayers, and he said to himself firmly, "I will never allow the man whom my father made religious to see that his son has become a irreligious." And with that newly formed resolution, he got off the trolley at the next stop, walked all the way back up the hill to the rehabilitation camp and has remained an observant Jew to this very day. (The Maggid Speaks, p.114 Rabbi Paysach Krohn) Hashem created this world for our benefit. Therefore, Hashem guides this world with an exact calculation. By recognizing these eternal truths, we will all live happier lives. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

In memory of Shusha Malka bas R' Avrohom ה"ע

To sponsor a drasha: M. Wolfberg 25 Robert Pitt Drive, Monsey, New York 10952 (845) 362-3234

THIS PAPER CONTAINS HOLY WRITING AND SHOULD NOT BE DISPOSED OF IN THE GARBAGE

Good Shabbos Everyone. It is said that the greatest Tzadikim (righteous Torah leaders) in each generation possess ruach hakodesh, a divine inspiration, that enlightens them with an uncanny understanding of the past and makes them privy to many of mankind's secrets of the future. Using this power, the righteous can give blessings to those who come to them.

We see this concept in this week's parsha Vayechi, in which we read about how Yakov blesses his children. Although the blessings seem somewhat cryptic on the surface, the blessings with which Yakov blesses his children contain some of the deepest mystical secrets of the Torah. We will focus our discussion this week more in general, on the power of the Righteous to give brochos - blessings to people who come to them for such.

There are those who say that the Chofetz Chaim, R' Yisrael Meir Kagan, of Radin, Poland, possessed the noble attribute of ruach hakodesh – a low level of prophecy. The story begins around the time after the First World War in Zhetel, Poland, the birthplace of the Chofetz Chaim.

In that town lived a certain R' Zalman who held a rabbinical position in the early part of his career. A citizen of the town, R' Asher, had a nineteen-year-old son who wished to settle in Eretz Yisroel. Aware of the economic difficulties there, R' Asher decided to teach his son a trade so that he could find work in Eretz Yisroel. He bought his son a car and taught him to drive so that he could be a chauffeur. He would pick up passengers from the railroad station in Zhetel, and take them to their destinations.

Soon enough, he became familiar with the various routes and back roads throughout the major cities of the region. One Friday afternoon, as people were going to shul, they noticed that R' Asher's son was still driving people from the station. It was just moments before Shabbos, and it was quite obvious that the boy, who came from a religious family, would not be home in time for Shabbos.

Although no one actually saw him driving after nightfall, it would have been almost impossible for him to get home before then. In shul, people told R' Zalman what they had seen. After davening, the rav had the young man summoned to his home and reprimanded him. The young man claimed that it was an accident, that he thought he could make it home before Shabbos, but there was traffic, he got lost, and so on. He assured the rav that it would not happen again.

A few weeks later, he was seen driving on Friday night. This time he was caught red-handed, and the witnesses were infuriated. They hurried to R' Zalman's home to tell him the news. Once again the young man was called in, harshly reprimanded and warned that the community would not tolerate his actions much longer.

The father had no control over his now independent son and soon it became common for the boy to be seen driving on Shabbos. The religious people in Zhetel felt outraged and affronted. They had seen this boy grow up and his open defiance was deeply felt by everyone. Additionally, they felt that such flagrant violations of the Sabbath by one of their own could have a harmful influence on the other young people in the community. They pleaded with R' Zalman to convince the father to send his son away from Zhetel at once. R' Zalman agreed to do so.

However, before R' Zalman had an opportunity to speak with him, R' Asher had a stroke and was rushed to the hospital. He lay there for some weeks, and although R' Zalman came to visit him a number of times, he felt that it was an inopportune time to discuss the doings of his wayward son. R' Asher wanted to leave the hospital.

The doctors, however, insisted that he remain. One night, R' Asher's deceased grandmother came to him in a dream. She told him that he was foolish for staying in the hospital and that he should follow her advice and leave at once. "What you need," she said, "is a brochah from the Chofetz Chaim. Go to him and tell him that you are from his hometown of Zhetel. His brochah will do more for you than all the medications the doctors have been giving you for the last six months."

The next morning, R' Asher got out of his hospital bed unobserved, took his crutches and hobbled somewhat unsteadily down the back corridors of the hospital and made his way outside. He went home and began to prepare for his trip to the Chofetz Chaim. In a few days he was ready to begin his journey to Radin.

While R' Asher was traveling on a train to Radin, the Chofetz Chaim himself along with R' Zalman (the Rav from Zhetel who was supposed to encourage R' Asher to send his son away) were traveling home to Radin from a rabbinic conference in Vilna. R' Asher happened to meet up with R' Zalman in the train station. R' Zalman directed R' Asher to the Chofetz Chaim's train car. R' Zalman was hoping to reach the Chofetz Chaim before R' Asher so that he could tell him about R' Asher's son. Perhaps, thought R' Zalman, if the Chofetz Chaim would admonish R' Asher about the matter, R' Asher would then try to influence the wayward young man. They entered the train and walked through the corridors until they came to the car where the Chofetz Chaim had just finished Shacharis and was putting his tefillin away.

Respectfully, they waited at a distance until he finished, and then R' Asher hobbled to the Chofetz Chaim and began talking before R' Zalman had a chance to say anything.

As R' Asher began talking to the Chofetz Chaim he burst into tears, describing his illness and lengthy stay in the hospital. "I am from Zhetel, your hometown," said R' Asher gasping from his exertion. "My grandmother, who was a deeply religious woman, came to me in a dream and told me that I should come to you for a brochah."

The Chofetz Chaim looked up at the man and said, "Yisroel Meir is not a brochah-giver. What can I do? How can I help you?" (The Chofetz Chaim often referred to himself by his first name Yisroel Meir.) The man pleaded and begged.

Finally the Chofetz Chaim said, "We say every Friday night: 'Let us go towards the Shabbos and welcome it, for it is the source of blessing.' If Shabbos, which is the source of blessing is happy with you, then I too can be happy with you."

"What do you mean, Rebbi?" asked R' Asher. "Well," said the Chofetz Chaim, "if Shabbos is observed in your home by the members of your family, then Shabbos will bless you. But if your son drives on Shabbos, and your daughter combs her hair in a manner forbidden on the Shabbos, then Shabbos is not happy with you. If so, what kind of brochah-giver is Yisroel Meir?"

The man was shocked by the insight of the Chofetz Chaim's words and he promised that he would make every effort to see that his children would become true Sabbath observers. How did the Chofetz Chaim know these details about R' Asher's family? (p. 171 Rabbi Paysach Krohn, The Maggid Speaks.)

Our righteous Torah leaders are conduits through which flows the divine goodness from above. By going to a Tzaddik, a righteous Torah leader, we can tap into this conduit and benefit from their blessings.

Let us all be inspired by this week's discussion to seek out our Righteous Torah leaders and flock to them to seek their brochos. Then we will all merit living happy and healthier lives. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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