

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 indigent 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.**