



הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה All is Foreseen, Permission is Granted

■ Sale, or Mission?

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו, אֲנִי יוֹסֵף, הֲעוֹד אָבִי חַי?

Yosef said to his brothers: "I am Yosef!

Is my father still living?" (B'reshit 45,3)

The abrupt revelation that the Egyptian ruler was none other than their brother Yosef sent the sons of Yaakov into a state of near shock: *"They couldn't answer him, as they were so startled before him."*

Yosef then asked his frightened brothers to approach him, and tried nicely and patiently to calm them down: *"Now do not be saddened or upset that you sold me here, for G-d has sent me before you to preserve life"* (verse 5). That is, "Yes, you sold me – but actually, it was G-d Who **sent** me here." But this does not settle his brothers' minds and hearts, and Yosef therefore continues, no longer mentioning that the brothers "sold" him:

וַעֲתָה לֹא אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִי הֵאֵר-לְהִים...

It was not you who sent me; it was Hashem... (verse 8)

He constantly emphasizes G-d's decisive role in the series of events that led him to the second-highest position in super-power Egypt. He makes it quite clear, in retrospect, that everything that occurred, culminating with Yosef's ascent to power precisely in time for the famine, was unmistakably orchestrated by Divine Providence.

But we cannot avoid this fundamental question: Do the positive consequences of the reprehensible sale of Yosef exempt the brothers from punishment? And in general: When one commits a sin that ultimately leads to positive results – is he thereby cleansed of guilt? Can he say that because of G-d's positive intervention in the events, he is no longer culpable for what he did?

A similar question can be asked about Megillat Ruth, which we read on Shavuot. It tells how the wealthy Elimelekh abandoned his suffering countrymen during a time of famine in the Land of Israel and ran off to Moav. This led to the return of his impoverished daughter-in-law Ruth and her marriage to Boaz, which in turn paved the way for the formation of the dynasty of the House of David. But can we say that Elimelekh is no longer liable for what he did?

And what about David's sin with Batsheva? Their second son ultimately became none other than King Solomon – builder of the Beit HaMikdash, unifier of all of Israel, and a critical link in the royal dynasty from which will sprout the Mashiach from the House of David. Does this cleanse King David of all guilt for his original act?

What exactly is the border between a person's responsibility for his own actions, and the achievement of a Divine plan and its objectives? What defines a person's area of responsibility?

■ **Shifting the Responsibility**

The story of Yosef in Egypt shows us that the brothers erred in precisely this question, shifting to Hashem the responsibility for what they did. It happened when they were on their way home after their first trip to Egypt, when they discovered that the money one of them had paid for the food had been returned. Gripped by fear and apprehension, they asked:

מה זאת עשה אֱ-לֹהִים לָנוּ?

What is this that G-d has done to us? (42,28)

Did G-d do this to them? It was they themselves whose sin brought about this trouble! In this connection, the Gemara (Taanit 9a) notes that R. Yochanan once heard the little son of his colleague Resh Lakish reading aloud from Mishlei: "*A man's foolishness corrupts his ways, yet he is angered at G-d*" (Proverbs 19,3). R. Yochanan asked him, "Is there any verse in Scriptures that is not alluded to in the Torah?" The boy answered that the above verse is hinted at by the story of the brothers and the restored money: They had claims against Hashem for causing them trouble, instead of realizing that the full responsibility for all that happened was theirs alone.

We can sum up all of our questions as follows: What is the exact definition of the sale of Yosef? Was it a treacherous sale of a brother, or was it a Divine mission? This formulation of the dilemma is based on the dual-meaning

words of Yosef himself, as we saw above: *“Now do not be saddened or upset that you sold me here, for G-d has sent me before you to preserve life”* (B’reshit 45,5). Was it that they “sold” Yosef, or did G-d “send” him?

■ All is Foreseen

The famous teaching of R. Akiva (Pirkei Avot 3,15) will help us answer our question:

“All is foreseen, and permission is granted; the world is judged with goodness, and everything is in accordance with the amount of deeds.”

There appears to be a built-in contradiction: If “all is foreseen,” meaning that everything is a product of the Divine plan, then how can it be that “permission is granted” to each person to choose his own path and make his own decisions? What kind of plan is it when no one involved commits to any prior decisions? On the other hand, it is patently clear to us that even though there is Divine Providence, there can be no system of Divine Reward and Punishment if a person cannot choose his own path.

We can resolve the contradiction as follows: Hashem determines the goals, and they are unchangeable; sometimes they have time constraints and sometimes they do not. Thus, “everything is foreseen.” On the other hand, G-d gave man the ability to choose the **means** by which these previously-set goals will be achieved.

Let us take the Nation of Israel as an example. What is the goal that G-d has set for Israel? The Torah tells us:

... וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מַמְלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ

You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation... (Sh’mot 19,6)

The path that G-d set to reach this target is that of Torah and mitzvot. However, Israel can also choose the opposite route, that of sin and disobedience. In both cases Israel will reach the ultimate goal, but if the latter path is chosen, it will be accompanied by great hardship and suffering.

Consider two people who must reach a particular destination. One runs in the right direction, and arrives quickly and happily. The second one, however, decides to go in the other direction. Once he realizes his mistake, he will have to make a U-turn, reaching his destination in double the time and with great hardship.

If the Divine objective will be attained no matter what, why does G-d bother

allowing us to choose the path? The answer is that **G-d has made man a partner in His Creation**. He wants man to participate in the attainment of the objectives, via his choice of the right path.

And the reason for this is because in this way, man can be rewarded based on his own merits, and not merely via Divine kindness. A person who receives gifts can never know how long they will last, if at all, while payment for a job well-done is guaranteed.

With this in mind, let us return to the above-quoted Mishna and understand it properly. Yes, “all is foreseen” – a reference to the Divinely-set goals – and at the same time, “permission is granted” to choose how to reach the goal. In addition, the Mishna continues, “the world is judged with goodness,” meaning that ultimately, everything that occurs leads to that which is truly and eternally good. Let us illustrate this with yet another example.

■ The Shemittah Year

The mitzvah of Shemittah is fulfilled in the Land of Israel every seven years, when we are bidden to stop all agricultural work for a full year. What happens when we faithfully carry out this commandment? The Torah promises us that we will merit life with our children and future generations, on the land that we will inherit forever.

But if we do not observe the Shemittah, the story is very different:

...אז תִּשְׁבֹּת הָאָרֶץ וְהִרְצַת אֶת שְׁבֻתֶיהָ. כָּל יְמֵי הַשָּׁמָה תִּשְׁבֹּת,
אֶת אֲשֶׁר לֹא שְׁבַתְתָּה בְּשְׁבֻתֵיכֶם בְּשְׁבֻתְכֶם עָלֶיהָ.

...the Land will then rest and thus appease its sabbaticals.

It will rest during all the days that it remains desolate,

that which it had not rested on your sabbaticals,

when you lived upon it. (Vayikra 26,34-35)

The Land will rest and remain fallow against our will – as actually occurred in history! The Nation of Israel did not properly observe the Shemittah between the time they entered the Land and the First Exile; that is, during a 490-year period, they missed all 70 Shemittah years. They therefore spent 70 years in the Babylonian exile, when the land lay fallow and desolate – for no one was there to work it – for the same amount of Shemittah years that they did not fulfill.

We thus see how the Torah directs us to the goals and targets set previously by Hashem. In this case, the goal was the observance of Shemittah in Eretz Yisrael, and we determined whether it would occur with joy in the Land of Israel, or, as actually happened, with pain and suffering in Exile. Either way, the goal is attained.

■ Yosef's Dream and Its Interpretation

The above helps us understand the “division of labor” in the partnership between G-d and man in the execution of His mission. In the great prophetic vision of the *Brit Bein HaBetarim* (Covenant Between the Pieces), Hashem presented Avraham Avinu with His objectives:

דַּע תִּדַע כִּי גַר יִהְיֶה זְרָעָךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם... וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה ...

*You shall certainly know that your descendants will be foreigners
in a land that is not theirs... and the fourth generation
will return to here...* (B'reshit 15,13-16)

Nearly 200 years later, after Avraham's grandson Yaakov settles down with his family, the time has arrived to begin to implement the Divine plan. Hashem sends a message to Yaakov to this effect via the dreams of grandeur of his son Yosef. The dreams mark an “interim goal,” namely, preparation for Bnei Yisrael's descent to the “*land that is not theirs*,” Egypt. Yosef sees in his dream that “*the sun, the moon, and eleven stars are bowing down*” to him (37,9). Royalty is being prepared for Yosef – a powerful position that will serve the interests of his brothers and his father's house. They will ultimately thank him for his kindness, recognize his true value, and actually bow down to him in appreciation and gratefulness.

How will these dreams be fulfilled? It depends on the choices to be made by Yosef, his brothers, and even Yaakov Avinu, the father of all 11 of them. Most unfortunately, both Yosef and his brothers chose a wrong path. Yosef told over his dreams to his brothers in a way that caused them to think he wanted to rule over them. This led to intense jealousy and hatred. The brothers, for their part, nearly killed him and sold him to the Ishmaelites, fearing that he was trying to edge them out of their share in the Chosen Nation and the Land of Israel.

In the end, both Yosef and his brothers underwent a very difficult process of rectification and purification, until the time came for true unification.

Both Yosef and his brothers were partners **after the fact** in implementing

the Divine plan. They could, however, have been full and genuine partners – had they chosen a different path. In both scenarios, the same goal would have been attained. Yosef, for his part, should have acted towards his brothers in the same manner in which he himself had advised King Pharaoh:

וְעַתָּה יֵרָא פַרְעֹה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם וְשִׂיתָהוּ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

So now, let Pharaoh seek out an understanding and wise man and appoint him over the land of Egypt. (41,33)

Yosef realized the importance of appointing someone who knows not only how to efficiently implement the solution, but also how to interact suitably both with King Pharaoh and with the entire citizenry of Egypt. If Yosef would have acted towards his brothers with this same understanding and wisdom – helping them and winning their natural trust – they would have responded with appreciation and admiration. They would have been happy to have as their leader someone who loyally serves them and does not lord over them for his own benefit.

This entire story manifests that which our Sages taught: **All dreams follow the mouth** (B'rachot 55b). That is, the dreams take shape and are fulfilled according to the interpretation given them. At first, this appears strange: How can it be that a Divine message is dependent upon the interpreter? But in light of all we have said, we understand that the dream does not end when the dreamer wakes up, but rather continues with the interpreter and his analysis. The interpreter himself is part of the dream, and he determines the way in which it will be fulfilled.

Let us apply this to Pharaoh's dream. Without Yosef's interpretation, the dream would have remained meaningless in terms of the Divine plan for the descendants of Avraham; there would have been no advance notice of the great famine, no stocking-up of food in Egypt, and no reason for Yaakov and his sons to leave their homes and come to Egypt.

■ **Make His Will – Yours**

The Mishna (Pirkei Avot 2,4) expresses in just a few words this central concept that we have learned:

Rabban Gamliel would say: ... Nullify your will before His will, so that He will nullify the will of others before yours.

This teaches that though your personal desires may be opposed to G-d's will, you can force and subdue your will in favor of that which Hashem

wants. In return, Hashem will cancel out the desires of others that are opposed to your own will (for permissible things).

But there is a higher level, and it begins the above-quoted Mishna:

Make His will like your will, so that He will make your will as His will.

This passage describes a tzaddik, a righteous person, who identifies totally with G-d's will; what G-d wants is what he wants. His entire will is to fulfill G-d's desire. Thus, when a tzaddik's desire is simply a means for the fulfillment of G-d's will, it is clear that G-d will adopt the man's simple physical wants for the purpose of His own plans.

The following example will bring this concept to life. Consider a tzaddik who wants, with all his might, to publicize and sanctify Hashem's Name – but he has no house on which to affix a mezuzah for that purpose. That is to say, he wants a house because G-d wants a mezuzah on it; he has made G-d's will his own will. G-d will then fulfill his personal will for a house on which he can place a mezuzah – his ultimate objective.

Hashem thus adopts the house as a means to fulfill His will.

In the case of Yosef's brothers, their desire to sell him did not correspond with Hashem's will, and was in fact opposed to Hashem's plans for Yosef. Yet He took their desire and adopted it for His own purposes, to carry out His plan of making Yosef king and bringing Yaakov and his family down to Egypt. We see here that even negative desires can be used to implement G-d's will – but the person whose will is thus utilized will receive no reward.

How can we attain the level of total solidarity with G-d's will? It comes as a result of seeking out and identifying with the basic values of G-d's commandments – namely, justice, kindness, and humility. As the Prophet Micha says:

הַגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מַה טוֹב וּמַה ה' דֹּרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ
 כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לְכַת עִם אֶל־לִהְיָ.
*He has told you, O man, what is good,
 and what Hashem demands of you: just to do justice,
 to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d.* (Micha 6,8)

