

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

V'YOSEF YASHIT YADO AL EINECHA

And Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes.

After years of reading about Yosef and all the drama that surrounds him, I finally noticed something I had not noticed before. All the incidents that lead to Yosef's achieving rulership, involve his being the "victim", if you will. He is thrown into a pit (did he even know why?); he is sold to traveling merchants; he is sold to be a slave; he is falsely accused by his master's wife; he is thrown into jail. One would imagine that after all this, he would question his relationship with Gd, if not totally reject Him. And yet, this doesn't occur. Not only doesn't it occur, but his statements are seasoned with recognition of HaShem. In refusing the advances of the wife of Potifar, he says CHATATI LEILOKIM - I would sin before Gd if I agree (39:9); his response to the SAR HAMASHKIM and the SAR HA'OFIM before offering an interpretation is HALO LEILOKiM PITRONIM - it is Gd Who has the solutions (40:8). Indeed, it is the same response he gives to Par'o; again, he repeats this idea during his explanation: ET ASHER HA'ELOKIM OSEH HIGID L'FAR'O (41:25) [Gd is telling Par'o what He will

do], and again, in verse 28. We, as onlookers, are aware of HaShem's involvement in all of this, as the text says a number of times, VAYHI HASHEM ET YOSEF (39:3) (39:21) [Gd was with Yosef], and many more. Is Yosef aware of this? I imagine he must be, given his constant references to Gd's involvement.

In trying to understand how Yosef could react like this, maintain his faith, and not lose hope, I can only conclude that he had the critical ability to believe that all was for the good, that there would be a positive, if distant, outcome, because Gd was behind it all. And when all the pieces would be put together, he could understand Gd's plan. Certainly, after all was said and done, he says as much to his brothers more than once: LO ATEM SH'LACHTEM OTI HEINA, KI HA'ELOKIM... [it was not you who sent me here, but rather, HaShem.]

If this is true, then it paints a different picture for me of something that follows in the text. When Yaakov is on his way down to Egypt, he stops in B'er Sheva and offers sacrifices, hoping that he wouldn't have to leave Israel, just as his father Yitzchak was told not to. Hashem reassures him that this was meant to be, the Jews would flourish and grow and that V'YOSEF YASHIT YADO AL EINECHA - that Yosef would not die in Yaakov's lifetime but would be present to put Yaakov to rest.

The Kol Aryeh, one of the students of the Chatam Sofer, explains the above phrase according to the Zohar as DA HI RAZA DIKRI'AT SH'MA - this is the secret of the K'RI'AT SH'MA. He explains that our lives contain difficulties and hard times and we can't always see Gd's hashgacha with our own eyes. Only in the World to Come would we be able to understand. Only in hindsight. This is how he explains the custom that Rav had when saying the first pasuk of the Sh'ma: Rav would cover his eyes when reciting it. He covered his eyes to teach that everything that occurs to us, whether from Y-H-V-H, the attribute of mercy, or from Elokeinu, the attribute of din, we cannot "see" with our eyes but only understand that it is all for our benefit, from HaShem's kindness (B'rachot 13:2).

The Zohar explains that in saying V'YOSEF YASHIT YADO AL EINECHA, HaShem was hinting this to Yaakov. That the events of Yosef's life are to teach that the end result was for good. Indeed, just as Yosef said to his brothers.

And now, I have a much better understanding of the very unusual Chazal that says that when Yaakov finally sees and embraces Yosef, he says the Sh'ma. This never made any sense to me, no matter whose explanation I read. Now, however, I can understand it. Yaakov comes face

to face with Yosef, the living proof of all the Sh'ma was teaching: he suffered, struggled, survived, flourished and never veered from all that Yaakov had taught him; trusting that Gd had a plan. V'YOSEF YASHIT YADO AL EINECHA - it was the story of Yosef that would 'put a hand over his eyes', that would prove that we can't always "see" what is behind what occurs to us. Yaakov's saying of Sh'ma at that moment was a statement that it was undeniably clear that all that had transpired, was Gd's plan for the future of his family, for the survival of the Jewish people. ❀