Spectacular Speech

פוא ח"ק -פ

Then he (Yaakov) went down to Egypt –
Yaakov really did not want to go to Egypt, but Hashem "forced" Yaakov to go.

And lived there –
This teaches us that Yaakov did not intend to stay in Egypt for long.
He wanted to be there for only a short while.
His sons told Pharaoh that they would stay in Goshen until the hunger in Land of Canaan was over.

DARKNESS TO DESTINY

We may notice that the Haggadah's treatment of this phrase differs from its comments on the following phrases in that it does not provide any verse to back up its comment but merely states it. This makes it sound like a helpful piece of information provided to us by the Haggadah, but not one that is derived from the verse in any way.

Upon closer inspection, we will see that this lesson too is derived from the verse, namely, from the very juxtaposition of Yaakov going down to Egypt with Lavan trying to destroy him. We have noted that there is no sequential connection between these two events. Rather, Lavan's efforts to destroy Yaakov required that Yaakov would have to go down to Egypt at a certain point. The source for this lesson is thus not included with the words "as it says," for there is no reason to quote an outside source for this idea; it is derived from the phrase in our verse that immediately preceded this one. (Mazal Nachas)
אני מצטער, לא מצאתי תקן קריאה על דף העמוד המוצג. אם אתה מחבר בתוכןisci, אני אשמח לסייע בחזרהelah.
Rabbeinu Yonah quotes from the Ta'Klit, “The Community of Israel is beloved through its voice and hated through its voice. It is beloved through its voice, as it is written (Song of Songs 2:14), ‘Let Me hear your voice, because your voice is sweet.’ It is hated through its voice, as it is written (Jeremiah 12:8), ‘She raised her voice against Me, therefore I have hated her.’ This is the meaning of that which is written (Proverbs 18:21), ‘Death and life are in the control of the tongue, and those that love it shall eat its fruit.’”

The tongue controls the power of life and death. One can build with the tongue, and one can destroy with the tongue. One can heal with the tongue, and one can harm with the tongue. One can give life with the tongue, and one can take away life with the tongue. God loves the Jewish people when they use their tongues properly, “because their voice is sweet.” And if they do not, He “hates” them, so to speak. Of course, God does not hate the Jewish people. Nonetheless, the prophet employs the harsh word “hate” as a figurative term to show God’s extreme displeasure when we abuse the power of speech.

Rabbeinu Yonah focuses on the end of the verse. “And those that love it shall eat its fruit.” What does this mean? It refers, he explains, to a person who loves the tongue. In other words, he loves to talk all the time. Indeed, who doesn’t like to talk? It is a normal thing. So what is a person to do if he really loves to talk a lot? He should “eat its fruit.” He should not satisfy this desire with idle chatter. Instead, he should talk words of Torah, Mussar and wisdom. He should speak about ways to bring people together in peace and harmony. He should speak about ways to raise up the spiritual level of the community. He should praise the good and condemn evil. He should encourage people to seek the truth.

If you like to talk, then talk. That is perfectly fine. No one is stopping you from exercising your power of speech, but you don’t have to abuse it. Why do you have to mock people and talk against them? Why wouldn’t you rather use your power of speech to bring them together and to raise them up? Be aware that you hold the power of life and death in your tongue. If you feel the natural urge to talk, “eat its fruit.” Use it wisely and well.

We find very often in the Torah that a few simple words change the Halachic status of people and articles. One of these is the mitsvah of arachin, values. If a person says, “Erki alai, I accept upon myself my value,” he is immediately obligated to donate a sum equivalent to his “value” to the Temple fund. The Sefer HaChinuch discusses at length the many aspects of this mitsvah (§350), but let us focus on his comments regarding its “roots.” These are not necessarily the reasons for the mitsvah, but rather the channels through which the spiritual sap, so to speak, is drawn into its performance and gives it taste.

“A person can only participate in the higher worlds,” writes the Chinnuch, “through his speech. This is the most distinguished part of the human being. It is what distinguishes him as a person in the verse, ‘And the Lord breathed into the person a nefesh chayah, a living spirit.’ Targum Onkelos translates nefesh chayah as ‘rauch memalela, a spirit that speaks.’ All the other parts of the body are inanimate [in the higher sense], and if a person were to corrupt [his speech], his body would remain entirely inanimate, a useless vessel. Therefore, a person must keep his word...”

In particular, it refers to the characteristics associated with the Name of Elokim, which is translated as “the sole Power in the creation and the control of the world.” By saying that we were created, berzelem Elokim, “in the image of Elokim,” the Torah is telling us that God gave us the power to control Creation, both in the lower and the higher worlds.

We can more readily relate to the idea of human control of the physical world, but our control also extends to worlds beyond our comprehension and imagination. Just as the unseen puppeteer pulls strings that cause the puppet to move about, so do the actions of the Jewish people in this world pull strings that effect changes in the higher worlds.

Therefore, every person must have yiras Shamayim, which is translated as “fear of Heaven.” It does not mean that we have to be afraid of Heaven, says R’ Chaim Volozhiner. We have to be afraid of God, not of Heaven. Rather, it means that we have to fear the effect of our actions in Heaven. Our every word and deed can build great edifices in the higher worlds.

One day, we will come to Heaven and survey what our lives in this world have wrought in the next. If we are not careful, we may survey a scene of great devastation, with ruins and rubble strewn as far as the eye can see, a scene that would cause us untold pain and anguish. Better to have “fear of Heaven” now, to fear the damage we can do to Heaven, so that when we arrive in Heaven we will find towering spiritual edifices rather than scenes of destruction.

This is R’ Chaim Volozhiner’s message to every single Jew. No one should say, “What am I? What power do I possess? How can my humble deeds have any influence at all?” On the contrary, he should know and affix in his heart that not one of his deeds, words and thoughts ever goes to waste. If used constructively,
ברד יплан ערוץ הים בהầm אדום.
ʰ⁴ ליבט אינ희ו אנקס, והדין אזמר.
⁴⁴ יראָנָא אנֶבָט, והדין עראְנָא.
⁴⁴ דילָמָא אינֶבָט, והדין ערְאָנָא.
⁴⁴ יראָנָא אנֶבָט, והדין ערְאָנָא.
⁴⁴ יראָנָא אנֶבָט, והדין ערְאָנָא.
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לא נמצאוشوני טקסטים בדף זה.
7.6 THE TURNING WHEEL

“It is only the heavenly sphere turning…”

Although God in His justice rewards the righteous for their devotion to Him and punishes the wicked so that they will mend their ways, His ultimate plan, as we have seen, is not merely to reward man but for all mankind to recognize Him as Creator and King. In order for Him to achieve this ultimate destination, man must have a vehicle to lead him to it. This is the function of the myriad aspects of this world.

Thus, Providence prepared a world of wealth and poverty; of happiness and sorrow; of health and suffering; of discoveries and inventions; of wars and conquests; of plagues and cures. All these vicissitudes, so that man may confront the problems of existence and ultimately realize that only devotion to spirituality and self-effacement before God can solve his problems. Human history is nothing more than God manipulating His world and guiding it to its ultimate destiny, the recognition by man of His sovereignty.

There are, then, two aspects to God’s Providence. One is that man is rewarded for good and punished for evil. But there is another, overriding aspect of Providence: the relentless push towards the goal of man’s total acceptance of God and God’s revelation to him. The fate of people, in this latter aspect, is not determined by their deeds but by what sort of cog they are meant to serve as in the wheel of destiny.

This “wheel” might require, for instance, that there be certain circumstances — e.g., wealth, poverty, well-being or sickness — in the lives of certain nations or individuals, even though according to their deeds they do not deserve to be in these situations. By serving God in these situations they contribute — in a way often known only to God — to the ultimate denouement of history.

But then, “Shall not the Judge of all the world do justice?”

If man does not receive his just reward? He does, of course, but not always immediately; this is the function of the world-to-come. Should a conflict arise between the reward a person deserves for his deeds, whether good or bad, and the role that Providence demands that he play in advancing the wheel of history, then in this world the latter takes precedence, and all differences whether for reward or punishment are settled in the world-to-come.

This is the meaning of the Sage’s statement, “Health, children, and sustenance are determined not by merit but by mazal.” The aspect of Providence that leads the world to its destiny is called mazal, “fortune,” in token of the fact that most of the time man does not understand its seemingly random disposition of human affairs. But the plan is there all the same, and the state of one’s health, children and sustenance is often not determined by the merits of one’s deeds but by how one fits into the ultimate design of history.

When a person’s role has been determined by this aspect of Providence, even prayer, though it be accompanied by the most scrupulous honesty, might not immediately bring him material success (unless it is accompanied with acts of great merit which have the capacity of changing one’s mazal). Thus it is not necessarily dishonesty that prevented the scholar’s prayers from being answered: “It is only the heavenly sphere turning.”

These things that I command you today.

“Today” is for doing them; “tomorrow” is for receiving the reward.

Justice is always done in its own time. One must know that “today,” the present world, is for doing the mitzvos that we were commanded. This is not the world of reward, for this world must be pushed into line and guided towards its final destiny. “Wait until tomorrow” — until the world-to-come — and you will find it there — one’s reward awaits him there, in full, with nothing lacking.