

Kinder Torah®

Parashas Vayeshev

T"01

The Darkness

"I have a riddle for you, Chaim."

"Go ahead, Avi."

"What is underground, dark, with just a small hole to let in light?"

"Ummm, a pipe?"

"No, bigger."

"A tunnel?"

"No."

"Ummm, I give up."

"A Biblical prison."

"Really? That is fascinating. How do you know that?"

"From this week's parasha. Rabbeinu Bechaye describes the prison into which Yosef was thrown. It was like a house built underground."

"How deep was it?"

"A lot deeper than you think. Rabbeinu Bechaye compares it to the *golus* (exile) of Klal Yisrael."

"That is true even today. We are deep in the darkness."

"Exactly. However, we have much to be thankful for. As the verse states, 'And Hashem was with Yosef' (Bereshis 39:21). Just as the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) was with Yosef in that prison, so too, Hashem is with us in this deep, dark *golus*."

"Tell me more."

"Rabbeinu Bechaye goes on and describes many parallels between our *golus* and Yosef's interment. His suffering in the prison is similar to our suffering among the nations. Hashem gave Yosef charisma in the eyes of the prison guards (Bereshis 39:21). Similarly, he gives us a charisma in the eyes of the nations. But the best part is the end."

"Where they take Yosef up out of prison."

"Yes. So too, we will be redeemed from this *golus*. That is why we pray, 'yaaleh vi'yavo' (rise up and come), because the end of this *golus* will be like rising up from a pit."

"Speedily and in our days."

"Amen."

Kinderlach . . .

Don't be afraid of the dark. The *golus* is very dark. However, we have the light – Hashem. He is with us. He protects us. He gives us charm. He loves us. And He will redeem us. Keep praying to him. Ask Him to bring us up out of the darkness. With His help, we will be in the light . . . very soon.

Everything is From Him

"Abbas, Yosef HaTsaddik is a veritable

tower of *emunah* and *bitachon*!"

"What an astute perception Avi! Can you give me some examples?"

"Yes, Abba. First, let me define which aspect of *bitachon* I am referring to. The *Chovos HaLevavos* in *Shaar HaBitachon*, chapter three, introduction number five, divides everything that happens in the world into two categories. The first one is a straight *gezayra* (decree) from Hashem Himself. The second one is His will carried out through various 'causes and reasons'. One who has mastered *bitachon* realizes that everything that happens to him in this world is from the Almighty, and therefore he tries to learn from the events of his life and grow closer to his Creator.

"The caravan of Yishmaelim that was taking Yosef down to Mitzrayim was carrying fragrant spices, instead of the usual cargo of smelly tar and kerosene. Rashi¹ explains that this was a reward for the *tsaddik*, who should not suffer damage from the bad

odor. This reward seems almost irrelevant to someone who was suffering as much as Yosef. His brothers had stripped him and thrown him into a pit of snakes and scorpions to die. They then sold him as a slave, despite his cries and pleas for mercy. As far as Yosef knew, he was permanently separated from his loved ones and doomed to a life of hard labor amongst lowly pagans. This is enough to crush a person. Why should a bad smell make such a

difference? From this we see that his spirit was not broken. He had *bitachon* that his *yissurin* (troubles) were from Hashem, and that He was with him. He had *menuchas hanefesh* (inner tranquility). Therefore, the Almighty sent him a reward, a caravan carrying fragrant spices, to ease his journey."²

"That is amazing, Avi."

"I have another example. Yosef was sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. He rose to become the supervisor of his household. Potiphar's wife wanted him to sin, but he stood strong and refused. Someone without *bitachon* could not have withstood such a test. What did Yosef the *Tsaddik* receive for his righteousness? He was thrown into the dungeon prison of Mitzrayim. Yosef could have thought, 'This is my reward? Where is the justice? Where is Hashem?' If he had allowed himself to sink down to the lowly level of the prisoners in the dungeon, no one could have blamed him. Yet, we see otherwise."

"How is that, Avi?"

"The warden in the dungeon saw that Yosef was intelligent and capable. He appointed him to be in charge of the prisoners. After nine years, two new prisoners arrived in the pit – Pharaoh's officers – the

Sar Ha'ofim who oversaw his food, and the *Sar Ma'mashkim* who oversaw his drink. A fly was found in the drink, and a stone in the bread. Therefore, these two men were thrown into the pit dungeon. After twelve months in the prison, they each dreamed strange dreams. The next day, Yosef saw them sitting in the corner with long faces. He asked them, 'Why are you looking so sad today?'³ What an astounding question! What kind of a question is that to ask prisoners in the pit dungeon of Mitzrayim? They are in a nasty prison and do not want to be there. They want to go home. If there is anywhere in the world where they are justified in wearing long faces, this is it. We see two things from Yosef's question. Firstly, we see that Yosef himself is not depressed. If he were, he would not care that others were wearing long faces. After all, misery loves company. Secondly, we see that the mood of the prisoners in the pit dungeon was cheerful. After all, these two officers of Pharaoh stood out – they were sad. Their mood was different from that of everyone else in the pit. Yosef had to ask them, 'What is this all about? True, you are prisoners in the pit dungeon of Mitzrayim, but why the long faces? Where are the smiles that naturally belong on the faces of people with *emunah* (faith) in their hearts? We see that Yosef HaTsaddik was so happy and filled with trust in Hashem that he brightened up the mood of all of the prisoners in the worst prison imaginable! He knew that the Almighty was with him, even in this pit dungeon. What *emunah* in Hashem! What a happy heart! What a *tsaddik*!"²

"That is truly astonishing, Avi."

"Abba, Yosef HaTsaddik inspires me to have *bitachon* that everything that happens to me in life is from Hashem, and be happy with everything that He sends me."

"May you always succeed, Avi!"

Kinderlach . . .

Everything is from Hashem, and everything that He does is good. It takes commitment and effort to realize this and internalize it into our lives. We can learn a lesson and receive encouragement from our ancestor – Yosef HaTsaddik. At the age of seventeen, he began to suffer terrible *yissurin* and endure enormous tests from the Almighty. It is almost beyond our abilities to comprehend how he withstood them. Yet, he was a tower of *emunah* and *bitachon*, seeing the good Hand of Hashem in everything. Yosef remained happy, relaxed, and close to his Creator. Let us take his example into our lives, *kinderlach*, and live with Hashem always. See Him in everything and be happy with it all.

¹ Bereshis 37:25

² Matnas Chaim

³ Bereshis 40:7