

## THIS TOO IS FOR THE GOOD

*Rabbi David Pinto Chlita*

**I**t is written, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be grieved, and let it not be evil in your eyes that you sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you. ... Thus G-d sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land, and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance. And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d" (Bereshith 45:4-8).

When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they were afraid of him. He implored them, "Come close to me, please" (v.4), which Rashi describes as calling to them "tenderly and pleadingly." Yet what did Joseph proceed to tell them? Instead of soothing words, instead of assuring them, he turned to them and reminded them that he had been sold. He also repeats this several times: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here." He then says, "And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d." It was as if he were saying, "You sold me, but it was G-d Who sent me." Does this seem like a way of calming his brothers, who were afraid that he would avenge himself? Was this a way of showing them that he felt no resentment for what they did to him? We are not asking this question only in regards to Joseph's wisdom, but also in regards to his middot, to his courtesy. That is, he saw how frightened his brothers were, he saw how ashamed they were in his presence, and he saw how they were progressively growing paler as their shame increased. Could this be the right time to confront and lecture them? If not, then why remind them of the painful incident of his sale?

It seems, in fact, that Joseph's intentions were entirely different. To understand, let us examine the text very carefully. What is the difference between "selling" and "sending," such that Joseph said "... for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you"? The difference is simple: A person can do something with one intention or another, such that the nature of his action is entirely different, be it a sin or a mitzvah. This is because everything depends on intention.

Although the brothers had ruled that Joseph was liable to death, and although they had acted in accordance with a din Torah – for as we know, they even involved the Holy One, blessed be He, in selling him – when they sold Joseph, they sinned in a very subtle way. Hence if they were being accused of this, it was in an extremely narrow sense. When we look at things from their point of view, this is how things actually stood. Nevertheless, when we look at things in retrospect, from the higher viewpoint of the Torah, we see that "G-d sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival." That is, there was something deliberate and

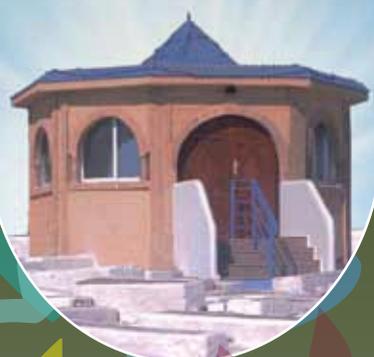
hidden in his sale, the goal of which was to ensure that a great people would live and survive.

We now see that this is what Joseph was trying to tell his brothers, and it is why he said to them: "Do not be grieved, and let it not be evil in your eyes." In other words: "There is no reason to be sad, nor is there any reason to be afraid of me. As soon as I was sold – when I realized that things did not depend on me, but that something was being accomplished through me – I understood that it was G-d's decree. I understand that 'this too is for the good.' I was certain that everything that the Merciful One does is for the good, and I was only waiting to see when I would understand what His intentions were. That is why you have absolutely nothing to fear from me, because from my point of view there is no reason to be angry. There is no reason to avenge myself, nor is there any reason to weep. In my eyes, everything is Hashem's will, meant to do you good. I was only a messenger. That is how I have seen things from the moment I was sold until now. From the second that you handed me to the Ishmaelites, that is how I have seen everything that happened."

This is what Joseph told his brothers, explaining what his intentions were in all this. He thereby revealed a small aspect of his conduct, one that earned him the name Yosef HaTzaddik by the Jewish people. This consisted of not growing proud, but of reassuring his brothers not to fear him or dread his vengeance.

Regarding Joseph's faith in G-d, the Sages say: "Happy is the man who has made Hashem his trust [Tehillim 40:5] – this alludes to Joseph" (Bereshith Rabba 89:3). The reason is that a person who trusts in Hashem is happy, being content with his lot both in this world and in the World to Come. He experiences neither agonies nor doubts, and he has no desire to avenge himself or harbor resentment. He does not get upset or angry, for his entire life is filled with pure joy in doing G-d's will.

As a result, what Joseph told his brothers demonstrated that not only was he not lacking sensitivity, his words also concealed some amazing virtues: Confidence in G-d, self-annulment, and true concern for the feelings of his brothers. We can learn so much from his faith in G-d, not only externally, but above all, internally. If someone hurts or upsets us, we should immediately forgive him, since this represents Hashem's will. Although it is one of the most difficult things to do, we should at least realize that such concepts and virtues, in all their greatness, stem from one thing only: Absolute confidence in the Creator of the universe. We may also be able to learn a lesson from this: When someone hurts or offends us, instead of harshly responding, we should realize that if we do get angry, it is a sign that our faith in Hashem is not very great. This is an extremely important lesson!



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## I am Joseph

When we examine the passage in question, we see that Joseph twice says “I am Joseph.” The first time is when he says: “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” The second time is when he says: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.” Why the repetition? Was saying it once not enough?

It seems that the name “Joseph” alludes to a great secret. This name has a numerical value of 156, which is six times that of the Tetragrammaton (26). This is what Joseph was trying to hint to his brothers, namely that for him, Hashem’s Name encapsulated his entire personality. Six represents the four cardinal points, along with two extra points, above and below.

## The Words of the Sages

### Blessings for Long Life

It is written, “Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How many are the days of the years of your life?’ Jacob answered Pharaoh, ‘The days of the years of my sojourns have been 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns.’” (Bereshith 47:8-9).

When the gaon Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ginsburg Zatzal, the author of Sha’agat Aryeh, was appointed as the Rav of Metz, there were some members of the community who conveyed their concern over his advanced age (he was about 70 years old at the time).

The Sha’agat Aryeh brought up this issue during his next public sermon. He began with Jacob’s response to Pharaoh: “Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life,” and objected that neither Pharaoh’s question to his guest, nor his guest’s answer, were understandable. This is because a person does not ask his guest, upon their first meeting, how old he is, nor does a guest usually complain about his problems. In fact Jacob’s answer had nothing to do with Pharaoh’s question.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib explained that Pharaoh knew that Egypt had experienced abundance because of Jacob’s merit. In fact Jacob appeared so old to Pharaoh that he didn’t think he would live much longer. Hence he was concerned about his age and asked him about it. Jacob, who was fully aware of this, told Pharaoh that in fact he was not as old as he appeared, for he had not yet reached the age of his fathers. Indeed, his hair had turned white only because of the numerous misfortunes that had struck him.

“This is my case as well,” continued the Sha’agat Aryeh. “The days of my life have been few and bad. I have been chased and exiled, and I am overcome by age. However I promise to remain with you for a long time.”

Previous to this, a few people from Minsk had wanted to persecute the Sha’agat Aryeh when he served as the city’s Rosh Yeshiva, and he was actually forced to leave Minsk. At the time, there was a tzaddeket living in Minsk by the name of Blumke Wilenkin. She supported the Sha’agat Aryeh, helped him financially, and nourished him.

She even built a Beit HaMidrash for him, which from that time until the Second World War was known as “Blumke’s Kloiz.” Later on, and because of her support, a yeshiva was established in this Beit HaMidrash by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin and his students, where the greatest rabbis of the generations served as Rosh Yeshiva.

The Sha’agat Aryeh is said to have given this generous woman the blessing that she would build a synagogue in Minsk and another in the Holy Land. Many years later, as Blumke approached the age of 80, she yearned to fulfill the promise of the tzaddik and leave for Eretz Israel. She went to see Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin and asked him whether or not she should go.

Rabbi Chaim said to her, “Since you have the blessing of the Sha’agat Aryeh in hand, why are you in a rush to leave? Who knows how long you’ll live afterwards? In any case, he promised that you would build a synagogue

This is because in everything that Joseph did – even in Egypt, the land of depravity and sorcery – G-d’s Name rested on him. At every instant, every day and each hour, Hashem’s Name rested on Joseph. This is what he was telling his brothers by saying, “I am Joseph.” In other words: “I am the same Joseph who was with my father Jacob, and I am the same Joseph who was with you. When I devoted myself entirely in the tent of Torah – when I invested all my strength into acquiring the sanctity of my father and his attachment to the Creator – that is precisely what I continued to do in Egypt as well, attaching myself to the Creator without limit, six times the Tetragrammaton, in every direction, on all sides, above and below. I surrounded myself with the Name of G-d. I am Joseph!”

in Eretz Israel, so better to wait and see how things turn out.”

Thus Blumke listened to Rabbi Chaim and remained in Minsk. It was only many years later, as she approached a very advanced age, that she left for the Holy Land and built a synagogue, as the Sha’agat Aryeh had promised her. As soon as it was built, the tzaddeket left this world.

### What do I Need with a Doctor?

Concerning the power of the Vilna Gaon’s blessings, it was said that even if such blessings were given in passing, they would be fulfilled. One day during Sukkot, a resident of the city entered the sukkah of the Vilna Gaon, who was completely immersed in Torah, unaware that a guest had entered. Contrary to his habit of warmly welcoming guests, this time the Vilna Gaon did not smile at him, but continued learning.

The guest was afraid that the Vilna Gaon was upset with him for something, and was expressing his grief by not welcoming him. However the Vilna Gaon eased his fears by saying, “Why would I be upset with you? Is it because you have come to rejoice with us in singing and praising G-d during our time of joy? May it be the will of Heaven that you live to be 100!”

The blessing of the tzaddik was fulfilled, and the man in question reached a great age, eventually attaining the age of 98. Some time afterwards, he grew weak and fell ill. His family wanted to call a doctor, but he prevented them, saying: “What do I need with a doctor? I have the blessing of the Gaon to live to be 100. I still have two years to go, and I have no intention of giving up a single day of the tzaddik’s blessing.”

This is precisely what happened. This elderly man lived to be 100, leaving this world on the day of his 100th birthday. All the prominent members of the community of Vilna accompanied his funeral procession.

It is also said that an elderly man from the town of Lovtch, Reb Binyamin, reached a very great age. Throughout his life, he relied on the blessing of the Vilna Gaon, and he would often recount the story of how he had received this blessing. It happened in childhood, when he prayed in the Beit HaMidrash of the Vilna Gaon. After prayers, the Vilna Gaon would continue learning, pacing up and down immersed in thought. Sometimes the young boy would also stay at the Beit HaMidrash to recite tehillim.

One day the two of them, the elderly Vilna Gaon and the young boy, met in the hall of the Beit HaMidrash. Upon seeing the Gaon, the boy was seized with fear, and by mistake he walked on the tzitzit of the Gaon’s tallit. He was so afraid that he remained frozen, unable to lift his foot. Finally the Gaon, who understood why the boy was so afraid and flustered, placed his hand on his shoulder and said with fatherly affection: “You have a long life, my son. Leave the tzitzit of my tallit!”

When this story spread in the Beit HaMidrash and the city, the words of the Vilna Gaon were interpreted not only as a blessing, but as a promise as well. The boy’s family made a celebration on that day and distributed tzeddakah to the poor. All his life, the boy was considered lucky, and he trusted in the Vilna Gaon’s blessing for long life.

### A Minor Rescue

It is written, “Do you have a father?” (Bereshith 44:19).

Is it possible for someone not to have a father?

Rather, what this means is the following: You did not follow the path of Abraham, who saved his nephew Lot. If he had been his brother, how much more would he have saved him! Nevertheless, you did not act like this. Instead, you divided yourselves into three groups:

Some of you said, “Let us kill him.” Others said, “Let us throw him into the pit,” so that the serpents and scorpions inside would bite and kill him. The last group said, “Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.” As such, you did not take the will of the Creator or your father into consideration.

– Midrash HaBaour

### Deliverance Through Tears

It is written, “He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them” (Bereshith 45:15).

When Joseph saw that his brothers were filled with shame, he said to them: “Come close to me, please” (v.4), which they did.

He kissed each one of them and wept, as we read above.

Just as Joseph pacified his brothers through tears, likewise G-d will deliver Israel through tears, as it is written: “With tears will they come, and with supplications will I bring them” (Jeremiah 31:8).

– Midrash Tanchuma

### A Precise Calculation

It is written, “To Benjamin he gave 300 pieces of silver” (Bereshith 45:22).

Through prophesy, Joseph saw that one of his descendants would be Mordechai (“the son of Yair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite” [Esther 2:5]). Now the numerical value of “Mordechai” is 274. Benjamin was given 26 more than this number, which came to 300.

– Pesikta Zutah

### The Punishment of a Liar

It is written, “For he did not believe them” (Bereshith 45:26).

Why did Jacob not believe his sons?

Rabbi Shimon said, “Such is the punishment of a liar: He is not believed even when he speaks the truth. Now the sons of Jacob had invented a lie, as it is written: ‘He recognized it and said, “It is the coat of my son.”’ Hence this time, he did not believe them even when they spoke the truth.”

– Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan

### Years Cut Short

It is written, “Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life” (Bereshith 47:9).

When Jacob said, “few and bad,” G-d reprimanded him by saying: “I saved you from the hands of Esav and Lavan. I returned Dinah and Joseph to you. Yet now you are complaining about the days of your life, saying that they have been few and bad?”

“I will diminish the years of your life by the number of words that you have spoken against Me [from “Pharaoh said” to “the days of the years of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns,” inclusive]. Years will be taken from you, and you will not live as long as your father Isaac.”

The passage in question contains 33 words, and therefore his life was cut short by 33 years. Thus Isaac lived to the age of 180, whereas Jacob only lived to the age of 147.

### The Treasures of the Righteous Joseph

Many sacred books cite the Midrash in stating that at the time of his death, Joseph summoned his sons and told them: “I am about to leave this world, and therefore I am dividing my entire fortune among you.” He then took out seven selayim and gave them to his sons.

Let us think about this. The Gemara states, “Joseph hid three treasures in Egypt: One was revealed to Korach, another to Antoninus the son of Severus, and the third is reserved for the righteous in the future” (Pesachim 119a). In that case, why did Joseph leave only seven selayim to his sons?

From here we understand that Joseph did not keep all the wealth that he had amassed for himself. He did not even keep the numerous palaces that Pharaoh had given him. Why did Joseph do this? It is because he considered himself as a foreigner in this world, as the verse states: “For we are like foreigners before You, and like sojourners, as were all our forefathers” (I Chronicles 29:15).

This is how the righteous act: They are the foundation of the world, and yet they consider themselves to be insignificant. Thus Abraham was the foundation of the world, and yet he conducted himself with humility, saying: “I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you” (Bereshith 23:4). Likewise Jacob said to Esav, “I have sojourned with Lavan [as a foreigner]” (Bereshith 32:5), and finally Israel is described by the words “foreigners and sojourners” (Vayikra 25:23). This is why King David said: “Hear my prayer, Hashem, and give ear to my cry. Be not mute to my tears....” Why? “...for I am a foreigner with You, and a sojourner like all my fathers” (Tehillim 39:13).

Our ancestors acted according to this principle. They exiled themselves from one place to another in order to study Torah, as our Sages have said: “Our ancestors were never without a yeshiva. In Egypt they had a yeshiva.... In the desert they had a yeshiva.... Our father Abraham was old, but stayed in a yeshiva.... Our father Isaac was old, but stayed in a yeshiva.... Our father Jacob was old, but stayed in a yeshiva” (Yoma 28b).

Even Joseph, although he did not exile himself to study Torah, considered himself as a foreigner. He constantly reviewed his learning, just as a foreigner constantly checks his pockets to see if he lost something during his travels.

How can we claim that Joseph reviewed his learning, since on the verse, “He sent Judah before him” (Bereshith 46:28), our Sages have said: “To establish a house of study where he could teach the tribal fathers” (Tanchuma, Vayigash 11)? In reality, these are not contradictory statements. In fact Joseph constantly reviewed the last passage that he had studied with his father, prior to their separation. When the brothers came to tell Jacob that Joseph was still alive, “[Jacob’s] heart grew cold, for he did not believe them” (Bereshith 45:26). Jacob remembered which passage he was learning when Joseph left him, and he thought: “I know that Joseph left during the study of the eglarufa [the heifer whose neck is broken].” He therefore told his sons, “Let him give me a sign to indicate which passage he was learning when he left me.”

Joseph not only remembered the passage that he was learning when he left, he also sent agalot (wagons) to his father to indicate this. Thus when Jacob saw these agalot, “the spirit of their father Jacob revived” (Bereshith 45:27).

When is the best time to pray and be answered? The Midrash responds to this question in the following way: G-d concealed the knowledge of this time from men in order for them to pray at all times. "Hashem fixed a time for each action, except for prayer. Regardless of when we pray, we will be answered." In fact if we were aware of the most favorable time for prayer to be answered, we would be content with praying only then. Hence G-d said, "I will not reveal to you the most favorable time for the acceptance of your prayers, so that you may pray spontaneously" (Aggadat Bereshith 76).

The following explanation from Rabbi Moshe Midner is well-known (Bet Avraham, Chanukah): "The curse of the serpent is that it should eat dust. Yet how is this a curse? On the contrary, it will never lack food! However this is precisely wherein the curse lies! Hashem, not wanting to hear its voice, provides its sustenance wherever it finds itself. Dust, which is readily available, will serve as its bread. Conversely, G-d makes it difficult for a Jew to earn a living, but only so he may ask Him for help in prayer, "for your voice is sweet and your appearance is lovely" (Shir HaShirim 2:14). It is like a father who holds himself back from giving his son what he wants, for he desires that his son should ask him for it. The father receives satisfaction from his son's requests, and the same applies to Hashem: He awaits the prayers of His children.

### Your Good Counsel

A family once found itself in a particularly confusing situation, and they went to see the tzaddik Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld for advice. The Rav said to them, "Leave now and return tomorrow." His plan was to implore G-d to help them make the right decision when he read, "Improve us with your good counsel," from the Hashkiveinu passage in Arvit. In fact upon their second visit, the Rav gave them a wonderful piece of advice that came to mind as he was reciting these very words in prayer. Through sensible advice, he truly brought them from darkness to light.

Thus anyone who finds himself in a confusing situation, not knowing what to do, should seriously concentrate as he recites this prayer so that Hashem will show him the path to follow. G-d willing, he will then see the light.

### When the Gates of Heaven Are Open

In the book *Otzrot Yerushalayim*, Rav Margalit includes an article entitled *Et Ratzon*. As the name indicates, this article discusses the various times that are particularly favorable for the acceptance of prayer, as we can see from the following excerpt.

The most favorable times for prayer are:

1. During the middle of the night (Shelah, citing the Hadra, as brought in Kumi Roni, paragraph 4).
2. At sunrise. This is a favorable time in all areas (Zohar III:45a).
3. Just before sunrise, for everything depends on the "hidden" light that reveals itself each day in the world, as mentioned in the Zohar. This light reveals itself during the early morning hours, prior to sunrise, and it is a favorable time for making requests of G-d (Imrei Pinchas, Parsha Shemot).
4. The morning is a favorable time in all areas (Zohar III:204a).
5. During public prayer. It is said, "What time is favorable for prayer?" and the answer is: "When the community prays" (Berachot 8a). Here the Rambam writes: "Communal prayer is always heard. Even when there are transgressors among [the congregation], the Holy One, blessed be He, does not reject the prayers of the many" (Hilchot Tefillah 8:1).
6. During the Amidah, in a hushed voice (Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 38; pp.72,78). We may add our own requests during the relevant blessing, or

during Shomea Tefillah, or at the end of the Amidah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 119:1; see also Mishnah Berurah).

7. In Nefillat Apayim, when reciting tachnun (Zohar Hakadosh, p.200).
8. When the Sefer Torah is taken out in public, for the gates of Heaven are open at that point (Zohar II:206a).
9. During the prayer of Torah scholars and tzaddikim (Zohar I:137a).
10. During Mincha, as it written: "When is a favorable time [for prayer]? During the prayer of Mincha" (Aggadat Bereshith).
11. From Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur (Sha'ar Ruach Hakodesh, p.50).
12. During the Ten Days of Teshuvah (Rosh Hashanah 18a; Zohar Chadash II, Parsha Terumah).
13. During Birkat Kohanim. This is a favorable time, for the angels and inhabitants of the earth are blessed at that time (Zohar Chadash III:147).
14. Seven days after Pesach Sheni, for the gates of Heaven are open at that time (Zohar Chadash III:152).
15. Mondays and Thursdays are days of favor (Rema 134:1).
16. During a circumcision, when the baby cries. It is written (Olelot Ephraim 415) that everyone who prays for his healing, or for the circumcised baby, must concentrate on the thought: "Hashem, have mercy on me, for I am unhappy, and I too am circumcised." Furthermore, when the baby cries because of the pain of the circumcision, each person must think of his own pain. Thus the cries of the baby, which ascend without being hindered by any impurity, will carry his prayers with them. In regards to this subject, it is said: "For Hashem has heard my cries" – these are the cries of the circumcised baby; "G-d has heard my supplication; G-d will accept my prayer." This is a very good piece of advice. (From the notes of the gaon of Griditz, printed at the end of tractate Shabbat, p.130.)

## I Am Prayer

### No Regrets During Prayer

Someone once expressed the following idea: In prayer, it sometimes happens that our mind wanders during Chonen Hada'at. Then, even before realizing it, we have already reached Hashiva Shofetenu. We then begin having profound regrets: "What have I done? I decided to concentrate for the entire Amidah! Why couldn't I do that?" In the meantime, we have already reached the blessing Hamachazir Shechinato LeTzion, and at that point we've lost all hope for this prayer, which we quickly try to finish.

Know that in such a case, we must not start regretting things in the middle of prayer. Rather, we must pull ourselves together, chase away all other thoughts, and focus on praying. It is only at the end that we may have regrets for not having concentrated enough during Chonen Hada'at, for that would have enabled us to acquire a little more wisdom.

Likewise, it is a shame that we did not concentrate during Hamachazir Shechinato LeTzion, for that would have intensified our connection to Torah study somewhat. The same goes for all the other blessings.

## I Am Prayer

### An Accusation Laden with Consequences

Because of our many sins, there is a small detail on which many people stumble. For example, when there are individuals in town who are known to be poor, and to whom people know they should give tzeddakah, if it happens that someone spreads a rumor that they are really not so poor, but are only acting in this way to fool others, many people may then refuse to give them what they gave in the past.