

Reuven heard, and he rescued him from their hand. (36:21)

Mechiras Yosef is one of the greatest tragedies recorded in the Torah. It was not merely a family quarrel or a dysfunction in the Patriarchal family (as those lacking in Torah and *yiraas Shomayim* would contend); it was the near dissolution of the future *Shivtei Kah*, the very foundation stones of *Klal Yisrael*. What makes the episode (for which we are still paying in the present) more painful is that it was rooted in misconception and misjudgment. The brothers were all noble and devoted to Hashem; yet, they misread Yosef's character. They saw what they saw, or perhaps what they wanted to see. As a result, his reports to his father concerning their behavior, which he also misread, were viewed by them as antagonistic and harmful to their collective destiny. They saw everything he did through the erroneous lens of suspicion. He looked through the eyes of innocence, lacking the deep perception which comes with age.

Yet, as in all events in history, the hidden hand of Hashem guided the entire process. Hashem wanted this to happen. Had the *Shivtei Kah* perhaps been on a higher spiritual plane, going down to Egypt, followed by the crucible of slavery, culminating in the miraculous liberation and Splitting of the Red Sea, leading up to the Giving of the Torah, could have occurred through a different venue and vehicle. This is what it was and we do not ask questions of Hashem because we will probably not grasp the answers. The brothers' error became the vehicle for a larger destiny. Yosef went down to Egypt not as the victim of family strife, but as the forerunner of the *Geulah*, Redemption. This is how a Torah Jew should view this "tragedy." This is how it appears to us. In the Heavenly sphere it is far removed from tragedy. It is part of the Divine Plan. The word tragedy has a different meaning in the Heavenly lexicon. What superficially appeared to the uninitiated as a family downfall was actually the precursor of a national ascent. Egypt was part of their destiny because Hashem wanted it to be the ordeal which would prepare and refine *Klal Yisrael* for *Har Sinai* and *nitzchiyus*, eternity.

The tragedy of *Mechiras Yosef*, like the rest of the Torah, can only be understood through the lens of the Torah as interpreted by able and spiritually refined commentators. The pain of fraternal misunderstanding and family strife, which led to a descent into a miserable exile, contained the seeds of consolation: the knowledge that nothing just happens. There is a Divine choreography to which we are not privy, but in which we have faith. Truly, even the gravest miscalculations are woven into the Divine Plan for Redemption.

Appearances can be deceiving, but if one delves beneath the surface, there is so much he can learn about what he is missing. I remember forty years ago taking a group of eighth graders to New York for a *gedolim* tour in conjunction with visiting a *matzoh* bakery and other religious venues. I record the date by design, because what has become acceptable and taken for granted, forty years ago in Cleveland was a novelty. One of the high points of the trip was to visit the Lower East Side and hopefully meet *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl*.

We were told that the *gadol ha'dor* was not up to receiving visitors. However, at 8:30 the next

morning he was being driven by his grandson to a medical appointment. If we were standing in the hall when he came off the elevator, we could give *shalom aleichem* and hopefully receive a *brachah*. I, for one, never having met *Rav Moshe*, was hyper-excited and I attempted to infuse my students concerning the unparalleled *z'chus* and good fortune of sharing in this experience.

Bright and early the next morning, having *davened* with the earliest *minyan* in Brooklyn, we stood in the hallway of the large apartment building which was home to many Jewish people, most of whom were senior citizens, the younger families opting to live in Brooklyn. We stood there looking at the elevator going up and going down, checking for the floor on which *Rav Moshe's* apartment was located. Finally, we saw the light go on – the elevator was descending. I was beyond nervous. My students could not understand my reaction. One day, when they grew older, they would perhaps understand. Finally, the elevator door stopped on the ground floor, the doors opened, and out poured a group of elderly ladies and a few elderly men, all dressed in their street clothes about to go shopping. They each turned to the “inhabitant” of the elevator and waved, “Bye, Rabbi,” “We hope you have a good day, Rabbi,” “Good luck with your doctor’s appointment, Rabbi!” Then the *gadol ha’dor* came out, small in physical build, but a giant in Torah, and he waved back to each and every one of the people. It was worth everything to see this incredible lesson in humility and respect for a human being. Not all the elevator passengers were Jewish, but *Rav Moshe* acknowledged each one. My students, however, were not yet ready to perceive the experience the way I did. Appearances can be deceiving.

The *Alter, zl, m’Kelm, Horav Simchah Zissel Broide*, was one of the primary disciples of *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, founder of the *Mussar* Movement. He devoted his life to training his students to perfect themselves in the area of *middos*, character refinement/traits. *Na’eh doreish v’na’eh me’kayeim*. The *Alter* was himself the paradigm of ethical refinement. Any intelligent person could observe his countenance and demeanor and realize that before him stood an unusual person.

During one of his trips, he stopped overnight at a farm. The farmer and his wife had heard of the sage and were eager to provide him with accommodations. Taking money for the provisions and lodging was out of the question. They were honored to host the *Rosh Yeshivah*. The farmer’s wife was excited to be able to prepare a meal for *Rav Simchah Zissel*.

As she was preparing the meal, *Rav Simchah Zissel* struck up a conversation. He asked about their cow: Does it provide sufficient milk? Do the chickens lay enough eggs? Was the quality of the eggs good? How was their potato crop? The farmer’s wife was not bashful. She gave lengthy answers to each question. She went into detail, describing the health of the cow and chickens, and the work involved in planting a potato crop. During this whole time, *Rav Simchah Zissel* carried on a long, animated conversation with this simple woman.

Rav Simchah Zissel later explained his actions. This couple had kindly provided him with a room and meals for a day. The next day, he would be gone and would probably not see these people for at least a year or two. They had refused to accept any remuneration for the accommodations they

had provided. How could he possibly repay them? The only other way was to show them that they were relevant, that he cared about their lives. By manifesting a friendly countenance, by taking an interest in the simple goals of their lives, by rejoicing over their achievements, and by praising their accomplishments, he was providing payment for their time and efforts. *Rav Simchah Zissel* placed great value on his time. Nonetheless, engaging in small talk with the farmer's wife was his way of compensating for his accommodations.

Now, let us imagine how this would appear to the average spectator walking by and listening to the conversation that ensued between *Rav Simchah Zissel* and this woman. He would look at the sage in a shocked manner. This is the effect of appearances. It takes a very intelligent and discerning person with a penetrating mind to realize that what he saw and what was the true reality of what he saw, were two very different images.