

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Vayeishev, 5782
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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח"ל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Vayeishev

A TZADDIK'S DISTRESS

The sale of Joseph teaches that distress leads to greater tranquility. Tzaddikim desire the tranquility that comes with Moshiach. G-d desires the prayers of tzaddikim. We have suffered the distress; like Jacob, we must now pray for the time of tranquility that follows Redemption.

The name of a particular Torah reading should tell us the general content of the whole portion. But in the case of this week's portion, *Vayeishev*, the name and the content seem to contradict each other. The word "*vayeishev*" indicates rest and quiet, the tranquility Jacob sought after his many years of struggling first with Esau and then with Lavan. Yet the Torah reading itself tells of the sale of Joseph, and Jacob's agitation and anxiety that followed. Indeed, the Sages explain this as cause and effect: Jacob sought to dwell in tranquility, so there occurred the upheaval concerning Joseph.

Jacob's desire – his request to rest after his trials and tribulations, to lead a quiet life – had the opposite effect, for as a result of the request G-d brought disturbance and disorder into his life. This sequence of events – a desire for repose becoming the direct cause for commotion and turmoil – applies not just to Jacob, but to *tzaddikim* in general, as the Sages explain. When the *tzaddikim* – the righteous – seek and desire to dwell in tranquility, G-d responds, what is prepared for them in the World to Come is not sufficient but they want to dwell in tranquility in this world, as well!

Since it is the *tzaddikim* – the righteous – who desire to dwell in tranquility, surely there is nothing wrong with such an aspiration.

Why then does G-d react negatively to this desire, so much so that he arouses the opposition, so to speak, bringing adversity and causing distress to the *tzaddikim*, as was the case with Jacob?

To understand G-d's complaint, as well as reconcile the apparent contradiction between the name of the Torah reading and its content, we first have to examine the nature of the *tzaddikim's* desire. For they seek to dwell in a tranquility that is perfect and complete, which means not simply physical repose, but a state of spiritual delight as well. In the World to Come, which the *tzaddikim* seek, there is neither eating, nor drinking, but only glorying in the Divine Presence.

Yet such tranquility belongs in the World to Come, not in this world. In the here and now, the task – especially of *tzaddikim* – is to work, to perform mitzvos, to accomplish our Divine service of transforming the physical realm into a dwelling place for G-dliness. It seems, then, that the request of the *tzaddikim* – to dwell in tranquility – is inappropriate, at least given the current situation.

However, there is a deeper reason *tzaddikim* seek tranquility in this world. They desire their Divine service – their mitzvos and Torah study here in the physical realm – to be perfect and complete. And that situation can occur only when the world is at rest, as in the days of Moshiach. As Maimonides writes: All Israel, the prophets and sages desired the days of Moshiach so the nations would leave them in peace, for the nations would not permit them to learn Torah or observe mitzvos properly. When Israel finds rest, it will increase in wisdom.

Nevertheless, achieving such a situation prior to the coming of Moshiach resembles receiving a reward that should come only after the task – the Divine service of transforming the world – has been completed. This is also why the troubles of Joseph overtook Jacob: his desire to dwell in tranquility was apparently not appropriate for his situation.

But it can't be said that Jacob did not deserve to dwell in tranquility and repose at all, for after the adversities that followed the sale of Joseph were overcome, Jacob's last seventeen years were peaceful and calm. That being the case, why it was necessary to bring new troubles and difficulties upon Jacob? Indeed, the adversity connected with Joseph was greater than the distress and affliction associated with Esau and Lavan.

Earlier we mentioned that the sale of Joseph and the resulting commotion resulted from Jacob's desire to dwell in tranquility. And we see that, in fact, Jacob ended up dwelling in tranquility. That is, in order to elevate Jacob to a level of Divine service high enough that the spiritual tranquility could be achieved in this world, Jacob first had to undergo a greater disturbance than previously experienced. For it is well known that adversity and distress refine and elevate a person to a higher level of Divine service.

This, by the way, answers the question concerning the name of the Torah reading: the disruption in Jacob's life caused by the sale of Joseph was only a preparation, the necessary means through which Jacob could truly dwell in tranquility, in the fullest sense.

Yet a question remains: surely Jacob, who embodies the attribute of truth, knew his situation. If he requested G-d to allow him to dwell in tranquility, it must be that, after all his previous trials and afflictions, he had in fact reached a level of Divine service where he deserved such a reward. Why, then, did he need to undergo the disturbance associated with Joseph to merit a proper repose?

Actually, Jacob had nine years of quiet and serenity after his return to Israel before the troubles with Joseph began. He had achieved a level of tranquility; but he did not dwell in the same type of tranquility before the sale of Joseph as he did after the family was reunited in Egypt.

On his own, Jacob achieved the highest level possible, where he and his family dwelled in tranquility, serving G-d and observing His commandments. Such a state was the natural result of his trials and efforts. But G-d gave him a tranquility beyond the natural – allowing Jacob to dwell in Egypt, metaphorically and actually a place of confusion, commotion and limitations. And precisely there G-d enabled Jacob to dwell in tranquility, both physically and spiritually. The locale did not affect the physical peace or the spiritual delight. In order to reach this level, however, Jacob had to undergo a greater trial and tribulation, an unnatural distress, as it were, that would raise his Divine service higher than he could achieve on his own.

Indeed, the adversity of Joseph differed from that of Lavan and Esau. With those two, Jacob was fighting the world's opposition to holiness, transforming the physical into the spiritual. The adversity of Joseph resulted in no such immediate or obvious spiritual triumph. It was simply a Divine decree, in order to elevate Jacob to a higher tranquility, beyond the limits of creation.

Since G-d wanted Jacob to reach this higher level of tranquility, why did he wait until Jacob asked before decreeing the sequence of events? Simply put, because G-d desires the prayers of *tzaddikim*. And from this we learn a critical lesson concerning our own Divine service: we must learn from the conduct of Jacob. We must seek and desire the Redemption. We must demand the arrival of Moshiach. Of course, in our times, we have already experienced the adversity and all aspects of distress. G-d wants the prayers of Israel; He wants us to desire the Redemption. And when we seek to dwell in tranquility as we should, then the hope and desire of all Israel – to see with our own eyes the return of the Divine Presence to Zion – will be immediately fulfilled.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 30, pp. 176-183)

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