



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

פרשת ויגש

וַיִּגְדּוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי וְכִי הוּא מִשָּׁל בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, וַיִּפֶּגַע לְבָבוֹ כִּי לֹא הֶאֱמִין לָהֶם. וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם, וַיִּרְא אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ, וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אָבִיהֶם. (בראשית מה, טו-כז)
And they told him, saying, "Yosef is still alive," and that he is ruler over the entire land of Mitzrayim; but he had a turn of heart, for he did not believe them. And they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him, and then the spirit of their father Yakov was revived. (Bereishis 45:26-27)

רש"י: ויפג לבו. נחלף לבו והלך מלהאמין, לא היה לבו פונה אל הדברים. את כל דברי יוסף. סימן מסר להם, במה היה עוסק כשפירש ממנו, בפרשת עגלה ערופה. זהו שנאמר "וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף, ולא נאמר "אשר שלח פרעה."

Rashi: But he had a turn of heart: *His heart was transformed and went away from believing; his heart did not turn to the words.*

All the words of Yosef: *Yosef gave his brothers a sign of what topic of study he was involved in when he separated from Yakov, in the parshah of eglah arufah. And this is why it says, "And he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent," and it does not say "that Pharaoh had sent."*

The *parshah* tells the story of how Yakov Avinu initially did not believe the report that his son Yosef was still alive. It was only after he saw the wagons which, according to Rashi's explanation, were a message from Yosef about the subject they were learning before they parted, that Yakov was able to accept the fact that Yosef was indeed alive.

There are several questions to be asked. Firstly, what was so unbelievable with this news that Yakov failed to trust his children? Additionally, Rashi brings on the *possuk* (42:1): וַיִּרְא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֵשׁ שֶׁבֶר וַיִּמְצָא חֵטָא בְּמִצְרַיִם, *and Yakov saw that there was grain in Mitzrayim*, an alternative explanation of the word שֶׁבֶר to mean *hope*. Yakov saw from Heaven that there was some hope in Mitzrayim, but it was not an actual prophecy that clearly indicated that Yosef was alive. If that is the case, why was Yakov so shocked and disbelieving when he was finally told that Yosef was indeed alive and well, especially when he had already been given hints about it?

Additionally, the *possuk* (37:35) states: וַיִּמְאַן לְהַתְנַחֵם, *Yakov refused to be comforted*. Rashi explains the reason for this being that a person cannot accept consolation for a live person whom he believes to have died. Could Yakov not have taken this as a sign for himself that Yosef had not perished?

And were we to have the answer to the above questions, what major revelation was there in seeing the wagons which Yosef sent. How did this prove Yosef's well-being?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* brings a deeper meaning into this episode based upon an explanation of R' Elyah Lopian *zatzal*. R' Elyah explains that Yakov understood that Yosef may be physically alive, however, he failed to believe the fact that he still held strong to Torah and *mitzvos*. For a young, handsome, and unmarried boy to withhold temptation in a country infamously known for its immorality and corruption was a notion that Yakov had trouble believing. Even more so, hearing of

Yosef being in a great position of power made him doubt that Yosef had remained untainted by his environment and position.¹

When the *shevotim* reported back to Yakov: עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי, *Yosef is still alive*, they were speaking in the terminology of the Torah. They were referring to what the Torah deems as חַיִּים – alive, and Chazal tell us that רָשָׁעִים בְּחַיֵּיהֶם קְרוּיִים מְתִים, *the wicked even when alive are considered dead*. Therefore, when the brothers described Yosef as being “alive” according to the Torah's definition, they were indicating that he was spiritually alive.

Once we understand this, we can resolve the first set of difficulties. Yakov did not have trouble accepting that Yosef was physically alive, as his Heavenly vision had previously indicated. He also understood why he could not be comforted despite knowing that Yosef was alive. However, he struggled to process the idea that Yosef was still spiritually intact.

How was Yosef able to achieve the impossible? In what way did he manage to stay faithful to the Torah and the lessons of his childhood, despite being so isolated in a place known for its wickedness and immorality?

Chazal teach us that it was through learning and being connected with the Torah in all circumstances. The Gemara (*Yoma 35b*) states that because of Yosef no one can remain blameless for not learning Torah. Even the wicked one will be told, “Yosef had it the hardest of all, enduring constant temptation from the wife of Potiphar, yet he held strong to the Torah!” Torah was the sole antidote that helped Yosef survive those years secluded from his household, without being lured into the enticements of Mitzrayim.

This was the message Yosef was sending to Yakov with the wagons. The message conveyed that he remained connected to the Torah and was still bound to the teachings they had learnt together before parting ways. Upon hearing this, Yakov became confident that Yosef could have preserved his spirituality throughout the years. Yakov understood that if Yosef had maintained his connection to the Torah, then it was possible for him to be spiritually alive and unharmed.

May we all be *zoche* to maintain the constant connection with Torah under all circumstances. This will enable us to preserve our spiritual *madreigah* and protect us from all the distractions and enticements with which we are constantly bombarded.

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¹ R' Elyah recounted a story of a great *tzaddik* who heard that his beloved son had decided to emigrate to America. In those days (100+ years ago) America was known as a spiritual wasteland with countless temptations. The father, out of his immense love and compassion for his son, davened every day that the ship carrying him should sink in the ocean. He preferred that his son should physically perish, rather than him being at risk of the spiritual trials and tribulations of America to which sadly so many succumbed.