



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

פרשת ויחי

וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף לְקַבֵּר אֶת אָבִיו וַיַּעֲלוּ אִתּוֹ כָּל עַבְדֵי פַרְעֹה וְכו'. וְכָל בְּיַת יוֹסֵף וְאֶחָיו וְבֵית אָבִיו וְכו'. וַיָּבֵאוּ עַד גֶּרֶן הָאֶטָד
וְכו'. וַיֵּרָא יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֶת הָאֶבֶל וְכו', וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָּל כְּבֹד זֶה לְמִצְרַיִם וְכו'. וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף מִצְרַיִם הוּא וְאֶחָיו
וְכָל הָעַלְיִים אִתּוֹ לְקַבֵּר אֶת אָבִיו. (בראשית נ, ז-י)

And Yosef went up to bury his father, and with him went up all of Pharaoh's servants and all of Yosef's household, and his brothers, and his father's household. They came to Goren HaAtad, and when the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning they said "This is a grievous mourning for Mitzrayim." Yosef returned to Mitzrayim – he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father. (Bereishis 50:7-14)

רש"י: הוא ואחיו וכל העולים איתו. בחזרתן כאן הקדים אחיו למצרים העולים איתו, ובהליכתן הקדים מצרים לאחיו, שנאמר "ויעלו איתו כל עבדי פרעה" ואחר כך "כל בית יוסף ואחיו"? אלא לפי שראו כבוד שעשו מלכי כנען, שתלו כתריהם בארונו של יעקב, נהגו בהם כבוד.

Rashi: He and his brothers and all who had gone up with him: *Here, at their return, his brothers are mentioned ahead of the Mitzriyim who had gone up with him, but at their departure, the Mitzriyim are listed ahead of his brothers as the possuk says etc...? The answer is that because they saw the honour that the kings of Canaan did for Yakov, that they hung their crowns from Yakov's coffin, they treated Yakov's descendants with respect and let them return ahead of them.*

The *parshah* details how Yakov Avinu was buried with much honour and was accompanied by his family and dignitaries of Mitzrayim. Rashi cites the Gemara (*Sotah* 13a) which questions the order of events mentioned in these *pessukim*. On their outward journey (*possuk* 7) the Mitzriyim are mentioned first, while the brothers come second. However, when they return to Mitzrayim, the brothers are listed first (*possuk* 14). The Gemara explains that the Mitzriyim gave precedence to Yakov's descendants on their return because they saw the honour that the kings of Canaan displayed for Yakov. As a result, they accorded Yakov's descendants with the appropriate respect and allowed them to lead the procession.

The Gemara (*ibid*) recounts a remarkable incident that occurred during Yakov's burial, which Rashi briefly refers to. The *possuk* relates how they arrived at a place called "גֶּרֶן הָאֶטָד" which literally translates as "the threshing floor of thorns." The Gemara wonders why this place was given such a name and relates the occurrence that explains it. It tells of how the sons of Eisav, Yishmael, and Keturah came to fight against the sons of Yakov to prevent his burial. But when they saw that Yosef's crown was hanging on Yakov's coffin, they all took their own crowns and placed them on his coffin as well. Thus, they encircled his coffin with their own crowns, and the scene resembled a "threshing floor surrounded by thorns." The Torah named the place in memory of this event.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* explains this remarkable episode based on what the Rambam writes in his introduction to Mishnayos Zeraim. The Rambam delves into the purpose of creation and man, and how early philosophers explored this topic extensively. They concluded that everything in existence has a purpose, as nothing was created in vain. All plants and animals were created to provide for human beings, with each one playing a unique and distinct role. Some entities were created to

provide sustenance and medication, while others were created for transportation of people and goods.

The Rambam then elaborates that if all beings were made for mankind, we must ponder the reason for our existence. Upon considering the many facets of humanity, we must conclude that only one endeavour is the primary objective for all, with the other aspects merely providing support. It cannot be that our purpose in life is to eat, drink, build a family, house or empire, as these things do not change a person but are merely activities he may be involved in. Rather, the sole function of humanity which transforms us and distinguishes us from animals, is that of the intellect. Our intellect, when focused on recognizing the Oneness of Hashem and all Divine knowledge, is the intent behind all of Creation. Everything else solely assists us in this exceptional task.

The Rambam further expands that the entire universe may exist solely for the benefit of a select few who attain perfection and *sheleimus* in their intellect and behaviour. The majority of humanity, who are to some extent influenced by their physical desires, will receive rewards for their efforts, but in reality, they live to support and assist the choice minority.

When the kings of Canaan came to wage war against the children of Yakov, they witnessed two things which caused them a crucial moment of realization. Firstly, they watched the great mourning of Mitzrayim. The Malbim explains that the cause for this grieving was that they couldn't have the privilege of burying Yakov in their own land, where his presence, even in death, would be a permanent source of merit for them. The Mitzriyim realised that now, with Yakov being buried in far-off Eretz Yisrael, the famine - which had paused in the merit of his presence - would return. Secondly, they noticed Yosef's crown on Yakov's coffin and the message which lied within this. By Yosef, the mighty world leader who was feeding and sustaining humanity, placing his crown on Yakov's coffin, he showed utter and complete submission. He was demonstrating that all his accomplishments and rise to greatness were solely to provide and assist his respected father Yakov, as the *possuk* (45:5) says, **כִּי לְמַחְיָה שָׁלַח־נִי אֱלֹקִים לְפָנֶיכֶם**, *for it was as a supporter of life that Hashem sent me ahead of you.*

The kings saw how Mitzrayim acknowledged the power and righteousness of Yakov, and how the influential Yosef submitted himself to his father. This helped them recognize the purpose of Creation. They realized that man was not given life to wage war and indulge in earthly desires, but rather to be part of the world of the Tzaddik. They surrounded Yakov's coffin with their crowns to signify their acceptance of this fact. This indicated that man's purpose in life is to assist the **אֲדָם הַשְּׁלֵמָה**, who is the true purpose for Creation. Once they admitted this, there was no motivation for war, as they were all now living with the same joint mission.

For this reason, the Torah referred to this episode comparing it to *a threshing floor of thorns*. Thorns are commonly planted around storehouses of produce to deter thieves. Thorns themselves are of no use and only serve to protect the edible produce inside. Similarly, the kings recognized that they were like thorns guarding the produce. Their sole purpose was to be a part of the world that guards and serves the Tzaddik.

May we all be *zoche* to focus our intellect on recognising Hashem and learning His Torah fulfilling the ultimate purpose of Creation!

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