

Yosef: Making the Redemption Possible

At the end of this week's Parsha, Vayechi, Yosef tells his brothers about the Redemption out of Egypt: "And Hashem will surely remember you and take you up from this land..." Yosef was the one who brought them down to Egypt in the first place, and now he foretells about the Redemption. The words of Yosef are not merely a prophecy or a sign, but they are what make the Redemption possible. Why is Yosef so connected to the Egyptian exile, from its beginning to the Redemption?

To understand this, we first have to get a deeper appreciation of who Yosef was. Since Yosef was, in a way, greater than all of his brothers and even his father, it came out in the physical realm as well – he was like a king. That is why his brothers bow to him, and even his father, Yaakov, bows to him at the beginning of this week's Parsha, as it says, "And Yaakov bowed down at the head of the bed." They bow to him, because he is greater.

Everything that is found in the physical realm is there because it is that way in the spiritual realms. This is specifically true about the forefathers and Yaakov's sons, the twelve tribes; their lives were completely spiritual, because they were Tzadikim, and the lives of Tzadikim are completely spiritual. So, surely the physical interactions that they had were rooted in the spiritual. Bowing down to Yosef is a clear indication that spiritually, he was greater.

Our forefathers and the tribes lived a life of spirituality. That is why they chose to be shepherds, so that they could use most of their time to serve Hashem. Yosef, on the other hand, was the viceroy of Egypt, that means that he was very much involved in the day-to-day lives of the Egyptians, and yet, at the same time, he was able to maintain a total oneness with Hashem, even deeper than that of his brothers.

That is why "they didn't recognize him," because they didn't believe that any of them could be so much involved in the physical world. They couldn't believe that it was him, even if he resembled Yosef,

because their way of serving Hashem was by separating themselves from worldly matters.

This will help us understand the verse, "And these are the children of Yaakov, Yosef..." as well as why it doesn't mention the other brothers: Because Yosef was the continuation of Yaakov, he was able to take Yaakov's highest accomplishments in spirituality – and, for that matter, Avraham's and Yitzchak's spiritual accomplishments – and bring them down into the lowest physical place, Egypt.

Why was Yosef able to do it? Because he was higher, he was able to draw it down, following the rule that "anything that is higher [spiritually], goes down lower [in the physical]," as will be explained.

We will understand this according to what the Zohar says, that the three major holidays are connected to the forefathers: Avraham is connected to Pesach, Yitzchak is connected to Shavuot, and Yaakov is connected to Sukkos. It also says that Yosef is connected to Shemini Atzeres.

If Yosef is a holiday of his own, why isn't he also one of our forefathers? Because he doesn't stand for a new path in our service to Hashem like the forefathers, but rather he represents the ability to draw the spiritual service that our forefathers gave us, into the most physical levels. And that is what Shemini Atzeres is all about, taking the spiritual gains that we got over the holidays and integrating them into every part of our physical lives.

The Yom Tov of Sukkos begins with seven days in a Sukka that surrounds us, and the G-dly light that is in the Sukka also surrounds us. On Shemini Atzeres, we don't eat in the Sukka because the G-dly light that surrounds is drawn inside and we integrate it.

Shemini Atzeres is a Yom Tov of its own, but at the same time, it is called Shemini, the eighth, which means that it is also part of the first seven. This is similar to the verse, "And these are the children of Yaakov, Yosef..." In one way, Yosef is a person of his own, but at the same time, he is an extension of Yaakov.

One of the translations of 'Atzeres' is collection or absorption. Again, this refers to the collection and absorption of the holiness of the holidays.

The holiday is called Shemini, the eighth. In Kabbalah, seven is the number of nature, like the cycle of the week, and even the spiritual realms of the world work in cycles of seven. Eight is the number that represents extra-worldly, even outside the spiritual realms of the world. That is the reason that Shemini Atzeres is so powerful: since it is higher than both the physical and spiritual realms, it can merge the two. Hence, it helps us integrate the G-dly holiness of the holidays.

The same was with Yosef – because he was rooted higher, he was able to draw down the spiritual service that our forefathers did into the lowest physical place.

Now we can understand why Yosef was so connected to the Egyptian exile. He was the one who brought the Jewish People down to Egypt, and he makes the Redemption possible – the main reason for the exile was to remove the G-dly sparks that were hidden in the physical, in other words, to work with the physical and uplift it to Hashem. In order to do this, we have to be higher than the world, and it is Yosef who lifts us up above, because he is the head, and the body follows the head.

It says, "Like the days of the Exodus from Egypt, I will show you miracles," meaning that the Redemption in the time of Moshiach will be like the Exodus. When we will finish our work, collecting the last few sparks, we will surely see the ultimate Redemption, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.