

Affordable Mitzvos

וְלֹא יָקְלוּ אֶחָיו לְעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפָּנָיו

"His brothers were unable to respond to him because their faces had fallen." (45:3)

Shabsi was a poor man who had always struggled to make ends meet. He would walk the streets of his home town listlessly, on the lookout for some work to earn a few coins to support his family. One day his wife asked him to buy their youngest son a new suit for his Bar Mitzvah. Shabsi was distraught, but he decided to go to the local clothes shop and see if there was anything suitable. When he walked in Shabsi was momentarily shocked. He had never seen so many beautiful clothes in his life and he didn't know where to begin. Gradually he regained his senses, and picked out what he thought was a very nice, albeit cheapish looking suit. Shabsi took the suit to the owner to pay and shyly asked the price. He nearly fainted when he heard that it was twenty rubles! He looked at it again and said with all sincerity that he was convinced it was only worth ten. The shopkeeper responded that irrelevant of what Shabsi thought, it was worth twenty, and that he wasn't even looking to make any profit from Shabsi because that was actually the price he had paid for it himself. Shabsi began to feel in his pockets to see what he could scrape together. He eventually pulled out a worn five ruble note and a few dull coins which came to a grand total of ten rubles. Shabsi nearly burst into tears. He looked at the shopkeeper, a silent plea emanating from his tired heart, and the shopkeeper had pity. He took the ten rubles, and with a pleasant smile gave Shabsi his suit and wished him a good day. When Shabsi returned home, he told his family the whole story. He got very animated as he told of the evil shopkeeper who had tried to cheat him by asking for twenty rubles, when the suit was obviously only worth ten rubles, because that was the amount he took for it in the end. His family looked at him askance. "How can you say that?" they asked, "Surely it's obvious that he only took your ten, for a suit worth twenty, because he took pity on you! He has taken a tremendous loss to make you happy; you should be praising his righteousness..."

The Dubno Maggid uses this Moshul to explain a Midrash on the Possuk quoted above. The Possuk relates that Yosef's brothers were unable to respond to his greeting because they were embarrassed at having sold him. The Midrash cites Abba Kohen Bardeloh, who said that if the brothers, who believed they had done the right thing by selling Yosef, were unable to face him, how much more will we, who have all sinned, be unable to face Hashem on the final day of judgement? The Dubno Maggid explains, that this means to imply that no-one can honestly say that they have done everything required of them in this world. No-one is able to face Hashem and say that they will come out successful in a comparison of what they actually did in this world and what they were capable of. It is this that will lead to our being shame-faced on the day of judgement. None-the-less, the Moshul brought above offers us hope. Just as the shopkeeper looked at Shabsi, and recognised that he was doing his best, meaning that the ten rubles he had were hard-earned rubles that he had put in much effort to acquire. Similarly, Hashem will look at those Yidden who have sincerely tried their hardest, and pity their lack of Mitzvos. He will then take pity on such Yidden and just as the shopkeeper gave Shabsi a suit worth more than he could afford, Hashem will give us a reward worth more than we technically deserve.

Wage Differential

קָנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם וְאֶת אֲדָמַתְכֶם לְפָרְעָה

"I have acquired you and your land this day for Pharaoh." (47:23)

The Meshech Chochmoh explains, why the Torah tells us about how Yosef acquired the land of the Egyptians for Pharaoh. He writes that it is well known that the gold and silver vessels which Klal Yisroel borrowed from their neighbours on leaving Egypt, and never paid back, were justifiably taken as payment for the hard work the Jews performed in Egypt. This is in keeping with the well-known story of the Gemoro, regarding the Egyptians who came before Alexander of Macedonia and demanded the repayment of these vessels. This argument was then refuted as the vessels were judged to be fair wages for the Jews' work.

However, this answer is difficult to accept as the Jews did not actually serve the Egyptian people; rather they built warehouses and fortresses for Pharaoh. As such, it would appear to be unfair to take payment from the entire Egyptian people for work done for one man, albeit their king. It was to answer this question, concludes the Meshech Chochmoh, that the Torah told us that Yosef acquired all Egyptian property on behalf of Pharaoh. So that when Klal Yisroel came to leave Egypt, the vessels they took would in reality belong to Pharaoh and could therefore be taken as wages for their work for him.

Protektzia...

אַל תִּרְגִּזוּ בְּדַרְךְ

"Do not be angry on the way." (45:24)

The Baal HaTurim offers a novel explanation for these words of Yosef to his brothers. He writes that Yosef was warning his brothers not to allow his position as head of government in Egypt to affect their dealings with other people. Yosef feared that they might rely on his position to protect them in case of any trouble, and would act inappropriately to others. He therefore warned them to avoid starting any fights or attempting to impose their will on anyone else.