SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 25

Vayeshev, Sicha 2

The Context:

Yosef endured two spells of enslavement, one in the home of Potiphar where he served as the house manager, and one in Egyptian prison after his master's wife's false accusations. But during both episodes, Yosef eventually found success.

Describing his stint with Potiphar, the Torah relates, "And his master saw that G-d was with him, and whatever he (Yoseph) did G-d made prosper in his hand. (Bereishis, 39:3)

And similarly during his time in prison, "The warden of the prison did not inspect anything [that was] in his (Yoseph's) hand, for G-d was with him, and whatever he did G-d made prosper. (Ibid, 39:23)

The Question:

Why during his time with Potiphar does the Torah describe his success as "G-d made prosper in his hand," while when describing Yosef's success in prison the verse says "whatever he did G-d made prosper," not mentioning Yosef's "hand"?

The Explanation:

When success is described as being brought by G-d "in his hand" this implies that the miraculous nature of this success is mediated through the person's actions. It is still a result that is beyond what is expected from this person in this situation, yet the success can be traced to the person's "hand," to their work and effort.

When the success is described as "whatever he did G-d made prosper," this implies that the success is so wildly miraculous that it is no longer attached to the person's "hand." It goes beyond what can be expected from the work invested by the person. The blessing is clearly G-d's alone, the person's efforts are immaterial to his success.

Why was Yosef's miraculous success more pronounced in prison than in Potiphar's home?

The vessel for G-d's blessing that is incommensurate with our work is humility and selflessness. When we consider our

accomplishments to be our own, then they can only yield success according to our limited efforts. But when we lose any illusion of autonomy and surrender ourselves entirely to G-d then we are open to G-d's unlimited blessing.

Thus, the deeper Yosef's sense of surrender, the greater success he elicited from G-d. In Potiphar's home, Yosef was a slave, the lowest rung of society. This induced a sense of selflessness in Yosef and invited G-d's miraculous success. Yet, he was given a prominent position in the home, and a slave, while lacking freedom, is given the opportunity to create and express himself in his responsibilities. Thus, the success was evident "in his hand," it was tied to his work.

But in prison, Yosef lost any remaining sense of self-importance. Now the blessing of G-d's success was so profound that it transcended the work of his "hand."

The 19th of Kislev Connection:

Both these stages are evident in the Alter Rebbe's redemption from prison:

When the officers interacted with the Alter Rebbe in jail, they saw that he was a "G-dly man," meaning that G-d's presence was associated with him and his actions. After the redemption, when the Alter Rebbe had experienced the deepest period of imprisonment, then the officer's reaction was different, "they spoke up and said that this came from G-d (as the Alter Rebbe writes in a letter)." Meaning, they no longer saw G-d's blessing as being connected to the human personality of the Alter Rebbe (a G-dly man), but as transcending any trace of human effort, "this came from G-d."

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