

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 25

Vayigash, Sicha 1

The Verse:

In Tehillim, King David refers to the entirety of the Jewish people with the name Yosef: “Listen, O Shepherd of Israel, Who leads Yosef like sheep. Appear, You Who is enthroned upon the cherubim.” (Tehillim 80:2)

Rashi explains why all of Israel is synonymous with Yosef: Because he sustained them during the famine in Egypt.

The Question:

Why do the Jewish people carry this identity of Yosef long after he sustained for a short time period in Egypt? There are many shepherds, providers, and guides of the Jewish people throughout history, and we are not called by their names?

The Explanation:

The Jewish nation is called by Yosef’s name long after he sustained them during the Egyptian famine. Clearly, Yosef’s contribution is an everlasting one. The temporal physical nourishment he provided

is the manifestation of a spiritual nurturing which endures for eternity.

What set Yosef apart from his brothers was his ability to thrive in an adverse environment. Yosef’s brothers chose shepherding as an occupation because its ascetic nature allowed them to remain committed to G-d. They knew that their spiritual devotion could not withstand the pressures of a secular milieu such as Egypt.

Yosef, however, possessed a remarkable spiritual endurance. Throughout his enslavement to Potiphar, his imprisonment, and his eventual ascension to the throne, his commitment to live a G-dly life never wavered. When Yosef’s brothers joined him in Egypt they needed Yosef to fortify them with his spiritual durability. Yosef’s resilience became part of them, their “nourishment.” From then on, carved within the Jewish soul is the endurance of Yosef. Because we are indebted to Yosef for our relentless spirit we forever bear his name.

This psalm, a poignant plea on behalf of the exiled Jew, invokes our relationship with Yosef to remind us of our ability to withstand the trials of exile.
