

PARSHAS MIKEITZ

תשפ"א

Parshas Mikeitz has two parts. The first part is the story of Yosef Hatzaddik moving from jail to become the ruler of Egypt, and what he accomplished as the ruler of Egypt. The second part describes Yosef's first meeting with his brothers. The parsha ends right in the middle of the second meeting.

The whole story of Yosef and his brothers is an unbelievable lesson in hashgocho protis. The Torah doesn't just tell us stories. Each story is conveying to us deep, critical life lessons – if you know how to read them carefully.

Hashgocho protis is an important concept that is often misunderstood. Hashgocho protis does not mean that if you have total bitochon that Hashem will miraculously wire money into your bank account, then it will happen just because you had bitochon it would happen. One has no right to expect such an unusual thing to happen for him. Hashem has no obligation to you to do something like that just because you believe it will happen. If it never happens normally, there is no reason to assume it will just happen.

There are a number of principles that Rishonim provide regarding the rules of hashgocho protis.

Hashgocho protis does not mean that I can ignore all risks and leave my health to up Hashem – I can't say, "He will decide if I will get sick or I won't get sick and I don't need to do anything to protect my health." Hashem created a world that works according to natural law. Hashem wants the world to operate with stable, predictable rules of how things function. If I let go of an object and sometimes it falls down and sometimes it floats up and sometimes it moves sideways, the world couldn't function. The only reason we can function is because – as the posuk says – chok nosan velo yaavor. Hashem made laws of nature which are absolute.

The Ramban's view on bitochon and hashgocho protis is very clear. Hashgocho protis depends which area you are dealing with. If a person has certain realistic spiritual goals and he pursues them with great hishtadlus, then he is guaranteed to achieve it. It is guaranteed. The posuk says "b'tach baShem v'assei tov" – in spiritual goals (assei tov) there can be absolute bitochon that it will happen. But a person must be pro-active in achieving them. He can't sit back and assume it will just happen by itself. The gemara says yogatoh u'motzoso ta'amin. Only when you put in effort will you understand. Lo yogatoh u'motzoso, al ta'amin. Don't believe someone when they say they didn't work hard in Torah and it still came to him by itself.

Then the posuk says "shechon bo'oretz u're'ey emunoh". When you are dealing with this world, then you need emunoh. What does that mean?

When Yaakov Ovinu was preparing to confront Eisov, he was afraid. We discussed why Yaakov was afraid even though Hashem gave Yaakov a promise. We know that everything that happens to us is a result of reward and punishment, and the promises of Hashem are only kept when they are earned.

On the one hand he was nervous whether or not he deserved Hashem's blessing. On the other hand he was nervous that his fear may come from a lack of bitochon. Maybe by being afraid of Eisov, he was empowering him. The Beis Halevi, in his essay on bitochon, gives the following rule. When I confront people and I believe they have independent power over me, then this itself gives them power. But if

I confront them and I understand that Hashem is running the world and it is up to Hashem to give them power over me, then I remain in Hashem's hands. This is because the very fact that a person believes other people have independent control over him shows a serious lack of bitochon. The punishment for such a failure is Hashem giving that person power over him. Bitochon means to understand that Hashem is running the world according to His infinite calculations of reward and punishment, etc.

Rabbeinu Avrohom ben HoRambam tells us the only time a person can rely that Hashem will protect him above the laws of nature, is when 1) he is a novi, and 2) Hashem tells him in advance that he will be protected above the laws of nature. This is why Eliyahu Hanovi didn't need to provide food for himself and could rely on ravens to miraculously bring him food. Other times, when he is about to confront Achov, Eliyahu Hanovi is afraid he will be killed. This is because he wasn't assured of his safety in advance by Hashem. If something requires going above the laws of nature, one can't simply rely on his bitochon that Hashem will change natural law for him.

Yaakov Ovinu made a deal with Lovon. He wanted to make his parnossoh by breeding his white sheep using peeled branches, etc. Some people want to claim the Torah is teaching us something about genetics and how traits are inherited. But the pesukim tell us that it didn't actually work the way he planned! Yaakov made the hishtadlus that he thought was required. But Hashem showed him in a dream that in reality, all the hishtadlus he made in producing speckled sheep had nothing to do with really happened. Hashem showed him that in the middle of the night, malochim brought 10,000 speckled male sheep over from Lovon to impregnate Yaakov's white sheep. It wasn't the branches affecting the genes at all.

But the point is that Yaakov didn't sit back and wait for Hashem to take care of his parnossoh for him. He did his hishtadlus, and when it turned out that it failed, Hashem intervened to make things happen above nature. Hashem made this miracle for Yaakov Ovinu specifically.

Yosef in Egypt is faced with many challenges in life. But he has Hashem's name on his lips constantly. He felt Hashem guiding his direction in life at every step. Even though he sincerely believed that he received a nevuoh in a dream that he will rule over his brothers, he still knew he has to deserve it in order to allow it to happen. He can't just give in to temptation and rely on Hashem to fulfil the nevuoh anyway. He viewed everything that was happening as part of hashgocho protis.

At the end of the story, the brothers are very anxious that Yosef is now in a position of power where he can take revenge on them for what they did to him. But Yosef reassures them – he won't take revenge on them because he sincerely believes Hashem's hashgocho made everything turn out this way. Our being in Egypt was all part of Hashem's plan.

We need the capacity to balance the demand to function within nature and do hishtadlus, while still realizing at the same time that the result of our hishtadlus is up to Hashem with His calculation of reward and punishment. It is up to Hashem to decide how and when things will happen. This is what hashgocho and emunoh and bitochon is all about. Hashgocho protis means to see the hand of Hashem in our lives – guiding us and arranging certain events and demanding we earn what we get.

The brothers came down to Egypt to get food. But when in Egypt, they tried to find Yosef. Of course, they think they are looking for a Hebrew

slave called Yosef, and of course, they can't find him. Instead, they find themselves standing in front of the effective ruler of Egypt. They cannot imagine in a million years that this is really their brother! He's supposed to be a slave!

Yosef accused them of being spies, and to verify their story he took Shimon prisoner and demanded that they bring their youngest brother down to him. When the brothers were among themselves, they started to make a cheshbon hanefesh. They were also ma'aminim in Hashem's hashgocho protis. They looked for the middoh k'negged middoh in this trouble that is happening to Shimon. They knew it has to be justified somehow. So they decided they must be deserving this harsh treatment because of how they treated Yosef so harshly when they sold him.

But notice that they didn't regret selling Yosef in the first place. That couldn't be wrong because when they decided to condemn Yosef, they had made a beis din and paskened he was guilty. They joined Hashem Himself in their minyan! This punishment couldn't be for that! We are only being punished for not being sufficiently sensitive to Yosef's pain when we sold him. Reuven objected and said we were wrong for condemning Yosef in the first place.

But all the brothers agreed on the basic assumption that if this is happening, there must be an aveiroh here and they need to do teshuvoh. They knew there is hashgocho protis over the world, and whenever there is trouble, it demands a cheshbon hanefesh.

The gemara says that whenever troubles come upon a person, you need to see it as a clear message that something is wrong and you need to make a cheshbon hanefesh to find it and correct it. This is hashgocho protis.

Hashem manages the world within nature, and occasionally works outside nature for specific people. We don't always know what is really causing the events we see. Yaakov thought he was an expert in genetics and figured out a way for white sheep to give birth to speckled offspring without speckled males. Hashem had to intervene with a miracle in order to save Yaakov from his mistake. It would have been a hidden miracle until Hashem told him about it. Sometimes Hashem uses an open miracle and sometimes it is hidden, and sometimes Hashem manipulates nature and stays totally within nature.

The meforshim talk about the battle of the sons of Matisyahu fighting off the Greek armies – was it a series of miracles or not? Was it completely natural? The point is we need to look at what is going on behind the scenes and see Hashem's hand orchestrating all the events. Once they saw the open miracle of the oil of the menorah, they realized that everything was really miraculous. Hashem was behind the military victory over the Greeks as well.

Hashem first works through nature. When that doesn't work, He changes nature in a hidden way. Very rarely does Hashem operate with open miracles. The generation first has to be worthy. It is questionable if most Orthodox Jews living today would be willing to accept that open miracles are possible – even after they see one! They would instinctively start analyzing it scientifically and try to explain it away as natural. Hashem doesn't speak to just anyone directly. You have to be on a certain madreigoh.

When Yosef is brought before Pharaoh, and Pharaoh tells him he

expects Yosef to interpret his dreams, Yosef immediately responded that he himself has no special powers of interpreting dreams. It only comes from Hashem – and He will decide whether He wants the dream interpreted by Yosef or not. After Yosef finished the interpretation, he tells Pharaoh that this dream came from Hashem to tell him about future events. I am just a messenger who is carrying Hashem's message to you. He never takes credit for anything. He doesn't show off his talents or promote himself.

Because of this, Yosef caused Pharaoh to recognize that Hashem is directing everything that is going on. This is a tremendous Kiddush Hashem. Only because Yosef himself deeply believed in Hashem's hashgocho and saw that He was running Yosef's entire life, was he capable of impressing this belief on Pharaoh who worshipped idols his whole life. This is how people are effective in kiruv.

Noach openly preached that his society needs to do teshuvoh while building a massive teivoh for 120 years – and not one person listened! Everyone besides his family was killed! Why was Noach such a failure? There are two reasons for this, and both are true. One reason is that Chazal tell us that Noach lacked complete conviction that a mabul was really coming. If you yourself aren't really convinced of the truth, you aren't going to be able to convince others of the truth either.

A second reason is that when Hashem told Avrohom Ovinu that He is going to destroy Sdom, Avrohom argues that there has to be tzaddikim in Sdom and it can't be destroyed. When Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu that He is going to wipe out Klal Yisroel, Moshe immediately argued that it can't be done. But when Hashem tells Noach that He is bringing a mabul to destroy the world in 120 years – no reaction. Noach just starts building the teivoh to save his own family. He didn't believe that his generation was even worthy of being saved. If you don't care about someone and you don't communicate a deep belief in their ability to change, you won't be able to change him.

Yosef believed deeply that everything that happens to him comes from Hashem. He saw the hand of Hashem guiding him the entire way. Everyone has to see their lives as being guided by Hashem – not just Yosef hatzaddik. Because he had such a sincere conviction in Hashem's hashgocho, he was able to pierce through Pharaoh's whole worldview of avodo zoro and get him to admit that Hashem runs the world.

The whole story of Yosef is a lesson in hashgocho protis. Every person in his personal life has to know Hashem is running the course of his life on an ongoing basis. It is not a pre-determined course. It is a result of reward and punishment.

As much as Yosef recognized Hashem's hashgocho in his life, the brothers also recognized it in their lives. The moment they ran into trouble with Yosef, they made a cheshbon hanefesh and realized that Hashem was acting with them measure for measure to punish them for what they did to Yosef all those years ago. Nothing bad or good would happen to them unless they deserved it. They didn't say it wasn't fair or blame it on anyone else but themselves. Either it was a lack of middos and sensitivity, or it was the decision to sell him.

Everyone in the parsha is listening to the messages Hashem is sending them through what happens to them. They react accordingly by making cheshbonos to change. This reaction is the result of a deep awareness that Hashem