

Many people ask: Why doesn't the Chumash provide a more detailed account of the lives of the Ovos? Surely Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov lived extraordinary lives, much more must have happened to them than the few incidents and short narratives recorded in the Torah!

The answer is found in the phrase of Chazal: "Maaseh Ovos simon labonim". We find only those stories which set into motion a pattern for the future of Klal Yisroel and Jewish history. The Ovos lived their lives on two levels. One level was the life of individuals, going about their own private, great lives. The other level they lived on was as founders of Hashem's chosen nation, fulfilling the bigger masterplan of the goal of creation.

Yaakov is the only one of the Ovos who shows us how to survive spiritually in golus, amongst various destructive and corrupting influences. We learned last week that the way he accomplished this was by closing off the rest of the world and immersing himself in learning Torah for 14 years. He survived the falsehood of Lovon with absolute honesty, immediately confronted Eisov, and emerged complete and unaffected. He then spent the last 17 years of his life in Egypt, preparing Klal Yisroel to survive the golus of Egypt.

The whole story that follows now with Yaakov, and Yosef and his brothers, is bizarre. If it would just be a dramatic story of betrayal and intrigue about members of an ordinary family, it wouldn't be in the Torah, taking up a full quarter of Sefer Bereishis. This chain of events are happening to Yaakov Ovinu and the Shivtei Koh—the founders of Klal Yisroel. Each link in this chain is critical for our history and it had to happen this way in particular.

Chazal tell us that one way or another, Yaakov and his family must go into golus. It was a Divine decree foretold to Avrohom Ovinu at the Bris Bein Habesorim. The Midrash says that Yaakov could have gone down to Egypt in chains and in captivity. Hashem arranged things to make sure that Yosef preceded Yaakov to Egypt and this was what compelled the family to go into golus. But now it was under the best possible circumstances. Chazal say the Shechinoh went down with Yaakov.

Yaakov Ovinu was there for 17 years, teaching us how to survive the nisyonos of golus. These are all deep lessons to be learned, to guide us for our national survival in golus.

The story begins with Yosef and his dreams. He seems to have delusions of grandeur—that he will rule over his brothers—and naturally, his brothers resent him for it and see him as a threat. We will get back to this point in the future.

Yaakov summons Yosef to Chevron and dispatches him to Shechem to seek out his brothers. The posuk describes Chevron as a valley. But it is on a hill! Chazal explain that the decision to send Yosef to find his brothers came from the Bris Bein Babesorim Hashem made with Avrohom - who is buried in Chevron. This was the first step in the series of events which will bring Klal Yisroel to the slavery of Egypt. Yaakov thought he was doing something mundane, but really, it was a part of Hashem's deep plan.

Yosef can't find his brothers in Shechem and meets a man who shows him the way. The Torah refers to this man three times. Chazal explain that Yosef kept getting lost and was wandering around grazing fields. Ramban says something very important at this juncture. Ramban remarks that Yosef at this point had many reasons to turn around and go back to Yaakov. The last thing Yosef wanted to do was confront his

brothers who he knew resented him. But Yosef was a devoted son and he would not disappoint his father.

Hashem had a decree that He needed fulfilled. He wanted to make sure that Yosef would be sold into slavery in Egypt. There is a divine plan. Everything is arranged—Yaakov gives the command to send Yosef, the Yishmoelim are stopping off at Dosan on their way to Egypt. Yosef is supposed to be there. But Yosef gets lost along the way. He is about to turn back home. But he is a devoted son. So Hashem sends this ish who points him in the right direction.

This is how the hashgocho operates in the world. You can think you are using your own free will to cause things to happen in the world. But Hashem is subtly using your free will to make sure things turn out according to Hashem's masterplan. This is exactly what Yosef says to his brothers towards the end of Parshas Vayechi. He reassures them that he harbors no ill-will towards them after all they did to him. The brothers were sure that Yosef would exact revenge upon Yaakov's death. They took Yosef as an ordinary human being with normal gripes and grudges. But Yosef tells them what he's been telling everyone around him his whole life. He is just a tool and you are just a tool.

"We are all tools in Hashem's hands, going through nisyonos and making decisions, thinking we are causing things to happen. Hashem wanted me to be sold into slavery and wind up in Egypt. He wanted me to work for Potiphar and wind up in jail with the sar hamashkim. He gave me the power to interpret the dreams and rise to power in order to bring Yaakov down to Egypt. If I ended up here ruling Egypt it is only because Hashem wanted me in this position to take care of Klal Yisroel. He just used your bad middos so that it would end up the way He wanted. So I can have nothing against you, personally."

This is what the Ramban says: The gezeirah of Hashem will always be fulfilled, come what may. The Egypt-bound caravan is coming to where the brothers are, and Yosef has to rendezvous with them in one way or another.

These are not just stories about people's petty jealousies. Hashem has a masterplan for the future of Klal Yisroel. He puts people in the right place at the right time to carry out His plan using their free will.

Hashem put Yosef in the nisayon with Potiphar's wife because He knew Yosef had the power to stand up to it. If he would have chosen differently and failed the nisayon, Hashem would have arranged another way for Yaakov to come down to Egypt. If Yosef would prove himself by passing the nisayon, he would be the chosen tool to bring Yaakov down. The Shevotim had free will. Had they decided not to sell him, Hashem would have orchestrated other means to bring Yosef down. He used the Shevotim's bad middos and Yosef's tzidkus to bring about His plan. Yosef got lost—he could have blamed the hashgocho of Hashem to excuse himself from meeting his brothers. But Hashem knew whom He was dealing with. Yosef would not twist the hashgocho to make things more convenient for him personally. Hashem uses each person's potential and capacities to stand up to nisyonos, and brings human history to its ultimate goals.

Look at the rise and fall of Bavel. The Netziv points out in his essay on Anti-Semitism, that when you look at Sifrei Nevi'im, Ashur is really the dominant power in the Ancient world. Bavel emerges suddenly to destroy the Beis Hamikdash and bring Klal Yisroel into golus, and disappears suddenly.

The Greek empire emerged suddenly in order to bring about the decline of avodo zoro throughout the world. Alexander the Great, a disciple of Aristotle, takes over Greece and was able to spread Greek culture and Greek thought to all of Western civilization. Where his conquest ended—in India—so did his influence. From there eastward, avodo zoro still dominates to this day. Hashem gave Klal Yisroel an opportunity to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of avodo zoro and to spread the ideas of the Torah throughout the world. But Klal Yisroel failed the test and got lured into Greek culture—the very tool Hashem was using to eliminate avodo zoro.

Hashem uses the choices and personalities of various people in history to bring about the ends that He desires. It depends on our free will to meet the challenge and bring about the goals of Hashem in the best possible way. It doesn't mean that Nevuchadnezer, Titus, and Hitler didn't have bechiroh. Hashem gave them an opportunity to actualize their evil. Historians have shown that there were many attempts on Hitler's life, but they all went wrong at the last moment. Hashem wanted to give him the chance to actualize his evil with his own free will without outside interference.

The brothers thought Yosef would take revenge on him for selling him. Yosef says—this is how Hashem arranged to have me become the ruler of Egypt and save Klal Yisroel from famine! Through your decision to

sell me! I have no complaints about Hashem's using your bad middos for His plans for Klal Yisroel. That is between you and Hashem. This is a very deep expression of emunoh—of accepting the will of Hashem and accepting that other people acting against me are merely a tool in His hands.

Something happens to a person and people wonder why it is happening. We need to accept it—sometimes we can figure out why on the spot, and sometimes we have to wait some time until it makes sense. But Hashem has a gezeirah and it will ultimately happen. How it happens is up to us. The only question is how I will use my free will to be a tool for Hashem's hashgocho? What positive role can I play in the masterplan and bring out my potential? That is the challenge.

The Chumash speaks to every Jew on their level of understanding. From the youngest child in nursery to the advanced talmid chochom, the infinite chochmoh of Hashem found a way to imbue these seemingly simple stories with infinite depth and powerful messages. The story of Yosef and his brothers challenges us to look at the world and look at ourselves in a different light. We aren't just individuals going about our pre-programmed routine. We are agents of Hashem's hashgocho, confronting nisyonos designed to bring about His masterplan for the world, while simultaneously using our free will to maximize our own potential.