

# LONELINESS

**Topic:** Joseph in Egypt

## THE SALE OF JOSEPH.

(לז:כד) וַיִּסְתַּחֲפוּ וַיִּשְׁלְכוּ אֹתוֹ הַבְּרָה וְהַבּוֹר רַק אֵין בּוֹ מַיִם:

1) What is repetitive about this passuk?

See what Rashi explains:

רש"י - ממשמע שנאמר: **והבור רק** יודע אני שאין בו מים, מה תלמוד לומר **אין בו מים**? מים אין בו, אבל נחשים ועקרבים יש בו.

2) How does Rashi (quoting the Midrash) explain the extra words in the passuk?

3) Thinking Question: Why did Chazal and Rashi feel the need to share that with us?

→ See 37:25 and Rashi's comments

(לז:כה) וַיָּשׁוּבוּ לְאֶכְלֵ-לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיִּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אֲרֻחַת יִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים בָּאָה מִגְּלָעַד וּגְמַלְיָהִם נֹשְׂאִים נְכֹאֵת וְצָרִי וְלֹט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרַיִם:

וגמליהם נושאים וגוי - למה פירסם הכתוב את משאם, להודיע מתן שכרו של לדיק שאין דרכן של ערביים לשאת אלא נפט ועטרו, ולזה נזדמנו בשמים שלא יזוק מריח רע.

4) What question is Rashi asking in וגמליהם נושאים?

5) How does he answer the question?

6) Thinking Question: Why should something so small matter when Joseph's whole life is actively falling apart!?

- 7) Read what Rabbi Sacks says about Happiness vs. Joy. How does that inform the significance of Joseph's "treat" on the Midianite caravan?

*"Happiness is about a lifetime, but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy." (studies in Spirituality, (Koren, 2021), p. 258.)*

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### THINK, PAIR, SHARE

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*With your chavruta, please discuss a time when something **bad** happened, but there was still a small positive amid the terrible experience.*

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### JOSEPH IN POTIFAR'S HOUSE (פרק לט)

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See these פסוקים about Joseph in Potifar's house:

(ב) וַיְהִי יָקוֹק אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מְצָלִים וַיְהִי בְּבַיִת אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרָיִם:

- 8) Thinking Question: What is the connection between the first half of the פסוק and the second half?

(ג) וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי יָקוֹק אֶתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה יָקוֹק מְצָלִים בְּנֶדוּ:

רש"י: כי י"י אתו - שם שמים שגור בפיו.

- 9) With the 2<sup>nd</sup> passuk in mind, what is the connection between Joseph's connection to Hashem and his success?

(ד) וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּשְׁרֵת אֹתוֹ וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל־בַּיִתוֹ וְכָל־יִשְׁלֹוֹ נָתַן בְּנֶדוּ:

(ה) וַיְהִי מֵאֵז הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבַיִתוֹ וְעַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹוֹ וַיִּבְרָךְ יָקוֹק אֶת־בַּיִת הַמִּצְרָיִם בְּגַלְל יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בְרַפְתּוֹ יָקוֹק בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹוֹ בְּבַיִת וּבִשְׂדֵה:

10) What does *ויברך ה את בית מצרי* mean?

11) Thinking Question: Do you think Joseph was happy in Potifar's house? Is it even possible for him to be happy?

12) See Rabbi Sacks and consider what he might say...

*"Happiness, or blessedness – the terms are almost interchangeable – means living in accord with the word and will of God, which is how the Bible construes the moral life. It means doing well, living in harmony with the fundamental values embedded in the universe by its Creator." (Morality (Basic Books, 2020), p. 103.)*

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### MAINTAINING JOY

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13) What can we do when we're in difficult life situations in order to still find happiness?

14) Despite his challenges, what does Joseph consistently do while locked in an Egyptian prison?

See מ:ו-ז

וַיָּבֹא אֲלֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף בְּבִקְרוֹ וַיִּרְא אֹתָם וְהֵנָּם זָעִפִּים: וַיִּשְׂאֵל אֶת-סְרִיסֵי פְרַעֲה אֲשֶׁר אֶתּוֹ בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית אֲדֹנָיו לֵאמֹר מִדּוּעַ פְּגִיכֶם רְעִים הַיּוֹם:

➔ *To appreciate Joseph's method for continued happiness despite his hardships, see one of my favorite stories from Rabbi Sacks in a little book called Celebrating Life (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 14-15*

Kohelet forgot something that I discovered by chance. Many years ago I went to visit one of the great religious leaders of the twentieth century, the Lubvitcher Rebbe. As I sat

waiting to see him, I began talking to some of his followers. Among other things, they told me this story.

Someone had written to the Rebbe in a state of deep depression. The letter went something like this. 'I would like the Rebbe's help. I wake up each day sad and apprehensive. I can't concentrate. I find it hard to pray. I keep the commandments, but I find no spiritual satisfaction. I go to synagogue but I feel alone. I begin to wonder what life is about. I need help.'

The Rebbe wrote a brilliant reply that did not use a single word. All he did was this: he circled the first word of every sentence and sent the letter back. The disciple understood. The Rebbe had answered his question and set him on the path to recovery. The ringed word was 'I.'

It is hard to translate a biblical text into contemporary English and still preserve the nuances of the original, but Kohelet's problem was the same as that of the letter-writer above. 'I built for myself...I planted for myself...I acquired for myself...' In Hebrew the insistence on the first person singular is striking, reiterated, discordant. There is no other book in the Bible that uses the word 'I' so many times as so those first chapters of Ecclesiastes. Kohelet's problem was that he kept thinking about himself. It made him rich, powerful, a great success. As for happiness, though, he did not have a chance. Happiness lives in the realm called Not-I.

➔ **Rabbi Norman Lamm** spoke about these experiences as well. His drasha "*The Days of Smallness*"<sup>1</sup> he address how to carry on through our toughest and least inspired days<sup>2</sup>. Here is a small excerpt:

There are days - nay, years and decades - when we are small: our capacities sorely limited, our spirit puny, our soul desiccated, our sensitivity parched, our hearts shrunken and dried up. Society pushes us towards a constant trivialization. We are immersed in petty details, lost in the shallowness of little problems, little people, and a little self. We abjure large visions, we deny depth, we ignore our own large capacity for experiencing lofty emotions, for an awareness of the transcendent, for a sense of the mysterious, for the daring to lift the veil of everyday life and catch a glimpse of the grandeur and majesty that lie just beyond the world of money and machines, shipping and shopping. And in these Yemei ha-katnut, when we cannot summon up the spirit from the resources within us, in these days too, we must not desist from prayer, from Torah, from Mitzvot. Just as kelal Yisrael accepted the Torah because God chose them and coerced them into it, so we as individuals, in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/988468/rabbi-norman-lamm/in-the-days-of-smallness/>

Or see the originally typewritten copy here:

<https://archives.yu.edu/gsd/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASHa7a3.dir/doc.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe in his Alei Shor Vol. 1 p.48 has a similar themed essay titled 'ימי האהבה, וימי השנאה', וימי הייאוש

"days of smallness," must force ourselves to do and observe, to live and obey, according to the word of God: as if we were big, inspired, uplifted.

There is no greater pleasure, says the Baal Shem Tov, than "davening" or studying Torah during the Yemei ha-gadlut, when we feel fully inspired, alert to the whisper of divinity all about us. But there is no greater reward, he continues, for practicing the disciplines of one's self that results in observing, in studying, in practicing Jewishness during the Yemei ha-katnut ! For the only way to arrive at gadlut -greatness -is to live responsibly and respectfully through the periods of Katnut - smallness. Those who are defeated by triviality and pettiness cannot hope to succeed to greatness and eminence. Only he who can "daven Minchah" in his office, despite a crowded calendar and a mind cluttered with commonplaces, can hope, some day, to experience true gadlut, an exquisite aliyat neshamah - the soaring of the soul and ascension of the spirit - during a Neilah service or other very special occasion. Only a person who studies Torah and attends classes regularly despite an inner inertia will some day experience the unique, full, and breathless joy in perceiving new intellectual horizons and spiritual vistas in Torah itself. For Torah is not primarily a matter of human moods; it is primarily a matter of the divine will. If we respond to that will when we are caught up in the moods of mediocrity, in Yemei ha-Katnut, then it will be His will to grant us a loftier, more sublime, and more exalted experience of gadlut.

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#### THE HARSH REALITY

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➔ *Even though we have a path to find happiness in the darkest of places, at times sadness and loneliness find all of us... even some of our greatest rabbis:*

Something similar can be traced in modern times. Rav Kook, when he arrived in Israel, wrote, "There is no one, young or old, with whom I can share my thoughts, who is able to comprehend my viewpoint, and this wearies me greatly."

Even more candid was the late Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik. Near the beginning of his famous essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*, he writes, starkly: "I am lonely." He continues, "I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the psalmist, 'My father and my mother have forsaken me,' ring quite often in my ears like the plaintive cooing of the turtledove." This is extraordinary language.

At times of loneliness, I have found great solace in these passages. They told me I was not alone in feeling alone. Other people had been here before me.

"Loneliness and Faith," *Covenant and Conversation, Beha'alotecha*, 5780.<sup>3</sup>

15) Thinking Question: When have you felt lonely? What have you done to deal with that feeling?

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotecha/loneliness-and-faith/>