

*Words of comfort*¹

ועתה אל-תעצבו ואל-יחר בעיניכם כי-מכרתם אתי הנה כי למחיה שלחני אלקים לפניכם

Now, don't be upset or feel guilty² that you sold me, since G-d sent me [to Egypt] before you as a salvation [from the famine]³

After Yosef revealed to his brothers that not only was he alive, but he had become the viceroy in Egypt, they were taken aback. They couldn't find the words respond. Yosef sensed they felt guilty for selling him as a slave twenty-two years earlier. To make them feel more at ease during this long-awaited reunion, he offered them words of comfort. In reality, their act of selling him was for a blessing. The known world had been plagued by a famine for already two years. Only Egypt had food to survive, as Yosef had made the necessary preparations after he properly interpreted Pharaoh's prophetic dream. He succeeded in securing enough food for the nation to last through the seven year-long famine. Yaakov and his family had managed to survive this long with their savings, but they had run out of food. Only because Yosef was sent to Egypt was there salvation from starvation. Therefore, the brothers shouldn't feel guilty for selling him. However, at further inspection these words of comfort seem to be superficial.

The *gemarra* relates⁴ that the verse⁵ which says, "The ways of Hashem are straight; righteous people walk in them and transgressors stumble in them" refers to Lot and his two daughters. After the city of Sedom was destroyed, Lot and his two daughters were the sole survivors⁶. His daughters thought they were the only human beings left on Earth, and felt it was their duty to repopulate the world⁷. Their intentions were for the sake of Heaven; therefore, they are considered to have walked in the ways of Hashem. However, Lot's intentions were to fulfill his lusts. How do we know this? We know from earlier⁸ that Lot was a lustful man, as that was his motivation to move the city of Sedom⁹. Consequently, *Chazal* tell us we can assume that is what his intentions were here too¹⁰. Therefore, while Lot and his daughters were involved in the same act, regarding him he is considered a transgressor stumbling in the ways of Hashem. According to this, we should be able to say the same thing regarding Yaakov's sons selling Yosef. Albeit their act fulfilled the Divine plan, Yosef was able to save his family from the famine, however this wasn't their intention. The brothers didn't know this would end up happening; they simply intended to sell him as a slave. However, we can't consider the sons of Yaakov to be sinners. There must be some resolution to this problem.

To answer this, we must first investigate this idea that a good act with bad intentions makes a person considered a transgressor who stumbles in the ways of Hashem. We are taught¹¹ that if a poor person benefits from a coin that was unintentionally dropped, the one who dropped it is considered as if they had given it directly. We see that even though this person didn't intend to do any *mitzvah*, it's looked at

¹ Based on *Chasam Sofer* (*Toras Moshe Mahadura Tinyana*) to *Genesis* 45:5

² Translation from *The Living Torah* by *Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan*

³ *Genesis loc. cit.*

⁴ *Nazir* 23a

⁵ *Hosea* 14:10

⁶ *Genesis* 19:30

⁷ *ibid* verse 31 with *Rashi*, citing *Bereishis Rabbah* 51:8

⁸ *Genesis* 13:10

⁹ *Nazir loc. cit.*

¹⁰ *Rashi ad. loc.*

¹¹ *Sifrei Devarim* 283:6, paraphrased by *Rashi* to *Deuteronomy* 23:19

favorably. Why isn't Lot's unintended *mitzvah* considered meritorious? However, one could differentiate between the two. There, the person didn't intend to do anything; neither a *mitzvah* or a transgression. This is unlike Lot, whose main intention was to do commit a lewd act. Even though in the end because of him his daughters were able to accomplish a *mitzvah*, he's looked at like a transgressor. However, we do see another case where a person intended to commit a sin, and it's looked at favorably. King David and the story with Bas-Sheva¹² is on the surface sketchy, yet *Chazal* say¹³ that he wasn't suitable for such a sin. Rather, it was Divinely engineered to teach the masses the power of repentance. Seemingly David did not have this in mind when he was with Bas-Sheva. We should then say the same with Lot. Despite his bad intentions, it was engineered that a *mitzvah* would be fulfilled through him.

We therefore need to make the following distinction: the conclusion of the story should prove its beginning. The intimacy between Lot and his daughters bore them the nations of Amon and Moav¹⁴. Regarding them, the prophet says¹⁵: "their pregnancies¹⁶ did not follow their thoughts¹⁷". Since in the end their children are considered illegitimate¹⁸, we would then have to say that this act was not Divinely influenced. All we have then is his bad intentions, despite the *mitzvah* that he caused. Therefore, he is called a transgressor. However, by Bas-Sheva¹⁹, the result of that relationship produced King Shlomo²⁰ and began the lineage of Moshiach. This great conclusion shows that the beginning of their relationship was Divinely engineered. It was done to teach the masses how to repent.

This then was the comfort that Yosef offered his brothers when he saw that they looked guilty and depressed. There already was a decree from Heaven that the Jews should be exiled to Egypt²¹. Therefore, *Chazal* teach us²² that Yaakov really should have been dragged to Egypt in chains, as the common method of enforcing exile is through chains²³. However, Yaakov's merits saved him from this debasement. Nevertheless, this severity of exile somehow had to be fulfilled²⁴. It ended up being fulfilled through Yosef being sold to Egypt as a slave²⁵. When he told his brothers not to worry about selling him, he meant that they weren't suitable for such a transgression. Rather, it was Divinely orchestrated to occur, so this severity of exile would be fulfilled in some way. The proof of this is that Yosef was placed in a position of power, second in command to Pharaoh. Through this he was not only able to provide for his family, but ensure that his father was brought to Egypt with dignity and honor.

Good Shabbos.

¹² II Samuel Chapter 11

¹³ Avodah Zarah 4b. See Parsha Ponders to Ki Sisa 5777 (<http://parshaponders.com/ki-sisa-5777>) for more on this topic

¹⁴ Genesis 19:37,38

¹⁵ Isaiah 16:6

¹⁶ Rashi *ad. loc.*

¹⁷ Malbim *ad. loc.*

¹⁸ The Chasam Sofer goes as far as to say they are *mamzerim*, which makes sense since it was an incestuous relationship. However, this doesn't fit well with the lineage of King David coming from Moav

¹⁹ The original text says Tamar, but this must be a typo

²⁰ Not from that original act but from their eventual marriage

²¹ Genesis 15:13

²² Shabbos 89b

²³ Rashi to Shabbos *loc. cit.*

²⁴ To satisfy Hashem's *middas hadin*, attribute of Justice

²⁵ This is alluded to by Yosef saying, "Elokim sent me to Egypt", which refers to Hashem's *middas hadin*