



The Parsha in Practice

I'm Hungry. Are You?

After Yosef's family arrives and settles in Egypt, the famine increases in severity and now the Egyptians need Yosef's help as well. Yosef develops a plan that has the Egyptians buying their food first with money, then livestock, and then their land itself. This economical re-engineering was clearly in the best interests of the Egyptian government, and additionally, as the pasuk describes (47:25), the Egyptians seem grateful to have survived the famine.



The economic moves make sense, but what Yosef does next is surprising: **וְאֶת־הָעַם הָעֵבִיר אֶת־וְעַד־קֶצֶהוּ:**

And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other.

Yosef moves the population around. Why? What end did this serve? Rashi explains that in order to reinforce the idea that they had given up their land to pay for their food, it was necessary to have everyone move to new properties. Rashi adds that Yosef's true motivation was to make his family, recent foreign refugees attempting to navigate a new land, more comfortable. Everyone was now a refugee from somewhere. No one was comfortable.

The Kli Yakar questions this motive. He wonders how Yosef could have done something of such great magnitude simply for his small, 70-member family. To re-jigger all of Egypt so they could be more comfortable among the natives? Seems like a bit much.

Kli Yakar explains that Yosef's intent was to sensitize and educate the entire nation in empathy towards those who are different and to "geirim," strangers, of all kinds. The Torah instructs us that "And you must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." We as a people should be inclined towards stranger-empathy because of our experiences having once been that stranger. So too, Yosef wanted the Egyptians to understand - personally - what it means to feel vulnerable so that they could behave better towards others who were at-risk. Yes, Kli Yakar adds, Yosef's family was a vulnerable population, but there would inevitably be many more such people and this displacement would serve to teach the Egyptians how to better understand and treat those populations as well. To Yosef, this was not only an economic project, but a project devoted to teaching future Egyptian generations the value of "loving the stranger."

I write this as my stomach grumbles on Asara b'Tevet and am reminded of one of the great curiosities of this and most fast days: why don't we read a Haftarah at Shacharit, and only wait till Mincha? Tosfot answers (Megila 21a) that the goal of the fast day is to give Tzedaka (See Berachot 7b), and we read in the Haftarah (Isaiah 56) that **כֹּה אָמַר ה' שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט וְעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה** - *"Thus said the LORD: Observe what is right and do what is just."*

"Do Tzedakah!" is one of the themes of this Haftara and so Tosfot says that we should wait to read this section until later in the day after the Tzedakah has been given.

I've always thought that there is another element to explain why we speak of - and hopefully give - Tzedakah later in the day when we are fasting. Put simply, because we are hungry. Our stomach rarely growls as it does late in the day on fast days and it is remarkable how quickly we forget that feeling after we've taken a few bites when the fast concludes. Perhaps the best time to speak of Tzedakah for the needy is late in the day, because that when we can understand what it means to be hungry and are needy ourselves.

No one should be faced with struggle just so they can understand those who are, but perhaps in those (hopefully) infrequent times that we are going through difficulty, we should train ourselves to consider the fact that for some, life is a consistent struggle. I saw an [article in Psychology Today](#) that discussed how experiencing hardship causes a person to have greater compassion and even raises their physiological indicators of empathy for others. It's not all bad, and as a matter of fact, your strain now can be for the benefit of others later.

There is no lack of struggle these days. There are illnesses, anxiety and mental health concerns, economic and employment challenges, substance abuses, and sholom bayit conflicts just to name a Covid-inspired few. There is plenty to be concerned with, and it is very easy to (justifiably) worry about ourselves and how we and our families will fare through this all. In spite of that, our tradition is clear that these moments need to teach us empathy for other as well. How can we help others who are waging the battles we have just endured? How can we look out for them, now that we've realized the importance of looking out for ourselves? Those are the questions we must answer.

Nowadays, a random sneeze gets a sideways look and a quick symptoms quiz. We've replaced the goodwill and mutual concern of a "bless you!" with our own self-interest. It's turned from a "Bless **you**," to a "Bless **me**!" Can't we find a way to do both?

I truly hope that through - and due to - the difficulties we currently face, we can see, understand, and elevate others. When we are displaced and turn that into concern for strangers or when we are hungry and turn that into tzedakah to make sure that others are not, that's a time that the verse above refers to as: **כִּי־קִרְוָה יְשׁוּעָתִי לְבוֹא וְצִדְקָתִי לְהַגְלוֹת**, *"For soon My salvation shall come, and my deliverance be revealed."* May that happen very soon.

Shabbat Shalom,

Shmuel Ismach