

"And he saw the wagons that Yosef sent"

Yosef Indicated to Yaakov that He Had Ascertained the Secret of the Circle of Life

In this week's parsha, parshas Vayigash, we read the following (Bereishis 45, 25-27): **"וַיַּעַל מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶל יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם, וַיִּגִּידוּ לּוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי וְכִי הוּא מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, וַיַּפֵּג לָבוֹ כִּי לֹא הָאִמִּין לָהֶם, וַיִּדְּבְרוּ אֵלָיו אֵת כָּל דְּבָרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶם, וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֲגֻלּוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׁאת אוֹתוֹ וְתַחֲי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם."** **"They went up from Egypt, and came to the Land of Canaan, to Yaakov their father. And they told him, saying, 'Yosef is still alive' and that he is ruler over the entire land of Egypt; but his (Yaakov's) heart stood still, for he did not believe them. And they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him; then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived."**

The narrative informs us that initially Yaakov did not believe that Yosef was alive and that he ruled in Mitzrayim, until they related to him Yosef's message. In addition, he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent him. Only then did he believe them and his spirit was uplifted. We must endeavor to explain what precisely was the message that Yosef instructed his brothers to deliver to Yaakov? Additionally, what was so special about those wagons that Yosef sent Yaakov that they succeeded in convincing Yaakov that Yosef was still alive and ruling in Mitzrayim, to the point that: **"The spirit of their father Yaakov was revived"**?

An explanation to these inquiries is provided for us by Yisrael's teacher and foremost commentary, Rashi, z"l, (ibid. 27), based on the Midrash (B.R. 94, 3): **"את כל דברי יוסף, סימן מסר להם במה: זהו שנאמר וירא את העגלות אשר היה עוסק כשפירש ממנו, בפרשת עגלה ערופה, ולא נאמר אשר שלח פרעה"** **—Yosef gave his brothers a sign related to the topic he was studying when he departed from his father—the passage of "eglah arufah." And this is why it says: "And he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent," and it does not say: "that Pharaoh had sent."**

Amazing Insights from the Shem MiShmuel Regarding the Cycle of Life

In this essay, we wish to delight in the subject of the wagons which Yosef sent Yaakov—which convinced him that his son was

still alive and thriving in Mitzrayim—based on the enlightening teachings of the Shem MiShmuel (Vayigash 5681). They should provide encouragement and "chizuk" for every Jew, no matter what his current situation—whether he is at the height of success or, chas v'shalom, down on his luck. Let us examine what he writes:

"וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף לשאת אותו ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם. ונראה דבכל ענין העגלות רמז יש בדבר, כי אופני העגלה הסובבים, שעל שם זה נקרא עגלה על שם האופנים הסובבים בעיגול, מורים שזה שלמעלה בתכלית כרגע יורד למטה, וזה שבתכלית הירידה למטה משם מתחיל לעלות למעלה."

והוא רמז לאדם שאפילו במצבו שבתכלית הירידה אל יתיאש, אדרבה יתן אל לבו, אולי זוהי העת האחרונה של הירידה, ומעתה תתחיל העליה, וכן כשהוא בתכלית העליה יתן אל לבו, אולי הגיע לתכלית העליה, ומעתה יתחיל לרדת כי גלגל הוא שחוזר. וזהו הרמז ששלח יוסף ליעקב עגלות, שכל יצטער הרבה על ירידתו למצרים, שזו הירידה עליה תהיה לו, וזה לשאת אותו שהוא לשון עליה, ולא הזכיר לשון ירידה כלל.

וזה עצמו הוא שנזכר יעקב, שמאחר שיוסף שלח לו רמז כזה, בודאי לקח גם בחינה זו לעצמו, ואפילו כשהוא מושל בארץ מצרים ובתכלית העליה, לא סר מנגד עיניו לחשוב, אולי זהו הרגע האחרון של העליה ומעתה תתחיל הירידה, ועל כן לא גבה לבבו והוא שפל ברך כמו בירידה, ועל כן אין עוד רבותא יותר, שעמד בצדקתו עם כל גדולתו, מאם לא היה מושל. ובאמת כך היתה מדתו של יוסף, הוא יוסף הרועה את צאן אביו, הוא יוסף שנעשה מלך, שמדה זו הועילה לו בכל עתותי חייו, הן כשהיה בצרה ובתכלית והן בגדולתו בתכלית, ועל כן כשהכיר יעקב מענין העגלות כוונת יוסף, אז ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם."

The matter of the wagons represents an allusion. The wheels of the wagon are constantly turning; this is why a wagon is called an "agala," because its wheels rotate in a circle—"igul." They illustrate that that which is currently on top will inevitably go down; and that which is on the bottom will begin to rise upward from there.

This provides a vital lesson for every human being. Even if a person has reached rock bottom, he should not give up hope. On the contrary, he should consider that perhaps this is the end of his descent; from this moment forward, he will begin to ascend.

Similarly, when he is on top and doing well, he should consider the possibility that perhaps he has reached the summit of his success; and that from this moment forward, he will begin to plummet; because life is a cycle which repeats itself. This is the allusion inherent in the fact that Yosef sent Yaakov wagons. He didn't want his father to worry about descending to Mitzrayim. For, this descent would ultimately turn into an ascent. This is why the Torah emphasizes **לשאת אותו**—to transport him and elevate him. Yosef does not employ terminology related to descent at all.

Yaakov realized that Yosef applied this same message to his own situation. Even though he was currently a ruler in Mitzrayim and at the pinnacle of success, he did not forget for a moment that this could be the end of his success; very shortly, he could begin to fall. Hence, he did not become haughty; he remained humble, as if he was on the downward part of the cycle. This was the ultimate proof that he had remained righteous despite his enormous success. This in truth was Yosef's outstanding attribute. The same Yosef who shepherded his father's sheep was the very same Yosef who became king. This characteristic served Yosef well throughout his life—both when he was in dire straits and when he rose to greatness. Therefore, upon realizing the message Yosef was conveying by means of the wagons, Yaakov's spirit was revived: **"ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם"**.

It appears that the source for the Shem MiShmuel's insight concerning the cycle of life, which involves ups and downs, is the Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Devarim). In his own sacred way, he explains the practical significance of the language of the Mishnah in Sefer Yetzirah (1, 7): **"נעוץ סופן בתחילתן ותחילתן בסופן—their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end"**. He writes that life is a revolving cycle; what goes up must eventually come down. He explains that the **"end"** mentioned in the Mishnah refers to the very bottom; from there, there is no fear that a person will fall any further, for there is no further to go. This should provide a person with strength in his service of Hashem, even when he seems to be at a low point; he should never despair.

The Practical Significance of the Cycle of Life

Before delving further into the lofty concept of the cycle of life, which holds tremendous significance for every human being, it behooves us to reconcile a significant question related to this concept. A cornerstone of our emunah is that HKB"H wisely determines how much sustenance every creature requires and deserves for its own good. For, it is written (Tehillim 145, 16):

"פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון"—You open Your hand and you satisfy every living thing with its desire. Apropos this notion, we have learned in the Gemara (Beitzah 16a): **"כל מזונותיו של אדם—קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים—all of a person's meals are allotted to him from Rosh HaShanah to Yom HaKippurim."**

That being the case, it seems inconceivable that every person's individual cycle of life rotates like the wheels of a wagon—such that whenever he is at the bottom point of the cycle, he must necessarily begin to rise upward, seeing as he can drop no further. Similarly, when he is at the top of the cycle, he must necessarily begin revolving downward; seeing as it is not possible to rise any further. For, this raises the question Avraham Avinu poses to HKB"H (Bereishis 18, 25): **"השופט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפט"—Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?**

Thus, let us reconcile the viewpoints of the two tzaddikim cited previously, the Toldos Yaakov Yosef and the Shem MiShmuel. While it is evident that everything a person receives is determined by the blessed Almighty, nevertheless, He also established the cycle of life for a person's own good. Its aim is to prevent a highly successful person from falling prey to the yetzer—who instills in a person the misguided notion of: **"כוחי"—my own power and effort determine my success.** This false doctrine leads a person to abandon Hashem, as it is written (Devarim 8, 11):

"השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך, פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים תבנה וישבת, ובקרך וצאנך ירביון וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה, ורם בלבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים, ואמרת בלבך כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, וזכרת את ה' אלקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל."

"Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d, by not observing His commandments, . . . lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase—and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, you G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery, . . . And you may say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth."

Therefore, HKB"H saw that it was imperative to set this device in place. So, whenever a person senses that he has achieved the pinnacle of success and is in danger of thinking: **"כוחי ועוצם ידי"**, he should know beyond a shadow of a doubt

that like the wheel of a wagon, the cycle will eventually turn downward. In similar fashion, his fortune will also change for the worse. This will compel him to maintain his relationship with HKB"H and remember that He alone provides the strength and means to achieve success.

"How long will You conceal Your countenance from Me"

Continuing along this exalted path, let us explain why when a person has reached the nadir of his cycle, he must inevitably turn upwards and improve his life for the better. David HaMelech, Yisrael's sweet psalmist, says (Tehillim 13, 2): "עַד אֵנָה תַסְתִּיר אֶת פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי, עַד אֵנָה אֲשִׁית עֲצוֹת בִּנְפֹשִׁי" — **how long will You hide Your countenance from me? How long will I continue to seek counsel within my own spirit?** The great Rabbi of Ruzhin, zy"a, explains that David HaMelech wished to teach us a vital lesson regarding our emunah in Hashem. When a Jew wants to receive salvation from Hashem, he must first understand that he is totally helpless on his own; his salvation depends solely on Hashem.

Therefore, David HaMelech poses the following question to HKB"H: "עַד אֵנָה תַסְתִּיר אֶת פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי" -- **how long will You hide Your countenance from me?** He then proceeds to supply the definitive answer: "עַד אֵנָה אֲשִׁית עֲצוֹת בִּנְפֹשִׁי". So long as I delude myself into thinking that I am capable of resolving dilemmas with my own counsel and devices, the "hester panim"--divine concealment--will continue; however, as soon as I recognize with certainty that I in fact lack any such wisdom or ability, the "hester panim" will cease. This concludes the explanation of the Rabbi of Ruzhin, zy"a.

Thus, when a person is in such dire straits and has reached the absolute bottom of life's cycle, and it is quite clear that no human being can help him, he realizes that he can only turn toward Hashem. In the merit of his faith in Hashem, the cycle turns upwards in a positive direction. It turns out, therefore, that the upward or downward swing of the wheel of fortune depends entirely on Hashem, based on man's worthiness. When a person has reached the top of the cycle and is in danger of thinking: "כּוֹחִי וְעֹצֶם יָדִי עֲשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה", the wheel turns downwards. Conversely, when he has reached his nadir and realizes that he has nowhere else to turn but toward Hashem, the wheel immediately turns upwards.

This teaches us a vital concept regarding man's success. Even if a person has reached the pinnacle of the cycle, he must

make every imaginable effort to avoid falling into the yetzer's trap and adopting the misguided doctrine of: "כּוֹחִי וְעֹצֶם יָדִי". He must constantly remember that on his own, he would not have achieved that success; rather, it was HKB"H in His infinite mercy and kindness that provided him with the means to succeed. If he does so, his wheel of fortune does not necessarily need to turn downward; he can remain at the peak of his success. The same holds true for the converse, chas v'shalom. Let us consider a person who has reached rock bottom, the bottom of the cycle, and has lost all faith in his fellow human beings. Yet, rather than turning toward Hashem and praying for salvation from his lowly, dismal circumstances, he gives up hope and falls into deep despair. In this case, the wheel of fortune does not turn upwards; it remains at its low point.

When a Person Reaches the Top He Should Believe that He Deserves to Be on the Bottom

Let us spice up this notion a bit with a worthwhile suggestion. When HKB"H grants a person good fortune and greatness, what can he do to maintain this status and not revolve downwards? The great Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen teaches us in Tzidkas HaTzaddik (144):

"בְּמִקּוֹם שֶׁהוּא הַמּוֹחֲשֶׁבָה שֶׁל אָדָם שֶׁם הוּא כָּל הָאָדָם, כִּי עֵיקָר הָאָדָם אֵינוֹ הַגּוֹף רַק הַנֶּפֶשׁ, וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ אֵינָה דֹבֵר רַק כַּח הַמּוֹחֲשֶׁב וְמַהֲרָה וְהָרוּצָה שֶׁבָאָדָם, וּמִקּוֹם שֶׁמּוֹחֲשֶׁבָה אֲדוּקָה כִּךְ הוּא כָּל צוּרַת הָאָדָם בְּאוֹתוֹ עֵת."

A person's essence is his mind; for, his essence is not his physical body, but his soul; the soul is not tangible but merely a force within man that thinks, contemplates and desires. Thus, where his thought is focused at any given moment defines him.

His source comes from the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, zy"a, as presented by his loyal pupil in Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Chayei Sarah 3): "כְּשֶׁמֶקְשֶׁר וּמִדְבָּק מִחֲשֶׁבֶתוֹ בּוֹ יִתְבַּרְךְ, כָּל רִמ"ח אֵיבָרָיו וְשֵׁס"ה גִּידָיו גִּרְוִינֵן אַחֵר הַמּוֹחֲשֶׁבָה, וְכִמּוֹ שֶׁשִּׁמְעָתִי מִפֶּה מוֹרֵי בְּמִקּוֹם שֶׁחֹשֵׁב —הָאָדָם שֶׁם הוּא כּוֹלֵו" **when a person's thoughts are associated with the Almighty, all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews follow his thoughts; as I heard my teacher state explicitly: "Where a man's thoughts are is where he truly is."**

Accordingly, consider a person who succeeded in reaching the top of the cycle, but knows intellectually that he actually deserves to be at the bottom of the cycle—but that HKB"H showed him favor above and beyond what he deserved. By thinking that HKB"H is liable to turn the wheel downwards

at any moment, it is as if he is at the bottom of the cycle—in thought, at least. As we have learned, where a person's mind and thoughts are is where he truly is. Thus, it is as if he is down at the bottom even when he is actually at the top; and when he is at the bottom, he can only go upwards from there on the wheel of success.

It appears that we can apply this concept to interpret the passuk (Devarim 28, 13): **"והיית רק למעלה ולא תהיה למטה"—and you shall only be on top and you shall not be on the bottom.** Now, the Toldos Yaakov Yosef interpreted it as follows: **"והיית"—and you shall be on top," but not actually on top; thus, you will not need to go down.** Rashi (Pesachim 5a) teaches us: **"אכין ורקין מיעוטיין"—the terms "אך" and "רק" come to exclude.** Thus, when the passuk states: **"והיית רק למעלה"**—it is teaching us that when a person finds himself at the top of the wheel, he should maintain an attitude of humility and lowliness. This is the implication of the term **"רק"**—that you do not deserve to be on top. This will ensure: **"ולא תהיה למטה"**—that this person's wheel will not take a downward turn, seeing as he is already down at the bottom in thought and mind.

Now, we can begin to appreciate the Shem MiShmuel's explanation. By sending the wagons to Yaakov, Yosef was hinting to him that even while he was in Mitzrayim, he did not forget the secret of the cycle of life. Even when he was at the bottom of the wheel, when he was sold into slavery, he did not despair. Instead, he bolstered his faith in Hashem and trusted that Hashem would elevate him on life's wheel of fortune. Similarly, when he reached the pinnacle of the wheel as the King of Mitzrayim, he did not become haughty and take personal credit for his rise to greatness. Instead, he knew with certainty that everything depended on Hashem, and that he could very easily fall from grace. This then is the message conveyed by the passuk: **"And he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him; then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived."**

Life's Revolving Cycle

In this manner, let us learn another extremely valuable lesson. So, how does a person who HKB"H has elevated to the peak of success, to the top of the wheel, remain on top without continuing downward with the spin of the wheel? Let us introduce a fascinating passage related to the mitzvah of tzedakah described in the following pesukim in parshas Re'eh (Devarim 15, 10):

"נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו, כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלקיך בכל מעשיך ובכל משלך ירך, כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ, על כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתוח תפתח את ירך לאחיך לענייך ולאביונך בארצך"—

You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking. For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land; because of this I command you, saying: "Opening, you shall open your hand to your brother, to your poor one, and to your destitute in your land."

Regarding this subject, we have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 151b):

"כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ, תניא רבי אלעזר הקפר אומר, לעולם יבקש אדם רחמים על מדה זו, שאם הוא לא בא [לעניות] בא בנו, ואם בנו לא בא, בן בנו בא, שנאמר כי בגלל הדבר הזה, תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל גלגל הוא שחוזר בעולם."

"Poor people will not cease to exist within the land." It has been taught in a Baraita: Rabbi Elazar HaKappar says: A person should always plead for mercy regarding this fate (poverty). For, if he does not become poor, his son will come to be so; and if his son does not come to be so, his son's son will come to be so. For it is stated: "For in return for this matter . . ." A Baraisa was taught in the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael: Poverty is a wheel that revolves in the world.

At first glance, this passage should raise some eyebrows. After all, it is written in the Torah explicitly that HKB"H promises the person who gives tzedakah: **"נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו, כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלקיך בכל מעשיך ובכל משלך ירך"**—one who gives tzedakah wholeheartedly is promised that HKB"H will bless all the fruits of his labor. This being the case, how can we justify the elucidation: **"כי בגלל הדבר הזה, גלגל הוא שחוזר בעולם"**—that as a reward for the mitzvah of giving tzedakah, if he or one of his descendants become poor and destitute, they, too, will receive tzedakah?

I would like to suggest a solution to this puzzle by referring to the passuk (Shemos 22, 24): **"אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני עמך"—when you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you.** The Ohr HaChaim makes the following comment: **"פירוש, אם ראית שהיה לך כסף יותר על מה שאתה צריך לעצמך, שאתה מלוה לעמי, תדע לך שאין זה חלק המגיע, אלא חלק אחרים שהוא העני עמך, ובזה רמז כי צריך לפתוח לו משלך"**—if you see that your finances exceed your needs and you choose to lend money to My people, know full well that this portion (money) does not truly belong to you; it belongs, in fact, to the poor among you. This is a hint that

you should open your hand and return to him that which was originally his.

We have now found a wonderful method for remaining at the top of life's wheel of fortune without necessitating a turn downward. One should believe sincerely that the money in his possession which exceeds his personal needs does not truly belong to him. Rather, it is money that HKB"H deposited in his safekeeping to manage and guard on behalf of the poor. Thus, even when he reaches the top of the wheel, he still views himself as being at the bottom of the wheel, because most of the money in his possession belongs to the poor and is not truly his; HKB"H merely deposited it with him temporarily. In this manner, HKB"H assists him to continue to succeed and rise higher and higher. For, he realizes that as he earns more money, a significant portion does not actually belong to him; it is merely money belonging to the poor that has been placed by HKB"H in his safekeeping.

Now, the true test to ascertain whether or not a person is on this level is the mitzvah of tzedakah. If he gives tzedakah sincerely, without fretting that he has to part with his hard-earned money and give it to the poor, this is a sign that he realizes that this money was merely deposited in his safekeeping temporarily. Thus, even if he is at the highest point on the wheel, he is in reality far from there. For, the possessions that truly belong to him are meager. On the other hand, a person who gives tzedakah begrudgingly, believes erroneously that he is parting with his own money. When such a person reaches the pinnacle of success, the top of the wheel, he must inevitably experience a downward turn in his fortune. It is the only way to save him from the false doctrine of: "כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה".

We can now appreciate the depth of our sages' explanation regarding the passuk: "לעולם יבקש אדם רחמים על מדה זו, שאם הוא לא בא [לעניות] בא בנו, ואם בנו לא בא, בן בנו בא, שנאמר כי בגלל הדבר הזה, תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל גלגל הוא שחוזר בעולם"—a person should always plead for mercy regarding this fate (poverty). For, if he does not become poor, his son will come to be so; and if his son does not come to be so, his son's son will come to be so. For it is stated: "For in return for this matter . . ." A Baraita was taught in the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael: Poverty is a wheel that revolves in the world. They wish to convey the message that a person should not erroneously believe that he is at the top of life's wheel of fortune, believing that the money he has earned is truly his. Such a false belief will force him or one of his descendants to experience the down side of the cycle. Instead, he

should understand beyond a shadow of a doubt that the majority of the money in his possession belongs to the poor. That being the case, he is not really at the top of the wheel; hence, he will not need to experience the down turn of the wheel.

In the Future HKB"H Will Make a Circle of the Tzaddikim

I was struck by a wonderful thought. Based on what we have learned, we can shed some light on the following passage in the Gemara (Taanis 31a): "עתיד הקב"ה לעשות מחול לצדיקים, והוא יושב ביניהם כגן עדן, וכל אחד ואחד מראה באצבעו, שנאמר (ישעיה כה-ט) ואמר ביום ההוא הנה אלקינו זה קוינו לו ויושיענו, זה ה' קוינו לו נגילה ונשמחה בישועתו"—in the future HKB"H will make a circle of the tzaddikim and He will sit among them in Gan Eden; and each and every one will point his finger, as it says (Yeshayah 25, 9): "He shall say on that day, 'Behold! This is our G-d; we hoped to Him and He saved us; this is Hashem to Whom we hoped; let us exult and be glad in His salvation.'"

The Ohev Yisrael (Tu B'Av) explains by dint of allusion the following statement in the Gemara (Taanis 26b): "לא היו ימים—Yisrael had no days as festive as Tu B'Av . . . The name א"ב can be viewed as an abbreviation for א"לף, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In this light, ט"ו refers to the fifteenth (the numerical value of ט"ו) letter of the alphabet, which is the circular letter ס—alluding to the circle HKB"H will make of the tzaddikim in the future. This then is the message conveyed by Chazal with the statement: "Yisrael had no days as festive as ט"ו באב"—as the day on which HKB"H will form a circle of the tzaddikim in the shape of the letter ס. This concludes his sacred remarks.

Notwithstanding, we still have to decipher this curious riddle. What is the significance of this circle that HKB"H is destined to make of the tzaddikim in the shape of a ס? Additionally, what is the significance of the fact that He will sit among them, in the middle, and each one will point his finger toward Him? It appears that we can explain the matter based on what we have learned elsewhere in the Gemara (Berachos 4b):

"אמר רבי יוחנן, מפני מה לא נאמר גו' באשרי, [באשרי יושבי ביתך, כל פסוק מתחיל באות אחת מן הא"ב, ויש בהם כל האותיות מלבד אות ג'], מפני שיש בה מפלתו של שונאי ישראל דכתיב (עמוס ה-ב) נפלה לא תוסיף קום בתולת ישראל. במערבא מתרצי לה הכי, נפלה ולא תוסיף, לנפול עוד, קום בתולת ישראל. אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק, אפילו הכי חזר דוד וסמכן ברוח הקודש, שנאמר (תהלים קמה-יד) סומך ה' לכל הנופלים".

The Gemara is discussing the prayer of Ashrei, which is formulated based on the aleph-beit. It questions why a verse corresponding to the letter "nun" is absent; it answers that "nun" alludes to the fall and sins of Yisrael. The Gemara goes on to say that David HaMelech, the author of the psalm, saw fit, nevertheless, due to Divine inspiration, to include the verse beginning with the letter "samech" and support the fallen.

This passage teaches us that the letter "nun" alludes to Yisrael's decline in galut; for נ is the first letter of the word נפילה, meaning "fall." On the other hand, the letter "samech" -- ס -- alludes to סמיכה, the support HKB"H provides for the fallen, when he provides Yisrael's salvation and rescue. Based on this notion, the Bnei Yissaschar (Kislev-Teves 4, 2) explains the significance of the term נס, meaning "miracle." Initially, when the children of Yaakov are in a state of calamity, they are represented by the letter נ, associated with נפילה; however, when HKB"H comes to Yisrael's aid and delivers them from their troubles, by providing His support for the fallen with the letter ס, the combination of the two letters is formed, resulting in נס.

The Letter נ Is Only a Semi-circle whereas the Letter ס Is a Complete Circle

Let us suggest an explanation for why the letter נ alludes to fall and decline, whereas the letter ס alludes to support for the fallen. It seems logical to assume that life's wheel of fortune turns from right to left, in keeping with the teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 16b): "כל פינות שאתה פונה לא יהו אלא דרך ימין"—all turns that you make should be to the right. Furthermore, it comes out very nicely that the rise on life's wheel of fortune is on the right side, the side of "chesed"; whereas the descent on the wheel is on the left, the side of "din."

According to this scheme, the letter נ is a semi-circle, possessing a right side, but lacking a left side. This configuration represents a person who is self-reliant; he visualizes only the right half of the circle that he ascends. He does not see, however, the left side of the circle, on which he is likely to descend. This very fact that he is unaware that he is liable to fall actually causes the state of נפילה—decline.

The tikun for this situation is the letter ס—the complete circle. It represents that person who visualizes both halves of

the circle, the right and the left. He recognizes that the turn of life's wheel of fortune depends solely on Hashem. Therefore, even when he successfully rises to the peak of the wheel, he remembers full-well that just as HKB"H currently elevates him on the right side, in similar fashion He is liable to take him down the left side if he proves unworthy. Due to this critical awareness, he remains at the top of the cycle, in keeping with the notion of: "סומך ה' לכל הנופלים"—Hashem supports all that have fallen.

This explains very nicely the term נס, which is formed by the combination of the letters נ and ס. Because the source of trouble and calamity is forgetting to have faith in Hashem and crediting oneself for one's success and greatness—the situation represented by the letter נ, which only illustrates the ascent upward. When such a person experiences calamity, however, and wisely comprehends the need to pray to Hashem, the fulfillment of the passuk is realized: "סומך ה' לכל הנופלים". Hashem provides support for the fallen with the circular letter ס. This teaches us that we must always remember that just as we ascend on the right side, we can just as easily descend, chas v'shalom, on the left side. The way to avoid the latter is to fulfill that which is written: "וזכרת את ה' אלקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל"—you should remember Hashem, your G-d, for it is He Who gives you the strength to achieve your goals.

Now, we can explain very nicely the reason HKB"H will form a circle of the tzaddikim in the future in the shape of the letter ס; while He sits in their midst. For, HKB"H will rejoice with those tzaddikim, who like Yosef HaTzaddik, always remembered the lesson of the cycle of life. It is as if HKB"H sits in the middle of the wheel and spins it. When they were at the bottom of the wheel's cycle, they did not despair, for they knew that shortly HKB"H would spin the wheel in an upward direction for them. Similarly, when they reached the top of the wheel's cycle, they did not succumb to haughtiness, for they knew that at any moment, they were liable to decline and spin downwards. This is the significance of each and every tzaddik pointing with his finger: "ואמר ביום ההוא הנה אלקינו זה קוינו לו ויושיענו, זה ה' קוינו לו נגילה" —proclaiming their hope in Hashem and His salvation. For, no matter what their situation—whether they were at the nadir of life's cycle or at its pinnacle—they had faith solely in Hashem's salvation.

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