

Vayeshev

In the prayers of *Birchos Hatorah* we say, “*V’ha’arev na Hashem Elokeinu es divrei Sorascha befinu, etc.*”—“Make sweet O L-rd our G-d the words of Your Torah in our mouths. . . .” What is difficult to understand is why should we ask G-d to make the Torah sweet? Is then the Torah anything but sweet? Did not King David say in *T’hillim* 19: “*um’sukim mi’dvash v’nofes tzufim*”—“the Torah is sweeter than honey and all other sweet things?” Why should we ask G-d to make sweet something that is sweet already? In order to understand this, imagine someone sitting down to consume a loaf of bread and a shaker of salt. Upon questioning him, he will tell you that he has no time to eat a regular meal because he is late for work. Mind you, he is enjoying this salty meal. Imagine this same man two weeks later in a hospital, being fed a sweet compote. All you hear is bickering about why he must eat that bitter food instead of something tastier. Upon questioning him as to why a loaf of bread and salt seemed tastier than this sweet, delicious compote, he answers with tears in his eyes: “Two weeks ago when I was healthy everything tasted sweet and delicious. However, now that I am ill, even the most tasty and sweetest food seems bitter. My sense of taste as well as all of my senses are not balanced.”

The same is true of us. When we were spiritually healthy, every mitzvah was a pleasure, particularly *limud HaTorah*. Remember our fathers and grandfathers? Remember what pleasure they had from learning a *Blatt-Gemorah*? But we ourselves have lost the *Ta’am* that our elders had. Our *neshomos* have become ill. Our senses imbalanced. Why? Because we are confused as to what our priorities in life are. Should it be another dollar or perhaps a *Blatt-Gemorah*? Although we may not be the cause of this mix-up of priorities, we have succumbed to the temptations of society in general. Therefore, we must ask G-d to help us to put our priorities back in order, to help us balance our senses. We ask G-d to return to us the sweetness that the Torah gave us “*befinu,*” in our mouths.

With this explanation, we can perhaps understand *Rashi’s*

comment on the *posuk*:¹ "*Vayavo habaysa la'asos m'lachto*," that Joseph "went into the house to do his work." *Rashi* says, *Rav* and *Shmuel* differed on the meaning. One took it literally and the other took it as a euphemism: He (Joseph) entered the house to yield to *Potifera's* temptations, but his father's face appeared to him and he conquered the temptation. The *Gemorah*² further explains that at that crucial moment of surrender to temptation, *Jacob's* image appeared to him through the window and said: "Joseph, your brothers will have their names inscribed upon the stones of the *Ephod* and yours among theirs; is it your wish to have your name erased from theirs and be called one who associates with harlots?" It was only the forces of *kedusha* that kept Joseph from sinning with *Potifera*. Only the *kedusha* of a Torah environment that Joseph was raised in could help him withstand the temptations put before him. Realizing his predicament, he began to visualize his elders. He thought to himself: If *Abraham* spent his whole life spreading G-d's Torah over the entire world how could I give it all up for a moment's pleasure? If *Isaac* was ready to sacrifice his life for *Hashem*, how could I throw my life away for one evil deed? Then, he thought of his father *Jacob*, and began to taste the sweetness of Torah in his mouth. He thereupon left her standing with his coat and ran off.

If only we could visualize our *Avos* who sacrificed their lives for the promulgation of Torah. If only we could bring back the memories of our grandfathers and fathers in whose homes one could feel, smell and taste the sweetness of Torah. If we did, then we could cure our diseased *neshomos*. We, too, could bring back that honey-sweet, savory taste of Torah to our lives and to generations to come; *v'ha'arev na Hashem Elokeinu es divrei Sorascha befinu, u'vefi amcha Bais Yisroel*.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bereishith 39:11

2. Sotah 36b