

# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת ויחי

SERIES 1: ISSUE 12

### THE TEN MARTYRS ATONE FOR THE TEN BROTHERS SELLING YOSEF

#### Chapter 50

**17)** 'Thus shall you say to Yosef, Please forgive now the trespass of your brothers and their sin, for they have treated you with evil;' so now, forgive now the trespass of the servants of your father's God." And Yosef wept as they spoke to him.

**18)** Then his brothers also came and threw themselves down before him; and they said, "Here we are, servants unto you!"

**19)** And Yosef said to them, "Do not be afraid; for am I in place of God?"

**20)** "[Even though] you planned evil against me, God planned it to be good; in order to do what is happening today, to keep alive a large nation.

**21)** "And now, do not fear! I shall sustain you and your children." Thus he comforted them and spoke to their hearts.

**(יז)** כֹּה־תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אֲנָא שָׂא נָא פָּשַׁע אַחִיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי־רָעָה גִמְלוֹךְ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפָשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ וַיִּבְךְּ יוֹסֵף בְּדַבְרָם אֱלֹוֹ.

**(יח)** וַיָּלְכוּ גַם־אָחִיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנְנוּ לְךָ לְעַבְדִים.

**(יט)** וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אַל־תִּירְאוּ כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי.

**(כ)** וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשָׁבָה לְטָבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֶׂה בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַחֲיִית עַם־רַב.

**(כא)** וְעַתָּה אַל־תִּירְאוּ אֲנֹכִי אֲכַלְכֶּל אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְכֶּם וַיְנַחֵם אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּם.

#### Consider the following questions:

- Verse 17 states, "Forgive now the trespass of your brothers and their sin," then repeats, "forgive now the trespass of the servants of your father's God." What purpose does the repetition serve? And what is the significance of the switch from describing Yosef's siblings as "your brothers" to "the servants of your father's God"?
- Why did Yosef weep while his brothers' messengers were speaking to him?
- In verse 21, Yosef told his brothers, "And now, do not fear!" What is the point of the word "now"?

#### Editor's Introduction

There are various Talmudic and Midrashic passages (e.g. *Pesachim* 50a, *Eichah Rabbah* 2:4, and *Midrash Shocher Tov*, *Tehillim* 9:13) that refer to the Ten Martyrs killed by the Romans. According to Jewish tradition, the ten greatest Sages in the entire Jewish world of their time, living in the years just before and just after the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash, were killed as punishment for the ten brothers' sin of selling Yosef (see, e.g., *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Mishlei* 929). The story of their torturous executions is recounted in the *אֵלֶּה אֲזַכְרָה* (*These I remember*) prayer recited during Mussaf on Yom Kippur, and the elegy *אֶרְזֵי הַלְבָנוֹן* (*The Cedars of Lebanon*) recited on Tish'ah B'Av. As recounted in

these sources, the Roman emperor ordered the executions of those ten innocent *tzaddikim* as stand-ins for the ten brothers who were involved in the kidnaping and sale of Yosef, but who were never punished for their misdeed. To support the legitimacy of his murderous decree, the emperor cited the verse (*Shemos 21:16*), *One who kidnaps a person and sells him... shall be put to death.*

Now, Yosef and his brothers were prophetically aware of that tragic event. Therefore, the brothers first pleaded that Yosef should “*forgive now the trespass of your brothers,*” referring to themselves. Then they petitioned Yosef to forgive their sin for which ten *tzaddikim* of a future generation would be sentenced to death. Those *tzaddikim* are the people the verse refers to as “*the servants of your father’s God.*” **[This answers Question 1.]**

*And Yosef wept as [his brothers’ messengers] spoke to him,* for he realized that they were pleading for the innocent Sages who would be slaughtered as a consequence of what his brothers did to him, and his sense of mercy was aroused. **[This answers Question 2.]** At the same time, when the brothers saw Yosef crying, they realized that he was unable to prevent what was destined to happen to the Sages two millennia later. What might help, however, was if the brothers would be made to suffer in the same manner they had caused Yosef to suffer – that is, if they would be sold as slaves – their sin would be expiated measure for measure, and the future Roman emperor would not be able to use them as an excuse to murder innocent Jews. At this point, therefore, they said, “*Here we are, servants unto you!*”

Yosef, however, knew that their plan would not work. For reasons unknown, there was no way they could prevent the destined executions of the Ten Martyrs. Thus, he said, “*And **now** do not fear.*” He meant, “Do not fear about what will happen to you **now**. I will not enslave you; I will not punish you in any way at all. But, unfortunately, we have no power over what will happen in the future.”

**[This answers Question 3.]**

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### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

These sheets, distributed in memory of Yental *bas* Yitzchok, have been drawn from either the Alshich on Avos or Alshich on the Torah, published by Feldheim. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich’s true greatness.

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