

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וישב

ויאמר לו לך נא ראה את שלום אחיך ואת שלום הצאן והשבני דבר וישלחהו מעמק
חברון ויבא שכמה

“And he said to him: Please go see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the sheep and send a report to me. And he sent him from the valley of Chevron and he came to Shechem” (37:14)

Later on in the parsha, we find that Reuven goes back to Yaakov because it was his turn to serve his father. If there was a constant flow of brothers returning to Yaakov’s home, why did he need to send Yosef if there would soon be a brother returning home? R’ Nissan Alpert answers that Yaakov wanted to know how they were doing spiritually and if they were acting appropriately. Yosef’s leadership qualities earned him Yaakov’s trust and he relied on him to ensure that the brothers were acting properly and to correct them when necessary. Yosef was not the policeman and he was not trying to get the brothers in trouble. He possessed the maturity and leadership such that Yaakov expected him to help keep his brothers in line and guide them spiritually. This is why Yaakov specifically wanted to send Yosef to check on his brothers.

ויהי בעת ההוא וירד יהודה מאת אחיו ויט עד איש עדלמי ושמו חירה

“And it was at that time, Yehuda descended from among his brothers and he turned toward an Adulamite man whose name was Chira” (38:1)

Rashi says that “Yehuda descended from among his brothers” means that the brothers removed him from his position of leadership. After they saw how much pain Yosef’s absence was causing Yaakov, they were upset at Yehuda for his bad advice. Every person has a certain role in life relative to others, whether it is as a spouse or friend or parent. There are many opportunities in life where one can do something to make a difference. Each person has to see if he is using his position properly or if he is taking advantage of it. A person who can positively influence others loses a great opportunity when he fails to actively use that influence to help people.

איננו גדול בבית הזה ממני ולא חשך ממני מאומה כי אם אותך באשר את אשתו
ואיך אעשה הרעה הגדלה הזאת וחטאתי לאלקים

“There is no one greater in this house than me and he has not held anything back from me but you as you are his wife. How can I do this great evil and I will have sinned to Hashem” (39:9)

Yosef told the wife of Potiphar that he would sin if he listened to her. Why would only he be guilty? R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, in his sefer Kol Simcha, says that Yosef did not want to put himself together with her even in the same sentence. He wanted to create a complete separation from her. He established a boundary to help keep himself away from her by not mentioning the two of them as one even as a manner of speech. This is a lesson for us that we need to be careful with our words. When a person is careless with his speech, it can lead to big problems.

R' Moshe Mordechai Morgensztern, in his sefer Medrash Moshe, quotes Ramban in Parshas Emor who says that once the Avos had a bris milah, they had the halachic status of Jews. Since the punishment prescribed by halacha for adultery is different for a Jew than a non-Jew, he could not equate the sins that the two of them might commit.

Chanukah

Why do we thank Hashem for the miracles that happened in those days at this time?” R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus says that we are not only thanking Hashem for the miracles that happened then but also the miracles that happen today. It was Hashem who was behind the Jewish military victory over the Greeks over two thousand years ago and it is the very same Hashem who shapes world history today. Miracles show us how Hashem is always there at all times, even when events seem natural. This also answers the famous question of the Bais Yosef, who asks why Chanukah is eight nights if there was enough oil for one day. Only seven days were miraculous! Based on the above, we can say that even nature is a miracle. The fact that oil burns is a miracle itself and we note that by celebrating one day for the appreciation of Hashem's guiding hand in natural events. The numerical value of the word “Elokim” is the same as the word “hateva,” “nature.” This is an important lesson from the miracle of Chanukah.