

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman



פרשת וישב - שבת חנוכה א'

ויראו אחיו כי אתו אהב אביהם מכל אחיו וישנאו אתו ולא יכלו דברו לשלום
“His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers so they hated him; and they were not able to speak to him peaceably” (37:4)

Why does the posuk say that the brothers saw that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all his brothers? The Meshech Chochma explains that at first the brothers thought that Yaakov had a special love for sons of Rachel, his beloved wife. When they saw that the special love was only for Yosef and not Binyamin, then they hated him. They thought that Yaakov loved Yosef because of the derogatory reports that Yosef brought back to their father about them.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that we see how terrible things can happen when we do not judge others favorably. When Yosef saw his brothers acting in a way that he felt was improper, he should have judged them favorably and not immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were acting inappropriately. If he would have done so, his brothers would not have hated him. Not judging others favorably can damage relationships and break up families. The Gemara in Shabbos 127b says that judging favorably is part of the mitzva of bringing peace between a man and his friend. This is one of the mitzvos for which one receives reward in both this world and the next. One cannot judge people with an attitude that he has been wronged by them. One must assume that there is always something more to the situation and that the other person really does not mean him harm. This is how we must approach our relationships with our fellow Jews. It is an obligation to attribute things to other causes and not to assume that they are trying to harm us. We should be careful not misinterpret situations because it can lead to disastrous results. This is an important lesson to learn from this week's parsha.

This lesson is key to making a marriage work. Many times, a spouse will do something that can aggravate the other party. If the husband and wife always maintain the attitude that the other has a good reason due to unusual circumstances or that they meant well, then they will not get upset at each other and will be able to keep a peaceful atmosphere in their home. Too often people allow their natural instinct to set in. It is important to use one's mind and understand that one's spouse would never intentionally mean to do harm and this leads to the realization that there must be an explanation to the situation.

וירד יהודה מאת אחיו ויט עד איש עדלמי ושמו חירה
“And Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. So he divided the people with him, and the flocks, and the cattle, and the camels, into two camps” (38:1)

Rashi explains that the brothers lowered Yehuda from his position of greatness because they blamed him for the sale of Yosef, telling him that had he told them to bring Yosef home, they would have done so.

We must all think to ourselves whether we are making the most of our leadership positions and our ability to influence others. Yehuda's mistaken decisions caused him to be lowered from his position. In Parshas Ki Savo, the posuk says “cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah.” The Ramban explains that this is a reference to people who are able to use their influence to improve others but do not. Having influence is an important position to be in and those who do not use it to its fullest are held responsible.

In addition, the midrash in Rus says that if Reuven would have known that the Torah would write that he saved Yosef, he would have taken him on his shoulders and returned him to his father. If he would have understood the implications of his actions and the positive comments that the Torah would have made about him, he would have done even more to rescue Yosef. He had that capability but did not fully exercise it and is held responsible.

ויהי ה' את יוסף ויהי איש מצליח ויהי בבית אדניו המצרי
“Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man; and he remained in the house of his Egyptian

master” (39:2)

Why does the posuk need to repeat the fact that Yosef’s master was an Egyptian? The answer is that Yosef’s conduct teaches us how to act among gentiles. He would constantly remind himself that he was in the house of an Egyptian and he made sure that he did not get comfortable. Yosef teaches that one should always be sure to keep his distance from gentiles even while among them and not desire to be like them. Rashi also comments on the next posuk that says that “Hashem was with him” that Yosef always mentioned the name of Hashem. He never made any attempt to hide his Jewishness.

וימאן ויאמר אל אשת אדניו הן אדני לא ידע אתי מה בבית וכל אשר יש לו נתן בידי
“But he refused; he said to his master's wife: Look - my master does not know anything that is with me in the house, and all that he has placed in my custody” (39:8)

The *Shem MiShmuel* trop (notation) on the word “וימאן” tells us that Yosef clearly and emphatically refused the advances of Potifar’s wife. However, later on, there is an opinion in the Gemara that he was about to give in to her before Yaakov’s face appeared to him and stopped him. This shows us that even Yosef HaTzadik, when placed in a hostile environment, could be worn down by the constant daily advances of the wife of Potifar. How much more so do we have to be aware of our surroundings because it is so easy to stumble when we are placed in a difficult situation.

The *Shem MiShmuel* notes that Yosef first refused and only then did he explain his refusal. One must first flat-out turn down any opportunity to do wrong before he explains why. Without an immediate refusal, one may still get drawn in by the temptations.

ויהי כהיום הזה ויבא הביתה לעשות מלאכתו ואין איש מאנשי הבית שם בבית
“And it was on that day that he entered the house to do his work - and not one of the men of the household was there in the house” (39:10)

Rashi cites one opinion that Yosef entered the house with the intention of giving in to the demands of the wife of Potifar. However, he caught himself and he ran away. The *Eitz Hadaas Tov* writes that many times when a person starts off on the wrong foot, the evil inclination tries to convince him that since he will be responsible for what he has already done wrong, he might as well finish what he started and enjoy it. This is what happened to Yosef. The wife of Potifar caught him in his treachery. He realized what he had done wrong and he left his treachery with her and ran away. The key to spiritual success in life is to understand that although we stumble occasionally, we can always put an end to the downward spiral and right the ship. Although one has a natural tendency to give up after starting badly, we must follow the example of Yosef and maintain our inner strength and never fall prey to this habit.

Chanukah

R’ Tzvi Kuschlevsky points out that the three main decrees against the Jews were the prohibitions against the keeping of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh and the performance of a Bris Milah. The reason for this is that these are the main distinguishing factors between us and the other nations of the world. The *Megilas Antiochus* calls all three of these mitzvos “ברית,” a covenant. The Greeks wanted to remove our differences and wanted us to assimilate among them. By keeping the Torah and mitzvos that separate us from everyone else, we continue the fight of the Chashmonaim. Those who assimilate are only doing what the Greeks wanted the Jews to do many years ago. We must be careful to maintain our differences from the gentiles and be thankful for our ability to keep our differences.

Why did the Jewish people deserve to suffer through the harsh decrees of the Greeks and the desecration of the Beis HaMikdash? The Bach says that they were lax in their personal Avodas Hashem. Hashem responded to their laxity in serving Him by taking away their opportunity to serve Him. When they fought the Greeks and showed that they truly wanted to serve Hashem, He helped them succeed and returned that which was taken from them.

For this reason, there is no commandment to eat a meal on Chanukah like on Purim. Purim was a physical sin, at the feast of Achashveirosh, and a physical salvation, so we celebrate in kind with a festive

meal. Chanukah was a spiritual sin and a spiritual salvation, so we celebrate by saying Hallel and singing songs of praise to Hashem, thanking Him for giving us the ability to be able to learn Torah and perform mitzvos.

What is the meaning of the word Chanukah? One explanation is that it stands for חנוכה, they rested on the 25th. This signifies that the Jews rested from their victorious fight against the Greeks on the 25th of Kislev. Another meaning of the word Chanukah is "dedication." After the Jews won the battle, they rededicated the Beis HaMikdash, which had been defiled by the Greeks. The rededication is an important part of Chanuka that often gets lost among the miraculous victory and the miracle of the oil. This celebration of the rededication of the Beis HaMikdash plays an important role in our meals on Chanuka. When we thank Hashem for his kindnesses and we praise him, combined with the recognition of the rededication of the Beis HaMikdash, makes the meals of Chanuka a mitzva.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann