

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman



פרשת מקץ - שבת חנוכה

ויהי מקץ שנתים ימים ופרעה חלם והנה עמד על היאר
“It was at the end of two years: Pharaoh was dreaming and, behold, he was standing by the river” (41:1)

The opening Midrash Rabba of the parsha quotes a posuk in Tehillim (40:5): "Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust and turned not to the arrogant." The Midrash says that "the man who has made Hashem his trust" refers to Yosef. The latter half of the posuk which tells us that it is best not to turn to the arrogant is also a reference to Yosef, who spent two extra years in prison as a punishment for turning to the butler for help. There are two problems with this midrash. First, we know that there is a concept of "hishtadlus." A person cannot sit idly and expect Hashem to take care of all his needs. Everyone has to make an effort to take care of himself and trust that Hashem will bless his endeavors. What was wrong with Yosef making an effort to extricate himself from his incarceration? Secondly, how can Yosef be described as the epitome of trust in Hashem and be criticized for his lack of trust in the same posuk?

The Bais HaLevi addresses these questions. He writes that the level of effort that is required depends on each individual. The highest level of trust in Hashem is when a person feels that he can receive his needs from Hashem without an intermediary and without seeking the help of others. This is a very high level that Yosef was able to reach, but very few others are able to attain. Such a person should only make a minimal effort, if any at all, because to do otherwise would be hypocritical. Even though others also trust in Hashem, their trust is such that they turn to others in order to realize the blessings that Hashem bestows upon them. They must make an effort to seek the proper channels through which to receive their blessings and are even expected to do so. However, should one make a larger effort than necessary, based on his level of trust in Hashem, he will be held accountable. Such a person will have to work even harder to earn his living and will need to make a much greater effort than should be necessary.

Yosef made the smallest effort possible. He merely made a verbal request of the butler, a lowly servant of Pharaoh, to petition for his release. Nevertheless, he was punished for this request. Why was Yosef punished for making an effort, especially one so small? Based on the above, we can say that Yosef was the epitome of trust in Hashem. Because he had such a tremendous amount of faith, even the smallest attempt to secure his release was considered inappropriate and he suffered the consequences. This is why his trust is praised in the same posuk in which he is criticized. It is precisely his level of trust which led to his punishment. Yosef was the type of person for whom such effort was hypocritical and unnecessary.

One who reaches a higher level in Avodas Hashem must work hard to maintain that level. It does not get any easier just because a person has succeeded. Stagnation causes one to slide backwards. Just because Yosef was the epitome of trust in Hashem did not mean that he would never make a mistake even if he did not continue to work on himself. This concept is expressed in the posuk in Tehillim (24:3): "Who can ascend the mountain of Hashem and who can stand in His holy place?" Why does the posuk repeat itself? The answer is that there is a difference between the two statements. It is one thing to ascend the ladder of spiritual growth, but it is quite another to remain standing there. These are two separate challenges that a person must face. Once he overcomes the first hurdle of ascending the mountain, he must face the difficult task of standing there and not sliding back down.

A similar idea is expressed by the Ramban regarding a nazir. A nazir is required to bring a sin offering once his period of nezirus is completed. Why is this so, what sin did he commit? The Ramban answers that when he is no longer a nazir, he will not be able to stay at the same level of Avodas Hashem that a nazir can attain. This willingness to lose what he has gained is why he brings a sin offering. When a person grows and improves himself, it is easy to lose it all very quickly. One can never rest on his laurels but must keep up the effort that helped him achieve that growth in the first place.

וירא יעקב כי יש שבר במצרים ויאמר יעקב לבניו למה תתראו
“Yaakov perceived that there were provisions in Egypt; so Yaakov said to his sons, Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?” (42:1)

Rashi comments that Yaakov and his family really had enough food. However, Yaakov instructed his sons to go buy grain in Egypt so that their neighbors, the descendants of Esav and Yishmael, should not be jealous of them. Yaakov taught his family to be extra careful about keeping their success a secret. It was important that nobody else know that they had enough to survive while the others around them were starving. Had they known about this, their hatred for Yaakov and his family would have flared up again. Similarly, the posuk (42:5) says that the brothers entered Egypt "to buy among those who came." Since they were handsome men and stood out in a crowd as strong warriors, they made an effort to blend in among the people around them. Rashi writes that they split up and entered in small groups through each of the city's four gates because a group of eleven people would attract attention. They did not want to bring an ayin hara upon themselves by standing out.

We must be careful not to arouse the anger of the nations that are good to us and allow us to live peacefully in their lands. Throughout history, when the Jews have been successful, they have become the scapegoat for everyone else's problems. Yaakov and his family understood the importance of keeping a low profile while among gentiles and to try to avoid the negative attention that being noticed would bring upon them.

ויוסף הוא השליט על הארץ הוא המשביר לכל עם הארץ ויבאו אחי יוסף וישתחו לו
אפים ארצה

“Now Yosef - he was the viceroy over the land, he was the provider to all the people of the land. Yosef's brothers came and they bowed to him, faces to the ground” (42:6)

The gemara in Sanhedrin 92a says that one who teaches halacha to his students receives the blessings of Yosef as a reward. Regarding Torah, the posuk says (Mishlei 11:26), "One who withholds produce (a metaphor for Torah) will be cursed by the nation, but blessing will be on the head of the provider (משביר)." Since the word משביר describes both Yosef HaTzadik and one who teaches Torah, we learn that one who teaches Torah is rewarded with the blessing of Yosef.

The Maharsha explains why Torah is compared to produce. Just as grain is food for the body without which a person could not function, Torah provides spiritual nourishment that is equally vital for the person's survival. Just as Yosef received a blessing for providing people with food, one who teaches Torah receives the same blessing because he also provides his students with food for the soul. We should feel a hunger for Torah just as we do for food. One should treat Torah as a staple of his daily regimen and never go too long without it.

ויאמרו שלום לעבדך לאבינו עודנו חי ויקדו וישתחו
“They replied: Your servant our father is at peace; he still lives. They bowed and prostrated themselves” (43:28)

Chazal comment that Yosef lived 110 years rather than 120 because he lost ten years of his

life as a punishment for the ten times that he heard his father referred to as "your servant" without protesting. We can learn from this how important the mitzva of honoring parents truly is. Yosef's wrongdoing was only passive. He did not degrade his father verbally, but rather heard others doing so and did not stand up for his father's honor. For this, he was punished severely. We must appreciate the importance of this mitzvah and make every effort to honor our parents and certainly to avoid speaking badly of them.

חנוכה

The following Divrei Torah were said at Rabbi Friedman's Chanukah Dinner this past Thursday

Rabbi Yechiel London

(Rabbi Friedman's father-in-law, Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Heichal HaTorah & Shabbos Yeshiva)

The miracle of Chanukah was not really necessary. They could have made very thin wicks, which would have used much less oil. Using the oil sparingly, there would have been enough for eight full days. Why did they make regular wicks and rely on a miracle to happen? The answer is that they were not willing to compromise on their mitzvah observance. They wanted to perform the mitzvah of lighting the menorah in the way that it was meant to be done. They wanted to have a bright light. If Hashem wanted more than that one night, then they were confident that they would succeed in a supernatural manner. They made the effort and relied on Hashem for the rest. This was the attitude of the Chashmonaim from the very outset of their battle. They were outnumbered and they were not trained in war. What they did know was that they had to stand up and fight for Hashem. Perhaps it was unrealistic to expect a victory, but they believed that Hashem would see their commitment to defending a Torah way of life and would help them out in a supernatural way. That is exactly what happened. The Chashmonaim could have looked at the odds and despaired. They could have gone into hiding and at least preserve their own lives while keeping true to the Torah. But that was not enough. They knew that their duty was to fight the Greeks and not allow them to succeed. They were not ashamed of their beliefs. They were proud of who they were and stood up to the Greeks. Similarly, in Shema, we say that Hashem is our G-d and Hashem is one. Rashi explains that Hashem is not just our G-d but is the one G-d of all mankind. When we accept the yoke of Hashem's kingdom by saying Shema, we accept the responsibility to do our part to bring about that universal recognition of Hashem. We should not be ashamed of who we are. We can succeed and make a difference in the world if our hearts are in the right place. Our Chanukah candles remind us of a time when people recognized this as fact and sacrificed their lives because they knew it to be true.

Rabbi Mayer Friedman

In both Al Hanissim and in the second bracha we say when lighting the menorah, we thank Hashem for the miracles that occurred "in those days, at this time." Why do we repeat ourselves? What is the difference between "those days" and these times?" One answer is that it means in those years at this time of year. A second answer, from the Aruch HaShulchan, is that they refer to the two miracles of Chanukah, the miracle of the victory in battle and the miracle of the oil. The war against the Greeks lasted a few years and occurred "in those days," not necessarily during this time of year. The miracle of the menorah was specifically at this time of year, in Kislev, after the Chashmonaim defeated the Greeks.

A third answer is given by the Levush. He writes that we should not feel that miracles only happened in historical times and do not occur anymore in our times. Our continued existence as a nation is a tremendous miracle. The natural order of the world around us is a miracle. We thank

Hashem for the miracles that happened "in those days" and which continue to play a large role "at this time," in our lives. In Modim, we thank Hashem "for your wonders and kindnesses that are at all times, evening and morning and afternoon." Hashem is performing miracles for us all the time but we just fail to open our eyes and notice. Hashem is indeed watching us and taking care of us and we thank Him for these continued miracles whenever we mention historical miracles.

Rabbi Tzvi Romm, Rav of the Bialystoker Shul of the Lower East Side

The Bais Yosef asks a famous question regarding Chanukah. We celebrate eight days because the oil that should have lasted one day actually lasted eight full days. However, there was at least enough oil for one day. On the first day, the oil burned naturally. If so, then there were only seven days when the oil burned miraculously. Why do we celebrate eight days instead of seven? One answer, given by the Alter of Kelm, is that nature itself is also a miracle. Just because oil always burns does not make it any less wondrous. We are just so accustomed to oil burning that it doesn't make an impression on us. The Ramban talks about hidden miracles that are a part of everyday life: waking up, the rising of the sun, our ability to walk, etc. We should not take nature for granted, even though we see it all the time. Hashem's presence calls to us in every part of the wonderful world around us. When the Chashmonaim saw the oil burning for seven extra days, they realized that the first day had been a miracle in its own way too. From the extraordinary, they learned to appreciate the ordinary. The days of Chanukah are extraordinary days. They are a time of reflection and rededication to the Torah as our mission and purpose in life. It is very easy to feel the excitement during Chanukah. However, we have to make an effort to learn something about the ordinary days from the extraordinary days. We have to make the conscious decision to keep the fire of Chanukah burning long after we stop lighting the menorah. When life returns to the ordinary days, we have to maintain our commitment to learning Torah and our commitment to each other. That is the lesson of the eight days of Chanukah.

Maurice Harary (NYU Student)

What is the major difference between Chanukah and Purim? Chanukah commemorates a redemption from spiritual destruction while Purim marks a salvation from physical obliteration. In other words, the Greeks wanted to rob us of our Olam Haba while Haman wanted to deprive us of Olam Hazeh. These are the two attitudes that the nations of the world have approached us with throughout history. At times they come at us with the sword, but at times they come to us seeking an embrace with us. The Greeks, much like our evil inclination does today, offered the Jews a tradeoff. They promised them a great time in this world, if they would only forfeit their world to come. The evil inclination convinces us to live for the moment, to sacrifice our future for an enjoyable time in the present. We have to see past the trickery of the evil inclination and grasp the big picture. In truth, even the enjoyable present that the Greeks tempted us with is really a delusion and is not all that it is made out to be. The lesson to learn from the Greeks' assault on our Olam Haba is never to sacrifice a good future for the sake of a seemingly enjoyable present.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Rabbi Mayer Friedman.....Magid Shiur
Michael Gutmann.....Editor