

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת מקץ

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)

Rashi writes at the end of last week’s parsha that Yosef had to stay in prison for two extra years because he asked the butler to help him get out rather than place his complete trust in Hashem. Why Yosef punished for his actions? Aren’t we expected to make an effort even while trusting in Hashem’s help? Rabbi Friedman suggests that Yosef had already seen that Hashem was helping him in a supernatural way. He was thrown into a pit full of poisonous snakes and scorpions and Hashem helped him leave that pit unscathed. He was sold to Potiphar and Hashem helped him become the head of the household. He was put in prison and Hashem caused the warden to like him so much that he put him in charge of the other inmates. Yosef had seen Hashem’s direct help so many times that he should have understood that Hashem loved him and was going to help him. He was punished because he felt the need to get himself out of prison despite seeing Hashem’s great love and miraculous assistance on multiple occasions.

The Gemara on Shabbos 21a connects the teaching that the pit into which Yosef was thrown was full of deadly creatures with the teaching that a menorah placed higher than twenty amos is invalid. What is the connection between Yosef’s experience in the pit and the laws of Chanukah?

The Pnei Yehoshua asks why the miracle of Chanukah necessary in the first place? After all, we know that there is a rule of “tumah hutra betzibbur” which teaches that one is permitted to use impure items if there is nothing else? Commentators explain that Hashem made the miracle in order to show his love for the Jewish people. The Chashmonaim used whatever pure oil they had in order to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the menorah in the best fashion. Because Hashem saw that they desired to fulfill the mitzvah in the best possible way, He made the oil miraculously last eight days so that they would not have to use impure oil. This showed his great love for the

Jewish people and we commemorate this love by lighting the menorah every Chanukah and placing it in public view so that everyone knows that Hashem loves us.

When Yosef was saved from the snakes and scorpions in the pit, it was a tremendous miracle. After all, halacha says that when witnesses see a man fall into such a pit full of snakes, his wife can remarry even if nobody actually saw him die. Landing in such a pit is a guaranteed death. By saving Yosef, Hashem expressed His great love for him. Similarly, the menorah is an expression of Hashem's love and if it is placed too high up, people will not see the menorah and learn that Hashem truly loves us. That is why these two teachings are connected in the Gemara.

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“It was at the end of two years: Pharaoh was dreaming and, behold, he was standing by the river” (41:1)

The letters of the word חלם, dream, can be rearranged to spell מחל, to forgive. R' Dovid Feinstein says that being frightened in a dream is an atonement in a sense because Hashem is causing a person to be frightened in a dream rather than experience it in reality. However, when a person has a frightening dream, he should interpret it in a good way. Chazal tell us that a dream follows its interpretation, so it is important to seek out some positive message that can be extracted from the dream rather than focus on the negative parts.

ויען יוסף את פרעה לאמר בלעדי אלקים יענה את שלום פרעה

“Yosef answered Pharaoh, saying: That is beyond me; it is Hashem who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare” (41:16)

The Torah also uses the expression of “answering” with regard to the reading of pesukim that accompanies the bringing of bikkurim. Rashi in that section writes that “answering” means to announce in a loud voice. Rabbi Friedman suggests that we can extrapolate that lesson to this posuk as well and learn that Yosef emphatically stated that only Hashem was capable of explaining Pharaoh's dream. Yosef answered loud and clear so that Pharaoh would fully understand this point.

We find a similar point in a halacha that is part of our daily lives. The Gemara on Shabbos 119b teaches that one who answers Amen Yehei Shmei Rabbah with all his strength annuls bad decrees earns atonement for his sins. There are two opinions in Tosfos about how to understand this statement. The first explanation is that one should answer with as much concentration as he possibly can. The second explanation is that a person should say these words loudly. It is important to emphatically express one's belief in Hashem but also to feel it with every fiber of one's being. This is a lesson that we learn from the way in which Yosef expressed his belief in Hashem as the sole power in the world to Pharaoh.

ויקרא פרעה שם יוסף צפנת פענח ויתן לו את אסנת בת פוטי פרע כהן אן לאשה
ויצא יוסף על ארץ מצרים

“Pharaoh called Yosef’s name Tzafnas Paneiach and he gave him Osnas daughter of Poti-Phera, priest of On, for a wife. Thus Yosef emerged in charge of the land of Egypt” (41:45)

This is the first time that the Torah tells us that Potiphar was a priest of On. Rabbi Friedman suggests that Potiphar learned about spirituality when Yosef was living in his house. He saw that Yosef was a holy man and this had a profound effect on him. He felt that there was something missing in his life and so he sought spirituality and eventually became a priest. This is why Yosef was willing to marry his daughter. Yosef saw that her father had a desire for spirituality and was seeking a higher meaning in life. This quest for personal growth was an important characteristic that Yosef was looking for in a wife.

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)

Why were the brothers waiting for Yaakov's instructions before going to buy food? Rabbi Friedman suggests that they did not want to leave Eretz Yisrael and go to Egypt, a country full of immorality. They were willing to forego a full stomach in order to stay in Eretz Yisrael with their father in a positive environment rather than go to a place that was full of values that

were incompatible with their way of life. They would not leave unless their father explicitly told them to do so.

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