

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וישב

ויאמר אלהם ראובן אל תשפכו דם השליכו אתו אל הבור הזה אשר במדבר ויד אל תשלחו בו למען הציל אתו מידם להשיבו אל אביו

“Reuven said to them: Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him! - intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father” (37:22)

Teshuvos HaRashba (Siman 581) cites this posuk as a source that we should make an effort to publicize the mitzvos that people do. By anecdotally informing us of the motivation behind his advice, the Torah goes out of its way to show us that Reuven did a mitzvah. We should follow the example that the Torah sets for us and likewise try to bring the good deeds of others to everyone's attention. A halachic ramification of this concept is brought down by the Rama in Hilchos Tzedaka (Choshen Mishpat 249:13). The Rama writes that when a person donates something to a shul, it is proper to put his name on it. By doing so, people will learn from his example and will also give tzedaka. When charitable donations become public knowledge, people are inspired to follow suit and make their own donations.

Another lesson to be learned from this posuk is taught in a midrash in Rus (5:6). The midrash states that if Reuven would have known that the Torah would record his deeds, he would have lifted Yosef on his shoulders and carried him home to his father. Reuven did not completely comprehend the value of his actions and therefore did not have the impetus to go the extra mile. If we would only realize the true worth of Torah activism, we would find the strength to accomplish much more. People tend to shortchange themselves and fail to realize how much they are really capable of doing. This is a mistake and only keeps them from tapping into their full potential.

In the Gemara in Makkos 10a, R' Tanchum bar Chanilai asks why the ir miklat (city of refuge for one who commits an accidental murder) in Reuven's territory was listed first among the arei miklat (Devarim 4:43). He answers that because Reuven made the first attempt to save Yosef, his city of refuge, which served the purpose of saving people, is listed first in the Torah. The lesson to learn from this is that when we do a mitzvah, our readiness to jump in is also important. We should learn from Reuven and be the one to step up to the plate when the situation calls for it. It is very difficult to be the first to do anything, but there is a great reward for having the courage to take the first step. This knowledge should be an inspiration to us.

Every minute aspect of the manner in which a person acts is repaid in kind. The way in which Reuven did a mitzvah was repaid 272 years later when Moshe set up the cities of refuge east of the Yarden. Even the small nuances of how we fulfill the mitzvos will be rewarded. We cannot know if the reward will come directly to us or to future generations, nor can we know for certain the exact form that the reward will come in. What we can be assured of is that Hashem will reward us and that the reward will correspond to the mitzvos that we do and the attitude that we take toward them.

ויעברו אנשים מדינים סחרים וימשכו ויעלו את יוסף מן הבור וימכרו את יוסף לישמעאלים בעשרים כסף ויביאו את יוסף מצרימה

“Midianite men, traders, passed by; they drew and raised Yosef out of the pit and sold Yosef to the Yishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver and they brought Yosef to Egypt” (37:28)

When the Leviyim replaced the firstborns as the ones designated to serve in the Mishkan in the wilderness, there were 273 more firstborns than Leviyim. These extra firstborns could not be exchanged for a Levi and so they had to redeem themselves and free themselves from service in the Mishkan for the sum of five shekalim. Rashi (Bamidbar 3:46) cites a midrash which states that the five shekalim that the firstborns had to pay represented the twenty dinarim for which Yosef was sold to Mitzrayim (1 shekel = 4 dinarim). What is the connection between the sale of Yosef and the

payment of the firstborns? Rabbi Friedman suggests the following answer. Yosef was sold as a result of the jealousy that Yaakov caused by favoring him. From this we learn that a father should never express favoritism to any of his children, even if he feels that nothing will happen because of it. Many years later, when the firstborns redeemed themselves, their payment was set at five shekalim. This was in order to remind the people never to favor a firstborn child over other children and never to repeat this mistake. This lesson is still taught to this very day through the Pidyon Haben, the redemption of the firstborn son. The amount given to a kohen for a Pidyon Haben is five sela'im (1 sela = 1 shekel), also equivalent to the twenty dinarim of Yosef, to remind the father never to give his firstborn son preferential treatment over his other children.

Everyone, even great people such as Yaakov Avinu, make mistakes. What is important is that we learn from past experiences and grow from them. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch writes (Bereishis 12:10) that the Torah does not portray our Avos as perfect men. Hashem presents Himself as the ultimate role model and commanded us to emulate His ways for just this purpose. When the Torah tells us how our Avos also made mistakes, it does not take away from their greatness. If our Avos had been described as flawless, we would have assumed that they had a different nature than the average person and their level of perfection is unattainable for the rest of us. By presenting our Avos as men like any other who had to work hard to perfect themselves and refine their character, we see that we are able to - and obligated to - work on ourselves and reach that level. Unlike other religions which place a man at their head who cannot be replicated because of the inferiority of other men, our forefathers and leaders were regular people and we can be just like them if we put in the effort. This echoes the idea of the Rambam who writes that every person has the ability to become as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu with proper effort. We should not feel that the examples set for us by our illustrious ancestors are beyond our reach. (See also Rav Hirsch's commentary on Shemos 6:14)

ויהי מאז הפקיד אתו בביתו ועל כל אשר יש לו ויברך ה' את בית המצרי בגלל יוסף ויהי ברכת ה' בכל אשר יש לו בבית ובשדה

“It happened that from the time he appointed him in his house and over whatever he had, Hashem blessed the Egyptian's house on Yosef's account, so that Hashem's blessing was in whatever he owned, in the house and in the field” (39:5)

The Gemara in Brochos 42a cites this posuk as a source that blessing follows a talmid chacham. Hashem blessed the house of Potiphar because Yosef was there. Here again, just like when Yaakov was in the house of Lavan, the Torah stresses the benefits that one enjoys through association with a talmid chacham (See Parsha Shiur on Vayeitzei). The Torah Temimah asks: Why does the Gemara need to bring two proofs, one from Yaakov in Lavan's house and one from Yosef in Potiphar's house? He answers that perhaps the posuk regarding Lavan was not sufficient proof. Lavan was not fully convinced that his success was solely from Hashem, but rather he believed that he had performed some sort of magic to bring about the good fortune and said so to Yaakov. However, when Yosef brought success to Potiphar's household, there was no doubt that it could only be attributed to heavenly intervention because of the presence of a talmid chacham. Based on this gemara, it is recommended for a person to try and develop a relationship with a Torah scholar so he can learn and benefit from the talmid chacham's presence and example.

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 I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate this great evil and have sinned against Hashem” (39:9)

The Gemara in Arachin 15b notes that Yosef referred to sinning with the wife of Potiphar as "ra'ah gedola," "a great evil." There is also a posuk in Tehillim (12:4) which describes loshon hara as "loshon medaberes gedolos," "a tongue which speaks boastfully." Since both use the word

"gedola," we can derive that speaking loshon hara is almost equal to the sin of engaging in a forbidden relationship. The gemara continues to equate loshon hara to all three cardinal sins: idol worship, illicit relations and murder. How are we to understand this gemara? After all, one is required to give up his life rather than commit these sins. How can they be the same as slander?

The mussar sefer Orchos Tzadikim (beginning of Shaar Loshon Hara) explains this gemara as follows: "The above may be accounted for by the fact that the slanderer repeats his wrong. Ten times or more a day he humiliates and shames people, aside from injuring the object of his slander. And even a 'light' transgression, if repeated many times, is rendered 'heavy.' For even though a single hair is extremely soft and weak, when several such are woven together, they make a strong rope... In addition, it is difficult for the slanderer to repent because he has become habituated to his sin and has taught his tongue to speak evil. What is more, the sin is light in his eyes, for he says, 'I have done nothing more than to speak,' and he will not pay heed to the great damage that he has done and he will not repent."

Once a person becomes accustomed to speaking gossip, he tends to do so more frequently. When a sin is transgressed repeatedly, the many "small" sins can add up to the equivalent of a "severe" sin such as immoral relationships. We tend to ignore the cumulative effect of our actions, but, in truth, everything really adds up. A person is reviled by the thought of committing a severe transgression, but speaking loshon hara many times appears to be less important because it seems "trivial." We fail to realize that constantly doing "small" aveiros can be just as bad. It is therefore important to avoid derogatory speech at all times, even if it may be true.

חנוכה

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.

Rabbi Yechiel London, Rabbi Friedman's father-in-law and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Heichal HaTorah, points out that the Greeks were not content to attempt to assimilate the Jews into their culture, but they also defiled the Beis HaMikdash. They wanted to place their idols and perform their worship at the heart of the Jewish people and their center of Avodas Hashem. So, too, we must do the opposite of the Yevanim and take our Torah to the center of the Chochmas Yevanim, the colleges and universities. To continue the battle begun by the Chashmonaim, it is incumbent upon all college students to make a conscious effort to spread the light of Torah among college students and show them the proper path.

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