

SEDRAH SELECTIONS PARSHAS VA'YEISHEV 5775 BS"D

Ch. 37, v. 24: "Va'yikochuhu va'yashlichu oso haboroh v'habor reik ein bo moyim" – And they took him and they threw him into the pit and the pit was empty it was devoid of water – The gemara Shabbos 23 says that although it was devoid of water there were serpents and scorpions in it. Many commentators ask what gain there was given that Yoseif would surely be killed by the snakes and scorpions.

The gemara Taanis 21a relates the story of Reb Yochanan and Ilfa who were both learning in Yeshiva.

Their financial situation became grave. Reb Yochanan suggested to Ilfa that they leave the Yeshiva and pursue a livelihood, so as to fulfill the dictum of "Efes ki lo yi'h'yeh v'cho evyon."

As they wandered in pursuit of a livelihood, the weather became extremely hot, and they sought refuge in the shadow of the desolate remains of a building. Reb Yochanan was aroused from his mid-day sleep by a heavenly voice which said, "They are forsaking pursuit of eternal life and are pursuing temporal life. Let us throw this wall down upon them and kill them." A second voice responded, "Although they are deserving of such a fate, let us not do it, because one of them is destined to a great position."

When Ilfa arose, Rabbi Yochanan asked him if he had heard any voices. Ilfa responded in the negative.

Rabbi Yochanan realized that this was a clear sign that the message was for himself, and that if he were to return to the Yeshiva, he would be appointed the Rosh Yeshiva. He told Ilfa that he had changed his mind and that he was returning to Yeshiva, and in spite of his dire financial situation, he quoted the second verse, "Ki lo yechdal evyon mi'kerev ho'oretz." Indeed, Rabbi Yochanan returned and shortly afterwards became Rosh Yeshiva.

We might apply this here. The issue was whether or not Yoseif was right in stating that he would master over all his siblings. If he was indeed destined for greatness, as was Rabbi Yochanon in the above-mentioned incident, he would likewise be saved from death as Rabbi Yochanon was saved from a wall that was about to topple (af sh'yesh l'cha'leik b'pashtus). (n.l.)

Ch. 37, v. 26,27: "Va'yomer Yehudoh el echov mah betza ki naharoge es ochinu v'chisinu es domo, L'chu v'nim'k'renu" – And Yehudoh said to his brothers what gain is there when we will kill him and we will hide his blood, Let us go and sell him – No doubt they all felt that Yoseif was deserving of death or else a dissenting voice would have been heard. Why all of a sudden did Yehudoh change his mind and suggest selling Yoseif? The holy sons of Yaakov did not decide that Yoseif should be killed because of their displeasure or anger with him, no matter how extreme it might have been. They deliberated and came to an halachic decision that by law he should be killed. If they were so sure of themselves they had no reason to fear Yaakov's anger and a possible curse. Notwithstanding Yaakov's great pain, when he would be explained all the "court proceedings" he would accept it as the right thing to do and not be angry at the brothers in the slightest. It was when Yehudoh saw that a cover-up was in the making, by faking Yoseif's tunic being torn asunder by a wild animal and laden with human-looking blood, that Yehudoh realized that they felt they could not successfully convince their father that they were in the right for what they had done. If so, there was actual doubt to some small extent in Yoseif's actually being deserving of being put to death. Yehudoh said, "What moral value is there in putting Yoseif to death if you are also preparing a cover-up? He may not be put to death. Instead let us sell him and get this nuisance out of the way." (Rebbe Reb Bunim of Parshizcha)

Ch. 37, v. 35: "Ki eireid el bni o'veil sh'oloh" – Because I will descend to my son in the grave mourning – Rashi explains that this means that Yaakov said that he would always be in mourning over the loss of his son until he himself would die and be buried.

The Daas Z'keinim on Breishis 47:8 cites a medrash stating that because Yaakov responded to Paroh's query of how old he was that the days of his life were not many and they were difficult he lost 33 years of his life, as otherwise he would have lived as long as his father Yitzchok, 180 years. The reduction of 33 years is based on the 33 words in the verses of Paroh's query and Yaakov's response.

Yaakov's words in our verse might well contain a spark of prophecy of the loss of 33 years. He said that he would descend to the grave "o'veil." The numeric value of this word is 33. (Chasam Sofer)

Ch. 39, v. 3: "Va'yar adonov ki Hashem ito v'chol asher hu o'seh Hashem matzliach" – And his master saw that Hashem is with him and all that he does Hashem brings success – Rashi comments that the Name of Hashem was always mentioned by Yoseif. This is most puzzling. The verse clearly states that his master realized this through the success of his work, not through what he spoke. How did Yoseif's master know

that it was because of Hashem being with him that Yoseif was successful? We also find success by evil doers. Hashem allows them much success so that they receive their merits in this world. Rashi tells us to read our verse as, “And whatever Yoseif did (that was successful) he said ‘Hashem matzliach,’” that Hashem brought the desired result. This is exactly what Rashi is saying. His master realized that it came through Hashem because the Name of Hashem was always on Yoseif’s lips since he always attributed the success to Hashem. (Divrei Yisroel of Modzitz)

Ch. 39, v. 10: “Va’y’hi k’dabroh el Yoseif yom yom” – And it was as she spoke to Yoseif daily – Rashi (B.R. 85:2) says that Poti Fera’s wife saw through astrology that she was destined to produce great descendants with Yoseif and told this to Yoseif. No doubt that Yoseif had similar thoughts floating in his mind, as our Rabbis tell us that this was a phenomenal test for him, and if it was all a matter of physical attraction the test would not be very great at all for a righteous person. If so, how indeed did Yoseif know if this was or wasn’t the good inclination pushing him? Since she pestered him daily, “yom yom,” he realized that it was the evil inclination. When a person has a drive to do the right thing and he pushes it off, it doesn’t come back to him time and again, enticing him to act. It is only the evil inclination that does not let up and comes “yom yom.” (Rabbi Boruch of Mezebizh)

Ch. 39, v. 23: “Ein sar beis hasohar ro’eh es kol m’umoh b’yodo baasher Hashem ito” – The prison warden does not see anything that is in his hand since Hashem is with him – The jail warden saw Yoseif being successful and he correctly surmised that this was a result of some special service to Hashem in which Yoseif was engaged. However, he discerned nothing because Yoseif was exceedingly discrete in his service of Hashem. (Botzina Dinhora)

#### OROH V'SIMCHOH - MESHECH CHOCHMOH ON PARSHAS VA'YEISHEV

Ch. 39, v. 20: "M'kome asher asi'rei ha'melech asurim" – The Ramban says that the Torah makes note of the jail in which Yoseif was incarcerated as being that of the people the king would have incarcerated, to show the Divine providence that Yoseif would be joined by the king's personal wine butler and baker, something that would not have taken place had Yoseif been jailed in the "common man's" jail. Alternately, he offers that the Torah is teaching us that Yoseif's former master Potifar was so appreciative of his devoted service all the years that he had Yoseif placed in a more comfortable prison.

The MESHECH CHOCHMOH answers that Potifar actually knew that Yoseif was innocent, and would have readily sided with him. However, he would then have suffered great shame from the resultant guilt of his wife. He therefore decided to go along with her, but not have Yoseif killed as he was aware of his innocence. Potifar decided to place Yoseif into jail, but this presented a new problem. Once in jail, Yoseif would speak with other incarcerated people and tell them of his innocence, which Potifar knew would be quite convincing. Therefore, rather than place Yoseif into a common jail, where many jailbirds slept in a ward, he sent him off to the federal penitentiary, "m'kome asher asi'rei ha'melech asurim," where the "bessereh menshen" go, which had private single occupancy suites, so that when they retired Yoseif would have no one to tell of his innocence, and by day they were all guarded and under control.

#### CHAMISHOH MI YODEI' A – FIVE QUESTIONS ON THE WEEKLY SEDRAH – PARSHAS VA'YEISHEV 5775 – BS"D

1) Ch. 37, v. 34: “Va’yisa’beil al b’no yomim rabim” – And he mourned for his son many years – Rashi explains that Yaakov mourned for the loss of Yoseif for 22 years, the same amount of time that he was away from his parents (save time spent in Yeshivas Eiver). Yitzchok told Yaakov to leave home to pursue finding a wife so why is this time counted against him?

2) Ch. 37, v. 35: “Va’yimo’ein l’hisnacheim” – And he refused to console himself – Rashi explains that although Hashem set into a person’s psyche to forget the sorrow of the death of a loved one after the passing of a year (gemara P’sochim 54b), there is no consolation when the assumed deceased is actually alive (maseches Sofrim ch. #21). If so, why didn’t Yaakov himself realize that Yoseif must still be alive?

3) Ch. 38, v. 14: “Va’tishev b’fesach einayim” – And she sat at a road junction – This is Rashi’s interpretation. The reason that a road junction is called “pesach einayim” is because one has to open his

eyes, i.e. pay special attention at a junction, so that he continues his trip on the proper path (Rabbeinu Menachem and Pirush al Targum Yonoson ben Uziel). If this is so, why in verse 21 do we only have “vo’einayim al ha’derech,” without “pesach”?

4) Ch. 38, v. 25: “V’hee sholchoh el chomihoh” – And she sent to her father-in-law – Rashi (gemara Brochos 43b) says that Tomor did not simply say that Yehudoh impregnated her. Rather she only sent the payment, saying, “The man to whom these items belong is responsible for my pregnancy. If he admits it fine, and if not, let them burn me rather than my embarrassing him.” From this we derive that it is preferable for a person to throw himself into a fiery cauldron rather than embarrassing his fellow man. The Baal Haturim and Rabbi Yehudoh Chosid say that Yehudoh’s words of the previous verse, “Hotziuhoh v’viso’reif,” do not mean that she was to be burned to death, but rather, that a mark be made on her face with a burning brand, as a constant sign to her sin. If so, what is the proof that it is preferable to be burned to death, as that wasn’t going to be her punishment? As well, how do we derive that it is preferable to “throw oneself” as she was not about to do this to herself, but rather, it would be done by others?

5) Ch. 39, v. 9: “V’chotosi IEilokim” – And I will have sinned against Elokim – Yoseif did not justify his refusal on moral grounds, i.e. adultery is a morally wrong act, or that he might be caught. He simply said that this was against Hashem’s wishes. Why did he not say the former?

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## ANSWERS:

#1

One answer is that once he delayed his return he was responsible for all the years he was away. Rabbi Yehudoh Chosid #573 writes that even if a parent forgoes his honour and a child thus does not transgress the positive commandment to honour one’s parents, nevertheless, there can be heavenly retribution. This surely was the case with Yoseif. (Bris Olom on Sefer Chasidim)

This explanation is puzzling. Yoseif was caught in a catch 22 situation. If he leaves to Padan Aram, then he forgoes honouring his parents. If he doesn’t leave he transgresses his father’s command. How can there be heavenly retribution for complying with his father’s wishes, even though they bring in their wake an absence?

In a similar vein to Rabbi Yehudoh Chosid’s opinion, responsa Radva”z 1:524 writes that even though a father has foregone his honour, it is only insofar as his son’s not being punished for not according him honour, but the mitzvoh of “kibud av” is not fulfilled.

#2

There is grieving and mourning for a relative that is based on yearning for the deceased. This type of mourning dissipates after a year. There is however, another type of mourning, the suffering a person has by having the attitude that since Hashem took away a relative it reflects on the survivor, indicating that he is sinful and therefore was punished. This type of grieving does not necessarily dissipate after a year. As Rashi mentions, Yaakov was very disturbed by the incorrectly assumed death of Yoseif because he was privy to the knowledge that if all his sons would outlive him he would merit “olom habo.” His pain was twofold, but beyond the first year he assumed it was for his assessment of his dismal future in regard to “olom habo.” (Michlal Yofi)

#3

A few other explanations for “pesach einayim,” and it will be self-evident that some of them alleviate this problem.

- 1) It is the name of a city, as Tapuach and Einom (Paanei’ach Rozo)
- 2) “Eiyin” means a path. (Sforno)
- 3) There were two wellsprings there and their shape was similar to a door opening. (Ibn Ezra)
- 4) These words are an allusion to the opening/opportunity to be an ancestor of “V’hu admoni im y’fei einayim” (Shmuel 1:16:12). Medrash Hagadol)

#4

The answer lies in Rashi's words "mikan omru." "Kan," here, is not the happening in the verse, as the lesson taught is refuted in two manners, as per the questions just raised. Rather, "mikan," is from the words of Tomor, as recorded in the M.R. Tomor said, "Even if they were to throw me into a fiery cauldron I will not embarrass him." This was not the punishment they were about to administer. We thus derive that she was ready to suffer an extremely greater punishment, and this is called "throwing oneself into ....." At the same time we derive that even suffering death by fire is preferable to embarrassing your fellow man.

Paa'nei'ach Rozo writes that it is forbidden to believe that the Baal Haturim wrote this comment.

Another insight into the term "oneself" of the gemara Brochos 43b: The Ramban asks why Tomor should be given the death penalty since she was single at the time. He answers that it was because of her causing Yehudoh, who had the status of king, embarrassment. The mishnah in the gemara Arochin 7a says that if a pregnant woman is to put to death by the court we do not wait for her to give birth. The Rambam in his commentary on the mishnah says that this is based on the verse in Dvorim 22:22, "Umeisu GAM SHNEIHEM."

This ruling only applies when the court administers the death penalty for a sin that the Torah says carries capital punishment, and not that which is meted out by the king as an infraction of his honour. Therefore, since Tomor realized that she carried Yehudoh's child, a ben Yisroel should be saved. As we know from the incident of selling Yoseif, Yehudoh, and his brothers except for Yoseif, posited that they had the status of bnei Yisroel. Yehudoh did not realize that the child was his and was ready to have her put to death immediately. This explains why Tomor attempted to save herself by offering the items given her for her services, with the hope that Yehudoh would admit on his own, and if not, at least use some excuse to delay carrying out the death penalty until after the child was born once he realized that he was the father. By offering the items given as payment for her services, Tomor attempted to save the child but not herself. If only her life was at stake she would not have shown the signet ring and garment. This is why the gemara says "she'yapil es ATZMO." (Kovetz Ohel Mo'eid)

#5

The Rambam hilchos yesodei haTorah 5:10 writes: One who refrains from sinning or does a mitzvah should not do so because of any reason in the world, not out of fear or for honour, but rather, only because of the Holy One blessed be He, just as Yoseif refrained himself from sinning with his master's wife. This is true sanctification of Hashem's Name.

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