



Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFHA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת מ ק צ

ועתה ירא פרעה איש נבון וחכם וישיתוהו על ארץ מצרים:

After he concluded his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, Yosef told Pharaoh that in order to prevent suffering from the famine, the Egyptian people must prepare during the coming seven years of plenty. In his concluding remarks, Yosef advised Pharaoh to appoint a wise and understanding person to administrate and enforce this plan. Indeed, it took a wise person like Yosef to understand the message of Pharaoh's dreams, and coming up with a proposed plan of action was also no small feat. We must wonder however, why Yosef recommended that Pharaoh seek an 'ish chacham v'navon' – a wise understanding person – to implement it. Pharaoh agreed. It would seem that Pharaoh needed a good administrator and that any exceptional intellect, would be a bonus, at most.

HaRav Eliyahu Lopian zt"l offers an explanation that serve us as a lesson for life: It is human nature to see only the present. Even when things are especially good and the situation is such that it affords us the opportunity to prepare for a less prosperous future, we lean towards enjoying the present. This is the natural tendency of mankind, and it literally takes a genius to see past the present and actually be proactive about the future. Yosef understood this much and conveyed the message to Pharaoh: A plan of action is not sufficient. Successful implementation of it is necessary, and only a wise person can understand how to deal with the present in light of the future.



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This, explains R' Elya, is the situation every Jew finds himself in. We live in a world of opportunity for Torah and mitzvos. We think this will go on forever. However, there will come a time that each of us will leave this world and go to the olam ha'emes. There, we will no longer have opportunities to grow. Whatever merits we have amassed will go with us, but there will be nothing we can do to make our bundle bigger. In the words of Chazal (Eruvin 54), this world is like a wedding feast; it is relatively short and we should grab the food and enjoy it while we can. Indeed, Chazal (Pirkei Avos) define a wise person as one who takes the future into account. Yosef knew this and even Pharaoh ultimately understood it.

ואמר פרעה אל עבדיו הנמצא כזה איש אשר רוח אלקים בו:
ויאמר פרעה אל יוסף אחרי הודיע אלקים וכו':

Pharaoh was perhaps one of the biggest kofrim that ever lived. He denied the Ribono shel Olam's existence so much that Chazal tell us that he told claimed that it was he, Pharaoh, who created the Nile river. It is quite surprising therefore, that he should mention and even credit Hashem, twice in two consecutive pesukim.

HaRav Yaakov Kaminetzky zt"l explains as follows: When Pharaoh called in Yosef and told him that he heard about Yosef's ability to interpret dreams, Yosef replied that it is Hashem who gives him the ability to understand the dreams. Then after Pharaoh related what he saw in his dreams, Yosef stressed



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that these dreams are a message from Hashem. This itself shouldn't cause us to wonder. After all, it was the way of the avos and has always been the ways of tzadikim to be mishtatef sheim Shomayim - pronounce Hashem's name in their daily mundane affairs. Even, or perhaps especially when dealing with non-Jews, adding the words "thank G-d" or "G-d willing" makes a tremendous kiddush Hashem, and, explains Reb Yaakov, even Pharaoh couldn't help but being affected by it.

This is a tremendous lesson in chinuch. If even Pharaoh was affected to such a degree, imagine how Jewish children could react when they hear their parents, teachers, neighbors, etc. bringing Hashem into their daily lives. They will begin to look at the world differently, and so will we!

This idea fits very nicely with the beginning of the month of Teves, as follows: The Arizal gives us special kavanos to have in mind when saying the name of Hashem in the middle beracha of musaf of each Rosh Chodesh. The kavanos for this month is "Hashem it u'neromema shemo" - Hashem is with me and we will uplift his name.

ויאמר ראובן אל אביו לאמר את שני בני תמית וכו':

When the shevatim returned from Mitzrayim the first time, they did so without Shimon, and with a warning that they dare not come back without Binyomin. Even when they ran out of food, Yaakov refused to send Binyomin along. After losing Yosef and Shimon being held captive, he could not bear the



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thought that something might happen to Binyomin as well. In an attempt to reassure his father that everything would be ok, Reuvein volunteered the lives of his own two sons if he would fail to bring Binyomin back home. This needs to be understood. How would the death of two of Yaakov's own grandchildren make up for losing Binyomin? Indeed, Rashi explains that this was Yaakov avinu's response. Why didn't Reuvein understand this? Furthermore, we know that Reuvein had four sons, not two.

HaRav Moshe Shternbuch shlit"a suggests the following approach: According to the Zohar, Reuvein never knew what happened to Yosef. According to one opinion, he had taken leave of his brothers to go serve Yaakov avinu for a few days. When he returned, Yosef had already been sold to the Yishmaelim and he surmised that he Yosef had been killed and regretted that as the bechor, he didn't do enough to stop his brothers from carrying out their plans to get rid of Yosef. Full of remorse, Reuvein blamed himself for Yosef's demise. He thought that had he really felt a sense of achrayus for his brother, Yosef's life would have been spared. Now he was faced with a very similar situation. He wanted to take responsibility for Binyomin. He told his father "I learned my lesson. Although I may have cared about Yosef, I didn't care enough. I should have felt my brother's needs as if they were my own!" In an effort to express his willingness to accept responsibility for Binyomin and



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perhaps as a way to reinforce these feelings of responsibility in his own heart, Reuvein offered the lives of two of his children. Of course he understood that these were Yaakov Avinu's grandchildren as well, but he was trying to tell Yaakov that he learned that when one takes responsibility for others he must view it not as a favor for the other person, but as a responsibility for himself.

The lesson is obvious. Often, when we do chesed for others, we view them as “somebody else”. While this is certainly true to a certain degree, we must never forget that all Jews are connected and we are ultimately affected by one another. Helping another yid is not about “scoring more brownie points” in Shomayim. It is about fulfilling our obligation to ourselves. HaRav Shimshon Pinkus notes that Chazal are very critical of the lack of support of Torah before Moshiach comes. He questions how this could be true as the amount of money donated to Torah causes today far exceeds the amount of support for Torah in previous generations. He answers that while it is true that while more money is given, it is not given out of a sense of responsibility, rather as an “extra”. If we really felt responsible, than we would view the needs of others as if they were those of our own family members. We are living in times when there are so many people who need so much and most of us cannot possibly help all of them. This is absolutely correct, and most of us are certainly not obligated (or advised) to help everyone. However, to completely dismiss those in need of



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help as if “that is their problem” is undermining our responsibility for our fellow Jews.

The words of the Meiri require elucidation. After all, the mitzvah of Chanuka is just as much a woman’s mitzvah as it is a man’s. However, when a woman’s husband is present, she fulfills her obligation with his lighting, as the basic obligation is only one candle per household. Indeed, many poskim hold that if a man will not return home until late at night, his wife should light for both of them at the proper time. The converse is true regarding Shabbos candles. Men, fulfill their obligation with their wives. If a woman is away or otherwise unable to light in time, her husband should light the Shabbos candles with a beracha. In fact, the Bach says that the only reason why Chazal stress that it is a “woman’s mitzvah” is in order to discourage men from lighting and claiming that it is better that he do the mitzvah himself, rather than via an agent, i.e. his wife (mitzvah bo yoser mi'b’shluch). So what then does the Meiri mean that he gives up his mitzvah for hers?

Perhaps here lies the answer: Indeed, both husband and wife have both mitzvos, and this time they can only do one of them. He, would rather light Chanuka lights since then, he will be doing the mitzvah, for both of them. Instead, Chazal tell him, let her do the mitzvah for both of you. Either way, you can only do one mitzvah this time, so choose the one that will foster shalom bayis, because this is more important than doing the mitzvah yourself.