



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ו י ש ב

וישב יעקב וכו':

Rashi tells us that Yaakov Avinu wanted to “sit in peace”. In fact, say Chazal, that this is the way of tzadikim - to desire to live in peace. Hakadosh Baruch Hu however, does not concede to their request. “Is it not enough that they will dwell peacefully in Olam haba”, says the Ribono shel Olam, “that they desire to live peacefully in this world as well?” Because, Yaakov wanted “peace”, Hashem sent the episode of the sale of Yosef way, as if to say, “No Yaakov, you cannot have peace in this world!” It behooves us however, to understand, why not. After all, Yaakov wasn't looking to sit and relax on the beach or go on a cruise. Certainly, Yaakov Avinu's sole kavana in this was so that he could have enough menuchas ha'nefesh to dedicate himself to Torah and avodas Hashem without having to worry about anything else. These are very noble intentions. What could be wrong with this?

HaRav Moshe Shternbuch Shlit"א explains that although a person's main focus in life should be to Torah and mitzvos, a person grows more from difficult experiences. Chazal tell us “l'fum tzara agra” -that reward is commensurate with the pain involved. This means that although one should not seek difficult challenges in life, whatever Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends his way, is tailor designed for him specifically, so that he can achieve maximum growth. In other words, although an endless amount of money coupled with the genius of R' Akiva Eiger and the arichus yamim of Mesushelach might enable a person to



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LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ו י ש ב

learn more uninterrupted hours of Torah and be more involved in other higher pursuits, this is far from a recipe for success in achieve one's own potential. HaRav Shternbuch says that he remembers that when he was in yeshiva, a choson approached the Rosh Yeshiva (HaRav Moshe Schneider zt"l) on the day of his wedding to ask for a beracha. When the Rosh Yeshiva asked him what sort of beracha he wanted, the choson said he wanted a beracha that everything should go smoothly. HaRav Schneider, who understood that life isn't supposed to be "smooth" refused to give such a beracha. Instead, he wished the choson that he should "get through" all the challenges that life will present.

This is a vital lesson for all of us. When we see other people who seem to have it easy (or so we think), and we imagine that if we were not "so disadvantaged, imagine what we could accomplish..." we should first of all remember that it likely isn't true. However, beyond this, we need to bear in mind that we grow most from life's challenges, and if Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends us difficulties and challenges, we should understands that He wants us to grow.

וישב יעקב וכו

Rashi quotes Chazal that Yaakov, just like all tzadikim, longed to live in peace. In response to their desire,

Hakadosh Baruch Hu proclaims: ?Is it not enough that they will rest in the world to come, that they want to have it easy in this world as well?? As such, as soon as Yaakov began to feel settled, Hashem brought about the sale of Yosef.



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFAT & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ'רשת'ת ו'שב'ב

This begs explanation. Certainly, Yaakov Avinu's idea of "living in peace" was not relaxing on the beach with a glass of lemonade. This was the same Yaakov Avinu who spent fourteen years learning in the yeshiva of Sheim and Eiver without sleep! It is clear that Yaakov's desire for tranquility was in order to be able to sit and learn Torah and do mitzvos, undistracted. This seems to be a noble desire. What fault does Hashem find with these intentions?

HaRav Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l explains as follows: This world is very much like a furnace that purifies precious metals. Without the fire, the metals would remain unrefined. So too, a neshama in this world must undergo various difficulties in order to achieve perfection and thereby prepare it for olam ha'ba. Although it would be much easier to learn and do mitzvos if our lives would run perfectly smoothly, the nisyonos we encounter, help develop our character and mold our neshamos. Although most do not suggest adding unnecessary stresses and challenges to our lives, every yid has his own set of challenges, and while we continue to daven for refuos and yeshuos, we must bear in mind that whatever challenges come our way are opportunities for growth and ultimately for our good.

וישמע ראובן ויצלהו מידם וכו':

When Reuvein heard his brothers plotting to kill their brother Yosef and throw him into a pit, he tried to dissuade them from doing so, and so, he was sold to travelling arabs instead. In praising Reuvein for his efforts, the Torah



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFAT & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ו י ש ב

proclaims that Reuvein saved Yosef's life. In a famous medrash, Chazal tell us that had Reuvein known that the Torah would publicly praise his actions, he would have jumped to do so with more zeal and alacrity. This would seem to indicate that Reuvein would have "stepped up" his actions in order to gain greater recognition. This itself need to be understood. The continuation of this medrash is however less well known. There, Chazal make a similar statement about Boaz's marriage to Rus. The medrash concludes that all of our actions are recorded in a log kept by melech ha'moshiach, seemingly in an effort to encourage each of us in the performance of mitzvos.

HaRav Aharon Kotler zt"l however offers a novel approach in understanding the words of the medrash, and with it, encourages each of us in the more mundane aspects of our lives: Reuvein believed he was simply saving his brother's life. Little did he know that the Torah would testify that his actions formed the salvation of all of k'lal Yisroel. Because Reuvein did not allow his brothers to kill Yosef and sell him instead, Yosef ended up in Mitzrayim where he lay the foundations for his family to settle there and begin to build k'lal Yisroel. Reuvein did not just save his brother. He helped build the Jewish people. If only, he had realized this... Similarly, explains the medrash, Boaz thought that in marrying Rus he was helping her. Little did he know that he was becoming the progenitor of malchus beis Dovid. In a similar vein, conclude Chazal, our actions are of profound importance. Through our Torah and mitzvos, including those seemingly mundane activities such as raising our



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LESSONS IN HASHKAFHA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ'ר ש'ת ו'ש'ב

families, we are building worlds. If only we would realize the great ramifications of actions, we would jump at the opportunities that life presents us with!

ויעזב בגדו בידה וכו'...

The wife of Potifar persisted in trying to seduce Yosef day after day. One day when no one else was around, she grabbed onto Yosef's clothing to which he responded by running away, leaving his clothing behind. Certainly Yosef was physically stronger than eishes Potifar. Why did he not stop to grab his clothing before running outside? Leaving the way he did left things looking quite incriminating, not to mention, were lacking in decency.

HaRav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l explains that our primary task in this world is to run away from spiritual danger. Whenever the yetzer hara presents us with a challenge, we should not linger around, but rather flee! Even if remaining for a moment will allow us to accomplish more and be productive, the danger is too great! This is one of the tools of the yetzer hara; he often presents us with the opportunity for innocuous or even accomplishing undertakings just to get our attention. Yosef understood this and therefore fled, even though it meant leaving his clothes inside.

Halacha is replete with examples where Chazal forbade certain actions of behaviors lest they lead to actual transgression. As such, one should not take Rabbinic prohibitions lightly. On the contrary, it is specifically in those areas where the danger is greatest. Chazal say 'kol ha'poretz geder y'shachenu



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת      ו ' ש ב

nachash' - one who breaks down [Rabbinic] 'fences' will be bitten by a snake. Perhaps their intention is the nachash ha'kadmoni, the original snake who symbolizes the yetzer hara; by ignoring Rabbinic enactments, one exposes himself to being bitten by the yetzer hara. We see from Yosef however, that this is not limited to actual prohibitions. Any exposure to the yetzer hara presents a sakanah!

יוסף:

It took twenty-two years from the time that Yosef took leave from Yaakov until they were reunited. Chazal tell us that this corresponded to the twenty years that Yaakov had spent in Lavan's house, creating and raising his family, and the two years of travelling to get there and back. Since Yaakov had neglected kiud av v'eim for twenty-two years, his son was taken from his presence for the same length of time. While mathematically, this makes sense, why Yaakov should be punished for such, does not. Aside from the fact that Yaakov for the most part was busy working to marry Leah and Rochel and having children, he was in fact following his parents' directive to go find a wife from Lavan's family. Why then should he be faulted, and much less, punished, for his extended absence?

HaRav Moshe Shternbuch shlit"א suggests the following: The twenty-two years of Yosef's absence was not a punishment per se. Yaakov Avinu could not have avoided his situation. Indeed, he had to stay away from his parents in order to get married and build a family. The situation was beyond his control



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ'ר ש"ת ו' ש"ב

and Yaakov was not punished for it. However, Yaakov knew that it didn't have to happen this way. Had Elifaz not taken all his material possessions, Yaakov would have shown up to Lavan's house with the wherewithal to take Rochel as his wife and return home shortly thereafter. Yaakov understood the fact that he couldn't, as itself a punishment for previously neglecting or somehow being delinquent in his fulfilment of kidum av v'eim. While one might not be liable for failing to do mitzvos for which he was exempt, the growth he could have gained is an opportunity that is lost. This itself is a punishment.

Chazal tell us that "megalgelin zechus al yedai zakai" – one who has many merits, gains the opportunity for more merits. When opportunities for mitzvos and chesed come our way, the Ribono shel Olam is not only giving us the opportunity to grow, but is often rewarding us by giving us these opportunities. This is an important lesson to remember and internalizing it can introduce a new excitement to what could otherwise be perceived as bothersome.