

PARSHA

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REMEMBER THE MERIT OF YOSEF HATZADDIK

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, “These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph, at the age of 17 years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives. And Joseph would bring evil reports about them to their father” (Bereshith 37:2).

How are we to understand the statement, “These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph”? After all, Jacob’s descendants were numerous! The commentators explain that the Patriarch Jacob transmitted all his Torah knowledge to his son Joseph. Since all the Torah infused in Jacob was transmitted to this particular son, the text considers that “these are the generations of Jacob: Joseph.”

This seems surprising, for did Joseph study more than Reuven, Jacob’s firstborn, who was therefore older than him? Furthermore, why do we in the Jewish community normally describe Joseph as Yosef haTzaddik (“Joseph the Righteous”)? Why is Joseph alone described in this way, since his brothers were just as pious, and certainly not inferior to him?

I think that the answer to all of these questions resides in one and the same thing, something found in the affirmation that Joseph “was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah.” In reality, Joseph acted as a youngster among the sons of these maidservants. He took a backseat role and acted with humility by creating a special bond with these sons, not trying to dominate them. Rashi underlines that Joseph “arranged his hair,” meaning that he was very handsome and could have grown proud as a result. Furthermore, we know that he enjoyed a special relationship with his father, who made him a fine woolen tunic. Despite all this, Joseph maintained his great humility, expressing his affection for the sons of the maidservants and thereby lifting himself to an elevated spiritual level. Over the course of time, when he found himself in Egypt and was even appointed as viceroy, Joseph could have dethroned Pharaoh because he understood one language more than Pharaoh. Yet through gratitude to the king who put him in charge of all the regions of Egypt, Joseph did not try to take advantage of his superiority. Hence Joseph was endowed with tremendous modesty, remaining humble despite mastering every language and knowing how to interpret dreams that remained a mystery to all the magicians of Egypt. Instead of growing proud and becoming arrogant, on the contrary, Joseph clung to the virtue of restraint, from which he was fashioned. This is the sense of the expression, “he was a youth [na’ar] with

the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah” – he acted like a youngster (mena’er et tzmo), ridding himself of all feelings of superiority among the sons of the concubines.

A Name: Witness to Identity

After I carefully thought about these Torah verses, I concluded that among all the brothers, only Joseph could qualify as a tzaddik and inherit the Torah of his father. This is because all of Joseph’s actions were infused with decency and modesty. The holy Torah is acquired by affection for others and humility before them, just as Joseph humbled himself before the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Now we are well aware that anyone who shares in the difficulties of others merits a great reward.

We also know that Torah only endures with a person who sacrifices himself for it. Since Joseph studied with humility and self-effacement, he was able to quickly learn all the Torah that his father had acquired with Shem and Ever.

One day, a woman came to tell me about the problems she was having with her son, who was named Shemuel [Samuel]. Unfortunately, he wasn’t like the Prophet Samuel! (Note: In the time of the Judges, even before the Prophet Samuel was born, a celestial voice proclaimed that a child would be born and named Samuel, and that he would be equal to Moshe and Aaron. Hence all the women at that time named their son Samuel.) Now this woman told me that when they were deciding on what to name their son, she and her husband hoped that he would follow the way of the Torah. She didn’t understand why “her” Shemuel was making her life so bitter and not taking the path of the prophet of the same name. I then explained to this unhappy woman that when Chana named her son Shemuel, she meant that shemo (“his name”) would be E - I (“G-d”), meaning that he would be called “like G-d.” When the celestial voice was heard, Chana declared: “May it be Your will that I give birth to this child, and that he be as great as Moshe and Aaron,” as it is written: “Moshe and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who invoke His Name” (Tehillim 99:6).

I once read from Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Mann Shach, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh, that in our days some people choose this name for their son without realizing the profound meaning that lies behind it. I told the woman that since she gave her son this name, she was obligated to make some sacrifices for his Torah education, for his growth in Torah and fear of G-d, just as Chana was concerned for the future of her son and brought him to

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the Sanctuary as soon as he was weaned so he could be infused with words of Torah.

It is written that as Samuel was sleeping one day, he heard a voice calling out to him. He then got up and ran to Eli the Kohen, thinking that he had called him. However Eli told him that he hadn't. Not long afterwards, Samuel heard his name once more, and again he went to see Eli, who told him that he hadn't called him this time either. When this happened a third time, the Kohen realized what was happening. He then told the boy that Hashem was apparently calling him, and that the next time he hears his name, he should respond: "Speak, Hashem, for Your servant is listening." Yet when Samuel heard his name the next time, he responded: "Speak, for Your servant is listening" (I Samuel 3:1-3) – omitting Hashem's Name. Why?

As I see it, the Prophet Samuel in his great modesty did not believe that he had reached the level of perceiving G-d in a direct manner. Thus when he heard a voice calling him again, in his humility he decided not to mention Hashem's Name in his response. That is, he didn't think that he was great enough for Hashem to address him directly. It was for this reason that the Prophet Samuel was worthy of being compared to Moshe and Aaron, of whom it is said that they never inconvenienced a Jew for their own benefit without compensating him.

The Words of the Sages

What Goes Around, Comes Around

Rabbi Chaim Rosenberg, a former student of the Hevron yeshiva, recounted an extraordinary story that demonstrates how anyone who occupies himself with a mitzvah and puts an effort into helping others not only loses nothing, but also receives a great reward from Heaven.

The following story is mentioned in a book by Rav Zilberstein:

During the deadly bombing of the Sbarro Pizzeria in Jerusalem, of which there were numerous victims, two young women experienced a true miracle. They wanted to enter the pizzeria, but a waitress advised them to return an hour later. In fact the pizzeria was overcrowded at the time, and it would have been difficult to find comfortable seats had they stayed.

These two young women, who had traveled from the United States to visit Israel, followed the waitress' advice and left, thinking of returning in an hour. Yet a few minutes later, a bomb went off and a horrific massacre ensued.

The two tourists had obviously been saved, but the poor waitress was seriously wounded. She was rushed to a hospital, where she would undergo several operations.

Despite the logical reason she had given to dissuade the young woman from remaining at the restaurant, they saw her as a Heavenly messenger who had come to miraculously save them. Hence they visited her at the hospital and told her that they were returning to the United States, but if she ever found herself there, they would help her with any problem she had, medical or otherwise.

A few weeks later, the woman's doctors advised her to seek the help of plastic surgeons in the United States to completely repair her wounds.

She followed their recommendation, but before traveling to the United States, she informed the young women that she was coming for medical treatment.

The miraculous survivors kept their promise. They went to meet her at the airport, and intended on helping her throughout her visit.

How great was the reward of the waitress. She simply advised the young women to delay their meal, and yet in doing so she saved them

"Moshe and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel among those who invoke His Name" – because of his self-annulment and extraordinary modesty, the Prophet Samuel was worthy of being compared to Moshe and Aaron, being among those who invoke G-d's Name. In the books of the Prophets, it is said that Samuel would travel from place to place in order to deal with the problems of the people, rather than waiting for them to come to him. Such behavior was typical of Moshe and Aaron; indeed, Aaron loved peace and pursued peace, putting his honor aside and traveling to people's homes in order to establish peace there. Likewise Moshe Rabbeinu, ignoring his role as the leader of Israel, went to see Dathan and Abiram in order to assuage their anger during the rebellion of Korach and his followers.

In light of all that we have said, we learn that in order to acquire Torah and grow spiritually, we must act with humility and strengthen our ability to annul ourselves and yield before others, just as Yosef haTzaddik, Moshe, Aaron, and the Prophet Samuel did. Torah is only acquired by those who sacrifice themselves for it, meaning by fighting against and eradicating negative character traits.

and earned their precious help.

But that's not all. When their "benefactor" announced that she needed to consult some plastic surgeons, the young women were faced with two possibilities: They could either bring her to a local hospital, or they could go to the trouble of bringing all the way to a medical center in Baltimore, where doctors were more qualified.

The young women decided to sacrifice a day of work to bring their friend to Baltimore, which was quite a way from their home, as well as from their workplace in New York. Nevertheless, they did not allow obstacles to get in their way as they brought the injured woman to Baltimore.

What happened next? As it turned out, these young women worked in a prestigious office located in the Twin Towers, and on the day they didn't work so they could accompany the woman to Baltimore, the Twin Towers were completely destroyed. Needless to say, the office in which the young women worked was destroyed as well.

Just the thought of what would have happened if they hadn't sacrificed a day of work – but instead had remained in New York on that day – makes us shudder.

Is there a clearer proof that anyone who makes concessions for others and devotes himself to them will eventually be led to the heights of happiness?

Guard Your Tongue

A True Nightmare

In general, people do not become greatly upset when a simple individual blames them or commits an injustice against them. On the other hand, when people learn that a scholar has criticized them, they will hate him much more, and a dispute will often erupt. More specifically, when this involves the Rav of the community, it can do tremendous harm and turn his life into a true nightmare.

– Chafetz Chaim

Acknowledging the Truth

It is written, “Judah acknowledged them and said, ‘She is more righteous than I’” (Bereshith 38:26).

Why is it so difficult for human beings to acknowledge their mistakes and change their minds?

The gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz Zatzal believes that the first opinion that forms in a person’s mind becomes fixed in place, at which point he no longer listens to other opinions or tries to determine what is right. From that point on, he will do everything to justify his opinion. Such an approach is in fact disastrous, for a person becomes enslaved to his initial point of view, which he thinks is the truth, and therefore he will not budge.

This character flaw defines a person’s conduct throughout his life, for even when he knows that he is wrong, he will find it difficult to acknowledge his mistake and change his mind. Indeed, he will try to justify his viewpoint by using all sorts of pretexts. This is why the Sages say, “One transgression brings about another” (Pirkei Avoth 4:2). Why? Because if a person were to stop transgressing, it’s as if he were acknowledging that he is wrong – and since he will avoid that at all costs, he will continue to transgress.

The tzaddikim know how to control themselves and acknowledge that they have erred, thus meriting the World to Come. Judah was not ashamed to acknowledge his sin. What was the result? He inherited the life of the World to Come (Sotah 7b).

Among the greatest talmidei chachamim of Jerusalem was the gaon Rabbi Gershon Lapidot Zatzal. As the Rosh Yeshiva of Chayei Olam, he stood out for his extraordinary diligence and unparalleled scholarship in all areas of Torah. At one point he was learning Torah in the Shoshanim LeDavid synagogue, where he developed a deep friendship with the gaon Rabbi Yehudah Tsadka Zatzal.

The book *VeZot LiYehudah* recounts that one Friday night, both men were studying Torah there, each in his own corner. A man arrived and asked Rabbi Yehudah a practical question on the laws concerning loans with interest (ribbit). In general, Rabbi Yehudah avoided making rulings and giving practical directives, but in cases of need he would answer such a question. He therefore believed that he had to tell the man what the Halachah was.

However the man was not satisfied with the answer, and he addressed Rabbi Gershon with the same question – and received a different answer! Aware of what had happened, Rabbi Yehudah approached Rabbi Gershon and discussed the Halachah for a long time, until he clearly realized that he would not be able to convince him, at which point he returned to his place.

A few days passed. Rabbi Yehudah was studying Torah, as he normally would, with his students in the Tzofiof synagogue in the Bucharim district. All of a sudden, Rabbi Gershon entered holding the responsa Maharit Tzahalon in his hands.

He energetically approached Rabbi Yehudah and joyfully proclaimed, “You were right, Rabbi Yehudah! The Maharit also gave the same ruling that you deduced!”

Rabbi Gershon’s humility and love for truth, which were deeply rooted in him, had pushed him to come in the middle of the day to tell Rabbi Yehudah that he had found someone who held a similar view, and had rendered the same halachic decision as him.

I Have Nothing to Say

During one of the classes given by the gaon Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer Zatzal at the Etz Chaim yeshiva, he was asked a question that put an end to the lesson.

He immediately stopped the class and stepped down from the podium. A week later, one of his students asked another question that required deep thought, and again he ended the lesson.

On another occasion, he recounted a story concerning his own teacher, the gaon Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik Zatzal, who had said to him: “When I was a young teacher at Volozhin, I went up to the podium to give a class one day. I read a page of Gemara in front of the yeshiva students, and I said to them: ‘I have nothing to tell you on this page.’ I then stepped down from the podium. Naturally, the students were bewildered.”

He explained his approach to Rabbi Isser Zalman as follows: “When I had prepared for the class, I asked a question that nobody had dreamed of asking, and then an explanation came to me, but nobody had ever dreamed of giving that explanation either! I therefore had something to say, but I didn’t feel that it was the truth, which is why I decided not to give the class.” Rabbi Chaim then turned to his student Rabbi Isser Zalman and said, “Are you capable of doing the same thing as well? If so, then you can be a Rosh Yeshiva!”

In the Light of the Parsha

Two Categories of Faith

It is written, “Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but he forgot him” (Bereshith 40:23).

Rashi comments on the verse as follows: “Because Joseph relied on him to remember him, he was compelled to be confined for two years, as it is said: ‘Praiseworthy is the man who made Hashem his trust, and did not turn to the arrogant’ [Tehillim 40:5]. He did not turn to the Egyptians, who are called arrogant.” The commentators see a contradiction here, for at first Rashi states that Joseph placed all his trust in the chief cupbearer, which is why he was punished. Rashi then asserts, however, that Joseph trusted in G-d alone. The words of the Gemara are well-known: “Our Rabbis taught, ‘You shall gather in your grain’ [Devarim 11:14] – what is to be learned from these words? Since it says, ‘This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth’ [Joshua 1:8], I might think that this injunction is to be taken literally. Therefore it says, ‘You shall gather in your grain,’ which implies that you are to combine the study of [Torah] with a worldly occupation. This is the view of Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says, ‘Is that possible? If a man tills in the tilling season, sows in the sowing season, reaps in the reaping season, threshes in the threshing season, winnows in the season of wind, what will become of the Torah? Not so, for when Israel performs the will of the Omnipresent, their work is performed by others, as it says: ‘Foreigners will stand and tend your flocks...’ [Isaiah 61:5]. Yet when Israel does not perform the will of the Omnipresent, their work is carried out by themselves, as it says: ‘You shall gather in your grain.’ Yet that is not all, for the work of others is also done by them, as it says: ‘So you will serve your enemies...’ [Devarim 28:48].’ Abaye said, ‘Many have followed the advice of Yishmael, and it has worked well. Others have followed Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and it has not been successful.’” (Berachot 35b). The commentators have explained that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was speaking in terms of his own level, meaning that not everyone is able to depend completely on G-d. Such an approach befits only the perfectly righteous.

From here we learn that in regards to having faith in G-d, there are two categories: The first is comprised of simple individuals, those who must make a personal effort to see to their needs. The second is comprised of the perfectly righteous, those who do not need to make any effort to guarantee their sustenance, and who are committing a sin if they do.

Now Joseph was among the second category mentioned by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Hence he was not to make any effort through natural means, but was to content himself on trusting exclusively in G-d. After all, Joseph had acted in this way for many years prior to this incident! Yet the fact that he once depended on the chief cupbearer to find a natural means out of prison is considered a sin for him.

Here the Midrash states, “‘Praiseworthy is the man who made Hashem his trust’ [Tehillim 40:5] – this is Joseph – ‘and did not turn to the arrogant and to strayers after falsehood’ [ibid.]. Yet because he said to the chief cupbearer, ‘But remember me...and mention me’ [Bereshith 40:14], two years were added to his suffering” (Bereshith Rabba 89:3).

Always Be Prepared

It is written, “Jacob dwelled in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan” (Bereshith 37:1).

In the Midrash our Sages comment: “When the righteous wish to dwell in peace in this world, the Satan comes and accuses them: ‘They are not content with what is in store for them in the World to Come, but they also desire to dwell in peace in this world!’” (Bereshith Rabba 84:3).

To what does this desire of the righteous correspond? Does Hashem not really want the righteous to be happy both in this world and in the World to Come?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that Jacob wanted to lead a peaceful existence in regards to educating his children. Seeing that they were all righteous, infused with a fear of G-d, and extolled by Hashem, Jacob believed that he had nothing to worry about.

It was at that point that Jacob was struck by the tragedy surrounding Joseph.

This teaches us that we must never turn our attention away from our children, regardless of how old, righteous, and G-d-fearing they may be. That is, we must always be prepared to reprimand them and teach them how to act correctly.

Little by Little

It is written, “Reuven said to them, ‘Shed no blood!’” (Bereshith 37:22).

The Shelah cites Rabbeinu Levi bar Gershom in describing an amazing principle:

“If we see one or several people preparing to do something wrong, we must gradually deter them from carrying out their plan. In fact if we try to completely deter them, they will use it as a pretext to ignore such advice, and they will carry out their wicked plans.

“For example, when Reuven saw his brothers preparing to kill Joseph, he realized that because of their intense hatred for him [Joseph], they would not listen to him [Reuven] if he tried to deter them. Hence he dissuaded them little by little, telling them not to shed blood, but rather to throw him into a pit, where he would die on his own.

“By doing so, he hoped to deter them completely and therefore save Joseph so he could return him to his father without the brothers knowing. The latter followed Reuven’s advice, disregarded their initial plan and eventually obeying Judah, who said: ‘Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites – but let our hand not be upon him’ [Bereshith 37:27].”

Praise and Criticism

It is written, “The pit was empty; no water was in it” (Bereshith 37:24).

It was empty of water, but filled with serpents and scorpions. According to Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, this verse teaches us that Joseph was thrown into a pit that had good and bad aspects to it: The good thing was that it contained no water; the bad thing was that it contained serpents and scorpions. The good thing is explicitly stated (“no water was in it”), whereas the bad thing is only alluded to (“the pit was empty”). Knowing that two restrictive expressions (“no water”, “empty”) intensity the idea contained in the verse, we learn that the pit was filled with serpents and scorpions. If such is the case for a simple pit, how much more does it apply to a human being! In other words, if we are to praise someone, we should do so in clear and explicit language. And if we are sometimes obligated to reveal a person’s fault, we should only do so by allusion.

Judah’s Reasoning

It is written, “Judah said to his brothers, ‘What gain will there be if we

kill our brother and cover up his blood?’” (Bereshith 37:26).

Three reasons may push a person to kill another: The first is to steal his money. The second is to take vengeance. The third is for glory, to demonstrate just how brave a person is by killing someone.

According to Rabbi Yitzchak Abrabanel, this is what Judah was thinking when he said to his brothers: “What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?” In other words, in response to killing him for the first reason (money), Judah said: “what gain?” – “what profit” according to the Targum. In response to the second reason (vengeance), Judah said: “our brother” – since he is our brother, we cannot take vengeance on him. Finally, in response to the third reason (glory), Judah said: “and cover up his blood” – despite what we want, killing him must remain a secret because we can never reveal it to anyone. In view of all this, “What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?”

In His Hand

It is written, “His master saw that Hashem was with him [Joseph], and whatever he did, Hashem made it succeed in his hand” (Bereshith 39:3).

Rabbi Yossi [said]... wherever the tzaddikim walk, the Shechinah accompanies them and does not abandon them. Joseph walked through the valley of the shadow of death, having been brought down to Egypt, but the Shechinah was with him.... Because of the Shechinah, all that he did prospered in his hand – so much so that if he had something in his hand and his master wanted something different, it changed in his hand to be what his master wanted. Hence it says “made it succeed in his hand” – the reason being that Hashem was with him. Observe, too, that it is not written here, “His master knew,” but “His master saw,” meaning that with his own eyes he saw the miracles that G-d performed by the hand of Joseph every day.

– Zohar I:189a

Men of Faith

In a Miraculous Way

On the Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, a woman arrived and told the participants an astounding story:

The year before, doctors had discovered serious problems with her eyes, problems that could lead to complete blindness. She therefore went to see a specialist, who told her that she needed an operation. Now the thought of an operation terrified this woman, and she explained how she went to see Rabbi David Pinto Shlita for his blessing.

Naturally, Rabbi David told her to start observing mitzvot, at which point the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim would protect her, and with G-d’s help she would be healed.

She agreed, committing herself to strengthening her observance of mitzvot. She believed with all her heart that the merit of the tzaddik would enable her to be healed. On the day of the scheduled operation, doctors performed some tests prior to surgery, and then something extraordinary happened: Upon seeing the results, they concluded that she didn’t need an operation! It was something completely impossible to explain by natural means.

Rabbi David Shlita explained this astounding turn of events by saying that it concretely showed that Hashem can modify the laws of nature. In fact all misfortunes come from man, and they only exist so he can repent. When a person does repent, Hashem removes his misfortunes in a miraculous way.