



The Chanukah Lights Teach Us Diligence

"Reuven heard, and he rescued him from their hand; he said, 'We will not strike him mortally!' And Reuven said to them: 'Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him!' – intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father" (Bereishit 37:21-22)

The Midrash writes on the verse, "All my dudaim emit a fragrance; all at our doors have the precious fruits of comely deeds" (Shir Hashirim 7:14), that there is a connection between Reuven protecting Yosef and the Chanukah lights. "All my dudaim emit a fragrance", this refers to Reuven, and "all at our doors have the precious fruits of comely deeds", this refers to the Chanukah lights. This is a perplexing Midrash. How do we understand the comparison?

We can explain it in the following way: When Reuven's mother, Leah, gave the dudaim to Rachel, he understood that this act was an expression of her enormous valor. The dudaim symbolized Reuven overcoming his desire since he did not eat them and also showed his caution with regard to the sin of theft (Sanhedrin 99b). Through this act, Reuven became an example of restraint to his brothers. Leah's desire (for the dudaim) was not simply for the physical pleasure that she would enjoy when partaking of them, rather she wanted to feel the great delight represented by the dudaim – her son's strength of character. It was these dudaim that Leah presented to Rachel.

Ya'akov rebuked Reuven for changing round his father's bed and bringing it from the tent of Bilhah to the tent of Leah. Ya'akov's rebuke was that in this situation, Reuven did not use the attribute of restraint that he possessed, as he had demonstrated with the incident of the dudaim. He now behaved with rashness and let his anger lead him. The lesson that we can derive from this is that a positive attribute must be adhered to incessantly in every situation.

"All my dudaim emit a fragrance", this refers to Reuven. The meaning is, you Reuven possess the power to rule over your natural tendencies, to overcome the lust for eating and other desires. "All at our doors have the precious fruits of comely deeds", this refers to the Chanukah lights which represent the mitzvot that are within the reach of every Jew. They are the mitzvot which one can fulfill on a regular basis, as Chazal say (Makot 23b): "Hashem wished to give merits to Yisrael, therefore, He increased the Torah and mitzvot that He gave them". In this way, we remain constantly connected to mitzvot and good middot. "All my dudaim emit a fragrance", when a person knows how to overcome his yetzer hara for the sake of fulfilling a mitzvah (as Reuven showed us), he must know that "All at our doors have the precious fruits of comely deeds", he is surrounded by additional, endless mitzvot which he must take care to fulfill persistently.

This idea is symbolized by the Chanukah lights; another mitzvah and another light, until one completes the mitzvah in its entirety. The message that was inherent in Ya'akov's rebuke penetrated Reuven's essence, the proof being that he once again excelled in the attribute of restraint when

he saved Yosef. Ya'akov showed favoritism and a special love for Yosef who on the face of it took the place of the firstborn. Nevertheless, Reuven who was the true firstborn, overcame his middot, protected Yosef and saved him. When Leah gave Rachel the dudaim, Reuven had no bad feelings about this, neither against Rachel nor against her son Yosef who was born as a result of this incident. Reuven once again showed his great strength of character and despite reasons to the contrary, he saved Yosef from the pit.

"All at our doors have the precious fruits of comely deeds", this refers to the Chanukah lights. We can also learn from this verse that the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights only reaches its perfection when lighting all the eight lights with perseverance, for one ascends in holiness and does not descend, according to the opinion of Beit Hillel (Shabbat 21b), who says that every night one should add an additional light. Reuven's attribute did not reach its perfection due to one incident of weakness, moving the beds, which caused a deficiency in his persistence.

This parsha is sometimes read on Chanukah, a time when we are surrounded by the mezuzah on one side and the Chanukah lights on the other. On each day of Chanukah, we read the Torah section that describes the offering brought by the leaders during the dedication of the Mishkan. Their offerings were identical yet were brought by a different leader each day. This teaches us that just like the leaders of the holy tribes, from big to small, were all unified, so too must we take care that there is no schism in Klal Yisrael at all. Each tribe brought his individual portion and the end result was an outcome of their true unity and was a perfect, complete offering.

The Zohar tells us (Vol. 3, 73:1), "Yisrael, the Torah and The Holy One are all one". The Chanukah lights symbolize the Torah, and we light them for eight days just like the numerical value of the first letter of the word Chanukah (חנוכה). The word 'שמונה' (eight) is made up of the same letters as 'נשמה' (soul) and 'השמן' (the oil). Chazal tell us (Shemot Rabbah 36) that Klal Yisrael are compared to oil. Just as oil, when mixed with water, will always float to the top, so too every time Klal Yisrael is trod upon with the intention of annihilation, they overcome their oppressors and rise up intact without even a single 'drop' remaining below. In order to achieve perfection in fulfilling the mitzvot, we are obligated to be united, since every Jewish person is connected to the other and all of us rise up together. Unity, with the absence of any negative feelings, is the condition that guarantees the existence of Am Yisrael. On Chanukah we say "In those days at this time" and the implication is that throughout the generations, we must be on the level that Bnei Yisrael achieved when bringing offerings for the dedication of the Altar. The word "Chanukah" (חנוכה) is from the term "dedication" (חנוכת המזבח). We must educate and instill in ourselves to increase love and brotherhood among us. The number eight symbolizes the neshama (of the Jewish people), while the Chanukah lights symbolize the Torah. When the Jewish people observe the Torah in unity, they are at one with Hashem.

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Hilula

- 23 - Rabbi Ben Zion Alfass, author of 'Ma'aseh Alfass'
- 24 - Rabbi Massad Shitrit, the 'Baba Sidi'
- 25 - Rabbi Avraham Harrari Rafal
- 26 - Rabbi Avraham Ben David, the Ra'avad
- 27 - Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kahen, the Admor of Toldot Ahron
- 28 - Rabbi Ezra Chamou
- 29 - Rabbi Yisrael Friedman



Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Ruling out Reflections of Revenge

In Elul 5764, during the week of parashat Shoftim, I was in Montreal, receiving people before delivering a speech. A man came in with his wife and children, to ask for a blessing. As we spoke, I learned that the man intended to leave immediately after our meeting. I urged him to stay for my speech, saying, "Don't leave just yet. Stay to hear some words of inspiration. We are in the month of Elul, when everyone seeks ways of strengthening himself in teshuvah and good deeds. It can't hurt to hear some words of chizuk."

The man agreed and went into the hall to find seats for his family. During the course of the speech, I mentioned the Torah prohibitions of taking bribery, taking revenge, and bearing a grudge.

After my speech, this man came over to me, extremely moved. He kissed my hand and thanked me profusely. I asked him to explain his enthusiasm. He explained, "Of all the people who met with the Rav before the lecture, I was the only one whom the Rav asked to stay for the speech, even though I was with my wife and family. The Rav usually does not allow children to attend his speeches, because they disturb. But this time, my children did not disturb at all."

I still did not understand what he was driving at and he continued, "the Rav's speech spoke to me on a personal level. I did indeed have intentions of taking vengeance against a specific Rabbi for ruling against me. But now, after hearing your speech, I realize that this is wrong to take vengeance and bear a grudge against him for this. I will now accept his ruling without question."

"Additionally," he continued his personal confession, "I thought over his ruling and came to the conclusion that he was right. According to the Torah law, I am guilty and my adversary is innocent. I am most grateful to the Rav for enlightening me and saving me from improper thoughts of vengeance. In the merit of the Rav, I was spared terrible sins."

"Do not thank me," I told this man. "Baruch Hashem, I was chosen as the messenger to enlighten you so that you should not sin, chas v'shalom. But think about it yourself. Perhaps you did a good deed recently in which merit Hashem saved you from these serious sins."

The Haftarah

"Thus said Hashem: For three transgressions" (Amos 2,3)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftarah hints to the selling of Yosef Hatzaddik, as it says: "for their selling a righteous man for money". The selling of Yosef Hatzaddik is described in detail in the Parsha.

Guard Your Tongue

Be Wary Only

We explained that when hearing lashon hara one is permitted to be wary in order to protect oneself from harm. But G-d forbid, one may not cause this person any harm or embarrassment, in any form. One is even forbidden to hate him in one's heart.



Words of our Sages

Why Did the Doves Come to Rav Shteinman's Bedside?

"Ya'akov settled in the land of his father's sojournings" (Bereishit 37:1)

Before returning to his father's homeland, Ya'akov Avinu lived through great challenges. He suffered from Lavan, from Esav and from the incidents of Dina and Yosef. Chazal, in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer on the verse, "I was not secure, I was not quiet, I was not at rest; and torment has come" (Iyov 3:25), tell us that Ya'akov did not have security because of Lavan, did not have quiet because of Esav, did not have rest because of Dina and his torment came because of Yosef.

What is the reason why Ya'akov Avinu had to go through so much suffering until finally experiencing tranquility?

The Midrash Talpilot writes in the name of the 'Galei Razy'a', that the intention behind all the suffering that Ya'akov went through, was so that he should not feel arrogant and superior to his brother Esav. He explains that had Ya'akov merited serenity and tranquility, he would have become conceited and felt greater than Esav and "Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem". The Shechina does not rest on such a person, and where there is no Shechina there is no Divine assistance and a person sees no success in his efforts. Ya'akov's lack of peace and quiet with the troubles and challenges that Hashem brought upon him, caused him to feel humble and therefore he merited Hashem saving him and returning to his father's homeland, without fear of Esav.

It is important to understand that any kind of hardship or suffering that a person is faced with, is orchestrated by the Hand of Hashem and we do not know the reason behind it. But once we are faced with a challenge, we should realize that it contains an element of lowering a person from feelings of pride. Would he always live in peace and tranquility, he might come to personify "Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem", G-d forbid.

One of the exceptional attributes of Maran Harav Ah-

ron Leib Shteinman zt"l, was fleeing from honor and from the trait of arrogance. He ascribed many of life's adversities to an outcome of pride.

Harav Yitzchak Levenstein zt"l, who enjoyed a close relationship with Harav Shteinman zt"l, told over the following story:

Once when Maran had to be hospitalized in Maynei Hayeshua, the staff wished to assign him the most comfortable room in the department. A quick check revealed that this room was already occupied by an elderly, respectable gentleman and they felt uncomfortable telling him why he was being asked to move to a different room.

The head nurse volunteered to inform him of the change and explained that the Gadol Hador would shortly be arriving and they wished to offer him the optimal conditions for recuperation. She explained that this comfortable, quiet, side room would allow him total rest. On hearing this, the elderly man rejoiced at the opportunity to do chessed with the Gadol Hador and immediately agreed to change rooms.

Several days later when Maran zt"l was about to be released, they told him that the elderly gentleman in the adjacent room had agreed to give up his original room for the Rosh Yeshiva and that maybe he wishes to visit him and bless him.

As soon as Maran heard this he said: "Now I understand why doves came to sit on the window sill of my room. They remained there the entire time and I was most puzzled. The holy sefarim tell us that it is the way of kosher birds to be attracted to a holy place. I couldn't understand why my room should be considered holy but now I understand! Since previously this elderly Jew occupied my room and he performed this noble act of sacrificing for someone else, this kind of deed brings holiness to the place and this is why the doves constantly sat by the window!

Maran did not think for a moment that maybe the doves had come because the Gadol Hador was occupying the room. He remained puzzled until he came up with a solution that had no connection to himself. This is the attribute of modesty at its perfection and an example of distancing oneself to an extreme from any thoughts of pride.



Pearls of the Parsha

A Great Foundation in Education

"Ya'akov settled in the land of his father's sojournings" (Bereishit 37:1)

Ya'akov wished to settle down in tranquility but the anguish of Yosef's kidnapping pounced upon him (Rashi). The Mashgiach Rabbi Chaim Friedlander zt"l, uses this verse to point out an important foundation in educating our children (brought in the sefer 'Kol Ram'):

Hashem certainly desires that the tzaddikim should live in tranquility, as Chazal say, "Fortunate are the righteous who have peace in this world" (Horiyut 10b). However, the intention here is tranquility in instructing one's children. Ya'akov Avinu assumed that since all his children are righteous, he no longer needs to be concerned about their education and he can now settle down in tranquility... This is why the anguish of Yosef's kidnapping pounced upon him.

This teaches us that a father must continue to pay heed to even his older and righteous children's behavior, and continue teaching them and showing them the correct path!

Conquering the Yetzer Through Faith

"But he adamantly refused; he said to his master's wife, "Look – with me here, my master concerns himself about nothing in the house, and whatever he has he placed in my custody" (Bereishit 39:8)

The 'Ilana Dechayai', in the name of Maran Harav Shlomo Chaim of Kodnaveh zt"l, explains that the word 'אָמַי' (he refused) contains the same letters as the word 'אָמַי' (he believed).

Yosef merited refusing his master's wife and conquering his yetzer hara by means of complete emunah.

He adds that the cantillation mark (ta'am) on the word 'אָמַי' is a 'shalsheles' (a long sounding repetitive note). The reason for this is because Yosef Hatzaddik refused time and time again.

Evaluating the Advice of the Evil Inclination

"How then can I perpetrate this great evil and have sinned against Hashem" (Bereishit 39:9)

The Sfat Emet queries: How did Yosef know with certainty that this act was a sin against G-d? Do not Chazal say that the intentions of the wife of Potiphar were for the sake of heaven since she saw that in the future she would bear children from Yosef? We can assume that she told this proof to Yosef. The verse tells us, "And so it was – just as she coaxed Yosef day after day", meaning that day after day she tried to convince him that the act was in fact permissible and correct. This being the case, how was Yosef able to declare with certainty that "I have sinned against Hashem"?!

The Sfat Emet zt"l answers that due to the many proofs that she brought and her constant persuasion, Yosef knew with certainty that this must be the guise of the yetzer hara. The yetzer hatov is not a nuisance, and since she bothered him with her 'proofs' day after day, Yosef took it as a sign that it was a ruse created by the yetzer hara who doesn't let up for a moment.

This principle is explained by the Vilna Gaon (Rut 1:18) on the fact that Naomi agreed to allow Rut to accompany her back to Eretz Yisrael, since "She saw that she (Rut) was exerting herself to go with her". The Gaon explains that if one wants to verify if one's actions stem from the yetzer hatov or the yetzer hara when performing the act one should observe if one's limbs are co-operating with him, or if they feel heavy. If his limbs move with alacrity to perform the mitzvah, the act is probably one that the yetzer hara is pushing you to perform since it is not natural that a person's heavy limbs, that originate from the dust, should run to perform the will of Hashem. This is simply the counsel of the yetzer hara in order to trap you in his net.

Since Naomi saw that Rut was struggling to walk and it wasn't easy for her, she took it as a sign that she was following her yetzer hatov and this is why the yetzer hara made her limbs feel heavy.

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita



Yosef's Self-effacement in Front of His Brothers

"These are the chronicles of Ya'akov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen 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 Yosef would bring evil reports about them to their father" (Bereishit 37:2)

"These are the generations of Ya'akov: Yosef". Why, out of all Ya'akov's children, is Yosef singled out? This teaches us that Yosef acted with humility when facing his brothers, just as his father Ya'akov played down his own worth. Yosef Hatzadik demonstrated great strength of character by acting with humility before his brothers, despite all that they did to him. The word יַעֲקֹב is made up of the letters 'י' and 'עֲקֹב', heel. The heel is a concealed limb which is found on the underside of a person's body, but it is that which is responsible for a person's entire stability. So too the letter 'yud' is the smallest of all the letters but is always written at the top of the line, which shows its significance. Ya'akov always made himself insignificant and played down his worth, but in fact, his place was reserved on high. He was considered the 'Choice one of the Avot'.

"The deeds of our forefathers are an indication for their descendants" (Tanchuma Lech Lecha 9). Yosef learned from his father's conduct and therefore he knew that it was appropriate to diminish his status in front of his brothers, even though he ruled over the entire Egypt. Before his brothers set out on their journey home, Yosef told them, "And now, be not distressed" (ibid 45:5), since when a person feels sad, the Shechina does not rest on him. Since the Shechina only rests in a place of joy (Shabbat 30b), you must leave in a spirit of happiness so that you merit Divine Inspiration which will enable you to see the truth. What is the truth? You will realize "it is my mouth that is speaking to you". 'פִּי' (lit. mouth, here hinting to a bodily opening) refers to the brit. Even though I lived in Mitzrayim, 'כִּי פִי', I did not commit any sins which would blemish the holy covenant, therefore, my brit remained holy. 'הַמְדַבֵּר עִלְיָכֶם', and had I spoken lashon hara about you, holiness would not have rested on my brit.

This could be the reason why it says "These are the chronicles of Ya'akov: Yosef". Yosef Hatzadik is singled out because he was the one who personified the elevated and exalted attributes of Ya'akov Avinu.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



When a person is in danger, for example, he is facing an abyss and right behind him are people who wish to kill him, he should jump into the abyss rather than fall into the hands of man, as David Hamelech a"h said, "Let us fall into the hand of Hashem, for His mercies are abundant; but let me not fall into human hands" (Shmuel II, 24:14). What lies behind this insight? When a person who believes in Hashem faces some kind of natural danger, he places his faith totally in Hashem Yitbarach and cries out to him with all his might. The result is that Hashem watches over him and performs a miracle for him. However, when it is a human being who is the cause of the 'danger', it is natural to imagine that your fate is in his hands and he therefore becomes the address for your rescue efforts. Since one doesn't place one's trust in Hashem alone, Hashem does not watch over him with the same complete supervision and he can fall into his enemy's hands. All the more so if he completely forgets about the existence of Hashem, and only sees the human being opposite him, then Hashem removes His protection from him and he will definitely fall prey to his enemy.

Based on this idea, the 'mefarshim' explain the incident of throwing Yosef into the pit:

Yosef's brothers decided to kill him. When Reuven saw that the brothers were determined to kill Yosef, he decided to save him from their hands. Therefore, he suggested that they throw him into the empty pit... Rashi tells us that the pit was indeed empty of water, but it did contain deadly scorpions and snakes...

This seems to be most puzzling: What did Reuven think? What kind of act of rescue was this? Throwing Yosef into a pit that is full of deadly scorpions spells out certain death. Would it not be better to leave him in his brothers' hands? Maybe he will be able to arouse their mercy and they will decide not to kill him!

The answer is, explains Rabbi Shalom Arush shlita in his sefer "Garden of Faith", that Reuven knew that Yosef Hatzaddik

was a ba'al emunah, he possessed great faith. It was clear to him that as soon as Yosef becomes aware of the danger that he faces from the snakes and scorpions, he will immediately cry out to Hashem with all his heart, and then Hashem Yitbarach will certainly save him from them. For this is the condition that Hashem formed with nature: As soon as a person cries out to Hashem with all his heart – nature must change. As we are told (Lekutei Hilchot Birchot Hashachar 5): "Hashem made a condition with the sea that it should split for Bnei Yisrael. Meaning, Hashem warned nature and all the angels that are appointed over the running of the world, that the following behavior is an inherent part of nature: As soon as Bnei Yisrael cry out and wish to change the natural order of the world, they are obligated to fulfill their wish: Water should transform into dry land, the sun should stop, fire should not have the power to burn nor lions to devour."

This is why Reuven was so sure that through his act he was saving Yosef, even though he knew that the pit was full of snakes and scorpions. This is the meaning of the words, "Reuven...rescued him from their hand". The verse uses an expression of certainty. It does not say, "and he tried to save him from their hands", which would denote a possibility. For tzaddikim understand the power of prayer and they believe without a doubt that when a person cries out to Hashem, nature is immediately altered for him.

However, Reuven did not rely on Yosef Hatzaddik's faith which would be tested were he challenged by a human being who has free choice. He understood the difficulty inherent in this kind of test and he was concerned that Yosef would become confused and turn to his brothers, pleading with them or attempting to pacify or persuade, for example by saying to them, "I am your brother", or, "Have mercy on Father". As indeed was the case, it is clear from the brothers' confession that he did beg his brothers: "Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed" (Bereishit 42:21). Reuven was concerned that Yosef would not place his trust in Hashem alone, in which case Hashem's protection would not be complete and the brothers would be able to kill him without any difficulty.

Of course, when Yosef was thrown into the pit, he did not plead with the snakes

or scorpions that they should not harm him, rather he cried out to Hashem with all his heart and this is why Hashem indeed saved him.

Know Before Whom You Stand

The lesson that we can derive from the above is that when a person faces a challenge presented by a human being who has free choice, for example, a driver is stopped by a police officer, or someone from his family is causing him distress, he must determine unequivocally who is really standing in his path, as it says, "Know before Whom you stand"! If he decides that he is standing before faith, meaning that he believes that this situation was determined by Hashem Yitbarach, and it is not his children, wife or police officer who are doing this to him, then he will not try to flatter, beg or put forth any effort to persuade this person, who is seemingly responsible for his fate, to leave him alone or listen to him. All the more so, he will not grow angry, despise the person or curse him. Rather, he will turn to the One who watches over him and presented him with this challenge, who is the only One who can help him, the Creator!

Even when a person suffers because of his own mistakes or failures and it seems that the ramifications are an outcome of his own free choice, he must know that indeed he made a mistake, he had the free choice not to err, but once the mistake has already occurred, he must believe that this situation holds a Divine message for him! Therefore, he shouldn't blame himself and fall into the trap of guilt and upheaval.

The explanation for this is simple: A believing person knows with certainty that when he chooses correctly, it is only because Heaven helped him. This is something that every believing person must admit and if not, it shows that he is guilty of arrogance since he feels "I am the cause of my success". This is why we are always particular to use phrases like, "with siyata dishmaya", "with the help of Hashem", "with Hashem's kindness", "Hashem helped me". In the same measure, a person is obligated to believe that even if he mistakenly chose incorrectly, this is due to the fact that he was denied Heavenly assistance. He must accept his failures with faith and love, and use them as tools for self-improvement.

In short, we must believe that without exception, any form of distress that a person experiences, or any kind of personal imperfection, is all a result of Hashem's will!