

Parshas Vayeishev – Shabbos Sheva Brachos

This week's parshah describes how two individuals dealt with an extremely difficult and testing situation. They both took a similar approach, and the root of what they were doing is a quality that has been mentioned a number of times about both my daughter and my son-in-law.

After the whole story of selling Yosef, the pasuk says: ויהי בעת ההיא וירד יהודה מאת אחיו – During that time, Yehudah descended away from his brothers. He proceeded to marry Bas-Shuah and the whole story of Tamar follows. Rashi explains that he was demoted, after the Shevatim saw the repercussions and ramifications of their actions, and how it was destroying Yaakov Avinu, they blamed Yehuda's faulty leadership. He could have just as well convinced them to spare Yosef instead of selling him!

The Medrash says a fascinating thing:

רב שמעון בן נחמן פתח כי אנכי ידעתי את המחשבות – שבטים היו עסוקים במכירתו של יוסף, ויוסף היה עסוק בשקו ובתעניתו, ראובן היה עסוק בשקו ובתעניתו, ויעקב היה עסוק בשקו ובתעניתו, ויהודה היה עסוק ליקח לו אשה, והקב"ה היה עוסק בורא אורו של משיח.

*Rav Shimon ben Nachman opened with the pasuk: Because I know all the thoughts of man – the Shevatim were busy selling Yosef, Yosef was busy fasting and wearing sackcloth, Reuven was busy fasting and wearing sackcloth, Yaakov was busy fasting and wearing sackcloth, Yehuda was busy getting married, and Hashem was busy creating the light of Moshiach!*

What does this Medrash mean? Yosef was doing teshuvah with fasting and sackcloth because of the difficult situation he found himself in, and he blamed himself for. Reuven was doing teshuvah for the story of Bilhah, and Yaakov was fasting, davening, and doing teshuvah because of Yosef's disappearance. What was Yehuda doing? He was getting married! Somehow, this is connected to Hashem bringing Moshiach!

The Shem Mi'Shmuel brings a fascinating argument between two great Rebbe's. He quotes Rav Bunim of Parshischah who explained that Yehuda thought that he was lost. He couldn't possibly rectify what he had done. He had made a mistake and Yosef was sold, and Yaakov's life was destroyed. Teshuvah simply couldn't help since he couldn't bring Yosef back. Therefore he wanted to have children, because his children would perhaps turn out good and bring 'aliyah' to

him. The Kotzker Rebbe (who was the grandfather of the Shem Mi'Shmuel,) said that is wrong – how could the rebbe say that a person would rely on his children for his tikkun! He explained that Yehudah thought that he had lost everything that he had achieved from the day he was born, and ruined all his avodah – so what did he do? He started over! He began from the first mitzvah in the Torah – Pru U'Rvu, to have children!

The Shem Mi'Shmuel explains Rav Bunim's approach, saying that Rav Bunim was misquoted. He references what other seforim write, what was the real difference between Avraham Avinu and the tzaddikim who preceded him, Noach, Shem, or Ever? The difference was that other tzaddikim were satisfied with their personal perfection and growth, but Avraham Avinu made it his life's mission to create an Am Hashem – to bring into this world children tzaddikim who would create a nation who serves Hashem. Likewise, all the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and the Shevatim, continued this mission of creating an Am Hashem.

However, Yehudah created a new path in Avodas Hashem:

אך יהודה המציא דרך חדש מאד נעלה, כי בין כה ובין כה צריכין אנו ראשית לראות שיהיו צורך גבוה נעשה, ואפילו ח"ו אין לנו עוד שום תיקון מ"מ חלילה לנו לגרוע מצורך גבוה להעמיד עדה של קוראים בשם ה'

*However, Yehudah innovated a new, very elevated to serve Hashem, because either way, the first objective is to see that Hashem's mission is done, even if Chas Vi'Shalom we don't have any hope of rectification anymore, even so, Chalilah to take away from our mission of Hashem to create a nation of servants of Hashem!*

He goes on to explain that different tzaddikim have varied approaches in this issue. Some first work on rectifying themselves, but other tzaddikim push forward no matter what, even at the expense of their own tikkun – just to see that Hashem's will is done!

These are two paths in Avodas Hashem for us to adopt when we are the most difficult situation possible. The most difficult situation isn't when a crisis happens, or when catastrophe strikes. The utmost difficulty is when we have lost faith in ourselves. What Yehudah was going through was the tremendous test of losing hope in oneself, assuming that our avairos and our past are just too bad to be fixed. What did he do? What does a Yid do? There are two approaches: The Kotzker tells us – start over! You think you have ruined everything you ever accomplished, you have done

things that can't be rectified – if so – turn a new page and start over from the beginning – from the first mitzvah in the Torah. Rav Bunim tells us, whatever you did, however bad you think you are – that doesn't give a Yid the right to stop! We have a mission from Hashem to accomplish in this world – and that takes precedence – even over our own tikkun! No matter how far we have fallen, Hashem comes first, and Hashem wants our Avodah and our mission has to get fulfilled. We can't stop – we have to push forward.

These are both functions of the most essential middah every Jew must have – 'ויגבה לבו בדרכי ה' – our hearts are elevated in serving Hashem. Meaning, the self-worth of a Jew is intensely holy and nothing can stop that. Whatever we have done, even if we legitimately believe we can't be redeemed as Yehudah did – we have to then start over, and we can't stop what we are doing! Nothing takes away from the Avodah of a Jew – it is too important and too holy.

We find later in the parshah, after Yosef was becoming successful in the home of Potifar, the pasuk says that Yosef was 'יפה תואר', and Rashi explains that as he saw himself gaining influence, he began to eat and drink and comb his hair. Hashem held this against him because how could he be so insensitive to the plight of his father who was mourning him? But essentially, there was nothing wrong with him combing his hair. Why did he do that? He did that in order not to lose sight of his own self-importance. Yosef was exercising 'ויגבה לבו בדרכי ה'!

I read in the sefer *אמלא אוצרותיהם* two beautiful personal stories, which emphasize how important it is for every Jew to realize his self-worth, and when a person comes to that recognition it is life-changing! He once went to a bus stop in Sorotzkin and saw Rav Simcha Zisel Broyde zatzal, an eighty-year-old Rosh Yeshiva standing there by himself! He went over and asked if he could tell him a chiddush. Rav Broyde agreed, and he told him an answer he had to one of Rav Elchanan Wasserman's shailos in *Kovetz Shiurim*. Rav Broyde listened and then said, 'That's a wonderful teretz! You know I gave shiur about this a number of years ago, and I had two answers to this kasha, but your teretz is better than both!' Years later, by the levayah of Rav Simcha Zisel, he was walking alongside Rav Dovid Cohen the Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron, and was talking about the greatness of Rav Simcha Zisel. Rav Dovid Cohen told him, 'You can't imagine the greatness in kindness that Rav Simcha Zisel had! Whenever a bochur would ask him a

question and say an answer, he would say 'I have two terutzim to this, but your answer is better than both!'

He then tells another story of how he was by a chasanah and suddenly a person comes over and gives him a warm hug and two kisses, but he doesn't know who it is! He asked the person, 'Remind me, who are you?' The man smiled and asked, 'You are Reb Eliezer Turk, right?' He answered yes. 'You learned in Ponavezh during these years, right?' Again, he answered yes. 'Do you remember a bachur by the name of so and so?' Suddenly, he remembered. This bachur was a sweet bachur, very quiet, but everyone liked to learn with him as a chavrusah. He had inexplicably left Yeshiva after two years, and no one knew where he had gone. 'I'm that bachur!'

Rabbi Turk asked him why he left Yeshiva and what he is doing now. The man answered that he was a computer engineer, and B"H is doing quite well. He explained that in truth he had a very hard time in yeshiva. He didn't really understand Gemarah and couldn't keep up with the rest of the class. He kept quiet so everyone thought he was smart, but in truth he was fooling everyone. After a while he felt he couldn't keep up the façade anymore, so he consulted with a rebbi who advised him to leave yeshiva and go to work.

Rabbi Turk then asked him, why did he hug and kiss him? The man answered, 'Some years after I left yeshiva we met on the street. You told me, that you had just reviewed your notes from Rav Shmuel Rozovsky's shiur and you saw that you had written down that I asked Rav Shmuel a kashah which he loved! Those notes were eventually the basis of Shiurei Reb Shmuel. I went home and started crying. How could it be that someone who is inscribed in Shiurei Reb Shmuel doesn't open a sefer anymore! I went and bought a new Gemarah Bava Metziah and a Shiurei Reb Shmuel and began learning whenever I had time – it changed my life! I learned at night and weekends, and whenever I was off. As a result, all my children and son-in-laws are learning full-time! You changed my life with those words!'

This is the power of 'ויגבה לבו בדרכי ה' – once a Jew realizes his abilities and capabilities – there's nothing that can stop him – or should be able to stop him!