

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of this week's drasha:

- Boruch and Chanie Bernstein, "In honor of Rabbi Marwick for all that he does for the shul and its members. He goes way above the call of duty and his kindness knows no bounds." Thank you.
- Mazel tov on Milton Fried's birthday and Milton and Marcia Fried's anniversary. Sponsored by the Fried, Klein, and Gastfreund children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.
- Tracey Gordon, in memory of her father, Jack Gordon, Yaakov Eliyahu ben R. Eliezer, 5 Teves, and in memory of her mother, Gloria Gordon, Chaya Golda bas R. Boruch, 11 Teves.
- Avigdor and Beth Loeb, in memory of Avigdor's father, Robert Loeb, Reuven ben Levi, 5 Teves.

Thank you for your support of the shul. Wishing continued good health and *bracha* and *hatzlacha* to all our sponsors and their loved ones, and may the *neshamos* have an aliya.

I want to encourage everyone to contribute to the Shomrei Israel Fund, which supports the outstanding work of Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon's La'Ofek initiative. They find creative ways to do *chessed* on the highest level—aimed at many of the underserved populations in Israel, helping them support themselves with dignity. It is a privilege to be a part of this effort.

I also want to bring to your attention the upcoming NCSY concert—to be enjoyed from your home—next Motzei Shabbos, December 26th. This year's concert will feature Benny Friedman, Yoni Z, and Joey Newcomb. The Atlantic Seaboard NCSY is led by our very own Rabbi Jonah Lerner. I have joined them at several Shabbatons and other events and have seen first hand how they offer meaningful Jewish experiences to inspire and empower thousands of Jewish teens. I encourage everyone to support them. More information is available at ncsy.org/concert.

Last week's *Parsha* tells of Yosef's descent, from the favorite child of his father, Yaakov Avinu, showered with extra love and attention and a special coat, to a pit filled with snakes and scorpions and eventually a dark and dank prison cell in Mitzrayim. This week's *Parsha* discusses Yosef's miraculous ascent, from a dark and forlorn prison to the bright palace as the new viceroy in Mitzrayim.

How did this all happen?

What was the underlying issue that led to his fall, and what led to his ascent?

Yosef's life was always connected to dreams. In Canaan, he dreamed about a bright future filled with glory, but his dreams were shattered. In Mitzrayim, Yosef ended up in prison. Among his fellow prisoners were Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer. By interpreting their dreams, Yosef eventually makes his way to the royal court, where he interprets Pharaoh's dreams, as well. As a result of his insight, Yosef becomes second only to Pharaoh in the land.

Dreams got him into trouble and dreams got him out of trouble.

What is the significance of his dreams?

There must be a difference between the dreams in Canaan and Mitzrayim.

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein zt'l gave a beautiful insight to answer this question. He said it all depends on the dreams. At the beginning of the Parsha, Yosef is dreaming about himself: about his own importance and the fact that others will be prostrating themselves before him. At the end of the Parsha, however, the dreams are not about Yosef, but about other people: Pharaoh's ministers, their futures, and their welfare. Here, Yosef is not telling the world about himself, instead, he is trying to help others understand themselves.

According to Rabbi Bernstein, when your dreams are all about yourself, your ego, and your own importance, you will be on the way down. But when you see your role in life as helping others understand and achieve their dreams, you will certainly be on the way up.

In short, Yosef got into trouble when he listened only to his own dreams. He succeeded when he was open to listening to the dreams of others.

The Torah teaches us that Moshe Rabbeinu, at the beginning of his journey to becoming the leader of the Jewish people, ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם. *Moshe grew, and he went out to his brothers and saw their suffering.* Says the **Noam Elimelech**, the Torah is teaching us that ויגדל משה, Moshe grew in stature—he became great-- when he went outside his comfort zone to see how he could help others in their time of need.

Similarly, when Yosef was focused only on himself, he was limited and small, and others were jealous. But when Yosef was able to use his gifts and abilities to listen to others and help them, he became great. When people are focused on helping others—with an *ayin tova*—others are less likely to become jealous. Indeed, **Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky** writes that in general having an *ayin tova* towards others is an antidote to *ayin hara*.

The great Hillel taught us in *Pirkei Avos*, that אמ אין אני לי מי לי וכשאני לעצמי מה אני. *If I am not for myself, who will be for me. But if I am only for myself, what am I?*

Rav Shimon Shkop, in his introduction to *Shaarei Yosher*, understands this to be teaching us that our mandate in life is to include others in our core identity and in our focus. Other people should be the object of our care and concern. The needs of others should concern us like our own needs. This represents a true fulfillment of ואהבת לרעך כמוך.

The ability to love others, to think of others, to truly identify with the needs of others is crucial in our relationship with other people and with Hashem. As the *Mesilas Yeshtarim* teaches, in perek 16, the ultimate in *avodas Hashem* is to focus on the will of Hashem—without ulterior motives. That is the essence of relationships, as well—to be able to truly focus on others.

The **Ponovezher Rav**, towards the end of his life, was in a hospital recovering from illness. His students visited him, and he immediately engaged them in plans for new *chessed* initiatives. His students were surprised that he was focused on helping others when his own life was in a precarious state. But the answer was clear. Someone who was so focused on others did not differentiate between his own needs and the needs of others. He included the needs of the *Klal* in his own sense of identity.

We read an unusual *haftara* this week, one that we have not read in 20 years. This is because of a quirk in the Jewish calendar. Parshas Mikeitz almost always falls out during Chanukah, but this year, it is read on the day after Chanukah, so we read a *haftarah* from Melachim.

The Book of Melachim 3:5-15

בגבעון נראה ה' אל שלמה בחלום הלילה, ויאמר אלקים שאל מה אתן לך? ויאמר שלמה...ונתת לעבדך לב שומע לשפוט את עמך, להבין בין טוב לרע...ויאמר אלקים אליו יען אשר שאלת את הדבר הזה ולא שאלת לך ימים רבים, ולא שאלת לך עושר...ושאלת לך הבין לשמוע משפט. הנה עשיתי כדבריך, הנה נתתי לך לב חכם ונבון...וגם אשר לא שאלת נתתי לך, גם עושר גם כבוד...ואם תלך בדרכי...והארכתי את ימך...ויקץ שלמה והנה חלום.

At Givon, Hashem appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask, what shall I grant you?" Shlomo responded "Grant, then, Your servant an understanding mind to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and bad; for who can judge this vast people of Yours?" And God said to him, "Because you asked for this—you did not ask for long life, you did not ask for riches, you did not ask for the life of your enemies, but you asked for discernment in dispensing justice—

I now do as you have spoken. I grant you a wise and discerning mind; there has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you arise again.

And I also grant you what you did not ask for—both riches and glory all your life—the like of which no king has ever had.

And I will further grant you long life, if you will walk in My ways and observe My laws and commandments, as did your father David."

In summary, in his dream, Hashem told Shlomo Hamelech as he became King that he could make one request. Shlomo asked for wisdom and a listening ear to hear and understand others. Hashem responded that because he made this request and did not ask for honor, wealth, or military strength, but wisdom and understanding, he would make him the wisest and most understanding individual in history, and grant him all of those other things, as well.

This *haftara* is correlated to the story of Yosef and dreams. What was Shlomo Hamelech dreaming about? Not about his own self aggrandizement or honor. He was dreaming about how best to serve his kingdom and to help others. The *gemara* in **Brachos 54** teaches that dreams are formed by our thoughts and desires. Shlomo Hamelech's dreams show us that his deepest desire was to properly understand the needs of others, which is why he was fit to be King.

What specifically did he request? The Radak writes *לב שומע*—מבין a listening heart means the ability to understand others. To properly understand others requires wisdom, but it also requires deep care and concern. Hashem told Shlomo that a leader who is focused on others will be respected and adored, and will be a successful ruler. People who help others and who focus on others themselves become bigger and greater.

We just finished the wonderful Chag of Chanuka. In *Maoz Tzur*, we refer to בני בינה ימי שמונה קבעו שיר ורננים to *those who had this deep insight and understanding* that the Chanuka miracle was worth celebrating and established the holiday of Chanukah.

What was the deep insight or *bina* that was necessary to establish the holiday? They had just won a miraculous victory. They had just merited an open miracle, confirming that Hashem agreed with their approach. Wasn't the creation of a holiday obvious?

I believe the necessary *bina* (insight) was their care and concern for the future of the Jewish people. Knowing that there will be future battles for the soul of the Jewish people, they thought, how can we ensure that future generations will gain inspiration from the Chanuka miracle? They were not simply focused on their own generation. They were firmly focused on the future.

That was what had inspired them to take on the Syrian Greeks in the first place. The Maccabees were larger than life, as they were filled with genuine care and concern for all the Jewish people—in that generation and in the future. It was that commitment to the history and destiny of the Jewish people that gave them strength—beyond the strength expected of a small group—to persevere. When we live for others, we are granted new strength, and motivation, courage and determination.

May we learn from Yosef Hatzadik to listen to our dreams—but also to listen to the dreams of others. May we live life, focused on helping others. May we learn from Shlomo HaMelech, that when we listen to, and understand others, we become greater. And may we learn from the Maccabees, that if we see ourselves as harbingers of the Jewish future, we will receive new strength...and accomplish great things.

As the cold, snowy winter is upon us, and the end of the pandemic is still elusive, we must all do our part to help others in whatever way we can. Reach out to someone who may enjoy a call or a helping hand...

May we merit soon to see the day when all will understand our connection to one another and to Hashem. May we merit to see the return of the Beis Hamikdahs...*bimhera viyamenu*...amen.