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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Mikeitz

The Perspective of Levi and the *Chashmonaim*

Our *parasha* states (42:21) that after being treated harshly by Yosef, the brothers contemplated having sold Yosef saying, "And one said to his brother, 'We are guilty because of our brother, for we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, and we did not listen. Therefore, this trouble has befallen us.'" They also contemplated their deeds a second time after they found that their money had been returned to them, as the *pasuk* states (ibid. 27), "Each one trembled saying, 'What is this that Hashem has done to us?'"

Questions:

- 1- Why does the *pasuk* state, "And one said to his brother" and not simply "But we are guilty." Is this not superfluous? 2- Furthermore, why does the *pasuk* say that "this is why this trouble has befallen us"? Would it not be sufficient to write, "This is why this trouble has come"? 3- The first time the brothers contemplated their deeds the *pasuk* does not say that they trembled, but the second time it does – why is this? 4- Finally, why did they tremble when they got back their money? Hashem made a miracle and they "won the lottery" - shouldn't they have been happy?

The World View

When we look at the problems that people face in this world, our first thought is to try and explain them logically, according to the laws of nature. For example, if someone is suffering from poor health, a headache, stomachache, or sore throat, and the like, he always tries to figure out why he got sick. Perhaps he ate spoiled food, lacks sleep, or has a virus, he wonders. If he is having a difficult time making a living, he obviously has a rational explanation for it – he either has a bad job, made a mistake in business, or was cheated or stolen from. If, *chas ve'shalom*, there was a car accident, it is clear that there was a reason for it – perhaps the driver dozed off or was busy with his cell-phone, maybe the other driver was driving like a madman, and the like. Similarly, anything that happens in one's home or with his family and community, the initial thought is simply to deal with it by thinking of a rational explanation. However, our holy Torah teaches us that we must think differently and realize that Hashem is hiding behind each and every event that transpires, as it were, for it is He who runs the world. We must purify our thoughts and contemplate exactly what Hashem wants from us, without considering the natural cause and effect. Man merits being able to do this by serving Hashem with purity and holiness; by doing so, he is able to think clearly and arrive at the correct conclusions, as we will learn from our *parasha* and from the lesson of Chanukah.

The Difference Between the Behavior of Shimon and Levi

We already wrote last week that whatever we write about the holy *Shevatim*, the sons of Yaakov, is in order for us to be able to understand it on our level. But we cannot truly understand their greatness, and anything the Torah relates about them must be understood according to their level of greatness. That being said, we find that when the Torah and *midrashim* discuss the sale of Yosef, the ones who



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were primarily in charge were Shimon and Levi. The four oldest brothers were Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah. Reuven was opposed to the sale from the beginning to the end, as was Yehudah; he was the one who prevented the brothers from killing Yosef and suggested selling him instead. According to the *midrashim*, the ones who said, "Look, the dreamer is coming!" when they saw Yosef approaching them in Shechem were Shimon and Levi. The ones who threw him into the pit were Shimon and Levi. It is reasonable to assume that the ones who raised him from the pit to sell him to the Midyanites were also Shimon and Levi. We also find in our *parasha* that when Shimon was imprisoned and the brothers said to one another, "We are guilty [for selling Yosef]," the *midrash* explains that this referred to Shimon and Levi. Afterwards when the *pasuk* states, "And one opened his sack," the "one" in the *pasuk* is Levi, who was left alone without his partner Shimon, who was imprisoned. The fact that they were partners is related by our Sages, who say that they joined forces to free Dina by killing the entire city of Shechem. Therefore Yaakov, when blessing his sons at the end of his life, said about Shimon and Levi, "Shimon and Levi are brothers, weapons are their craft. Into their council let my soul not enter. In their congregation let my honor not join. For in their wrath they killed people, and they willfully uprooted an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their rage for it is harsh. I will divide them up amongst Yaakov and spread them out among Israel." In other words, their blessing was that they should not live together, because it would be dangerous. Yet if we look later on in the Torah, we will find that the tribes of Shimon and Levi took different paths. Sadly, despite the fact that in Shechem, Shimon acted zealously to protest the immorality that was perpetrated, nevertheless, his tribe also stumbled to immorality. When viewed retroactively, this reveals that Shimon's initial zealotness was not purely for the sake of Heaven; rather, there was self-interest involved, of course, according to his lofty level, which we cannot comprehend. On the other hand, from Levi descended Pinchas, who acted zealously for the sake of Heaven and struck the prince of Shimon's tribe when the latter acted indecently. This reveals that Levi's original zealotness against the perpetrators in Shechem was a pure act of zealotness, for the sake of Heaven alone. We see this all throughout with Shevet Levi. They were the only ones who were not enslaved in Egypt, and our Sages teach us that this was due to the fact they withstood Pharaoh's offer for financial gain. For Pharaoh had initially lured the Jews into working for him by offering them money; but shortly thereafter he enslaved them, and they worked for free. The Tribe of Levi, however, were not tempted by money; they would not forgo their Torah study at any cost. Therefore they were never enslaved. Similarly, when the Jewish Nation sinned with the Golden Calf, the Tribe of Levi refrained. Rather, they responded to Moshe's call, "Whoever is for Hashem, come to me!" They therefore merited being chosen as the tribe who would perform the holy service, and were referred to by the Rambam as the "soldiers of Hashem."

The Difference Between Shimon and Levi in the Sale of Yosef

While Shimon and Levi were the dominant figures in the sale of Yosef, there was a difference between them, just as there was a difference between them when they killed the inhabitants of Shechem. Shimon, on his holy level, had an admixture of personal interests along with his zealotness, as opposed to Levi, who acted purely for the sake of Heaven. The same thing applied to the sale of Yosef; Shimon's



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motives were mixed, while Levi's were not. It is for this reason that Yosef specifically imprisoned Shimon and not Levi. Following the imprisonment, Shimon and Levi were moved to examine their sin of selling Yosef. This is because it was mainly they who were involved in Yosef's sale. This is why the *pasuk* states, "And one said to his brother," referring Levi [Shimon was imprisoned at the time]. They therefore examined their deeds twice – once following Shimon's imprisonment and then again when they found that their money had been returned to them. The first time they were debating whether Yosef's sale had actually been a sin or not; perhaps they were being punished because of Yosef's suffering, but because the actual sale had been a mistake. They decided that they did not err in judgment, but they still should have displayed mercy on Yosef, when he begged them for mercy. We find similarly that Yaakov had been punished for causing Yitzchak anguish when he received the blessing in place of Esav, even though Rivkah had instructed him to do what he did. They therefore did not regret having actually sold him at that point. Yet the second time, after Levi found the money at the opening of his sack and not at the bottom, like his brothers, he now let his brothers know that they were being punished for actually selling Yosef. For why were they now being schemed against with money? It must be because they sold Yosef for 20 silver pieces! This caused the brothers to tremble the second time. It also explains why they said "This is why this trouble has befallen us". Now even though they could have seen this as a sign of love from Hashem, for after all, He gave them back their money and they got food for free, but Levi knew otherwise. Since he thought clearly as a result of his pure actions, which were for the sake of Heaven alone, he understood that this was a continuation of the punishment of Shimon's imprisonment. They were being punished for selling Yosef, not just for the pain they caused him.

A Battle for Holiness and Purity

The Greek exile was different than the other exiles. They understood that in all the other exiles the gentiles had tried to battle and decimate the Jews, *chas ve'shalom*, and they had all failed, leaving over not even a trace. Therefore the Greeks, after giving the matter much thought, realized that the existence of the Jewish Nation depended on their holiness and purity. That was the reason that the Jews continued to exist, while all other nations had fallen by the wayside. For we find: 1 – Hashem had stated, "You should be holy, because I am holy." They therefore understood that the only way to connect with Hashem was if the Jews sanctified themselves. 2 - Hashem stipulated that His Divine Presence would reside amongst the Jewish people only if they fulfilled the condition of "and your camp will be holy and no impropriety will be seen by you, causing Hashem to turn away from you." 3 – Bilam as well understood this and therefore devised a plot to cause the Jews to stumble in illicit relations. By doing so, he caused a plague to befall the Jews. There are many more sources as well exhorting the Jews to be a pure and holy people, for their success depends upon it. We are forbidden to study Torah or perform mitzvot in unclean places like a bathroom or bathhouse. The question is why. Torah study is primary amongst our people, why is it forbidden in these places? The Torah is teaching us that if holiness is mixed with impurity, the holiness does not endure. This is why the Greeks changed their strategy. If they could succeed in contaminating the Jews, then they would lose their very foundation. They would ultimately assimilate with the nations of the world, and that would be the end. They

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therefore exerted every effort to influence the Jews. Theirs was not a physical battle, but rather a mental battle, intent on finding ways to lure them away from their Jewish practices and embrace the Greek culture. They therefore issued laws requiring the building of gymnasiums and centers of "culture" where people could pursue intellectual pursuits and sciences – but all devoid of holiness. Unfortunately they succeeded in polluting the Jewish heart and many a Jew embraced the Greek culture and left the Torah path.

The Greeks Contaminated All of the Oil in the Sanctuary

According to this we can understand why our Sages stress the fact that when the *Chashmonaim* entered the Beit Hamikdash they saw that all of the oil had been defiled. Why did the Greeks do this? Wouldn't it have made more sense just to spill out the oil or burn it, so that the Jews could never use it? The answer is that this was the entire goal of Yavan, to remove the holiness and purity from the mitzvot, therefore they specifically wanted to defile the oil, for it did not bother them that the Jews would light impure oil; that's exactly what they wanted.

The Victory of Holiness and Purity

Now we can understand the connection between our *parasha* and Chanukah. The *Chashmonaim* were the descendants of Levi and it was from him that they inherited their trait of holy zealotry for the sake of purity. For the primary miracle of Chanukah was not the physical defeat of the Greeks; rather it was the victory of guarding the Jewish Nation's purity and holiness, symbolized by finding a flask of pure oil with the seal of the Kohen Gadol.

Words of Mussar

We have learned just how much one must contemplate the events of his life. But to merit a clear perspective, one must purify his Divine service. His body and hands must be pure, as well as his deeds and thought. Therefore he should always take great care to purify his body and hands, especially for praying and studying Torah. He should accustom his children to washing *netillat yadayim* when they rise in the morning. Because one who learns Torah and performs mitzvot in an impure state lessens their value. He will err in his way and forget his Torah study. Sadly, in our times with technology the way it is, man can easily view many forbidden things. It is our duty to purify our camp to whatever degree we can. Man must guard himself lest he fall into the net of the *yetzer hara* and use impure devices to see things that are forbidden to see. By doing so, he contaminates his soul, Torah and mitzvot which Yavan battled so fiercely to do. It is considered like lighting the Menorah with impure oil, which invalidates the lighting. Rather, we must guard the purity of our nation and retain the proper Torah outlook. This is the way of Levi and the *Chashmonaim*, and we commemorate this on Chanukah, when the Menorah was lit with holiness and purity. May it be Hashem's Will that we all merit the kindling of the Menorah in the third Beit Hamikdash, which should be rebuilt speedily in our days. *Amen ve'amen*.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka