**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Vayeishev – Vol. 12, Issue 9**

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**ויאמר יהודה אל אחיו מה בצע כי נהרג את אחינו וכסינו את דמו לכו ונמכרנו לישמעאלים וידנו אל תהי בו כי אחינו בשרנו הוא וישמעו אחיו ויעברו אנשים מדינים סחרים וימשכו ויעלו את יוסף מן הבור וימכרו את יוסף לישמעאלים בעשרים כסף ויביאו את יוסף מצרימה (37:26-28)**

The Gemora in Shabbos (10b) teaches that the preferential treatment that Yosef received from Yaakov caused his brothers to became jealous of him, which led them to sell Yosef into slavery, which eventually resulted in the Jewish people descending to Egypt and becoming enslaved there. Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that although Hashem had already promised Avrohom that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land, it was only at the time of Yosef’s sale that it was established where and how painful the servitude would be as a punishment for the brothers’ hatred of Yosef.

Rashi writes (Shemos 6:16) that although the lifespans of Yaakov’s other children are not mentioned, the Torah records that Levi lived 137 years to teach us the duration of the enslavement in Egypt, which did not begin until the last of Yaakov’s sons – Levi – died. The Gur Aryeh (Shemos 13:16) elucidates the calculation as follows: Yaakov was 84 when he married Leah (Rashi Bereishis 29:21), and two years later, she gave birth to Levi when Yaakov was 86 (as the Seder Olam writes that each of his sons was born in the seventh month of pregnancy). The Torah records (Bereishis 47:9) that Yaakov was 130 when he descended to Egypt, in which case Levi was 44. Since Levi died when he was 137, he lived in Egypt for 93 years. As Rashi writes (Shemos 12:40) that the Jewish people spent 210 years in Egypt, we find that the enslavement in Egypt, which began when Levi died, spanned a period of 117 years. Why were they specifically punished with 117 years of bondage and servitude for the sin of selling Yosef?

The Ostrovtzer Rebbe points out that only nine of Yosef’s 11 brothers participated in the sin of selling him into slavery, as Binyomin and Reuven were not present at the time of the sale. Yosef was 17 when he was sold (Bereishis 37:2), and he was 30 when he was freed from jail and appointed viceroy (41:46), in which case his brothers’ decision to sell him caused Yosef to be enslaved for 13 years. Multiplying this by the nine brothers who sold him yields 117 years, which is the precise duration of the bitter enslavement with which their descendants were punished for their actions. Rabbi Ronen Shaharabany adds that when Reuven returned and saw that Yosef was no longer in the pit where he had left him, he remarked (37:30) הילד איננו ואני אנה אני בא – The boy is gone, and I, where can I go? The numerical value of the word איננו is 117, as Reuven was hinting to his brothers that as a result of their actions that caused Yosef to be missing, their descendants would be punished with 117 years of bondage and servitude.

**וישלח יהודה את גדי העזים ביד רעהו העדלמי לקחת הערבון מיד האשה ולא מצאה (38:20)**

Before having relations with Tamar, Yehuda promised to send her a young goat from his flock as payment. Tamar insisted that he leave three valuable personal items with her as collateral, which she would return upon receipt of the goat. Yehuda then sent a goat with his friend the Adullamite, whose name was Chirah, to pay her as promised, and to retrieve his deposit. However, Chirah was unable to locate Tamar, and after asking around unsuccessfully, he returned to Yehuda, who decided that it would be preferable to allow her to keep his items than to risk humiliation if his actions became publicized through further inquiries.

Although none of us would ever find ourselves in Yehuda’s situation, if we try to put ourselves in his shoes, we would clearly expect him to go present the payment himself, rather than approaching a friend for assistance, which would necessitate explaining to him the indelicate circumstances underlying the request. No matter how close a person feels to his friend, he will not feel comfortable informing him that he had consorted with a harlot and now needed help paying for her services and recovering his pledge. Why wasn’t Yehuda afraid to tell his friend what he had done?

Rav Yissocher Frand notes that in recording Yehuda’s actions, the Torah stresses that he sent the goat with רעהו העדלמי – his friend the Adullamite. He explains that the Torah is revealing to us that the definition of a true friend is somebody to whom one can confess his most embarrassing moments and greatest mistakes – even immoral conduct with a harlot – without fear of being judged and condemned. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (1:6) advises, “Acquire a friend for yourself.” In his commentary on this Mishnah, the Rambam writes that a person should seek a friend whom he can completely trust, and from whom he does not need to hide any part of himself. He should feel comfortable sharing his entire life with his friend, both the good and the bad, without worrying that his friend will divulge his secrets to others or stop being his friend.

Applying this idea to marriage, Rav Frand notes that the fifth blessing recited during Sheva Berachos (the seven blessings said in honor of the bride and groom) begins: שמח תשמח רעים האהובים כשמחך יצירך בגן מקדם – Grant abundant joy to the beloved companions, as You gladdened Your creation (Adam) in the Garden of Eden of old. Why do we specifically describe the bride and groom as רעים האהובים – beloved friends? We are giving them a blessing that they should become true friends, in the sense that they can tell each other their foibles and shortcomings like Yehuda and Chirah, knowing that through thick and thin, they will still be accepted and respected, as true friends do for one another.

**ויהי כדברה אל יוסף יום יום ולא שמע אליה (39:10)**

Rashi writes (Bereishis 1:4) that when Hashem created the universe, He initially created an extremely powerful and holy light, but He subsequently realized that it would be inappropriate for wicked people to benefit from this light, so He decided to hide it away for the righteous to enjoy in the World to Come. Nevertheless, there are still a few places in this world where this light is hidden and we can tap into its special holiness and sanctity. The Rokeach (Hilchos Chanuka 225) writes that before it was concealed, this light burned during Creation for 36 hours, which correspond to the 36 candles that we light on Chanuka. This light is also hidden in the 36 tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, and in the 36 hidden tzaddikim (righteous people) in every generation in whose merit the world is sustained.

My dear cousin Shaya Gross z”l of Baltimore points out that Chazal (Yoma 35b) describe Yosef as the epitome of moral fortitude and hidden righteousness, and he is discussed at length in the Torah portions that we read on Chanuka. Not surprisingly, the Talmudic discussion of the episode in which his master Potiphar’s wife unsuccessfully attempted to entice him to sin is found in the Gemora in Sotah on daf (page) 36, and the Imrei Noam writes that this incident occurred on Zos Chanuka, the last day of Chanuka. Additionally, Yosef is mystically associated with the middah (attribute) of yesod (foundation), which is the sixth of the seven kabbalistic middos. The day of Sefiras HaOmer that corresponds to yesod sheb’yesod, of which Yosef was the embodiment, is the 36th day.

With this introduction, Shaya notes that Chanuka offers an unparalleled opportunity to tap into multiple sources of this hidden light. This unique possibility is alluded to by the fact that the name of this month – Kislev – is comprised of two words: כס, which means concealed, and לו, which has a numerical value of 36, hinting that this is the month in which the hidden holiness of 36 is uniquely accessible. Precisely in the cold winter with its long dark nights, when the Greeks unsuccessfully attempted to contaminate and defile us, we have the ability to tap into an unparalleled confluence of holiness. Let us all try, each on our own levels, to imbibe the special Chanuka kedusha that permeates the air.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. After Yosef saw that relating his first dream, in which their sheaves bowed down to his, to his brothers increased their hatred toward him (37:8), why did he proceed to tell them his second dream, in which they again bowed down to him, instead of keeping it to himself? (Moshav Z’keinim, Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh)
2. The Torah records (38:5) that after Yehuda’s wife gave birth to two sons, Er and Onan, she conceived a third time. She bore a son and named him Sheilah, while Yehuda was in Cheziv at the time of his birth. Why was it necessary for the Torah to relate this seemingly insignificant information about Yehuda’s whereabouts during Sheilah’s birth? (Daas Z’keinim)
3. Did Yehuda betroth Tamar prior to having relations with her (38:18), and if so, through what means did he do so? (Bereishis Rabbah 85:8, Moshav Z’keinim, Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi, Maharsha Sotah 10a, Chavos Daas Yoreh Deah 192, Chavatzeles HaSharon)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The **Moshav Z'keinim** maintains that Yosef's dreams were a form of prophecy, and the Mishnah rules (Sanhedrin 11:5) that a person who represses his prophecy and refuses to share it with others is liable to be killed at the hands of Heaven. Yosef reasoned that it was better to share his prophecies with his brothers and risk the uncertain repercussions of their jealousy and hatred than to quash his prophecies and render himself liable to guaranteed Heavenly punishment. The **Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** answers that Yosef hoped that relating his dreams to his brothers would show them that they would eventually need his assistance and cause them to stop hating him so that he wouldn't take revenge on them at that time. It would also show them that his superiority over them was decreed in Heaven, in which case they shouldn't resent Yaakov's preferential treatment of him. Alternatively, the Gemora (Berachos 55b) teaches that the meaning of a dream is determined by the interpretation given by those who hear it. The Gemora advises a person to relate his dreams to his friends so that he will receive positive explanations, so Yosef told his dreams to his brothers as a way of demonstrating that he loved them and trusted them.

2) The **Daas Z’keinim** explains that the custom at that time was that the father chose the name for the first child and the mother for the second, and they alternated with each successive child. This is hinted to by the fact that the Torah states regarding the first child, “and *he* called his name Er,” but with the second child, the Torah says, “and *she* named him Onan.” In light of this explanation, it is difficult to understand why in relating the birth and naming of the third child, the Torah says, “and *she* called his name Sheilah,” indicating that Yehuda’s wife deviated from the custom of alternating the selection of names and gave a second consecutive name. To address this anomaly, the Torah explains that Yehuda wasn’t present at the time and was unable to give a name, leaving his wife with no choice but to choose the name herself.

3) The **Moshav Z’keinim** writes that the signet ring that Yehuda gave to Tamar was given for betrothal, and two witnesses were present because an important person like Yehuda would never travel alone. The **Maharsha** questions this, as Yehuda expressed concern (38:23) that he would be humiliated if the incident became known, which shouldn’t be the case if he first married her. Rather, this was permissible before the giving of the Torah (Rambam Hilchos Ishus 1:4). **Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi** agrees that Yehuda wouldn’t have transgressed the prohibition against having relations with a harlot, but he argues that the betrothal couldn’t have been performed through the ring because the Gemora in Kiddushin (8a) rules that an item given as collateral for a debt that a man owes a woman cannot effect betrothal. Instead, he suggests that the goat that he promised her and the ring that he gave as collateral were not given as payment, but simply to appease her, and the betrothal was effected by other money that he gave her for this purpose which isn’t mentioned in the Torah. He concludes by citing the **Medrash** which teaches that Yehuda did not want to have relations with Tamar but was forced by an angel, which indicates that he did not betroth her, which is also the opinion of the **Chavos Daas**.

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