Denver KOLLEL

TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Vayeshev

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A Taste of Torah

Grapes of Kindness

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

At the end of this week's parsha, we read about how Pharaoh became angry with his cupbearer and his baker and imprisoned them along with Yosef. Shortly after their imprisonment, they came to Yosef with perplexing dreams. The Targum Yonasan explains these dreams as prophecies meant for the Jewish People.

The cupbearer dreamt of three grapevine shoots that grew three bunches of grapes, which he squeezed into Pharaoh's cup. The Targum Yonasan explains that the three shoots represent the three Patriarchs and the three bunches of grapes correspond to Hashem's three messengers of redemption, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, who were sent to liberate the Jewish People.

The baker dreamt of birds eating from three baskets of baked goods he was carrying on his head. These represent the three types of labor the Jews would be subjected to in Egypt, as expressed in the verse (Shemos 1:14), "mortar, bricks and every labor of the field."

It is strange that these dreams predicting the future of the Jewish People should show up in such a peculiar place. What message were these dreams meant to convey?

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1908; author of the famed halachic work Aruch Hashulchan), in his work Leil Shimurim (a commentary on the Pesach Haggada), explains that simply understood, the offense of Pharaoh's chamberlains was in their carelessness. Rashi tells us that the cupbearer allowed a fly in the wine and the baker allowed a pebble in the bread. If so, what was the big uproar about? Why were they thrown in jail? Why did the baker eventually get the death sentence for his crime?

Rabbi Epstein postulates that the chamberlains deliberately caused these mishaps to occur, and so what they did was taken very seriously. However, if this is so, the cupbearer's offense seems worse than that of the baker. The baker placed a pebble in the bread which was on the table before Pharaoh. There was no guarantee that Pharaoh would even take from that loaf. The cupbearer, however, did something much more insulting. He directly handed Pharaoh the cup with the fly he had placed inside. Why then, did only the baker receive the death sentence while the cupbearer was ultimately freed from prison?

Perhaps, says Rabbi Epstein, what happened is that the chamberlains were trying to get each other in trouble and, out of spite, each one set his colleague up for a fall! The baker was the one who snuck the fly in the wine, and the cupbearer placed the pebble in the bread. When their treachery was discovered, the baker received the more severe punishment, since he was the one responsible for the more malicious insult to Pharaoh.

With this approach, continues Rabbi Epstein, we can understand why the dreams of these two men served as the medium to convey the aforementioned messages of Jewish exile and redemption to Yosef. The prime cause of exile is *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred. The Talmud (Yuma 9b) teaches that the Second *Bais Hamikdash* (Temple) was destroyed on account of *sinas chinam*, triggering the start of our current exile. Similarly, if one traces the events leading to the descent of the Jewish People to Egypt and the subsequent exile there, it began with the enmity of the other Tribes toward Yosef and their selling him as a slave. Hence, the Egyptian Exile also began on account of *sinas chinam*.

Yosef and his brother Binyamin were the only ones who did not participate in this sin.

Additionally, the verse (Jeremiah 31:14) shares that when the Jews were being led into the Babylonian Exile following the destruction of the First *Bais Hamikdash*, "a voice is heard on high, Rochel crying for her children." Our Sages teach that of all the righteous departed people who implored Hashem on behalf of the Jewish People, only Rochel's voice was heard. Why is Rochel's voice the one heard on high? Our Sages explain that it was due to her act of selflessness toward her sister Leah. On the day Yaakov was supposed

Continued on back

Stories for the Soul

A Cut Above

Government officials in the city of Brisk placed a tax on all *shochtim* (ritual slaughterers). The purpose of this tax was to help pay for government monitors who would perform inspections for the sake of the public health. Some local *shochtim* wanted to avoid this payment, and so a black market was created. These *shochtim* would go to a hidden place in the outskirts of the city to perform *shechita*, thus avoiding the tax. The Brisker Rav (Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik; 1886-1959) was not happy about this development and felt that the Jewish council of the city could not give certification to such *shechita*, even if the actual *shechita* was of the highest standards. And so, he called a meeting of a number of prominent community members to discuss the matter.

The participants took their seats and waited for the Brisker Rav to begin speaking. However, he said not a word and simply sat in his place. Initially befuddled as to the Brisker Rav's silence, the attendees soon realized that one of the *shochtim* who was a part of this black market was present at the meeting. Despite whispered pleas from some of the assembled to the Brisker Rav to ask the man to leave, the Brisker Rav refused, as this would greatly shame the *shochet*. Speaking about the issue in his presence would embarrass him even more! Instead, the Brisker Rav simply sat at the meeting and said nothing, until the attendees finally rose and left, leaving the matter unresolved.

In this week's parsha, Tamar was willing to let herself be killed rather than shame Yehuda publicly, sacrificing not only herself, but her unborn children, one of whom would be the ancestor of the Davidic line and Mashiach himself. Great sacrifice is sometimes required, sometimes even in the religious realm, to avoid shaming another.

Kollel Happenings

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Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: What type of food will require a different blessing depending on one's intention when eating it?

Answer: *Pas haba'a bikisnin*. Though last week's article explained that *pas haba'a bikisnin* requires a blessing of *mezonos*, this is only true if the item is not being eaten as a meal. The Gemara (Brachos 42b) says that if one is *kove'a se'uda* (establishes a meal) with *pas haba'a bikisnin*, the blessing of *hamotzi* is made. Determining how much food is considered "a meal" is complex, but there are situations where one's intention affects the halacha – if one intends to eat the *pas haba'ah bikisnin* as a snack, the blessing is *mezonos*, but if one intends to eat it as a meal, it requires *hamotzi*.

This week's question: What type of food will require a different blessing depending on one's intention when making it?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part VII

The exact dates of the holidays based upon Hillel's calendar were determined by the Torah leadership in Babylon. For the year 922 CE, however, Rabbi Aharon ben Meir announced his own calculations, based on certain ideas he promulgated in the calculation of the new moon, for the coming year's calendar – and those calculations were at odds with those of the Babylonian scholars.

A Taste of Torah

continued from front

to marry Rochel, Lavan deviously switched her for Leah. Yaakov had anticipated this and had given Rochel special signs she would share to identify herself. Rochel, realizing her sister would be horribly embarrassed, gave her the signs, thus allowing a rival wife into her home. Her self-sacrifice on behalf of another, which is the converse of *sinas chinam*, is a trait that was passed to her children. It is by using this trait that redemption will ultimately come to the Jewish People.

These two reasons are why redemption is ushered in by the offspring of Yosef or Binyamin. Yosef led the Jewish People in early years of their first exile of Egypt. The protagonists of the Purim story, Mordechai and Esther, were descendants of Binyamin; the events of Purim led to the Jewish People returning to Eretz Yisrael and the construction of the Second *Bais Hamikdash*. The process of the Final Redemption will begin with a Mashiach from the Tribe of Yosef, and conclude with ultimate redemption through a second Mashiach descended from the House of David (see Sukka 52a). Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet), the one who will deliver the tidings of the Final Redemption, is of matrilineal descent from the Tribe of Yosef.

Let us return to Yosef, now sitting in prison at the dawn of the first exile of the Jewish People, who were soon follow him down to Egypt. Pharaoh's chamberlains landed in jail alongside Yosef, their dreams a pointed message for the Jewish People and for Yosef, who would be their leader in Egypt. The message of these two men was simple and straightforward: Look at us and see where *sinas chinam* will lead you. Our acts of hatred landed us in jail, and yours will lead you to a similar fate.

The only way for the Jewish Nation to rise out of exile is to follow the selfless lead of Rochel and restore the unity among brothers. In fact, the Tana Divei Eliyahu (Chapter 23) writes that the merit that brought about the redemption from Egypt was exactly that. He explains that the Jews in Egypt convened an assembly where they collectively agreed to perform *chesed* (acts of kindness) and stand behind each other. With this demonstration of care and concern for each other, they rose out of the *sinas chinam* that was the cause of the exile.

In the same vein, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b) asks, what should a person do to survive the birth pangs of Mashiach? The Talmud replies that one should engage in Torah study and acts of *chesed*. If we commit to care for each other and to do *chesed* with each other, we can bring about the final redemption.

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