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מקץ
Parshat Miketz

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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Reading The Room

Rabbi Ben Sugerman

As the famine begins in Egypt, the Torah gives us a seemingly incidental detail regarding the birth of Yosef's two sons. The pasuk (Bereishit 41:50) reads

וּלְיוֹסֵף יֻלַּד שְׁנֵי בָנִים בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא שְׁנַת הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לּוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן׃

A careful reading of the pasuk indicates that the boys were born before the famine began. The Gemara Taanit takes note of this detail and gleans a halacha based on the formulation:

אמר ריש לקיש, אסור לאדם לשמש מטתו בשני רעבון, שנאמר וליוסף יולד שני בנים בטרם תבא שנת הרעב.

The halacha states that it is forbidden for a man to be with his wife during years of famine, as we learn from the conduct of Joseph.

The simplest understanding of the gemara is the fact that it would not be prudent to introduce children into the world knowing that it would be a struggle to feed them. When food is scarce, we must take into consideration the effects of bringing in new mouths to feed.

The Tosfot on this gemara ask a very strong question. We know that there is a discrepancy between the stated number of people who went down to Egypt versus the actual number of people who went down. A careful counting of the family that went down to Egypt is 69 people but the Torah pronounces that 70 people went down to Egypt. There are a number of ways to resolve the discrepancy, but the most accepted view is that there was somebody born en route to Egypt. Notably, it was Yocheved who was born to Levi. Taking this viewpoint, the Tosfot ask an outstanding question. The brothers and the families went down to Egypt at the beginning of year two of the famine, which obviously brings us to the conclusion that Levi fathered Yocheved during the years of famine. How can our gemara safely conclude that it would be prohibited to have children during the famine when, meanwhile, Levi did exactly that! (See the Tosfot there for a possible suggestion.)

The Torah Temimah offers a novel approach to this dilemma. Levi was living in Israel at the time, while Yosef, on the other hand, was living in

Egypt. The difference, explains the Torah Temimah, is that Levi was experiencing the famine firsthand. In contrast, Yosef was comfortable in Egypt as he had prepared the entire country for the famine, and so they had plenty of food and were not suffering. The Torah Temimah explains that the prohibition of having children during a famine is not a function of introducing children into a world where there is not going to be enough food, but rather a function of empathizing with those who are suffering. Yosef needed to consciously empathize as he himself was not suffering. Levi, on the other hand, living in the famine, didn't need an external reminder of his current situation. Levi, therefore, was not bound by this prohibition.

The lesson for our days couldn't be any clearer. As far away as we are from the current situation in Israel, it becomes even more imperative for us to take into consideration into our daily lives the pain and suffering that our brothers and sisters are experiencing. We can't live in a bubble, insulating ourselves from the duress that they are currently going through.

The Legacy of Yehuda

Eden Pardau ('26)

In this week's parsha, Pharaoh, the leader of Egypt, had two dreams. One was about seven thin, sickly cows eating seven fat, healthy cows. In the other dream, seven healthy ears of grain were swallowed by seven thin and very dry ears of grain. Pharaoh was bothered by these dreams. However, none of his advisors could offer any good interpretations about them. Yosef, a dreamer in his youth, had become a successful interpreter of dreams for other inmates in prison. He was summoned to Pharaoh. Yosef told him there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Yosef, giving credit to Hashem for his predictions, could have left it at that, but Yosef knew that as a responsible person, he could not just be an interpreter. He also had to be an advisor. Yosef had to place himself in a position of authority and act to save his family and others who would be affected by the famine.

Later, when Yaakov was reluctant to send Binyamin to Egypt with his brothers as Yosef had demanded, Yehuda stepped up. Because it was Yehuda's idea in the first place that Yosef be sold, causing Yaakov so much pain, Yehuda had lost the respect of his brothers. Now Yehuda had a chance to redeem himself. He was able to reassure his father in a way his older brother Reuven could not. Yehuda was persistent and took full responsibility, guaranteeing Binyamin's safety on their journey to Egypt. He even told Yaakov (Bereishit 43:9),

"If I do not bring Binyamin back to you, and stand him in front of you," – וְחָטָאתִי לְךָ כָּל-הַיָּמִים – "then I will have sinned against you forever."

Rashi explains "forever" to mean, even in *Olam Haba.* By stepping up, Yehuda earned his father's trust and, therefore, unity between all the brothers was achieved.

As we exit the inspiring and exciting period of Chanukah, it reminds us of the responsible nature of another Yehuda, Yehuda haMaccabee. Yehuda knew he and his family were the ones to fight for religious freedom and Jewish independence. The fighting spirit of Yehuda in the Chanukah story and the compassion shown by Yosef and his brother Yehuda in this week's parsha are things to look up to and admire. We should take these character traits and do our best to implement them into our own lives in any way possible. Shabbat Shalom!

In The Blink of An Eye

Nava Shekhter ('24)

The beginning of this week's parsha, Miketz, details the story in which Pharaoh has strange dreams, wakes up disturbed, and fails to find the right interpretations of the dreams, leaving him frustrated. Then, the Sar HaMashkim tells Pharaoh of a young Hebrew slave who successfully interpreted his dream when he was in prison:

וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיְרִיצֻהוּ מִן הַבּוֹר וַיְגַלַּח וַיְחַלֵּף שִׂמְלֹתָיו וַיָּבֹא אֶל פַּרְעֹה

"And Pharaoh sent and called for Yosef, and they rushed him from the prison. They cut his hair, changed his clothes and brought him to Pharaoh" (Bereishit 41:14).

The Sforno comments on the word וַיְרִיצֻהוּ – "they rushed him". This could be explained as servants eager to please Pharaoh and excited at what sounds like a shot at interpreting his dreams. However, alongside this narrative a deeper principle is at play.

Hashem runs this world in an exact manner. We each get what we deserve in precise measure, no more and no less. When Hashem decides it is time for someone's fortunes to be changed, they change in a heartbeat. Hashem decided that Yosef was to be in prison for a while, but when his release came, it came fast. וַיְרִיצֻהוּ – they rushed him. It was time. When Hashem brings *yeshua*, salvation, He brings it fast.

This helps us understand another major episode in the Torah: the Jews coming out of Egypt. A central feature of their leaving was that it was done speedily, such that they had no time for their dough to rise. Our eating of matzah during Pesach commemorates this. But why was it so important for them to speed out? Sforno explains that when Hashem saves, He does so in a speedy fashion, which is a feature of Hashem's salvation.

The Gemara Rosh Hashana (10b) tells us that Yosef was released from prison on Rosh Hashanah. Why does the gemara mention this? Rav Yitzchak Hutner explains that the gemara does not literally mean it was Rosh Hashana, rather it is telling us something about the nature of Rosh Hashana: that Rosh Hashana, the day on which we daven and ask Hashem for a sweet new year, is a day when fortunes can change. In the same way that Yosef's life was turned around in an instant, so too we believe and daven that all the difficulties in our lives turn around for us. *Yeshuat Hashem k'heref ayin* – Hashem's salvation happens in the blink of an eye.

A Jew is a Jew

Calev Zak ('25)

Rabbi Ken Spiro has a theory that the history of Judaism and Jewish conflict has gone in stages. The first of these stages came in the form of hatred and conflict between brothers. The first brothers in the world, Kain and Hevel, fight to the death, Noach's sons don't get along, Yitzchak and Yishmael don't get along, and of course Yaakov and Esav fight all the time. This theme seems to continue through this chapter with the story of Yosef and his brothers.

The story seems to go through all the necessary stages: we have brothers, they hate each other, try to kill each other, and separate from each other. However, at the end of the story something unexpected happens: Yosef and the brothers forgive each other for everything that they did to each other. After this, we don't really see brother to brother hatred as a main theme of conflict in the Torah anymore.

Furthermore, Rabbi Spiro believes that since the time of the second Beit Hamikdash, the Jewish people have been in the stage of sinat chinam, hatred between one another. This was seen a lot right before this war with Chamas, with arguments over judicial reform in Israel. Many Jews were at each other's throats over politics, and our country seemed less unified than ever. However, as soon as the war broke out, we reached an unprecedented level of achdus and unity. Our parsha hints to the necessity of this unity with the pasuk:

"וַיַּכֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכִּרֻהוּ"

"And Yosef recognized his brothers and they did not recognize him."

Rabbi Sacks points out that we can apply this pasuk to the world around us today. Christian and Muslim nations, the main other monotheistic religions in the world, are considered to be our "brother" nations, and we are "Yosef". There are tens of Islamic states, but only one small Jewish state, and yet we are constantly put down, attacked, and denied official recognition. Just like Yosef and his brothers, we recognize our brother nations, but they do not recognize us. Therefore, we cannot waste our time arguing amongst ourselves and must realize the bigger problem: that peace with our neighboring nations will be impossible until they recognize us.

Therefore I give us all a bracha that we can see ourselves as our enemies see us: not as Ashkenazim, or Sephardim, or Chassidim, or Reform, or Orthodox, or anything like that. When our enemies attack, they see all of us equally and to

them, a Jew is a Jew. So may we all have the merit to see and love one another in that same equal way and keep this level of unity going forever so that we may finally leave this stage of *sinat chinam* and rebuild the third Beit Hamikdash.

Bringing the Past into the Present

Avi Harris ('26)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Miketz, the Torah states:

ויקרא יוסף את שם הבכור מנשה כי נשני אלקים את כל עמלי ואת כל בית אבי

"And Yosef called the name of the first-born Menasheh, 'for God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house'" (Bereishit 41:51).

The simple question here is: why was Yosef grateful that he forgot his father's house?

There is a great story that answers this question. A tourist once entered a kosher restaurant. He was very unimpressed with the religiosity of the place, and began to inquire about kashrut standards. The proprietor looked at a picture on the wall, of a guy with *peyot* and *tzitzit*. He said, "You see that man up there? He was my father!" The visitor replied by asking the restaurant owner why the kashrut was questionable if his father, a religious looking man, is pictured on the wall?

There are many people who only connect to *Yiddishkeit* through their parents. They remember the good memories of Shabbat dinner with their families, but sadly do not follow in those footsteps. While living with the Egyptians, Yosef was in danger of becoming part of Egypt's upper class, with no trace of who he was in his past. Fortunately, however, he still learned Torah. Therefore, it was unnecessary for him to tell his children about his parents' observance, as that was not his only link to his past. He was able to "forget" his father's house by making his own home just like he remembered his parents home, a living example for his children to follow.

May we all merit to create a "house" of Torah observance in any circumstance, just like Yosef did before us.

Good Shabbos!

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