

NOTHING HURTS MORE...

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Today's Learning:
Tevul Yom 3:4-5
Orach Chaim 27:7-9
Pesachim 118
Yerushalmi Beitzah 14

The midrash introduces this parashah, in which we read that Yosef's brothers hated him and sold him as a slave, with a verse from Iyov (3:25), "Never did I feel secure, never quiet, never at peace; and now, torment." The midrash expounds: "Never did I feel secure - because of Esav; never quiet - because of Lavan; never at peace - because of Dinah; and now, torment - because of Yosef."

R' Aharon Lewin z"l (1879-1941; the "Reisha Rav") explains: There is nothing as painful to a father as a fight between his children, for children represent a father's hope for the future. A parent's greatest desire is to see his children happy, to see them growing without obstacles or frustrations; therefore, if the children are at odds with each other, the parent's heart is broken within him and all of life's troubles pale in comparison.

The verse quoted by the midrash summarizes Yaakov's life. Yaakov faced many trials and tribulations in his lifetime, but none of these dampened his spirits or depressed him - that is, until the

enmity between Yosef and his brothers broke out.

Experience shows that there is no war as bad as a civil war. Throughout history, powerful nations have dominated their neighbors and sown fear and dread into the hearts of smaller nations. Yet, when these powerful empires have experienced internal dissension, they have disappeared almost overnight. [Ed. note: In our own time, the breakup of the Soviet Union is an example of this phenomenon.] Yaakov knew how to deal with an attack by Esav, by Lavan, or by Dinah's kidnappers. Nevertheless, he was at a loss when it came to dealing with the battle that raged in his own home. (Ha'drash V'ha'iyun)

"Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourns, in the land of Canaan." (37:1)

Rashi writes: "Yaakov wanted to live in tranquility, but the troubles with Yosef befell him [literally: 'jumped on him']. When tzaddikim desire to live in tranquility, Hashem says, 'Is it not enough for them that their portion in the World-to-Come awaits them? Must they seek tranquility in this world as well?'"

Why should Hashem object if tzaddikim wish to live in tranquility? R' Raphael Boruch Sorotzkin z"l (rosh yeshiva of Telz) offers several explanations:

First, Hashem does not object to a tzaddik's living in tranquility, but He does object to a tzaddik's wanting to live such a life. A tzaddik's concern should be with the quality of his life in the World-to-Come, not his life in This World.

Second, Yaakov's wish implied a desire to begin a spiritual retirement, i.e., to stop growing spiritually and to live off of his prior accomplishments. However, the purpose of life in This World is to work and grow; spiritual retirement is reserved for the World-to-Come.

Third, perhaps Yaakov meant that it was time to "retire" from worrying about the spirituality of others so that he could devote more time to his own spiritual needs. To this, too, Hashem objects, for it is every person's obligation to work toward a world that is saturated with knowledge of Hashem. (Ha'binah Ve'ha'berachah)

"Reuven heard, and he rescued him [Yosef] from their hand..." (37:20)

Did Reuven really save Yosef? He proposed throwing Yosef into a pit full of snakes and scorpions! Also, the gemara (Sanhedrin 6a) says that one is prohibited from praising Yehuda for saving Yosef from the pit. Why? Wasn't Yehuda's act greater than Reuven's?

R' Y. Stern z"l of Paris explains: True, Reuven's act might have led to Yosef's death, but only his physical death. In contrast, by proposing that Yosef be sold to Egypt as a slave, Yehuda condemned

Yosef to a spiritual death (i.e., a lesser person than Yosef would have been swept up by the idolatry and immorality of Egypt). (Iturei Torah)

"Behold! A caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead... Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?'" (37:25-26)

The work, Melo Ha'omer, explains Yehuda's response to seeing the Ishmaelites as follows:

According to the midrash, one of the reasons that Yosef's brothers wanted to kill him was to prevent the birth of Yosef's descendant, Yeravam ben Nevat, one of the most destructive personalities in Jewish history. However, when Yehuda saw the Ishmaelites, he remembered how Hashem had once spared Yishmael's life because at that moment Yishmael was not deserving of death. Though the angels argued that Yishmael should die because he would father the Arabs, who would oppress the Jews, Hashem spared Yishmael because he, personally, was not wicked at that moment. (See Rashi to Bereishit 21:17)

Similarly, Yehuda reasoned, Yosef may be the ancestor of Yeravam, but Yosef is not deserving of death now. Accordingly, Yehuda saved Yosef from death. (Quoted in Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

"Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What betzah/gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?'" (37:26)

Making a play on the word betzah (which also means, "to slice bread"), the midrash states: "If we kill our brother, can we recite hamotzi?" R' Meir Yechiel of Ostrovtza z"l (died 1928) explains as follows:

The gemara (Kiddushin 32b) relates: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Tzaddok were at the wedding of Rabban Gamliel's son, and Rabban Gamliel was serving them.

Rabbi Eliezer refused to accept a drink from him, whereas Rabbi Yehoshua accepted a drink. Rabbi Eliezer reprimanded his colleague: "How is it, Yehoshua, that you allow Rabban Gamliel to stand and serve us?"

Rabbi Tzaddok interjected, "How is it that you are more worried about Rabban Gamliel's honor than Hashem's honor? Does He not serve us by causing the wind to blow, the rain to fall, and the crops to grow? Does He not set the table for every person?"

R' Meir Yechiel continues: The reason that Yosef's brothers sentenced him to death was that he claimed to be their king, whereas the brothers recognized Yehuda (ancestor of King David) as their king. Yehuda argued, however, that when we recite the blessing of hamotzi and eat the bread that Hashem has produced, we effectively recognize that a king (i.e., Hashem) can forgive the honor due him. If so, how can we kill Yosef? Rather, I must forgive my own honor. (Meir Einei Chachamim Vol. III)

R' Nechemiah Beirach z"l died 5612 (1851/52)

R' Nechemiah of Dubrovna, the son of R' Avraham Beirach, was recognized by those who knew him as a great scholar, yet he lived in obscurity (and remains relatively unknown today). To a rabbi who once shared a train compartment with R' Nechemiah and, after talking with him for several hours, expressed surprise that he had not previously heard of R' Nechemiah, the latter related the following parable:

A peddler of books used to travel from town to town selling his wares. Once, on a particularly hot day, he arrived in a certain town and was invited to refresh himself in the rabbi's house.

The peddler was awed by the rabbi's immense library, and he said to the rabbi with great emotion, "Do you realize how much money you could make by selling these books?! What are you waiting for?"

The rabbi replied, "I am shocked by your question. Is my library for sale?"

Although R' Nechemiah never held a formal rabbinic position, he was asked many halachic questions and his answers to these are published in Divrei Nechemiah. In addition, his glosses to the Talmud are published in the standard Vilna edition (the edition in common use today).

In his second marriage, R' Nechemiah was the son-in-law of R' Chaim Avraham, son of R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi (founder of Chabad chassidism). (Source: Gedolei Hadorot 606)

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