

BE PATIENT!

by Shlomo Katz

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz
Vayeishev-Chanukah
Volume XV, No. 9
26 Kislev 5761
December 23, 2000

Today's Learning:
Yevamot 12:6-13:1
Orach Chaim 351:3-352:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sotah 2
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Batra 32

R' Yechiel ben Yekutiel ben Binyamin Ha'rofei z"l (see page 4) writes: "My sons! Come, and I will teach you the importance of the trait of tzeniut / discretion. Know my sons, that the trait of tzeniut is one of the most important and distinguished traits, for it is one of the three traits that Hashem seeks from Yisrael, as it is written (Michah 6:8): 'What does Hashem require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk with tzeniut / in a low-key manner with your G-d?'

"Moreover, tzeniut protects a person from an ayin hara and saves him from sins, as was the case with the tzaddik Yosef a"h [in this week's parashah]. Because he acted with tzeniut, he was saved from the wife of his master Potiphar and he did not stumble with her, as it is written (Bereishit 39:7): 'After these things, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Yosef . . .' She lifted her eyes to look at him, but he did not lift his eyes to look at her, as our Sages said in the midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 87:11): 'She placed a metal poker on his throat so that he would lift his eyes and look at her.' Even so, he did not

look at her, as it is written [regarding Yosef] (Tehilim 105:18): 'They afflicted his legs with fetters, his soul came into irons.'

"We are taught in the midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 87:6) that a Roman noblewoman asked the sage Rabbi Yose, 'Is it possible that Yosef, who was only seventeen years old, did not do this thing [i.e., sin]?' Rabbi Yose took out a copy of Bereishit and showed her that the Torah records the faults of Reuven [in last week's parashah] and of Yehuda [in this week's parashah]. He said, 'If the Torah did not cover-up for these two, who were grown-ups and who lived in their father's home, would the Torah need to cover-up for a youth who was in a foreign land [who could be forgiven for any weakness]?' . . . "My sons! How great is tzeniut, for the first luchot, which were given in public [with lightning and thunder], were subject to ayin hara and were broken. Therefore, when He wanted to give the second luchot, He did so discretely." (Ma'alot Ha'middot: "The Ninth Trait")

"Yosef would bring evil reports about them to their father." (37:2)

One of these reports, according to the midrash, was that they ate aiver min hachai / flesh of living animals. Is this really conceivable? And, if they would commit such a despicable act, would they be foolish enough to do it in front of Yosef? On the other hand, if Yosef's brothers did not eat aiver min hachai, was Yosef lying?

R' Avraham Abusch Gurnovsky z"l (1847-1912; rabbi on the Upper West Side of Manhattan beginning in 1869) explains: Why is it the lot of the Jewish nation to be pursued and persecuted for most of its history? The answer is that the Jewish nation has as a mission to be a living example to the world of what it means to place one's faith in Hashem. The more that a Jew suffers, but nevertheless adheres to his emunah and bitachon / faith and trust, the stronger is the message conveyed to the rest of the world that the Jew relies on G-d alone.

Yosef believed that his brothers, in particular Shimon and Levi, were not living by the above ideal. After all, Shimon and Levi had destroyed the city of Shechem to avenge their sister's honor (as related in last week's parashah). Yosef argued: "Hashem will avenge our injuries eventually. Our role is to be patient."

What causes the sin of aiver min hachai? It is one's inability to be patient and to wait until the animal is ready to be eaten (that is, until it is dead). Yosef's brother's did not literally eat aiver min hachai; rather, in Yosef's view, they had the same character flaw that causes a person to eat such forbidden meat. That is what Yosef reported to his father. (Even Yisrael p. 55)

"My master concerns himself about nothing in the house, and whatever he has, he has placed in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate this great evil and have sinned against G-d?" (39:8-9)

It appears from these verses that what prevented Yosef from sinning with Potiphar's wife was Yosef's appreciation of his master's kindness. In contrast, the Gemara (Sotah 36b) says that Yosef nearly succumbed to Potiphar's wife, but he saw the visage of his father and he conquered his yetzer hara. How can the gemara's explanation be reconciled with the above verses?

R' Elimelech Meller shlita (dean of Kollel Minchat Chinuch in Yerushalayim) explains: When Yaakov sent Yosef to visit his brothers at the beginning of this parashah, Yaakov said (37:14), "Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock . . ." The midrash asks, "We understand Yaakov's concern for his sons -- but for the flock? This teaches that one should seek the welfare of everything from which he benefits."

In light of this midrash we can say that the immediate reason why Yosef did not sin was his appreciation of his master's kindness. However, who taught Yosef the importance of recognizing and repaying others' kindnesses? Yaakov taught him that, and seeing Yaakov's visage reminded him of what he had learned. (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Shai La'Torah p. 416)

"When the Greeks entered the sanctuary, they defiled all of the oil that was within. When the House of Chashmonai overpowered [the Greeks], they inspected [the Bet Hamikdash] and found only one small flask of oil, which had been left with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. There was only enough oil in that flask to light [the menorah] for one night, but a miracle occurred and they lit from it for eight nights." (Shabbat 21b)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) describes the inner meaning of the Chanukah story as follows:

Regarding the relationship between Israel and the nations of the world, their wise men, their customs and their etiquette - our Sages have already commented on the seeming contradiction between the rebuke (Yechezkel 11:12), "[F]or you acted according to the laws of the nations who are around you," and the rebuke (Yechezkel 5:7), "[Y]ou did not act according to the laws of the nations around you." Our Sages (Sanhedrin 39b) explain G-d's complaint to be: "You did not act like the civilized nations around you. Rather, you acted like the uncivilized nations around you."

However, writes R' Kook, one who follows even the civilized ways of the nations must take care not to absorb that which is uncivilized. And, while one may sometimes adopt superficially that from among the nations which is good, one's inner spirit must be strong and faithful only to Hashem, the G-d of Israel, and His Torah. When the spirit of Greece, the symbol of that which is best among the nations, enters the deepest sanctuaries of Israel's holiness and attempts to change Israel's basic character, then all of the oils in the sanctuary become defiled. Not only the Jewish ideas and beliefs that came into contact with Greek culture became contaminated when the Greeks entered the sanctuary, but all good deeds and teachings absorbed a ta'am lifgam / "bad taste" [a Talmudic expression borrowed from the laws of kashrut].

This, continues R' Kook, is the most horrible sorrow that could affect the soul of the Jewish nation. However, it is Hashem's design that even if one's basic Torah values have been contaminated by contact with the Greeks, nevertheless, just as the kohanim are set aside to teach Hashem's laws to the nation, so every person has a little bit of "kohen" in himself. (Thus it is written in Shemot 19:6, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of kohanim.") Very deep in the heart is the light of the Jewish soul -- there is hidden the tie that connects the Jew to his fundamental faith in Hashem, the G-d of Israel. This hidden aspect is reminiscent of the Kohen Gadol's entrance into the hidden Holy of Holies on that holy day [Yom Kippur]. Thus, that little flask of oil bearing the seal of the Kohen Gadol the Greeks could not defile; they could not uproot the deeply hidden ties between the Jewish people and Hashem.

Of course, one little flask of oil cannot give much light. However, the wonder of the hidden light within the Jew is that Hashem fans the little spark which the oil fuels until it burns out all of the foreign ways. There was only enough oil in that flask to light the menorah for one night, but a miracle occurred and they lit from it for many nights. (Ain Ayah)

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R' Yechiel Anav (Del Mansi) z"l

R' Yechiel ben R' Yekutiel ben R' Binyamin Ha'rofei Anav lived in Rome, Italy in the mid- and late-thirteenth century. The Anavim (plural of "Anav"), as they were called, were among the most distinguished of Italy's Jews. A family tradition recorded that the clan's ancestors were brought to Rome by the Emperor Titus when he destroyed the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

R' Yechiel is believed to be the author of the halachic compendium Sefer Tanya, which for many generations was accepted by Italian Jews as an authoritative code of Jewish law. The opinions in Sefer Tanya are still quoted in halachic works today. (This work should not be confused, of course, with a 19th century chassidic work of the same name.)

R' Yechiel wrote liturgical poetry, and he authored the work Ma'alot Ha'middot, which deals with character improvement. In this work, he collects Biblical verses and teachings of the Sages dealing with twenty-four different character traits, and presents those teachings in a highly readable style. Interspersed among the Sages' words are a relatively small number of R' Yechiel's own thoughts and interpretations, as well as popular sayings and philosophical maxims. (The eighteenth century work Migdal Oz by R' Yaakov Emden quotes extensively from Ma'alot Ha'middot and explains that even the teachings of non-Jewish philosophers are an appropriate source from which to learn ethical behavior if those teachings complement the words of our Sages.)

R' Yechiel may have earned his living as a scribe. Several works which he copied still exist, including the oldest complete edition of the Talmud Yerushalmi. Each of the works he copied bears his signature, the date, and a dedication to the individual who commissioned the copy. (Sources: The ArtScroll Rishonim p. 189; Ma'alot Ha'middot, Intro. to the Eshkol edition)

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The Vogel family on the yahrzeit of mother Miriam bat Yehuda Laib a"h (Mary Kalkstein)

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