

BLOOD LIBEL

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 262, Yichud And The Open Door Policy. Good Shabbos!

Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov - - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

Reb Elchanon Sees Blood Libels Foreshadowed In This Week's Parsha

One of the overriding themes of the book of Genesis is that the actions of the forefathers foreshadow events that will happen to their descendants (ma'aseh avos siman l'banim). The blueprint of Jewish history is contained in this first book of the Chumash. This week's parsha is no exception to that rule.

Last week's parsha (recounting Yaakov's meeting with Eisav) represented the paradigm of how Jews must deal with the non-Jewish world. This week's parsha foreshadows the ways Jews act among themselves. Unfortunately, parshas Vayeshev has become the blueprint for intra-Jewish relations.

Unfortunately, the undeserved hatred, jealousy and divisiveness that existed between Yosef and his brothers set the tone for thousands of years of Jewish history. Of course, we need to preface our remarks with the disclaimer that when we speak about the actions of the patriarchs and the founders of the Tribes, we cannot superimpose our petty jealousies and sibling rivalries on these holy individuals. But nevertheless, if one wonders why the Jewish people have always been so argumentative, why the Second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of undeserved hatred, one has to only look at this week's parsha to see from where the die was cast.

Rav Elchanon Wasserman (1875-1941) carried this idea one step further with the following very scary thought.

For thousands of years, Jews have always suffered from blood libels. Many thousands of Jewish

lives have been lost because of them. As recently as the 1930s there was also a blood libel in the state of New York.

A blood libel was the absolutely ludicrous charge that somehow or another the Jews needed the blood of Christian children as an ingredient in the baking of Matzah for Passover. Anyone who knows the slightest thing about Judaism knows that the Torah is replete with exhortations warning us against the consumption of blood. We must salt our meat to remove the blood. We must salt our chicken to remove the blood. We are not allowed to drink any kind of blood. It is absolutely incongruous that the Jews would have anything to do with blood, let alone human blood. So how and why did this falsehood get started?

Rav Elchanon says that the history of blood libels all started with the fact that Yosef's brothers slaughtered a goat, and dipped his coat in its blood -- in order to deceive their father into thinking that a wild animal killed Yosef. This is the Ma'aseh Avos Siman L'Banim. The foreshadowing of patriarchal actions can work in a positive fashion, and it can also work in a negative fashion.

We are still suffering from the ramifications of the argument between Yosef and his brothers, up until this very day.

There Is A Time For Compromise and A Time For Remaining Firm

When we learn about the incident of Yosef and his brothers, how should we judge the actions of Yehudah who, in effect, saved Yosef's life? ("What good is it that we should kill our brother? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites." [Bereishis 37:26-27]) Was Yehudah's act laudable or was it an act to be condemned? Was it something to commend or something to condemn?

The Talmud answers this question [Sanhedrin 6b]. "Rabbi Meir teaches that any person who praises the compromise of Yehudah is committing blasphemy." This was a terrible act of Yehudah's to have offered such a compromise.

The Medrash teaches a similar idea in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "Whoever begins to do a mitzvah but does not complete the mitzvah, will in the end bury his wife and children... as we see from what happened to Yehudah." Yehudah should have carried Yosef on his shoulders back to their father. Since Yehudah only went part of the way, he suffered a 'measure for measure punishment' by having to bury his own children. It was a measure for measure punishment in the sense that since he only did half a job in the mitzvah that he fulfilled, Heaven only allowed him half the job of raising his children -- and only allowed him half the lifetime that he would have wished to spend with his wife.

These ancient sources notwithstanding, we need to understand -- why was Yehudah's action so terrible? Doesn't the Talmud praise the institution of compromise? [Sanhedrin 6b] The first thing a judge is supposed to ask the litigants is "will you accept compromise?" Yehudah advanced a compromise here. What was his great sin?

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl provides the following explanation. There are many occasions when compromise is appropriate, but there can be no compromising the truth. When the brothers said, "Yosef is deserving of death", they issued that ruling based on the conclusion that Yosef had the law of a 'pursuer' (rodef) who according to Jewish law is deserving of death. If their conclusion was correct, then Yosef should have been killed. If their conclusion was wrong, then Yosef did not deserve to be sold as a slave either. The truth was either with the brothers or with Yosef -- there was no room for compromise. From Yosef's perspective a compromise that sold him into slavery was a travesty of justice. He claimed that he was innocent, a Tzaddik!

Yehudah had the opportunity to do what was right. Unfortunately, he did not seize the moment.

We see this concept still more dramatically from the Medrash in the Book of Exodus, Shemos. The Medrash says that when the brothers went to try to comfort their father, he refused to accept consolation. The brothers then blamed Yehudah: "Had Yehudah asked us not to sell Yosef, we would not have sold him, just like we listened to him when he asked us not to kill Yosef."

Yehudah was the future monarch. Monarchs are supposed to lead, not follow. If Yehudah believed that the brothers were correct in their analysis of Yosef's character, then he should have supported their position. If he believed that they were wrong, then there was no moral basis for compromise. Yehudah was to be the King. He had an obligation to lead. The brothers themselves testified (in the Medrash) to the fact that they would have listened to him.

Yehudah compromised in a situation where he had the opportunity and the ability and the duty to do what was right. For this he was condemned.

There are certain occasions in life when one cannot compromise. In situations where we are supposed to compromise, the evil inclination comes and whispers in our ear "Do not compromise. Stick to your guns." On the other hand, in situations where we are supposed to be firm and stand up for principles, the evil inclination comes and whispers "compromise."

The Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) once organized a campaign against a group of merchants in Radin that began to keep their stores open on Shabbos. He spoke to them privately and he spoke publicly about the issue. Finally, the merchants agreed to keep their stores closed on Shabbos. They only had one request from the Chofetz Chaim. "We expected to be open for Shabbos and on that basis greatly increased our inventory of perishable items. If we close for the next two Saturdays we will take a severe loss. Just let us stay open these two weeks to unload our extra merchandise, and then we will stay closed for Shabbos after that."

The Chofetz Chaim responded, "I am sorry gentlemen, but it is not my Shabbos." In other words, I am not the owner of the institution of Shabbos that I have the license to grant you compromise on this issue. Shabbos belongs to G-d. There is no way that I am justified in compromising.

Here too, it was Yosef's life at stake. Yehudah had no right to make compromises with it.

There are times in life when compromise is necessary and there are times when it is unacceptable. Our challenge is to figure out when we must compromise and when we must stand our ground.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayeishev are provided below:

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