

RABBI FRAND ON PARSHAS MIKETZ

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 # 661, Davening for the Welfare of the Government. Good Shabbos!

Forgetting My Father's Household

Yosef had two children, whom he named Menashe and Ephraim. Regarding the naming of Menashe, the pasuk [verse] states [Bereshis 41:51]: "G-d has made me forget (nashani Elokim) all my hardship and all my father's household." This pasuk should raise an immediate question in our minds: How could Yosef name his child Menashe and proclaim proudly that the Almighty helped him forget the household of the Patriarch Yaakov?

Rav Simcha Zissel in "Som Derech" explains this by citing a Gemara [Bava Metziah 85a]: When Rav Zeira went up to Eretz Yisrael from Bavel, he first fasted 100 fasts - in order that he might forget the Babylonian Talmud that he studied in Bavel. He wanted to be able to study the Jerusalem Talmud without being distracted by preconceived notions that he had acquired while studying in Babylonian Yeshivos. Rashi explains that the Talmudic methodology in Eretz Yisrael differed from that of Babylonia. In order to acquire the new style of learning that Rav Zeira was hoping to acquire in Eretz Yisrael, the best thing for him to do would be to forget the methodology of the learning he had been accustomed to until now.

This may not be that different from a young fellow who has been studying in America and wants to go to study in a Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael with a different style of learning. Such a young man needs to pray that he not be "boxed in" by his previous methods of Talmudic analysis so that he might have an open mind for acquiring the methods of study being used in contemporary Yeshivas in the holy land.

Rav Simcha Zissel said that Yosef HaTzadik learned in the house of Yaakov Avinu and he learned the Torah of Yaakov Avinu. He learned his way of life and his system of values. But Yosef knew that the approach that worked in the house of Yaakov was not going to work in Egypt. If he tried that approach in this foreign land, he would be doomed.

Yaakov's home was one of sanctity and purity. The approach that worked there worked perfectly for an environment in which one was surrounded by brothers who were all sons of the same father - the Tribes of G-d. But now, Yosef said, I am in a hostile environment. I am in the decadent land of Egypt.

If I try to use the same approach and lifestyle that worked for me in my father's house here in this land, it will be disastrous for me and my family.

Therefore the righteous Yosef prayed to G-d for the insight and wisdom to adapt to his new surroundings with a new spiritual approach. In order for him to do that, he needed to forget "all my toil and all the household of my father." Yosef did not proclaim that he named his son Menashe in order to thank G-d for His help in forgetting Yaakov's household because he chas v'Shalom demeaned his father's household, but rather because he now needed a different approach. He now needed a new approach that would enable him to survive and prosper in the environment of Egypt.

Explaining The Relevance of the Choice of the Chanukah Torah Reading

The Derech Hashem writes that the Torah reading for any given holiday serves as an appropriate conduit for heavenly influence unique to that particular holiday. For example, the Torah reading of Purim is "And Amalek came..." [Shmos Chapter 17], because Purim is the day in which the Jewish people did battle with Amalek and it is a day in which we commemorate our continuous battle with Amalek. This Torah reading, which describes the victory of Klal Yisrael over Amalek, serves as a conduit for the influence which originates in Heaven and which grants the Jewish people strength in their perpetual battle with the forces of Amalek.

Likewise, on the first day of Shavuos, we read the chapter [Shmos 19] relating to accepting the Torah (And Israel encamped there opposite the mountain...), because Shavuos is a day which represents accepting the Torah. We read the appropriate Torah section in order to bring that Heavenly influence of what it takes to accept Torah on an ongoing basis.

The Torah reading for each holiday is spiritually appropriate to what is happening on that day. The Torah reading on Chanukah, however, does not have as obvious a connection to the holiday.

The Torah reading on Chanukah is the section of the korbonos [sacrifices] of the Nesiyim [Princes] during the period of the Dedication of the Mizbayach [Altar] [Bamidbar Chapter 7]. One might reasonably ask oneself -- what does this have to do with Chanukah? Granted that Chanukah is only a Rabbinic holiday so there is obviously not a Biblical source that explicitly discusses the events of Chanukah. However, given that handicap, it might not be seen as such a stretch to read about the Chanukas haMizbeach -- the dedication of the Mizbayach in the times of the Mishkan [Tabernacle] in the Wilderness. But without further insight, the connection does appear rather tenuous.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon provides that insight. He notes a profound connection. Rav Solomon argues that there is a message in the korbonos brought by the Nesiyim that is indeed one of the main concepts of Chanukah. He quotes a famous Bach (Rav Yoel Sirkas) in Hilchos Chanukah who asks why we have a mitzvah to feast on Purim, while there is no such commandment on Chanukah. The Bach explains that Purim came about because of a sin of eating (the Jews partook of the feast served by Achashverosh in which he used the captured vessels of the Bais Hamikdash). Since their bodies benefited from this meal, there was a decree against their bodies and they were sentenced

to die. The Jews repented by fasting. The fasting served as atonement for the inappropriate consumption that took place during the party of the King. G-d responded to their Teshuva by miraculously saving them and then gave them a mitzvah to party and feast in commemoration of that salvation.

Chanukah, on the other hand, had nothing to do with food. The punishment that preceded the Chanukah miracle came about because the Jews had become lax in their Service (hisrashlu b'avodah). They did not take the avodah in the Bais HaMikdash [Temple Service] seriously. They were unenthusiastic. They did it by rote. They only lamely went through the motions.

What was the Heavenly decree? "You don't care about the Bais HaMikdash? Okay. I will take it away from you." Consequently, the Daily Offering was nullified and the Menorah Lighting was taken away from them.

The Jews repented. They risked their lives to reinstitute the avodah in the Bais Hamkdash. The miracle of Chanukah provided Divine Assistance in allowing the Priests to properly perform the Avodah - as represented by the miracle of the long-lasting oil in the menorah.

The Torah states that the Nesiyim brought Avnei Shoham and Avnei Miluim for the Ephod and the Choshen. However, the word for Princes (Nesiyim) is spelled defectively (without a yud) [Shmos 35:27]. Rashi in Vayakhel explains that when it came time to raise funds for the Mishkan and the Nesiyim were approached for donations, their response was "See us later. First go solicit everyone else and we'll donate whatever is missing at the end."

Lo and behold, the entire budget was met by the initial donations and there was nothing more for the Nesiyim to give. The only thing left to give were the precious stones for the Priestly garments, so that is what they gave. Initially however, they were lax and they did not line up to give at the beginning of the building campaign. The Torah commentated on this laziness through the defective spelling of the word Nesiyim.

The Nesiyim, however, learned their lesson. By the dedication of the Mizbayach yhey lined up to give first. They were not going to allow themselves to make the same mistake twice.

The chapter of the Nesiyim thus is the story of people who learned from their mistake of not being enthusiastic enough when it came to taking part in the Divine Service. This is therefore the appropriate section to read on Chanukah. If Chanukah came about as a result of initially being lax in dedication to avodah in the Bais HaMikdash, it makes sense to read the chapter of the Nesiyim who also once made such a mistake. Just as the Nesiyim atoned for that sin during the dedication of the Mizbayach, so too the repentance that led to the Chanukah miracle taught the Jews of that generation and all future times, not to take the avodah in the Bais HaMikdash for granted.

The lesson of Chanukah and its Torah reading is that we must always serve Hashem with enthusiasm and with "geshmak" [excited emotion].

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 Miketz are provided below:

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