

EXPLAINING THE ROCKY ROAD A BAAL TESHUVA SOMETIMES ENCOUNTERS / MAKE A KIDDUSH HASHEM!

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: #968 – The Minyan: Must Everyone Be in the Same Room? (comments on the Madoff Scandal) Good Shabbos!

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Explaining the Rocky Road A Baal Teshuva Sometimes Encounters

The great famine has already hit the Land of Canaan. Yaakov, tells his sons to go down to Egypt and procure food for the family. The Torah tells us, "So, Yosef's brothers – ten of them – went down to buy grain from Egypt." [Bereshis 42:3]. Rashi points out that until now, the Torah always referred to the brothers as "Yaakov's sons" (*Bnei Yakov*). Here, for the first time, the Torah calls them "Yosef's brothers". Rashi elaborates: This teaches us that they regretted his sale and set their heart to act towards him with brotherhood and to ransom him for any price his captors might set.

They had sold him as a slave and they assumed he was still working as a slave. They were prepared to ransom him from slavery, no matter what the cost. They were beginning the first steps of *Teshuva*.

I saw an interesting question in a *sefer* called Tiv HaTorah from Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch. We are at the threshold of the greatest calamity that befalls Yosef's brothers. From this point on, they have a horrible existence. We all know the story – Yosef recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. He accuses them of being spies. He makes them jump through hoops. He makes them bring Binyamin down. The remainder of this parsha and the beginning of Parshas Vayigash narrate Yosef putting his brother through "the seven levels of Gehenom".

Is it not ironic, Rav Rabinovitch asks, that their troubles start after they are already doing *Teshuva*, deciding that they will redeem their brother regardless of what it costs, and regretting their earlier action? Is it not ironic that specifically now, Yosef is making them go through all the difficulties? If

they were steadfast in their opinion that Yosef was a murderer and a pursuer – then making them suffer might be poetic justice. However, given the fact that they are already on the road to repentance, why does Yosef put them through the torture?

To answer this question, Rav Rabinovitch cites a very interesting observation of the Sefas Emes. The Sefas Emes points out a similar type of phenomenon. In last week's parsha, Yosef faced a great temptation – that of the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife. Here you have a young man, separated from his family, alone, and the wife of Potiphar is trying to seduce him. Yosef withstood the test. For this spiritual accomplishment, Yosef earned the title "*Yosef HaTzadik*" [the righteous Yosef]. Chazal make this point on the *pasuk*, "the sea saw and it fled" [Tehillim 114:3, by the splitting of the Red Sea] that the sea saw the coffin of Yosef and fled in awe, just as he fled from the pursuit of his master's wife.

What happened to Yosef immediately after he withstood this test? They threw him into the dungeon. "This is Torah and this is its reward"? For this act of piety for which we are still the beneficiaries thereof, Yosef's immediate "reward" is to be thrown into a pit and kept there for years? Where is the justice here?

The Sefas Emes explains the matter: When a person does an act of *Tzidkus* [righteousness] and when a person initiates the process of repentance, then the *Ribono shel Olam* knows he is on the path to *teshuva* – and helps him do a complete *teshuva* by punishing him for his past deeds. Yosef had to do penance because he did speak *lashon harah* [slander] to his father about his brothers. Up until this point, Yosef was not ready to endure the punishment that the *Ribono shel Olam* felt that he needed to endure. Once he achieved this great spiritual level of righteousness – that he withstood this great temptation – then the Almighty said "You have already started the process of Teshuva, now I am going to help you do *Teshuva Gemura* [complete repentance]. How am I going to do that? I am going to throw you into the dungeon as a *kaparah* [atonement] for your sin of *lashon harah*, so that when you come out of that dungeon, you will come out as pure as fresh snow.

That is why, specifically after the incident with Potiphar's wife, Yosef was thrown in the dungeon. Therefore, Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch says, the same logic and the same reasoning explain what happened with Yosef's brothers: Precisely because now they started the process of *Teshuva*, they are now fit to complete the process of *Teshuva* – by enduring the terrible travails through Yosef. This completed their *kaparah*.

Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch adds the following interesting idea. (I personally know many cases where I have seen this and it has always been something that is inexplicable to me.) Sometimes a person decides to become a *Baal Teshuva*. Slowly but surely, he becomes more and more religious. The fellow has a fantastic business and a wonderful family and he decides to do *teshuva*. He closes his business on Shabbos through great self-sacrifice.

Then what happens? The sky falls in. The business goes down the drain. He has family problems.

Half the family does not want to have anything to do with him. They think he is off his rocker. Here the fellow is a sincere *Baal Teshuva*; he was *moser nefesh*; he closed his business on Shabbos! What happened after all this? His life goes sour!

What is the theological meaning of this? I have seen this happen too many times for it to be considered a rare coincidence. We would think that since this fellow became a *Baal Teshuva*, the Almighty should shower him with all types of reward!

Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch says it is this same phenomenon. Until now, he was not up to withstanding these tests. Now, he has begun the *teshuva* process. He has reached a different level. The Almighty wants him to complete the *teshuva* process. In order to complete that process, perhaps he must endure *yisurim* [difficulties] to give penance for his former life. Therefore, rather than immediately reaping the benefits of being a *Baal Teshuva*, he sometimes must endure hardships. Certainly, the eventual goal of all this is that he will in fact emerge from this ordeal as a much purer person. He is ready to endure it because he has already shown that he has the mettle that it requires to become a *Baal Teshuva*.

Make A Kiddush Hashem!

We all know the story. Pharaoh has dreams. He does not know what they mean. The seven fat cows, the seven thin cows; the seven fat stalks; the seven thin stalks. Yosef interprets the dreams. He tells them there are going to be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Yosef not only interprets the dreams but also gives Pharaoh advice: In the seven years of plenty, store the surplus grain so that food will be available during the seven lean years.

The *pasuk* states: "Pharaoh called Yosef's name *Tzafnas-panayach* and he gave him *Asnas*, daughter of *Poti-fera*, Chief of *On*, for a wife; Thus Yosef emerged over the land of Egypt." [Bereshis 41:45] True to form, there were seven plentiful years -- "The land produced by handfuls during the seven years of abundance. He gathered all food of the seven years that came to pass in the land of Egypt, and he placed food in the cities; the food of the field that was around each city he placed within it. Yosef amassed grain like the sand of the sea, very much, until he ceased counting, for there is no number." [Bereshis 41:47-49] Just as Yosef predicted and advised.

Then the seven years of famine began: "The seven years of abundance that came to pass in the land of Egypt ended. And the seven years of famine began approaching, just as Yosef said; and there was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread." [Bereshis 41:53-54]

Rav Yitzchak Yakov Reines asks why it is that when the seven years of plenty came, the *pasuk* does not say, "Just as Yosef said". It is only when the seven years of famine began that scripture writes, "Just as Yosef said". Why is that? Either say, "As he predicted" both by the good and by the bad years

or omit it both by the good and by the bad years! Apparently, Yosef was "blamed" for the bad years that were attributed to his prediction, but he did not get credit for the good years, which he also predicted.

Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky cites an interesting anecdote involving Albert Einstein. When the great physicist developed the theory of relativity, he travelled to the great institutions of higher learning in those days to discuss his discovery. He presented his theory of relativity at the Sorbonne in Paris. He is reported to have quipped that if the theory of relativity will bear out, then the French will say that I am a citizen of the world and the Germans will claim that I am a German. "However," he continued, "if the theory falls on its face, then the French will say that I am a German and the Germans will say that I am a Jew."

The point of this story is that success has many fathers but failure is an orphan. In a twist on that, success may have many fathers, but failures are attributed to the Jews. Only when there is something negative to report – that is when we are told if it was a Jew.

Unfortunately, we typically cannot do anything about that. There is only one way to combat *Chillul Hashem* and that is with *Kiddush Hashem*. While most of us will not have the opportunity to make a public *Kiddush Hashem*, in our daily lives each of us has the opportunity to make a *Kiddush Hashem* on a daily basis. I think this is something we all need to think about – how we can create *Kiddush Hashem*?

We should never underestimate the ramifications of a small *Kiddush Hashem*. This week I had the opportunity to sit at the same table with Rav Abish Brodt. He reminded me of a very interesting story that I had actually heard previously. There was a certain reception in honor of Rabbi Berel Wein in Detroit. The person hosting the reception was a big wig in Detroit and he invited many business associates including the editor of the Detroit Free Press to this luncheon.

The editor of the Detroit Free Press asked if he could address the assemblage. This Detroit Free Press and this editor in particular had a history of being very pro-Israel and very pro-Jewish. The editor got up and said the following:

"I want to tell you why I have such warm feelings towards the Jewish people in general and towards Israel in particular. My mother came over from Ireland in the earlier part of the twentieth century. As was common with immigrants in those days, she was a housecleaner. She got a job as a maid in the house of an Orthodox Jew, a prominent member of the Jewish community, who happened to live next to a shul. The family, for whatever reason, went out of town for a couple of weeks during December and they were scheduled to come home on December 23."

"My mother thought to herself, 'This is terrible. They are out of town. When they come back, it will already be December 23rd at night. Where are they going to get a tree for the living room?' Therefore, she decided, 'They are such good people to me – I am going to go out and buy a tree.' She bought a tree and put it in the front window of the living room, right next to the synagogue. She

bought the tinsel and she put up the red and the green lights."

When people came to shul for *mincha-ma'ariv*, they saw the house all decorated for the Christian holiday and they started wondering – What happened with these people?

When the owner arrived home that night, he looked at his living room window and could not believe his eyes.

There are two ways he could have reacted to this. He could have told the maid to "PLEASE GET THIS THING OUT OF HERE IMMEDIATELY!!!" or he could have spoken to her gently, as he did. He called her into the kitchen and said "I want to tell you – this is one of the nicest, most sensitive, most considerate things that ANYONE has ever done to me in my life. I am so appreciative that I am going to give you a bigger Christmas bonus than I intended." He handed her a \$50 bill (which in those days was a lot of money). "However", he continued, "We do not celebrate this holiday and we do not display trees in our houses. So in spite of the fact that it was such a beautiful sentiment on your part, we are going to need to get rid of the tree."

The editor of the Detroit Free Press told the reception of Jewish leaders that his mother used to tell him this story about the tree and the Jew. It created such warm feelings in him towards Jews, Judaism and Israel. Why? It is because one Jew made a *Kiddush Hashem* that had a wide-ranging impact. One Jew did not just react to the spectacle of a tree sitting in his living room, but rather he thought about what went into it, and what the maid must have been thinking, and how sensitive that was, and he reacted in a sensitive matter. That created a *Kiddush Hashem* that had ramifications for many years to come.

We cannot erase the effects of some Jews who may unfortunately embarrass themselves and us. However, we can always do our best to make a *Kiddush Hashem*.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Miketz is provided below:

- # 035 - Chanukah Issues
- # 077 - Prohibitions During Times of Crises
- # 126 - Dreams in Halacha and Hashkafa
- # 173 - Dreams in Halacha II
- # 219 - Chanukah Issues II

- # 263 - Women and Chanukah Candle Lighting
- # 309 - "Lo Sechanaim" Giving Gifts to Non-Jews
- # 353 - Chanukah and Hidur Mitzvah
- # 397 - Lighting Neiros in Shul; Other Chanukah Issues
- # 441 - Taanis Chalom
- # 485 - Miracle Products and Other Chanukah Issues
- # 529 - Ner Chanukah: Where, When, and Other Issues
- # 573 - The Silver Menorah and Other Chanukah Issues
- # 617 - The Bad Dream
- # 661 - Davening for the Welfare of the Government
- # 705 - Chanukah Candles, Hotels and Chashunas
- # 749 - Solomonic Wisdom
- # 793 - Oops! 3 Candles on the 2nd Night
- # 837 - Hairbrushes on Shabbos - Permitted or Not Permitted
- # 881 - The T'reifa Chicken Scandal
- # 925 - Kavod Malchus - How Far Can You Go?
- # 968 - The Minyan: Must Everyone Be In The Same Room?
- #1012 - Preparing for Shabbos - Thursday or Friday? And other Issues
- #1056 - Oops! I Made A Bracha On The Shammash
- #1099 - Havdalah or Ner Chanukah - Which Comes First? And Other Issues
- #1142 - Must I Give Up My Hiddur Mitzvah For Your Kiyum Mitzvah?

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