

B"H

HOW TO PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE TO BRING MOSHIACH

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

Yenta was an old woman who went to shul every Shabbos. Every year, when they reached parshas Vayeishev and the story of the sale of Yosef, she would sob. One year, the alert rebbetzin noticed that Yenta wasn't crying.

"What happened? Every year you cried about this sad story ..."

Yenta said, "Every year he makes the same mistake. Why does he go to his brothers? This time, he deserves it!"

LIFE LESSON

Parshas Vayeishev tells the story of Yosef and his sale by his brothers. At first glance, it looks as though Yosef's irresponsible behavior is not consistent with basic Torah principles. According to Torah, life is the supreme value and a Jew is commanded to guard it. Yosef seems to have acted completely against this halachic principle.

When you look into Rashi on the first verses of the parsha, we find that Yosef was completely aware of the great danger in what he did. Yaakov sent Yosef to see how his brothers were doing. Yosef went to Shechem and did not find them. He suddenly met someone, the angel Gavriel himself, who told him that his brothers were in Dosan. In other words, the brothers are looking for a way to kill you, watch out!

There are commentaries (like Ramban) who say that the angel never told Yosef explicitly about what his brothers were planning. What he said could be understood as the name of the place and Yosef did not understand the hint that the angel was giving him. Yosef did not ignore the danger; he was unaware of it.

But Rashi in his commentary on the Gemara (Sota 13b) shows that he disagrees, that the angel told Yosef, "My dear fellow" - your life is in danger! Yosef disregarded this warning. Why?

There is a famous dispute between Rambam and Tosafos about whether it is permissible for a Jew to sacrifice his life for something that is not one of the three major sins (idol worship, murder and forbidden relations). According to the Rambam (Yesodei Ha'Torah 5:1), "Whoever is told transgress and do not be killed and he was killed and did not transgress, is guilty for terminating his life." It is forbidden. The Torah wants us to preserve our lives at all costs and it is forbidden to be stricter and die. The Tosafos (Avoda Zara 27b) say that it's the person's choice. If he decided to give up his life for a mitzva, whether a positive mitzva or prohibition, "it is accounted to him as a righteousness."

According to Tosafos we can explain Rashi's view about Yosef. Yosef had an explicit mission from his father Yaakov, to see how his brothers were doing and to let Yaakov know. This entailed the mitzva of kibbud av and not carrying out this mission meant not doing the mitzva. Yosef was ready to do anything to fulfill this mission, even if this entailed danger to his life which, according to the Tosafos, is allowed.

The question then is, even if it is allowed, what is the rationale for doing so? It's madness. We have found that it is permissible but why would Yosef want to do this crazy thing when he was no fool? Furthermore, his mission was to report back to Yaakov. If he would be killed in carrying out the mission, he would end up with nothing, i.e. the mission wouldn't be carried out and he'd lose his life! What reason can there be for this choice?

The Nimukei Yosef, R' Yosef ibn Chaviva, one of the Rishonim, in his commentary on the tractate Sanhedrin, says a short line that sheds light on Yosef's seemingly bizarre behavior. "If he is a great man, a chassid and yerei shomayim, and sees that the generation is lax in this, he is permitted to sanctify G-d's name and sacrifice himself even for a minor mitzva, in order for people to see and learn to fear Hashem and love Him with all their heart."

Yosef HaTzaddik wasn't being irresponsible; he was being a teacher! He wasn't crazy; he was devoted! He wanted to teach his brothers and all Jews about the importance of the mitzva of honoring parents. He saw a lack of respect. He saw Shimon and Levi killing all the people in Shechem against their father's explicit wishes. He saw how Reuven mixed into Yaakov's domestic arrangements and, mainly, he saw how his brothers hated him just because their father loved him, which was a serious breach in their father's honor! Yosef saw that the "generation was lax," and wanted to teach them a lesson even at the price of his life. Yosef wanted to show that he was ready to sacrifice himself for the mitzva of kibbud av so they should learn from him.

LIGHT UP YOUR LIFE

We are soon going to light the first light of Chanuka. The Shelah says there is a link between these parshiyos and the story of the Chashmonaim and their war against the Greeks. We can see a direct connection between Yosef's self-sacrifice and the sacrifice of Matisyahu and his sons, a self-sacrifice that went beyond the letter of the law and transcended all considerations.

The conduct of the Maccabim was as wild as Yosef's. After all, since when is there a Torah obligation to go to war? Even if we would say that during a time of a "decree of apostasy" we must sacrifice ourselves for every mitzva, where does it say we need to aim a gun and throw grenades? Where does it say that we need to organize an army of partisans and run to the hills, especially when they had no chance of success? This was "few against the money, weak against the strong," like the United States army against a group of impassioned yeshiva bachurim. Does this sound reasonable?

The answer lies in two words, "*kohanecha ha'kedoshim*" (your holy priests). The Chashmonaim knew that they were "your holy priests," "the high priests," and the law of "if he is a great man, a chassid and yirei shomayim" that he is allowed to give up his life at any time, any place, for any mitzva, in order to sanctify the name of G-d and to rectify breaches in the wall of religion. When one acts with self-sacrifice, going beyond any calculations, one merits to see miracles, in those days and at this time!

This is the lesson for us, to devote ourselves with self-sacrifice, beyond logic, to bring the Geula by investing our entire beings into revealing holiness in daily life and the revelation of the existence of G-d in the world and not to be fazed by calculations of the "prison" of exile. As we've seen before, when one operates with devotion, one sees miracles!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will conclude with a short review of the life of the Munkatcher Rebbe (1868-1937), the author of Minchas Elozor, which teaches us about the self-sacrifice needed to bring the Geula.

Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Weiss, rav of the Nevei Achiezer neighborhood in Bnei Brak and a student of the Munkatcher Rebbe, said, "There wasn't a single day that my teacher and master did not mention and talk about Moshiach. I will never forget the Rosh Hashana when before the tekios he stood and spoke, with tears, saying, 'Jews, leave all the side things. I know that each of you has problems with health and money, but what we all need to do now is pray this Rosh Hashana for Moshiach.'"

On Hoshana Raba 5695, the Munkatcher Rebbe spoke to his community and demanded self-sacrifice for Moshiach, ending with the words, "If they tell you that today Moshiach will come on condition that you die today, would you die for this?" All said yes. This speech, along with a letter that he wrote afterward by way of a response to a certain Torah scholar who challenged this approach were printed in his sefarim. In a sicha of Mikeitz 5744 the Rebbe referred to this and said, "If only they would publicize this letter."

Good Shabbos!