

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Make It Your Own

Back when I was a bochur, on the East Coast, someone took out a bunch of billboards and put up catchy quotes about civility, like

Be kind to everyone on the way up;
you'll meet the same people on the
way down. (Wilson Mizner)

A good friend of mine didn't like these little lessons. Shouldn't a person do the right thing because it's the right thing, and refrain from doing the wrong thing because it's wrong? What's with the ulterior motives?

The funny thing is, we see Yosef *haTzaddik* (*l'havdil!*) taking a similar approach. In this week's *parasha*, when Potifar's wife tries to seduce him, he tries to reason his way out of temptation.

"My master doesn't know what's with me in the house, and he's placed everything he has in my hand. No one's greater in his house than I, and he's kept nothing from me but you, because you're his wife. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against G-d?" (39:5-6)

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (*Da'as Chochma uMussar*) points out that Yosef's first argument is not about adultery, G-d, or sin. It's all about "normal" things—his relationship with his master, and the practical, very human need to be loyal.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (*Ma'ayan Beis haSho'eiva*) adds that, years earlier, Yosef's parents had dealt with a different challenge, the same way. When Hashem had told Yaakov to leave Charan, and Yaakov had pitched the idea to his wives (31:5-13), he'd recognized that he was asking them to leave their family and the

only place they'd ever known. "I see your father's face, and it isn't toward me, the way it was before... He's deceived me and changed my wages... An angel of G-d has spoken to me... [saying,] 'Rise and leave this place, and return to the land of your birth.'"

Before saying anything else, Yaakov had pointed out the dysfunction in his relationship with Lavan. Only after that did he mention that Hashem wanted him to leave.

Rachel and Leah had followed the same template in their response (31:14-16): "Do we have any part or portion in our father's house anymore? Doesn't he consider us like strangers? ...Do whatever G-d has told you to do."

Did all of these *tzaddikim* really put pragmatism before G-d and morality?

Of course not, says Rabbi Schwab. They were, however, negotiating situations in which it was difficult to do the right thing, and they knew that the best way to fight temptation is indirectly.

A person should always engage in Torah and mitzvos for insincere motives, for that will bring him to Torah and mitzvos out of sincerity. (Talmud, Nazir 23b)

When the Gemara says "always," it means just that. Taking on temptation by claiming the moral high ground is asking for trouble, because the Evil Inclination will always find a rationale. But it's hard, even for the *Yetzer Hara*, to argue against practicality. A pragmatic approach is *always* the best way for a sincere servant of Hashem to make sure he does the right thing. 🤖

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR
ALTER RAUBVOGEL

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI YITZCHOK PREIS

Q) Reuven encouraged his brothers to desist from murdering Yosef. Instead, he suggested that they throw Yosef into a pit that the Sages describe [based on an inference in the text] was full of dangerous snakes and scorpions. So what was to be gained by this "salvation"?

A) The Shaarei Aharon cites from the *Zohar* that Reuven knew that Yosef needed a miracle to survive this ordeal. Shifting the threat from being in human hands to being in the "hands of Hashem" would make it more likely that Hashem's compassion would be elicited and that Yosef would be saved. [See *Ohr Hachayim* for more on this topic.]

Another answer is offered based on the fact that the Talmudic scholar who deduces the presence of the snakes and the scorpions is Rav Tanchum in *Shabbos* 22a. And in the immediately preceding Gemara, Rav Tanchum describes the need to keep Chanukah candles below the height of twenty cubits where they cannot be easily seen. Some suggest that the correlation of these two passages is that the pit was of a depth that precluded visibility. Along these lines, Ramban suggests that whether due to the depth, or perhaps the snakes living in crevices, it is very logical that they were not vivid.

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

CONTINUED

He asserts that had it been evident that Yosef's survival in the pit was miraculous, the brothers would have had to acknowledge his righteousness and the whole dynamic would have changed. 🤖

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

At an outreach seminar in Israel, as people mingled over the refreshments after a class, one of the rabbis noticed a man pick up a slice of watermelon and, as he seemed to be in an inspired mood, made a loud blessing. "Shehakol nih'yeh bidvaro," the man concluded and bit in to his watermelon. The rabbi, noticing this, made his way over and engaged the man in conversation. "That was a beautiful blessing you made. Did you know that there is an even more specific blessing that mentions the fruit of the ground itself in the blessing that is more preferable to be made?" asked the rabbi. "Oh, I know there is other blessings, but I always make the Shehakol one." "Why?" asked the rabbi. "Well, I'll tell you," began the man, "when I was in the Golan during the Yom Kippur war, at one point we were surrounded. We thought we were done for. The easiest path of escape was blocked by a tank. We prayed to G-d that we be saved but we did not know any words of prayer, except one guy said he knows a blessing. "Say it with me," he said, "Baruch ata...Shehakol nih'yeh bidvaro!" And with that someone pulled the trigger on his anti-tank gun and BOOM it was a direct hit! So you see, Hashem thought it good enough for a Syrian tank, I say it on watermelon too." The rabbi smiled at the man's point, though proper practice it is not, with a renewed appreciation for the power of a blessing! 🤖

A BA'AL HATURIM FOR YOU

There are three places in *Tanach* that the word "assurim" meaning "are confined" is used. Two are in regards to the story of Yosef in prison, while the other is written regarding Hashem that He releases the confined. This, says Ba'al Haturim, hints to the conversation between Yosef and the wife of Potifar as brought in Midrash, where she threatened Yosef with being thrown in prison and Yosef responded "Hashem matir asurim," that Hashem releases the confined. 🤖

THIS WEEK!

Kollel Chanuka Event
Monday, November 29th
 THE SECOND NIGHT OF CHANUKAH
 At CHDSI For men

FAST & FURIOUS EIGHT DIVREI TORAH
in Five Minutes or less!

SPECIAL SURPRISE GUEST ?????

- R' Josh Pransky
- R' Shimon Bachrach
- R' Micha Holzer
- R' Shmull Botnick MC
- R' Mechael Soroka
- R' Noach Kunin
- R' Mendel Rosenberg
- R' Lazer Fischer

PROGRAM
 8:30PM HOT BUFFET
 8:45PM FAST & FURIOUS DIVREI TORAH
 Followed by Dessert
 -10:00PM MAASIV

JOIN THE CINCINNATI COMMUNITY KOLLEL
 for a **FAMILY CHANUKAH MYSTERY DRIVE**
TUESDAY NIGHT NOVEMBER 30TH
 6:30-7:45

EMAIL RSVP REQUIRED TO RECEIVE DRIVING INSTRUCTIONS & DETAILS
 Email: cckchanukah@gmail.com

mystery speakers, stories, multiple locations, food & more

THIS WEEK!
BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND

THE MYSTERY OF THE FAST OF THE NINTH OF TEVES (PART I)

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

In the last quarter of the Second Temple Era, approximately 100 years prior to its destruction and long before Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi authored the *Mishnah*, a *sefer* was written and disseminated in Eretz Yisrael and Bavel. This work, authored by the *Tana* Chizkiya ben Chananyah ben Garon and completed by his son Rebbi Eliezer, was titled *Megillas Ta'anis*. *Megillas Ta'anis* is essentially a list of all the days of the year on which great miracles, salvations, or events occurred to the Jewish nation. As a result of our immense joy and thanksgiving to Hashem on these days, the Sages forbade fasting and eulogizing the deceased.

In the 13th and final chapter of *Megillas Ta'anis*, the author lists all of the days on which we are obligated to fast, commemorating the tragedies which occurred throughout Jewish history. Some of these fast days are well-known and are applicable nowadays, while the majority of them are not well-known at all and, according to the consensus of the later *halachic* authorities, are reserved for those on a high spiritual level who are punctilious to a high degree in all areas of Torah observance to observe (see *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 580 and *Mishnah Berurah* there).

In the 13th chapter we find the following passage: "On the eighth of Teves the Torah was translated into Greek in the days of King Talmi, and darkness descended onto the earth for three days. On the 9th [of Teves] the Rabbis didn't write why. On the tenth of Teves the King of Babylon (Nevuchadnetzar) laid siege on Jerusalem with the intent of destroying it."

Some may be familiar with the account recorded in the Talmud (*Megillah* 9a) in which King Talmi (Ptolemy II of Egypt) ordered seventy-two Sages to individually translate the Torah into Greek (the Septuagint) and we are certainly familiar with the fast of the tenth of Teves which marks the beginning of the destruction of the First Temple. But what misfortune occurred on the ninth of Teves and why didn't the Rabbis wish to record it? Rabbis and scholars from the Medieval Period until the 20th century have attempted to solve the enigma of the ninth of Teves.

To be continued... 🤖