

United We Stand

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Parshas Vayechi

18th of Tevet 5784

The Parsha's Path

Revised from 5782.

Yehuda is a lion's whelp (49:9).

In Yaakov's blessings to his sons in this week's Parsha, he describes Yehuda as a lion who is feared by all, and Yosef as an ox who is immune to those who attack him. What is the significance of this symbolism?

After Yosef accused Binyamin of stealing his silver goblet, which Yosef had planted there, Yehuda pleads to Yosef to have mercy and take him instead. By the end of Yehuda's plea, Yosef can no longer restrain himself, and, bursting into tears, he reveals who he is.

On a straightforward level, this confrontation served as an atonement for Yehuda, who, years before, instigated the sale of Yosef, albeit to save him from death. Here, he did everything he could to spare Binyamin from slavery, even offering himself instead. Yet the midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 93) highlights that something deeper was going on here. The reason Yehuda was the only one to confront Yosef was that he was considered the king among his brothers, and Yosef, of course, was effectively king of Egypt, so it was fitting that one king speak to another. The midrash further describes a much more epic confrontation than what appears in the p'sukim, saying that after Yehuda stated his arguments, Yosef countered, "why didn't you do all that for your other brother, whom I divine that you sold into slavery?" At that point, bereft of a counterargument, Yehuda summoned his brothers to threaten to destroy all the marketplaces of Egypt. Ultimately Yosef realized he had to reveal who he was.

The midrash seems to understand that Yehuda's confrontation with Yosef represented a fundamental conflict between two types of kings. Indeed, we are told that at the end of days there will be a Moshiach both from Yosef and from Yehuda, but the Moshiach from Yehuda will be the eternal one, as Yaakov had promised, "the scepter shall never part from Yehuda." Yehuda's legacy of kingship is clearly dominant, just as he seems to have won, in a sense, his confrontation with Yosef. What is the nature of Yehuda vs. Yosef's models of kingship, and why does Yehuda win?

Back in Parshas Vayeishev, both Yehuda and Yosef were tempted with illicit relations; Yosef with the wife of Potiphar and Yehuda with Tamar. Yosef resisted, while Yehuda gave in (however, others explain that while he may have acted inappropriately, this was not a sin). On the other hand, Yehuda publicly confessed what he did, despite the extraordinary humiliation this involved, when Tamar was sentenced to be killed and he realized that she was the prostitute he had been with.

The midrash compares Yehuda to a plowman and Yosef to a reaper, and compares Yehuda to a treader of grapes (to make wine) and Yosef to a carrier of seeds.

All of these points help shed light on the fundamental difference between Yosef and Yehuda. Yosef is a model of restraint, remaining true to his principles and controlling his passions. Even when nobody is around, he has the iron will to turn away from temptation and remain steadfast to his principles. An ox has a certain strength of will that gives it consistent strength in even the most challenging conditions. It ignores outer stimuli and focuses on its job. A reaper separates the grain from the ground; Yosef separates his mind from his body, giving it complete and objective rule over himself. Yosef exhibits this same

restraint (from revealing his identity) and focuses on intellectual arguments in his confrontation with Yehuda.

Yehuda focuses not on restraint and his inner self, but on sensitivity and passion for what is outside of himself. While Yehuda stumbles in the episode of Tamar, when it comes to doing the right thing and confessing his sin to save her, he has no reservations. While he makes a mistake in selling Yosef, after he realizes what he's done and he's now in a position to do right for Binyamin, he has no reservations in standing up to what he perceives as an evil and dangerous tyrant. A lion's strength is not intrinsic to its build; it is rather its ferocity in its attack. It will do whatever needs to be done to conquer its prey. A plowman softens the dirt for planting; likewise, Yehuda sensitizes himself to the outer world to fully appreciate it and respond accordingly. This is an outgrowth of the trait of gratitude for which he is named; gratitude stems from a deep sensitivity to one's relationship with what is external to oneself. If one appreciates how something in the world benefits him and the implications that has for how he must show thanks for it, he will also be sensitive to when something is going on in the world that is not right and demands that he make it better. Thus, in his confrontation with Yosef, Yehuda shows far more passion and even, according to the midrash, threatens violence.

This is why Yosef is compared to an ox while Yehuda is compared to a lion. An ox's strength comes from its strong build; unaffected by its surroundings, it is able to consistently do its work in thick and thin. It is also the symbol in Jewish thought for *midas hadin*, strict-justice without compromise. In contrast, a lion's strength and majesty comes not from its internal build, but the ferociousness of its attack. When a lion sees an opportunity to pounce, he doesn't hold back.

In sum, Yosef is focused on his inner world resisting all external influences in the pursuit of consistent righteousness, while Yehuda is focused on his outer world, sensitizing himself to the external world as an impetus for serving G-d. Yosef's strength, by nature, is private and invisible, as much as it empowers everything he does. Thus, Yosef is compared to a seed-carrier, as seeds' greatness is also hidden from view. Yehuda, on the other hand, is compared to a grape-treader, for just as a grape-treader brings out the juices, Yehuda's righteousness is more external and brings out his greatness publicly.

Yosef's inner consistency lends itself to perfect righteousness, as he's clear headed and controls his passions. Yehuda, on the other hand, who is more passionate and emotional, may be prone to stumble. However, he doesn't get caught up in himself and is quick to repent and continue to do the right thing, because doing the right thing isn't just about himself, it's about what the situation demands of him.

Both aspects of kingship epitomized by Yosef and Yehuda are critical for proper avodas Hashem, and each contribute to the success of the other. Yet at the same time, it can be extremely difficult to work on both; in some sense they are even incompatible. If one focuses on his inner world, building restraint and self-mastery, that focus inevitably detracts from a focus on the outer world, and vice-versa. In fact, the very passion and sensitivity which Yehuda brings out is especially difficult to control regarding one's personal desires, while focus on restraint makes it difficult to bring out one's passions when they should be. This struggle is, in some sense, what the confrontation between Yosef and Yehuda is all about. Yosef and Yehuda challenge us to think about how to maximize the balance between inner vs. outer focus in our own lives, as we all strive to be kings of our character. *Note that the interpretations of the midrash are based on the ArtScroll insights on the Midrash Rabbah.*

Deeper Meanings

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I give you Shechem, one (portion) over your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and my bow (48:22)

"My sword", this is tefillah; "My bow" this is bakasha (Baba Basra 123a).

This week's Parsha ends Sefer Bereishis with the events leading up to and following the death of Yaakov. Yaakov gives Yosef the inheritance of the firstborn, which Reuven forfeited when he sinned by moving the bed of Bilhah, Yaakov's maidservant. Yaakov tells Yosef that he is giving him the portion of Shechem, which he conquered with his "bow and his sword." The Gemara points out that in Tehillim it's written *"For I trust not in my bow, neither can my sword save me,"* which seems incongruous to Yaakov's claim. Thus, the Gemara explains, Yaakov's sword refers to tefillah, or prayer, and his bow refers to bakasha, or petition.

Why is prayer defined as a weapon of war? Also, why is Yaakov telling Yosef how he conquered Shechem, and why now?

In the beginning of Sefer Iyov, Satan tells G-d, "Is there anyone more perfectly righteous than your servant Avraham?" G-d replies by pointing out that Iyov, a righteous gentile, acts perfectly faithful to Him. Satan then suggests that this is only because Iyov had all the means to serve G-d in comfort, and suggests that Iyov be robbed of his wealth and his children. G-d agrees to allow Satan to do as he wishes, as long as he doesn't harm Iyov's body. Iyov remains in his righteousness, after which the scene with G-d and Satan repeats itself, this time with Satan gaining permission to afflict Iyov's body.

The Gemara (ibid. 16a) relates that Rav Acha bar Yaakov once remarked that Satan acted for the sake of Heaven. He thought that it didn't look good that the most righteous person should be a gentile and not one of G-d's Chosen people. After making this comment, Satan appeared to Rav Acha and kissed him on his thigh.

Ben Yehoyada asks why Satan was so taken by Rav Acha that he personally appeared and submitted himself before him, and why did he kiss him on his thigh instead of his hand?

He explains that Rav Acha bar Yaakov paralleled Yaakov Avinu. In Kiddushin (29a), the story is told of how when Rav Acha came to visit the town of Abaye, he slept in the local shul, which, unbeknownst to him, was haunted by dangerous demons. A seven headed snake-like creature appeared to him, and he proceeded to bow in prayer seven times, each time resulting in the severing of one of the snake's heads.

This story illustrates that Rav Acha's prayers had an extremely powerful effect in fighting evil forces. Likewise, Yaakov's prayers vanquished the entire city of Shechem. In Parshas Vayishlach (32:26), Yaakov wrestles with Satan and, when Satan sees that he can't defeat him, he kisses him on his thigh (as per Ben Yehoyada's interpretation). Likewise, Satan wanted to do the same gesture for Rav Acha. This was a sign of peace.

The Satan is synonymous with the Evil Inclination and the Angel of Death (ibid.) Thus, something about the power of prayer has the ability to neutralize or subjugate the evil forces both within us and around us. Perhaps this is because prayer allows us to stop avoiding and fearing the challenges and harshness of reality and face it for what it really is: a manifestation of G-d's Will. Whenever we face any kind of difficulty, whether it's a struggle with temptation or personal growth, or physical, mental, interpersonal or environmental limitations, prayer enables us to reframe the situation as a part of our religious experience and make G-d a partner in helping us overcome it. Prayer puts G-d on our side, and when G-d is on our side, we have nothing to fear except Him. That attitude allows us to seize control of both the challenges that

come within and from without, telling them, "you can't do anything to me that G-d doesn't want you to." When we have that attitude, our relationship with Satan becomes transformed. He is no longer a dangerous, untamed beast; he becomes domesticated, to be used only at will. The Evil Inclination is rooted in physicality and passion, which when directed appropriately, can and should be an integral part of our service of G-d. The person of prayer realizes that Satan himself is not the problem; the problem is that people misuse him. Satan is a force that exists for the sake of Heaven, and if we have the tools to tame him – prayer and trust in G-d – then he can become our best friend.

Rav Acha Bar Yaakov, like Yaakov Avinu, always knew how to harness the power of prayer in controlling even the most powerful Satanic forces. This enabled him to see Satan for what he really was; not a diabolical threat to be feared, but a servant of G-d who should be used accordingly. That's why both he and Yaakov received Satan's kiss, as a sign of submission and respect.

This is perhaps why it was so fitting that Yaakov gave Yosef Shechem, which he acquired through his prayers. Yosef was constantly beset by challenges, from the hatred of his brothers to the temptations of the wife of Potiphar and the allure of Egyptian society, yet he always remained steadfast in his righteousness, unwilling to low external pressures to affect who he was. Such a quality can only endure in a people steeped in prayer, for prayer, above all else, allows one to unburden himself from the situation he finds himself in and find strength and take refuge in G-d. At anytime, anywhere, with a few simple words the most insurmountable hardship becomes an exercise in submission to the Almighty. Yaakov told Yosef that the greatest weapon he and his descendants can use that will bring them continued success is the weapon of prayer, and Shechem was to serve as an eternal reminder of that lesson. Let us take Yaakov's message to heart and use every need and difficulty into prayer, and as we bring G-d into every part of our lives, we, too, can transform Satan in all of his forms from an enemy to a friend.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshanah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, Ephraim Melech ben Tzilah, Yitzchok Elimelech ben Chanah Sarah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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