

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank Cheryl Mitnick, who is sponsoring the drasha in memory of her dear mother, Mollie Mitnick, Mala bas Elchanon, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 26th of Kislev. May her *neshama* have an *aliya* and may Cheryl be rewarded for her support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

We are in the middle of our annual Chanukah campaign for La'Ofek. To give you a little history of this unique organization: In 2006, Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon founded JobKatif, which helped 3,000 evacuees of Gush Katif re-integrate into the work force and rebuild their lives, turning an 85% unemployment rate into an 88% employment rate. Having completed the original mission, Rav Rimon decided to apply the organization's knowledge and experience to other vulnerable and struggling sectors of Israeli society: Soldiers from economically depressed households and Ethiopian-Israelis. He would later add those severely hurt by the Corona pandemic. Today, having already assisted 10,000+ Israelis, these programs are helping more than 1,000 individuals annually strive towards a brighter future imbued with greater independence and financial security. La'Ofek's employment-based programs are life-changers for Israel's vulnerable sectors, bringing them new hope and promise. Shomrei has been most proud to partner with Rav Rimon and La'Ofek since the beginning. Rav Rimon is the paradigm of *chesed* and it has been a real *zechus* to assist him in this important mission. I invite everyone to join in this special initiative. Checks can be made out to Shomrei Israel Fund. Thank you!

This morning we read of the conflict between Yosef and his brothers. The *Pesukim* are very clear that the majority of the brothers planned to kill Yosef.

בראשית פרק לז (כ) ועתה לכו ונהרגוהו ונשלכוהו באחד הברות ואמרנו חיה רעה אכלתהו ונראה מה יהיו חלמתיו:

Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his dreams!"

Reuven, the oldest brother, heard this plan and he attempted to save Yosef and return him to his father.

בראשית פרק לז כא) וישמע ראובן ויצלהו מידם ויאמר לא נכנו נפש:

But when Reuben heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let us not take his life."

But Reuven was only partially successful.

רשב"ם בראשית פרשת וישב פרק לז פסוק כא ויצילהו מידם – שלא נהרג:

While he did manage to save Yosef from death, he did not succeed in returning Yosef to his father.

Instead, Yosef was sold, and ended up in Mitzrayim.

(כט) וישב ראובן אל הבור והנה אין יוסף בבור ויקרע את בגדיו:

What happened? What was Reuven's plan? Where was he when Yosef was sold? Why was he unsuccessful?

פסיקתא זוטרתא בראשית פרק לז סימן כט וי"א הלך להביא חבל להעלותו:

The **Medrash** fills us in and writes that Reuven convinced his brothers not to kill Yosef immediately. Instead, he convinced them to put Yosef in a pit for the time being, and then he went to get a rope to rescue Yosef from the pit.

This seems like a sound plan. Chazal teach that the pit was 30 feet deep, so he clearly needed a rope to extract Yosef. Reuven's plan was probably to wait until the brothers were distracted by lunch, at which point he would rescue Yosef. This certainly seemed easier than standing up to ten brothers consumed with rage towards Yosef... But his plan didn't work...

Was it his fault that it didn't work? Could he have done anything differently?

The **Medrash** blames Reuven for not trying harder.

רות רבה (וילנא) פרשה ה סימן ו א"ר יצחק בר מריון בא הכתוב ללמדך שאם אדם עושה מצוה יעשנה בלבב שלם שאלו היה ראובן יודע שהקב"ה מכתוב עליו (בראשית ל"ז) וישמע ראובן ויצילהו מידם, בכתפו היה מוליכו אצל אביו,

The Medrash writes that one should perform *Mitzvos* with a *lev shalem*, a full heart—passionately, boldly, decisively. Says the Medrash: If only Reuven had known that the Torah would write of him, “And Reuven heard and saved him from their hands,” he would have picked Yosef up on his shoulders and carried him back to his father immediately.

This comment is deeply puzzling. Did Reuven really need to know there would be a “tribute journal” before he decided to rescue his brother? Was he not committed enough to this moral cause? What would the Torah’s recording this have changed?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky writes that if Reuven had been aware that he was not “just” saving a brother, that he could have prevented *galus Mitzrayim*, he would have found a way to bring his brother home.

אמת ליעקב בראשית (פרשת וישב) פרק לז פסוק כא
ביאור הענין נלפענ"ד, שראובן, וכן אהרן ובוועז, לא ידעו שדבר גדול נעשה כעת על ידיהן, והיה ראובן דומה שהוא מציל רק אה, אבל באמת אילו היה מוליכו אצל אביו היה חוסך את ישראל מגלות מצרים; . . . ויותר נכון לומר שהם לא ידעו שעשייתם זאת תהיה תורה, שהתורה וכן הנביאים יביאו עובדא זו לדורות, שאילו היו יודעין שענין היסטורי הוא בודאי שהיו מיפין את פנימיותם שגם הבר יהיה גדל הערך, שהרי ענין לדורות הוא. ולפיכך סיימו חז"ל שגם עתה אל ידמה האדם שכיון שהתורה כבר התומה אין שום חשיבות במעשים, אלא לא כן הדבר, כל מעשה טוב של יהודי הוא ענין של חטיבת עתידה של היהדות היא עד שאליהו ומשיח עסוקין בכתיבה והקב"ה חותם, כלומר עתידו של ישראל.

Rav Yaakov Weinberg, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael, explained that when the Torah writes צו את אהרן (command Aharon), the purpose is to motivate him. The Torah is highlighting for us that we all have extra inner strength, extra energy that adrenaline can bring out. We might run a mile thinking we are going as fast as our bodies will allow—but if a killer were chasing us, we would find the energy to run even faster. But we need motivation... Sometimes it is an extra reminder or a deeper understanding of the significance of our actions...

The greatest motivation comes from seeing the full impact of our actions. From understanding that we represent a part of a continuum, connecting the past and the future, history and destiny—metaphysical and physical. Understanding that we have an important and crucial part to play in the story.

The **Nefesh Hachaim** writes 1:4

וזאת תורת האדם כל איש ישראל אל יאמר בלבו ח"ו. כי מה אני ומה כחי לפעול במעשי השפלים שום ענין בעולם אמנם יבין וידע ויקבע במחשבות לבו. שכל פרטי מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו כל עת ורגע. לא אתאבדו ח"ו. ומה רבו מעשיו ומאד גדלו ורמו. שכל א' עולה כפי שרשה לפעול פעולתה בגבהי מרומים בעולמות וצחצחות האורות העליונים.

This is a lesson for everyone. Each and every Jew (איש ישראל) should never [think] within his heart ח"ו (Heaven Forbid), "What am I and what power do I have to accomplish with my lowly actions in any matter in the world/universe." [Rather,] he should understand, know, and implant within his heart/mind, that every detail of his actions, words, and thoughts at every moment in time, is never for naught, ח"ו. [He should know/understand] the great significance of his actions even to the loftiest heights. For each (action, word, or thought) rises to the loftiest heights according to its root (שרש) in the upper-most worlds of light and their brilliant radiance.

Similarly, the Midrash is teaching that knowing the great significance of his actions would have led Reuven to find within himself extra strength and courage. If he had known this—he would have found the courage—as the oldest brother—to stand up to the other brothers and find a better way to rescue Yosef, instead of creating a plan with so many unknowns—so much room for failure. He would have immediately and boldly rescued Yosef from the pit. He would have gotten the job done.

In life, we often make decisions that, unknown to us at the time, are destined to have a tremendous impact on our lives or the lives of others. We must learn to internalize the idea that all of our actions, all of our words, can have great significance. And if things are important enough to us, we can find the motivation to always do our best and push ourselves to maximum levels.

Rav Shlomo Arush relates the following account about **Rav Shimon Shkop's** impact, about 80 years ago, on a young bachur in Eastern Europe.:

I was a young man in a poor village whose only desire was to learn Torah. My parents saw my abilities and I dreamed of learning in the Yeshiva in Grodno – but there was no money. My mother wouldn't let that stop her. She sent me off with whatever she could give me, and I spent two weeks walking on foot to the Yeshiva. I slept on the benches of whatever synagogue I happened upon, and here and there was lucky enough to get a bite of bread from someone who had mercy on me. I spent the entire journey worrying about how I would pass the difficult entrance exam...

Upon arrival at the Yeshiva, exhausted and in tatters from the long and hard journey, I was directed to the home of the Rosh Yeshiva himself in order to be tested. The Rosh Yeshiva himself answered the door, and immediately noticed my thin, dusty appearance. I explained that I wanted to be tested for acceptance to the Yeshiva.

The Rosh Yeshiva welcomed me into his house warmly, saying, "I have only two questions for you. If you answer them correctly, you'll be accepted to the Yeshiva." I took a deep breath, trying to garner my last reserves for the surely difficult questions to come in hopes of achieving my dreams. "Young man, tell me – when was the last time you had a hot meal?" the Rosh Yeshiva asked. "Two weeks ago," I answered sheepishly. "In that case, I am pausing the test, and I insist that you eat something before we continue." The Rosh Yeshiva then stood and proceeded to make me a hot meal himself! He explained that the Rebbetzin was currently away, apologizing, "I am afraid you'll have to manage with my own cooking..."

Cooking back then was not like it is today. It was a major project just to make a cup of tea! And here, a Gadol Hador stopped everything to make me a satisfying hot meal. The meal didn't just revive my exhausted body; it revived my soul. I felt to the depths of my being how much he loved me, cared about me, and was prepared to sacrifice everything for my sake.

"Now young man, are you full? Are you ready for the second question?," asked the Rosh Yeshiva. I nodded in agreement. "When was the last time you slept in a proper bed?" "Two weeks ago," I answered again.

"Excellent! You answered all the questions correctly, and you've been accepted into the Yeshiva! Now, follow me." The Rosh Yeshiva prepared his own bed for me with clean sheets. He laid me down to bed and covered me with his blanket like a loving father...

After I awoke totally refreshed, the Rosh Yeshiva arranged a learning partner to teach me. I applied myself with all of my abilities, and I caught up to the level of the learning in the Yeshiva in only three months! But I never, ever forgot that meeting with this giant in Torah, giant in kindness and giant in loving others, who was more like an angel than a human. This interaction with someone who truly modeled himself after His Creator left a deep impression in my heart and mind.

I cannot put into words what I went through during the War. But every time I almost despaired of everything, I remembered my master and teacher, Rabbi Shkop. I said to myself, "If there is in the world a Torah that can turn a human being into an angel, it's worth it to try to keep living." This was the only thing that kept me alive during those dark years.

Rav Shimon Shkop could not have known his impact on that bachur. But when you live every moment understanding that your life has significance, you find the motivation to give each person you interact with maximum attention לב שלם.

Later in the Parsha, in Mitzrayim as a young man, Yosef was tempted by Potiphar's wife. The **Medrash** says he was protected by a vision of his father.

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת וישב רמז קמו: ותתפשהו בבגדו לאמר שכבה עמי [ל"ט, י"ב] באותה שעה נראה לו דמות דיוקנו של אביו אמרה לו יוסף עתידין אחיך שיכתבו על אבני אפוד ואתה עמהם רצונך שימחה שמך מביניהם ותקרא ורועה זונות יאבד הון, מיד ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפוזו זרועי ידיו נעץ צפרניו בקרקע,

He saw an image of his father telling him, you are destined to have your name written on the choshen of the Kohen Gadol. Would you like to erase your name from among them?

What is this Medrash teaching us?

Yosef understood the significance of that moment. He saw himself as connected to his past—and to his responsibility to his future. That was his motivation to stay strong in the face of a major life test.

As the **Kedushas Levi** points out, the *trop* on the word *va-ye'maen* is a *shalsheles*—highlighting the chain of tradition, the connection to his family heritage, that kept him strong.

We always read the story of Yosef in Mitzrayim during Chanuka. Overcoming the seductive urge of the values of the ancient Greeks, and modern society, is a challenge that continues to this day.

How do we find the motivation to stay true to our values?

The Chanukah story was fought by a family—מתתיהו ובניו. But more so—it was fought with an understanding of history and destiny, past and future. As Mattisyahu said in his fiery speech cited in ***Maccabees I***: ***“Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers.”***

They saw it not as an option, but as a mission they must take on...a responsibility.

Rav Shaul Yisraeli cites a teaching in yeshiva of Navhardok: when you must—you find a way...

וכפי הפתגם של ישבת נבהורדוק: כשאין יכולת לעבור מוכרחים לעבור, וכשמוכרחים גם יכולים

To commemorate this motivation that made it all happen, and that we must tap into today, Chazal told us to light our menorahs as a family—נר איש וביתו.

The message is clear, as expressed by **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks** in an article entitled “The Light of Home”: *And yet within a few years Greece began its decline and fall, yet Jews and Judaism survived; they still do. What was the difference? The Greeks focused on politics and the state. Jews placed their faith in something smaller—the family and the home. . . . When families are strong, children are strong, and they can face the future without fear. When families are weak, children grow up anxious and confused and a civilization begins its decline. The future of our world won't be decided by the Euro, the Internet, or space probes to Mars, but by how much or how little we value our children—by the flame we light at home.”*

When properly motivated, we can all accomplish great things. May we all truly appreciate our ability to bring light into this world...and do our part *b'lev shalem*, with strength, courage, and belief. Knowing that what we do has great significance, continuing the traditions of our ancestors for future generations.

When we light our Chanuka candles next week, let us ponder the potentially far-reaching consequences of our actions. Let us think about the beautiful tradition that has been entrusted to us—and our responsibility to continue that tradition and spread the message of truth and light to others. In this world, where darkness unfortunately reigns—where evil seems so powerful—may the light of our actions inspire and guide the world to a time when the light of God will be visible to all—and the darkness will be replaced by the bright lights of Hashem's presence. May we see this day soon...amen.