



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת מקץ תשס"ט • Parshas Mikeitz 5769

THE RIGHT FOOT

“Grant me wisdom from my enemies” (*Tehillim 119:98*). At times, we can extrapolate the best way for successfully serving Hashem by taking a lesson from the designs of our worst enemies. The Yevanim (Greeks) of the Chanukah saga are no exception.

As opposed to Amalekite Haman – who sought the physical annihilation of the Jewish people – the Yevanim were intent on our spiritual demise. As long as the Jews would forsake Hashem and adopt foreign ways, the Yevanim would allow them to live (*see Mishnah Berurah 670:6*).

To this end, the Greeks issued a series of evil decrees, forbidding such practices as Torah study and circumcision, for example. They defiled the Beis Hamikdash and tried to force idolatry on the Jews.

MILK

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah 2:4*) relates one of their bizarre and cruel decrees. They forced their Jewish subjects to inscribe the following declaration on the “horn of an ox”: “We have no portion with the G d of Yisrael.”

Many commentators struggle to understand the particular venue the Yevanim chose. They obviously were trying to coerce the Jewish people into severing their connection with Hashem, G d forbid. But this business with using an ox’s horn seems puzzling, to say the least. If they didn’t have paper, couldn’t they just use the classic papyrus?

R’ Leib Gurvitz (former Rosh Yeshivah of the Gateshead Yeshivah) once observed an exhibition of sorts that shed some possible light on the subject at hand. The exhibitors were demonstrating some of

the “technological advancements” of ancient times. One of the devices on display was the antique version of a baby bottle, which was actually a hollowed out... ox’s horn! A small hole would be punctured in the narrow end, from which the youngster would sip his milk.

R’ Yitzchak Zilberstein (who recorded the account of the above mentioned exhibition) explains the rationale of the devious Greeks. This decree was not just some whim of an evil and eccentric commander, but a well thought out calculation on the part of the enemy. The Yevanim were specifically targeting the youngest element of the Jewish population, attempting to inculcate them from the start with their heretical ideas. In other words, they recognized the importance of a “good start,” and sought to tear a Jew away from the Torah from the very beginning, while he was still an infant (*Aleinu L’shabei’ach, vol. 1, p. 83*).

This vital *chinuch* (Torah education) principle cannot be underscored enough. “The end is good from the beginning,” states Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of all men (*Koheles 7:8*). *Chazal* explain his words: When does an endeavor turn out well? When it gets off to a good start (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah, 2:1*).

A clear manifestation of this phenomenon is the seemingly perplexing topic of the *ben sorer u’moreh* (recalcitrant son). Here the Torah mandates that if a youth displays certain wayward tendencies, he can actually be liable for the death penalty.

WINE

“And the parents shall say to the city elders, ‘This son of ours is wayward and rebellious. He does not listen to us. He is a glutton, and a drunkard.’ [Consequently] He will be stoned to death” (*Devarim 21:20-21*).

Dedicated in memory of Dr. Ronald Shippel
ר' ירחמיאל משה בן ר' ישראל ע"ה
by the staff of Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah

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Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
of נחום בן מרדכי הלוי ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with
no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.



There are numerous precise conditions that must be fulfilled in order for such an individual to incur the death penalty, as outlined in the eighth chapter of Sanhedrin. This helps account for the fact that rarely (if ever) was there an actual case when someone was put to death under this law (see *Sanhedrin 71a*).

There are specific “criminal acts” that the *ben sorer u'moreh* must perpetrate to be eligible for this sentence. Generally speaking, they entail stealing and using the funds to acquire and consume a portion of meat and wine.

While this behavior is not exemplary, it behooves us to understand why he is killed just for having a wild party. The Mishnah (*Ibid. 8:5*) offers an explanation:

בן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה נִדוֹן עַל שֵׁם סוֹפוֹ.

“A *ben sorer u'moreh* is judged and punished based on his end (i.e., the eventual culmination of his behavior).”

Elaborating on this idea, the Gemara (*Ibid. 72a*) explains that in the end, things will become totally out of control. Compelled to satisfy his addictions, he will take to marauding and murdering.

Still, the idea seems difficult to understand. In most other circumstances, the Torah adopts a principle of “*ba'asher hu sham*,” judging an individual according to his present deeds. Why does the Torah seem to make an exception over here?

To further clarify this intriguing section, the Shem Mishmuel (*parshas Ki Seitzei*) points out that there is actually a very small window for the application of these laws. It does not apply to an actual minor, nor to someone who has reached real maturity. Practically speaking, it applies only for the first three months following the day a boy reaches the age of bar-mitzvah; anyone out of this age-bracket is not subject to the punishment.

In other words, the Shem Mishmuel explains, the entire section applies *only to the very beginning of adulthood*. This reflects the paramount importance of a good *reishis* (beginning). If he starts out on such a debased path, it is as if we can already view any (future) wickedness he will commit as already in existence right now. His *sof* (end) is really contained in his *reishis*.

This is the secret that the Yevanim understood – to defile the Jews right from the beginning, feeding them evil propaganda with their milk. And so let us gain “wisdom from our enemies” by employing the same tactic for the good. By inculcating a love for Hashem and His Torah in the early stages of our children’s development, they will be assured of a successful and righteous career.

The Shem Mishmuel stresses that this idea has many ramifications in our lives. A bar-mitzvah, a wedding, Rosh Hashanah – every morning, in fact – all present a new beginning, an opportunity to start afresh. Beginning with the proper attitudes and pure intentions can go a long way in ensuring a meritorious day, year, and life.



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