



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת תולדות תש"ע 5770 Parshas Toldos

A GLIMPSE – INTO THE BEIS HAMIKDASH

Trying to pass for his brother Eisav, Ya'akov – clothed in his brother's unique, cherished garments – approaches his father, Yitzchak, in the hopes of receiving the special blessing reserved for the first-born. The *pasuk* in this week's *parshah* records Yitzchak's reaction to the pleasant aroma emanating from those singular garments:

וַיִּרַח אֶת רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר רֵיחַ הָיִם בְּנֵי
כְּרִיחַ שָׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְוּ הוּא.

“And he smelled the aroma of his garments, and he blessed him, saying: ‘See that the aroma of my son is like the aroma of a field blessed by Hashem,’” (*Bereishis* 27:27).

The commentators (see *Rashi, ibid.*, and *Peirush Maharzu, Bereishis Rabbah* 65:22) raise a difficulty: Ya'akov was also clothed in goatskin to create the effect of sporting hairy skin like his shaggy brother, Eisav. Nothing smells worse than *that*; and yet the verse attests that Yitzchak was so taken by the aroma!

And so, in their capacity as the great expositors of the Written Torah, Chazal, imbued with their gift of *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration), perceive here an allusion, where the *pasuk* is actually referring to something else with a similar sound. According to the Medrash (*Yalkut* 115), it was not the **בְּגָדִים**, clothes, that impressed Yitzchak. Rather, through his prophetic glance into the future history of his descendants, it was the **בוֹגְדִים**, traitors, that gave Yitzchak pause. Specifically, it was the eventual return from their treasonous paths that so moved the elderly patriarch.

REMARKABLE REVERSAL

The Medrash continues to supply the particulars, and relates the story of the remarkable turn-around of Yosef Meshisa:

When the Greeks wished to enter and plunder the Beis Hamikdash, they first sent in a Jew to clear the way. They found a willing volunteer by the name of Yosef Meshisa and instructed him to enter the holy abode and take out whatever he wanted – for keeps. Yosef complied and found that the golden Menorah was much to his liking. But when his handlers saw this wondrous and sacred vessel, they requisitioned it for themselves. “Sorry,” they explained, “but this is not something for common folk. Go back in, and take something else. This time, you’ll be able to keep what you find.”

Suddenly, though, Yosef was not too keen on the idea. He hesitated to repeat the deed. The evil plunderers decided to up the ante.

“If you go back in,” they offered, “we will grant you rights to collect the taxes and keep them for yourself, for a three-year period.” Although this amounted to a considerable sum, Yosef would not relent. Much to their surprise and dismay, he declared: “Is it not enough that I angered my G-d once, that I should anger Him again?”

Seeing that he was not going to budge, they decided to take action. Putting him (literally) on the chopping block normally used to slice and prepare wooden boards, they set about their grisly work on the traitor-turned-martyr.

Throughout the horrific affair, Yosef emitted terrifying screams. But they were not screams of physical pain, but rather, deep expressions of sincere regret. For the Medrash tells us the content

לזכר ולעילוי נשמת

מרן הגה"צ ר' נתן מאיר בן הרב משה יום טוב זצוק"ל

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of his cries: “Woe is to me for having caused anger to my Creator!”

It is quite understandable how Yitzchak, perceiving these events, was duly impressed with the levels his children could attain – even those who began their careers as the lowest of scoundrels.

What is not so understandable, however, is the turn-around itself. How did it, in fact, come about? As stated, Yosef Meshisa first committed an act of ultimate betrayal to Hashem and to his brethren, assisting the enemy in plundering and desecrating the most sacred of places and most precious of objects! Furthermore, the act of appropriating such vessels to become one’s personal property is a most severe transgression in and of itself. Chazal equate such impropriety with the most heinous crimes, ranking it with the infamous act perpetrated by Zimri (*Bamidbar 25:5-15*). In such cases, the violator’s very life becomes forfeit. The Mishnah speaks of those sins that carry the verdict of *kana'im pogin bo*, situations when the perpetrator caught in the act can be instantaneously assassinated by any onlooker seeking to zealously guard the honor of Hashem. The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin 9:6*) states:

הגוֹנֵב אֶת הַקֶּסֶף וְהַמְקַלֵּל בְּקוֹסֵם וְהַבוֹעֵל אֶרְמִית,
קָנְאִין פּוֹגְעִין בּוֹ.

“One who (either) steals a consecrated vessel, (or) invokes the name of an idol to curse the True Hashem, or lives with an Aramean, can be dispatched by zealots.”

At one moment, Yosef Meshisa was a traitor of the lowest order; he committed one of the most severe transgressions, actually entering the Beis Hamikdash to retrieve the Menorah as his own keepsake. The next moment, he refused to repeat the very same act and would change his mind under no circumstances. He withstood the temptation of fabulous wealth and did not buckle even in the face of unspeakable torture!

What happened? What changed in an instant?

WHAT WE HAVE LOST

This affair, explains the Ponevezher Rav (quoted by R’ Matisyahu Salomon), provides us with a glimpse of what we have lost. For such was the *ko’ach* (power) of the Beis Hamikdash, the place in which Hashem’s Shechinah (Presence) dwelled. An individual exposed – even for an instant – to this ultimate manifestation of pristine *kedushah* (holiness) was automatically transformed. Even the lowest scoundrel could not help but be infused with inner stirrings of repentance and a burning desire to come closer to the Source of this *kedushah*.

Perhaps this heightened awareness of just what we – bereft of the Beis Hamikdash – are missing will strengthen our yearning for its rebuilding; may we see it, speedily in our days.

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