

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Miketz
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Miketz – Complete teshuva

In this week's Parsha of Miketz, Yosef is appointed as the leader over Mitzrayim and his brothers are forced to come to him to buy food. Though Yosef recognises his brothers, the brothers do not recognise him. The first time the brothers come to Mitzrayim, they leave Binyamin behind. Yosef tells his brothers that they are not welcome back to Mitzrayim if they don't bring Binyamin with them. He holds Shimon prisoner to encourage the brothers to return with Binyamin.

Eventually, the brothers are forced to return in order to buy more food. This time they bring Binyamin. This was an intensely emotional experience for Yosef. Binyamin is Yosef's only full brother, and they had not seen each other for 22 years. However, since Yosef could not yet reveal his identity, he had to hide his emotions.

Then Yosef rushed because his compassion was stirred toward his brother and he wanted to weep. So he went into the room and wept there. (Breishit 43:30)

Yosef's behaviour toward Binyamin seems inconsistent. He treats Binyamin with extra care and respect, as we would expect for his long-lost brother. He seats Binyamin right next to himself and gives him an extra-large serving of food. But then, Yosef chooses to deliberately set up Binyamin by planting his precious goblet in Binyamin's saddlebag and accusing him of theft.

Imagine how Binyamin must have felt when the goblet was discovered hidden amongst his possessions. If Yosef wanted to create a ruse to get his brothers back to Mitzrayim, why did he choose Binyamin to be set up? Did he love Binyamin or not?

Some commentators explain that Yosef deliberately chose Binyamin because he was trying to recreate the circumstances of the brothers' original sin of selling Yosef to give them a chance to do proper teshuva. The Rambam explains that one reaches complete teshuva for a sin when one has the opportunity to commit the same sin (and they have the same desires and strength), and yet they are able to hold themselves back.¹

Yosef tried to engineer a situation for his brothers that would allow for them to do complete teshuva. The brothers had been jealous of Yosef because he was Yaakov's favourite son, the first born of Yaakov's favourite wife. It was this jealousy that drove them to sell Yosef as a slave.² Yosef understood that Binyamin, as the only surviving brother of Rachel, would

¹ Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 2:1.

² The commentators explain that the brothers thought that Yosef was a threat to the newly developing nation of Israel and that he should not be part of the covenant (just like Yishmael and Eisav were not included). The brothers may have thought that they were acting appropriately. However, it is clear that their jealousy for Yosef caused their judgement to be biased.

take over Yosef's position as the favourite son in Yaakov's eyes. Yosef was now offering his brothers an easy solution to the 'favourite brother problem'. Binyamin was accused of stealing and he was sentenced to become a slave in Mitzrayim – the exact same fate to which the brothers had abandoned Yosef many years earlier! The brothers were now placed in almost exactly the same position and could get rid of their father's other favoured son by simply doing nothing. However, if the brothers rose to the challenge and defended Binyamin, Yosef would know that they had done complete teshuva.

A question arises. Do we need to put ourselves into the same situation we were in before in order to do complete teshuva for our own sins? That could be quite risky! We generally like to avoid being tested. We specifically ask Hashem each morning not to send us tests³.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz deals with this question as follows:

A man has two paths in front of him. He knows that one of those paths will expose him to unholy sights. The other path is free of any such temptations. Which path should he choose? The man decides to deliberately choose the path with the temptations in order to challenge himself to avoid the temptation. He presumes that this would be the more courageous approach. But Rabbi Tatz explains that this is the wrong approach. If he chooses the path with the temptations, he will most likely succumb to one of two sins – Taiva (desire) or Gaiva (pride). If he succumbs to his Taiva he will be guilty of sin. But if he manages to avoid the temptation, he may become proud of his achievement and be guilty of Gaiva. Thus, it is best to choose the safe path and avoid the temptation altogether.

Yet the question remains: if it is unwise to put ourselves in a position of temptation, how can we do complete teshuva? The Rambam explains that the repentant must reach the level where Hashem himself will testify that he will never return to the sin again. In that case, it may not be necessary for us to be exposed to the same temptation again.

We see that it is not up to us to decide which tests to expose ourselves to. Hashem will decide whether we need to be tested again with a specific test. We can trust Him (and not ourselves) that we will be stretched to the optimal level that we need in order to grow. He created us and he knows how we work best, even better than we know ourselves. If we do face the same test again, then we must do our best to overcome the temptation. But it is not for us to actively seek out such a test. Rather, our job is to reach an inner level of remorse such that Hashem Himself can testify that we would not commit the sin again. That is the level of teshuva that we need to aim for.

Let's try something this week:

1. We should aim to do teshuva to the level that we can be confident that Hashem, who knows what is inside our hearts, can testify that we have done complete teshuva. We also need to trust that Hashem knows the most appropriate way to test us.
2. Let's try not to take the high road and risk facing sin, but rather avoid temptation as much as possible.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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³ See the bracha of *המעביר שנה* on page 20 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.