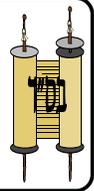




Kindert Torah

Parashas Vayeshev



Self Sacrifice

“Abba, can you please help me with my homework?”

“Sure, Esti. What’s the problem?”

“We need to find an example of outstanding self-sacrifice in this week’s parasha.”

“Do you have any ideas, Esti?”

“Yes, Abba. I was thinking about Reuven - how he saved Yosef’s life. The brothers wanted to kill Yosef. They were in the field tending the sheep when they saw him coming. They said to one another, ‘Come, let us kill him, and throw him into one of the pits.’ Reuven heard and rescued him. ‘Shed no blood,’ he said. ‘Throw him into this pit in the desert, but do not lay a hand on him.’ Reuven intended to return later to the pit, rescue Yosef, and return him to his father. (From Bereshis 37:19-22)”

“Excellent, Esti. Reuven saved his brother’s life. Now, what was the self-sacrifice involved?”

“Perhaps the brothers would have killed Reuven when he showed an interest in helping Yosef.”

“That is a good thought. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin has a deeper thought. He begins with Rashi who quotes the Medrash Rabba. Reuven said, ‘I am the *bechor* (firstborn). This blame for this horrible act will fall entirely upon me.’ Therefore, Reuven took action to save Yosef. Who was the one who would take over the leadership of the family after the father died? The *bechor*. However, Yosef was trying to usurp this process by claiming that he would rule over the brothers, in place of Reuven. The leadership of Klal Yisrael was at stake, and Reuven stood to lose everything. What happened? Along came the other brothers, wanting to kill Yosef. Reuven might see this as a good thing. It would remove all contention, and leave him as the uncontested leader. He only had to keep quiet and let them go ahead with their plan. Instead, he saved Yosef, intending to bring him back to Yaakov.”

“Now I see the tremendous self-sacrifice of Reuven’s act, Abba. What a *baal-middos* (master of good character traits)!”

“Yes, Esti. We can all learn from him. When our friend is in trouble, or in danger of losing something, and we stand to gain from his loss, we have to put our own interest aside and help the other person. We will learn the excellent *middah* of self-sacrifice. We can become like one of the *shevatim* - Reuven ben Yaakov.”

Kinderlach . . .

There are many levels of self-sacrifice. One can help someone without giving up anything. For example, you can bring your brother a drink of water at the same time that you get a drink for yourself. A higher level is to give up something that you do

not value so much - like giving a small coin to a poor person, or giving old clothing to a *gemach*. A higher level is to give up something important to you, like taking an hour of time to help someone move his furniture. Or giving a significant sum of money to *tsedaka*. Reuven gave up something even more valuable - Malchus - the leadership of Klal Yisrael. That is a tremendous act of self-sacrifice. We should all learn from him. May we all have the *zechus* to emulate him.

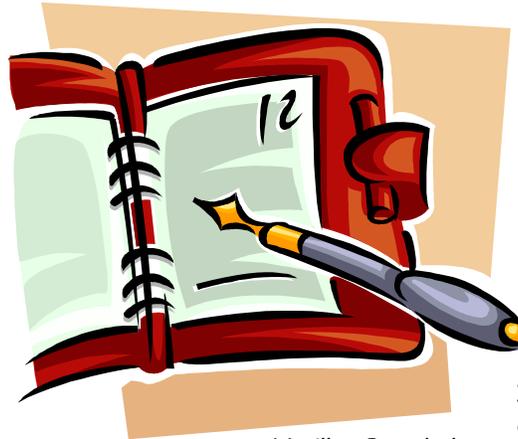
Write a Book

“Abba, can you help me with another homework question?”

“My pleasure, Esti.”

“Was Reuven’s act of saving Yosef lacking in any way? Could he have done it any better?”

“As a matter of fact, the Medrash Rabba



on Megillas Rus deals with that very question, Esti. Rav Yitzchak Bar Merion teaches us that a person should do a *mitzvah* with a complete heart. If Reuven had known that Hashem was going to write into the Torah that he heard (about the brothers’ plans) and saved him (Yosef) from their hands, he would have put Yosef on his shoulders and brought him to his father. Similarly, if Aharon had known that Hashem would write that he was happy to see his brother Moshe returning from Midian, he would have gone to meet him with drums and dancing. Lastly, if Boaz knew that Hashem will write about the *chessed* that he did with Rus, he would have served her fatted calves.”

“In other words, Reuven, Aharon, and Boaz could have done their *mitzvos* in a better way. They could have put in more effort and done them with a *lev shalem* - a complete heart. This is a powerful lesson for us, Esti.”

“I understand how they learned from their deeds, Abba. Reuven, Aharon, and Boaz all lived in the time of the Tanach. Hashem wrote down their good deeds for posterity, for us to learn from them. However,

we do not have the same *zechus* (merit). We live in the present time, when He is not writing down our deeds. From where will we get this motivation to do our *mitzvos* with a *lev shalem*?”

“Excellent question, Esti. The Medrash elaborates on this point. Nowadays, when we have no *neviim* (prophets), Eliyahu HaNovi writes down our deeds. Then, Melech HaMoshiach and Hashem sign on them.”

“So our deeds are also written down, Abba.”

“Yes, Esti. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:1) reiterates this fact. ‘Know what is above you - a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and that all of your deeds are written in a sefer.’ We are all authors, Esti. We are all writing the book of our lives. When we do a *mitzvah*, it is written into the book and we will benefit from it forever. And *chas v’shalom* (heaven forbid) the opposite is also true - we will suffer the effects of an *aveyra*. The Eved HaMelech sums up the subject as follows. Every day we pray to Hashem to open our hearts with Torah; to put love and fear into them in order to do His Will and serve Him with a complete heart. Reuven knew that killing Yosef was not right, however, he felt that leaving him in the pit was enough of an act to save him. Had he known the *Ratzon* (Will of) Hashem was to return Yosef to Yaakov, he would have carried him on his shoulders. Therefore, we ask Hashem to reveal His *Ratzon* to us, so that we may serve Him with a *lev shalem*.

And even when we do know His *Ratzon*, we ask Him for *Siyata Di’Shmaya* (Heavenly Assistance) to carry it out with a *lev shalem* and *b’simcha* (with happiness).”

“Amen!”

Kinderlach . . .

How do we react when an *oni* (poor person) asks us for *tsedaka*? Do we make excuses? “Perhaps he is not really poor. Perhaps he is trying to trick me. I will just give him a small coin.” Or, do we do the *mitzvah* with *simcha* and a *lev shalem*? “Here is a respectable donation, Mr. Oni. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this wonderful *mitzvah*!” That is the difference, *kinderlach*. Pray to Hashem to guide you in the right path and reveal His *Ratzon* to you. Then ask Him to help you do it happily with a complete heart. If you do, you will write a wonderful book - the Book of Your Life - filled with perfect *mitzvos*.

Parasha Questions:

- How long were the Sar HaMashkim and the Sar HaOfim in prison before they dreamed their dreams? (Rashi 40:4)
- What was Yosef’s punishment for relying on the Sar HaMashkim? (Rashi 40:23)

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