

Vayaishev

Perceptions • Kislev 20, 5785 • December 21, 2024 • Issue #2076

Here is this joke about a woman who cried the first time she read the story about Yosef's kidnapping and how he suffered. But her son noticed how she didn't cry when she read the story again the following year, and he asked her, "Not sad for you anymore?" She answered, "It is, but I can't cry for someone who doesn't learn his lesson the first time!"

Year after year we come back to the story of Yosef and his brothers, and suffer through his flaunting of his dreams, his brothers' hatred and jealousy of him and finally, his sale to Arab merchants. We can't expect Yosef or his brothers to learn from their past mistakes because they're long gone. But what about *us*?

The Torah reports that:

They took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat a meal. . . (Bereishis 37:24-25)

Really? They sat down to eat after their deed? Wasn't that kind of callous of them? And even if true, why tell us?

This has led some commentators to rationalize their actions, because we do not like to assume anything about the *Shevatim* that paints them in an unfavorable, mundane light, even though the Torah itself seems to. Rather, they acted as any *Sanhedrin* did when making life and death judgments, fasting until judgment and only eating after as part of the procedure.

Whether true or not, it is only in *Parashas Mikeitz*, when Yosef, a.k.a. Viceroy of Egypt, tightens the screws on the brothers and accuses them of being spies, that we retroactively get a better look at the emotional side of what happened:

They said to one another, "We are guilty for our brother because we witnessed his distress and did not listen [to his pleas]. That is why this trouble has come upon us." Reuven told them, "Didn't I tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy,' but you did not listen? His blood, too, is being demanded!" (Bereishis 42:21-22)

It is not for no reason that the Torah did that, showing us what happened in this week's *parsha* only next week in *Parashas Mikeitz*, when the brothers themselves were feeling the heat. It reveals to us how much a person can allow themselves to get away with, as long as no one challenges them. They know they are doing something unacceptable at the time, but out of weakness they do it anyhow and, *this is the important part*, they stifle feelings of remorse to feel less bad.

Had the brothers felt completely confident that selling Yosef had been the undisputed will of God, they would not have felt remorse after being accused by Yosef of being spies. The fact that they immediately attributed their own troubles to the sale of Yosef means that they had carried their guilt around with them for decades, especially since they saw that their father refused to let go of what happened.

Believe it or not, that says something good about the brothers. Even though they had acted as they had thought they should by ridding Jewish history of Yosef, they still harbored a sense of doubt and regret. True, it took Yosef masquerading as their accuser to expose it, but as the *Midrash* says, one of the main reasons they had come to Egypt was to find Yosef and bring him back home.

The *Gemora* says that one of the key differences between a *tzaddik* and a *rasha* is that a *tzaddik* falls seven times and gets up each time. A *rasha* falls once and stays down. Amazingly, the *Gemora* is saying that we should not think *tzaddikim* are people who never err. They err plenty. But whereas a *rasha* accepts his failings and incorporates them into his life view, *tzaddikim* never do. They allow themselves to feel bad about their mistake in order to try and avoid it the next time around. And they don't wait for a period of negative Divine Providence to bring it to the surface.

One of the main things that makes a sociopath a sociopath is, their apparently inability to feel any remorse about anything bad they do. Whether it is the result of some mental deficiency or some trauma they may have suffered, they lack the ability to feel bad about anything. This makes the most heinous acts run of the mill for them.

But there are plenty of people today doing despicable things and feeling little or no remorse about it. Their brains are just fine, *physically*. Their emotions are not. They have uncontrollable hatred, or unchecked levels of jealousy. They are too lazy to find out the truth or just don't want to know what it is because it will undo their plans and make them feel bad. Or worse, their brains seem to have "melted" due to technology and social media, and they just believe what they want because no one challenges them.

For now. It took 22 years for Yosef's brothers to meet their match and pay their dues. Oh, but the damage that occurred in the meantime! Likewise, justice will come

when God says it must, and whereas some will find vindication, many others will find out that the truth hurts when you make a point of avoiding it. Better to take stock of your life now, feel the remorse if you should immediately, and align with the God-given truth in the present. It might be a lonely approach in the short run, but the only safer and rewarding one in the long run.

Chanukah is almost here and the 24 days of preparation are nearing their end. Check it out at www.shaarnunproductions.org.