

פרשת וישב

The holiness of the entire week is drawn from the Shabbat Kodesh. The holiday of Hanukah arrives this week, and therefore the holiness of Hanukah begins from this Shabbat. The same goes for all of the holidays, their holiness is found on the Shabbat preceding them.

There is a strong connection between the topic of this week's Parasha, and the holiday of Hanukah. The Parasha begins with the affection that Yaakov showed for his son Yosef, and continues with the sale of Yosef and the trials and tests that Yosef faced in Egypt.

The Pasuk says; "ויסף בן שבעה עשרה שנה"-“Yosef was 17 years old”. What is the significance of telling us the age of Yosef at this time?? What message is the Torah conveying to us by giving his age?

The explanation is that by giving us the age of Yosef before he was sold to Egypt, the Torah is showing us that there were lessons of Torah that Yaakov taught Yosef. These lessons were crucial to Yosef's spiritual survival in the debased Egyptian society.

How can we see this from Yosef's age? Rashi tells us in last week's Parasha that Yaakov Avinu studied in Yeshivat Shem VaEver for 14 years before he went to the house of Lavan. This was after **63** years of learning Torah in the house of Yishak Avinu! What was the necessity of learning an additional 14 years by Shem and Ever?! The Torah that Yaakov learned there was the Torah of Galut. It was the Torah that taught him how to endure the spiritual attacks of Lavan, and how to fortify himself for his exile. Shem and Ever were the perfect teachers for this Torah. Shem experienced the great flood. He endured through a generation that was totally corrupt. His grandson Ever, lived in the time of the tower of Bavel where the entire world went against Hashem, but Ever opposed them all and stayed true to Hashem. He was called Ever which means “other side”, to show that the entire generation was on one side (against Hashem) and he was on the other.

Shem and Ever taught this Torah to Yaakov. It took them 14 years to give it over to him in its entirety. It was *this* Torah, and these lessons that Yaakov gave over to his son Yosef. Yaakov realized with his Ruach Hakadosh that Yosef would need this Torah in order to survive the impurities of his exile in Egypt. It says that a father should begin teaching his son Torah at the age of 3 years old. He should begin training him to say "תורה צוה לנו משה". Yaakov began teaching his son Yosef this Torah of Galut (exile) at the age of 3 years old. As mentioned, this Torah takes 14 years to learn. This would make Yosef 17 years old when Yaakov completed teaching it (3+14=17). This is why the Torah gives us the age of Yosef; it is hinting to us that Yaakov taught him the same Torah of Galut that he himself had learnt by Shem and Ever for 14 years!

The main test that Yosef faced in Egypt was the test of the wife of Potiphar. He was approached by her daily and he was alone, young, and handsome. This was a tremendous test for Yosef, in which he battled mightily with his Yeser Hara. The Pasuk says "ויהי כהיום הזה"-"and it was the day". Rashi explains that on that day Yosef was ready to finally relinquish to his Yeser Hara. He was prepared to commit the act, ו"ן. Just as he was about to sin, he perceived the image of his father and this strengthened him to control himself and resist the temptation. This took "superhuman" strength on Yosef's part, and it caused a massive spiritual reaction.

Yosef's resistance from sinning caused a wave of resistance on behalf of the entire Jewish nation for all generations. He imbedded in us this ability to withstand temptation and to remain pure and faithful. It was to the credit of Yosef that the Jews were called שבטי י-ה, and were pure from any intermarriage at the time of the exodus of Egypt. "ונס מפני נס"-the sea "split for the one who ran". The Sea split in honor of Yosef, and in honor of the purity of the Jews that were free from any intermarriage on account of Yosef.

What gave Yosef the strength to pass this test? It was the teachings of Yaakov for those 14 years. It was all for that pivotal moment! That was the moment that defined Yosef, and enabled him to cause a mass resistance on behalf of the Jews to the temptations of the Goyim. This enabled the Jews to be redeemed from Egypt, and saved us as a nation! When Yosef saw his father's image, it was as if his father was imploring him "this is the moment we prepared for"!!

It is to Yaakov's credit that Yosef passed the test, and therefore to his credit that the Jews were saved from Egypt. The Midrash says that Yaakov Avinu was there to

witness the entire redemption from Egypt including the splitting of the sea. The Pasuk says "ויראו את היד הגדולה"-"the Jews saw the great hand" it should have said **ויראו** (in plural). It said וירא (singular) because it is referring to Yaakov Avinu who is also called Yisrael. He was there to witness all the miracles. The Pasuk says "וירא את היד הגדולה" –that Yaakov saw the great "hand", the word יד equals 14. The Pasuk hints to us that Yaakov merited seeing the exodus - and we merited the exodus - because of the 14 years that he taught Yosef.

The Pasuk in "שמעו" says "מינה' נאדרי בכח"-"your right hand –Hashem- is glorious in power". The word כח equals 28. The Pasuk - in singing the praises of Hashem - shows us that in the merit of the 14 years that Yaakov studied in Shem VaEver, and his 14 years of teaching that Torah to Yosef (14+14=28) enabled us to merit this miraculous redemption by staying pure like Yosef.

In Parashat Veyehi the brothers expressed remorse to Yosef, and begged forgiveness for having sold him. Yosef explained to the brothers that as a result of being sold, he was able to be faced with the test that he overcame, and as mentioned, this saved the Jewish nation from assimilation! The Pasuk says:

"ואתם חשבתם עלי רעה אלקים חשבה לטובה למען עשה **כיום הזה** להחיות עם רב"
"You thought evil against me, but Hashem meant it as good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save a great nation".

Yosef was hinting to the moment of history when he said: **כיום הזה** - the same words that the Pasuk said which spoke of the day Yosef overcame his Yeser Hara. **ויהי כהיום הזה**! Yosef was explaining to the brothers, because you sold me I was faced with the test that I passed and as a result, I saved the entire **Jewish** nation **עם רב** להחיות!

The Megaleh Amukot explains that as long as the Jews are pure, and stay away from assimilation the sin of the brothers' sale of Yosef is "overlooked". "All's well that ends well". Their sin ended up being a source of purity and holiness through Yosef passing his test. If they had not sold Yosef, he would have never faced this test, and we would not have reaped the benefits. As soon as the Jews forfeit this holiness and begin intermarriage ח"ו, the sin is "brought back to the table", because there is no longer the "happy ending" as there was in Yosef's time.

This leads us to the connection between our Parasha which speaks of Yosef and his test, and the holiday of Hanukah.

The main objective of the Greeks in the times of Hanukah was to get the Jews to merge with them. They did not want to kill us, they only wanted us to be like them, and intermarry with them which would destroy us **spiritually**. They were trying to break the imaginary fence created by Yosef Hasadik, and thereby reawaken the sin of the brothers.

The first thing the Greeks did after they breached the walls of the holy temple was to touch, and defile all of the oil that was found. Why would they want to defile all of the oil? What is so special about oil that they rushed to make it impure?? Oil represents separation; it is the only liquid that does not in any way coexist with another liquid. When we pour oil and water in the same vessel, the oil always rises to the top and separates from the water. The Greeks tried to defile and nullify this barrier that the oil represents.

The Greeks made a strange decree; they commanded that the Jews inscribe on a horn of an ox "we have no portion in the G-d of Israel". Why would they want this written on the horn of an ox?! The ox represents Yosef, as it says (in Parashat Vezot Haberacha in reference to Yosef); "בכור שורו הדר לו" (the firstling of an ox, beauty is his). They wanted the Jews to write this on the *horn of an ox*- that stands for Yosef - to try and break the barriers that Yosef set when he passed his test.

They were almost successful. The Jews began to act like the Greeks. They began to attend their events, and participate in their sports. The Greeks would appear naked in their activities, and the Jews would copy. They wanted to blend in so badly that they even performed procedures to cover their Brit Kodesh. However in the end, a small group of feeble Jews known as the מכבים fought back, and saved the Jews from total spiritual annihilation. מכבי stands for מי כמכה באלים ה' - they were not mighty men as depicted in the children's books, they were physically weak as it says "גבורים ביד חלשים" (mighty in the hands of the weak).

How did the מכבים have the strength to thwart the attempt of the Greeks to assimilate us? It was through the power of Yosef Hasadik. The powerful impact

of separation that Yosef had when he passed his test broke through the attempts of the Greeks to stop it. The numerical value of אַנְטִיכּוֹס the king of the Greeks is 156. This is also the numerical value of the words מֶלֶךְ יוֹן (king of the Greeks) 156. The numerical value of יוֹסֵף is also 156. This shows that it was Yosef who nullified the attempts of אַנְטִיכּוֹס, and enabled the Jews to withstand the test of assimilating with the Greeks! We allude to this in the prayer על הניסים in the Amidah. We say "ופרצו חומות" "they breached walls of our tower". These walls are the imaginary walls of holiness that separated us and them. In the end, the power of Yosef stood for us as we say: "עשית תשועה גדולה ופרקן כהיום הזה" - "you made a great salvation and deliverance as it is to **this day**". We mention these words כהיום הזה again, the exact words used by the test of Yosef with Potiphar's wife "ויהי כהיום הזה"!

Yosef was thrown in jail (by the husband of Potiphar), on account of his passing his test, and the Torah call this jail a בור. We see that as a result of passing the test he was thrown in a בור, this is like the בור that Yosef was originally thrown into by his brothers which contained snakes and scorpions. Miraculously Yosef was not harmed by the poisonous snakes and scorpions. Why did Hashem make this miracle (of saving Yosef from snakes and scorpions), that no one but Yosef knew about?! The explanation is, that sometimes the prophets do an action to symbolize a prophecy. With the action, they make the prophecy "literal". Here too, Yosef being saved from the snakes and scorpions symbolized his being saved from the snakes and scorpions of Egypt! It was a literal act that pertained to the future. These snakes and scorpions were the Satan in the form of the tests that Yosef faced in Egypt, especially the test of the wife of Potiphar.

This explains the connection between two Gemarot in the Gemarah Shabbat. The Gemarah says that in the pit of Yosef were snakes and scorpions. Immediately afterwards the Gemarah says that we must light the Hanukah Menorah below 20 אמות. What connects these two ideas? One explanation is that the brothers were not able to see the snakes and scorpions in the pit (this is obvious, for if they were able to see them, and then see Yosef being saved from them, they would realize that he was a Sadik and never would have sold him!). The pit of Yosef was 20 אמות deep, we see from here that the eye can only see clearly up until 20 אמות, therefore we must light the Menorah below 20 so that it may be seen by all. Another understanding between the connection of the two Gemarot, is what has been explained regarding the connection between Yosef and Hanukah. The selling of Yosef - which led to his test - enabled us to ultimately merit the miracle of Hanukah, and light the Menorah! Yosef passed his test through שמירת העינים (guarding his eyes). The women would try and make Yosef

look up at them, but Yosef would not raise his eyes. We therefore light the Menorah in a visible place (under 20 אמות) where all can see. In the merit of Yosef's purity of eyes, we merit a Misvah that can be seen by all eyes!

Where did Yosef get the strength to control himself with the wife of Potiphar, and thereby merit imbuing the Jews with holiness to separate themselves from the Goyim, thus saving them at the time of Hanukah?? It was from Yaakov Avinu, as mentioned Yaakov taught Yosef and fortified him for his exile. When the moment came that Yosef needed to control himself, Yaakov appeared to him and saved him. The Gemarah in Shabbat (Daf 36) says that at that moment of Yosef's test, Yaakov appeared to him **בחלון**-"in the window". Yosef perceived his father's image in the window, and this saved him. Why the window?? The word חלון stands for Hanukah. The middle letters are לו which is numerically 36. We light a total of 36 candles throughout the holiday of Hanukah (excluding the Shamash). The outer letters are נ-ח which stands for **נר חנוכה**- Hanukah candles.

This is why we light the Menorah by a **window!** We remember that it was because Yaakov appeared to Yosef in the window, that we merited this miracle of Hanukah! We light oil with a little bit of water on the bottom to show this separation and commemorate being saved from the Greeks, who tried to nullify the holiness and separation represented by oil!

We read this Parasha around the time of Hanukah because it is the Parasha that speaks of Yaakov and Yosef and the story of his test, which gave us our salvation.

Ezra Hasofer gave a powerful speech to the people of his generation, imploring them to divorce their non Jewish wives. The anniversary of this speech is this week's Parasha. Ezra waited for this time in order to "tap into" the holiness of separation created by Yosef. Through this speech he was successful in purifying the nation from their intermarriage.

When we light the Menorah we should concentrate on this holiness. We should remember that we are special and different from the other nations. Our dress, behavior, and general conduct *must* be different from the Goyim. We are like the oil that must not and cannot mix with others. "If the Jews do not make Kiddush, the Goyim will make Havdalah". If we do not separate and be מקדש (sanctify) ourselves, and

instead try and be like the Goyim, they will make הַבְּדִלָּה (separation) and separate us from them, with force ו"ח! We must remember who we are, and how great our nation is. This is what the holiday of Hanukkah represents.

It is not by chance that this is the most “commercialized” holiday, and the Goyim are very familiar with our Menorah lighting. They try and merge their holiday with ours, but this is the *exact opposite* of what this holiday means to us! It is *only* us that are holy to Hashem and only us that will *always* be!