



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

פרשת וישב - חנוכה

וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצְלֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְנֹו נַפְשׁוֹ. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם רְאוּבֵן אַל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ דַם הַשְּׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה. (בראשית לז, כא - כב)

Reuven heard, and he rescued him from their hand. He said, 'We will not strike him mortally!' And Reuven said to them: 'Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit!' (Bereishis 37:21-22)

This week's *parshah* relates how the Shevotim hated Yosef and plotted to kill him. Reuven hearing their plot and wishing to save him, suggested that they don't kill him but throw him into a pit. Chazal tell us that the pit was full of dangerous snakes and scorpions. The Meforshim ponder whether Reuven knew this fact, and if so, what gain could there be by throwing him into a pit and not letting him be killed by the brothers?

The Ohr HaChaim (and others quoting a Zohar) assumes that Reuven *was* aware that the pit was infested. However, Reuven still advised casting him into the pit and was not concerned about the fatal bites of the deadly creatures. His rationale was that there is a difference between being harmed by a human being or an animal. A human who has *בְּחִירָה*, *free will*, can harm even someone righteous and not *מֵיִיב מִיְתָה*, whereas an animal is nothing more than a messenger from Above and can only act as an agent to punish one who has sinned. Reuven being confident of Yosef's righteousness, reckoned that he would be saved from the snakes and scorpions who only act when directed by Hashem. He therefore advocated that Yosef be thrown in the pit and not be left at the mercy of the brothers, since human beings with free will have the power to harm a person even when innocent.

This is a noteworthy concept here. If a person is deserving, Hashem performs miracles to save one from wild animals or natural disasters. However, Hashem typically does not interfere with a person's free will, even if they intend to harm an innocent person. This can be explained by the fact that for Hashem to go against a person's free will requires a much greater miracle. Therefore a person would need to have accumulated many more merits to deserve this higher level of intervention.

Expanding upon the concept mentioned above, the Ohr HaChaim explains that there are distinct methods of how to act when one is being threatened or punished by a human being – borne of his free will, or when one is being penalised by Hashem for sin. When one is being punished by Hashem, the only course of action is to do *teshuvah* and improve oneself. However, when it is apparent that it is not solely a Divine punishment, one is responsible for doing whatever he can to be saved from trouble. (See Ohr HaChaim - *Parshas Mikeitz* 44:16.) The insight for this is based on what was explained earlier; someone with free will can act even "against" Hashem's will and therefore one has to take every necessary precaution to physically protect himself.

There are two Yomim Tovim that were established to remember the miracles of *Klal Yisroel* being saved from the evil decrees of Homon and Antiochus. However, there are some differences between them. Purim is a day of *מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה*, *feasting and joy*, while Chanukah is a time of *לְהוֹדוֹת וְלִהְלֵל*, *to thank and praise*. The Levush (*Siman 670*) explains that the decree of Homon affected the physical welfare of the Jewish people, with no mention of being able to be saved by abandoning *Yiddishkeit*. In contrast, Antiochus' decrees were solely spiritual, wishing for the *Yidden* to reject Torah and *mitzvos* to be kept alive. Therefore, Purim is a time to commemorate our physical existence which is expressed with joy and feasting, something which Homon wished to remove from us. Chanukah, on the other hand, is a time to celebrate our spiritual freedom and our ability to recognise and praise Hashem, so it was established as a time of *לְהוֹדוֹת וְלִהְלֵל*.

R' Elchonon Wasserman *zt"l*, examines the different approaches which *Klal Yisroel* took to be saved when faced with decrees. When Mordechai and Esther learned of Homon's decree, they declared (Esther 4:16): *לֵךְ כָּנוּס אֶת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים וְכו' וְצוּמוּ עִלַי*, *Go, assemble all the Yidden, and fast for me!* They reacted with *tefillah* and *teshuvah* but did not entertain the thought of waging a physical war against Homon and his followers. When the Chashmonaim were facing the edicts of Antiochus, although they were few and weak against many and strong, they did not hesitate to physically fight besides to strengthen themselves spiritually. What was the reason behind this difference in behaviour? How did *Klal Yisroel* distinguish between these two challenges that made them react in such a distinct manner?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* explains the difference between the *גְּזִירָה* at the time of Chanukah and Purim. He bases his explanation on the concept of the Ohr HaChaim and an idea expressed by R' Elchonon. R' Elchonon explains that Hashem does not punish man with difficulty in performing Torah and *mitzvos*, only with physical hardship. Therefore, if a person has trouble keeping *Yiddishkeit* he can be assured that this is not solely a punishment from Above, it is also evil which has come about from someone's choice to do wrong.

During the times of Antiochus, when *Klal Yisroel*, were threatened and forbidden to keep Torah and *mitzvos*, they were aware that this decree was the result of evil and bad schemes displayed by the wicked Yevonim. Therefore, they realised that a different approach from the decree of Purim was necessary. It was not enough to work solely with spiritually strengthening themselves – war was necessary. However, in the days of Homon, they were conscious that this was undeniably from Hashem, and the only method was *teshuvah*.

Gut Shabbos and a Freilechen Chanukah!

(For one who wishes more insight into this complex concept – עיין קובץ מאמרים ואגדות להגר"א ווסרמן זצ"ל, – ענפיה ארזי אל על מועדים – (חנוכה) – ענפיה ארזי אל עה"ת (פ' וישלח), וענפיה ארזי אל על מועדים – (חנוכה).)

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