

Shabbos: Ta'am HaChaim

Vayechi 5784

If not with Shabbos, then with Tosefes Shabbos

Introduction

In this week's parashah the Torah relates how Yaakov blessed his children. The Torah states regarding the blessing that Yaakov conferred on Reuven (Bereishis 49:3-4) Reuven bechori atah kochi vireishis oni yeser sieis viyesser az pachaz kamayim al tosar ki alisa mishkivei avicha az chilalta yitzui alah, Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and my initial vigor, foremost in rank and foremost in power. Water-like impetuosity – you cannot be foremost, because you mounted your father's bed; then you desecrated Him Who ascended my couch. Rashi, based on the Medrash, teaches us that because Reuven committed an infraction regarding Yaakov's bed, he forfeited the opportunity that his tribe would be the Kohanim and the kings. What is interesting, however, is that the Torah itself does not state explicitly who replaced Reuven as the firstborn. However, in Divrei Hayamim (I 5:1) it is said uvinei Reuven bechor Yisroel ki hu habechor uvichalelo yitzuei aviv nitnah bechoraso livnei

Yosef Ben Yisroel vilo lihisyacheis labechorah ki Yehudah gavar biechov ulinagid mimenu vihabechorah liYosef, the sons of Reuven, the firstborn of Yisroel. (He was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Yosef son of Yisroel, although not to receive the hereditary right of the firstborn, for Yehudah prevailed over his brothers, and the ruler was to come from him; but the firstborn's portion was Yosef's.) The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 82:11) states that there are two opinions regarding the interpretation of this verse. One opinion maintains that Reuven forfeited the hereditary right of the firstborn, while the second opinion posits that Reuven still maintained the hereditary right of the firstborn. One must wonder, however, what lesson can be derived from this verse and the Medrash. We already know in the Torah that Yaakov gave Yosef two portions in Eretz Yisroel as a sign of being the conferred firstborn.

Understanding the roles of Reuven and Yosef

How do we understand the birthright? Reuven was born first but he was not able to sustain the level of retaining the birthright. The birthright had to be

transferred, but who was deserving of earning the birthright? The Torah teaches us that Yosef replaced Reuven as the firstborn, but only with regard to having his two sons, Menasheh and Ephraim, inherit land in Eretz Yisroel. What was the significance of this inheritance?

The significance of two

We are all familiar with the idea that "two is better than one." While one reflects the idea of unity, two symbolizes blessing and prosperity. The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 1:10) states that it was for this reason that the Torah commenced with the letter beis, as the letter beis has a numerical value of two, and this symbolizes abundance and blessing. Yaakov prided Reuven on being his firstborn and his strength and his initial vigor, and these attributes reflected in Yaakov a sense of discipline and control. Had Reuven been worthy, he would have retained that strength and Reuven would have been king and the Kohen. In the words of the Torah, Reuven would have been foremost, i.e. he would have been the source of blessing for the Jewish People, as it is through the king and the Kohanim that HaShem confers His blessings upon the Jewish People. Yet, Reuven forfeited these virtues and the

"one" that was to lead to blessing and abundance was lost. Yosef, whose name symbolizes the idea of continuity and abundance, was the natural choice to replace Reuven with regard to being the firstborn. While Yehudah became the king and Levi inherited the Kehunah, Yosef received the hereditary right of the firstborn. What was so special about Yosef that he inherited this blessing?

Yosef was the extension of Yaakov

We see from the Torah and from the Medrash that Yosef was an extension of Yaakov. The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 84:6) comments that whatever occurred to Yaakov occurred in a similar fashion to Yosef. Yaakov was hated by his brother and Yosef was hated by his brothers. They were both circumcised, both their mothers were initially barren, and many other similarities. Thus, while Reuven was biologically the firstborn son, Yosef was the son who Yaakov felt the strongest connection to. Thus, Yaakov transmitted to Yosef all the Torah that he had studied at the academies of Shem and Ever. Furthermore, Yaakov is likened to fire and Yosef is akin to the flame, which is the extension of the fire. It was the flame of the fire which

was and will be used to destroy the straw of Esav. Thus, in a sense, Yosef was Yaakov. It is noteworthy that of all the tribes, it is only regarding Yosef that Yaakov uses the term bracha, blessing (Bereishis 49:25-26). Furthermore, the Sforno (Ibid verse 25) writes that whereas the blessings that Yaakov conferred on Menasheh and Ephraim were through an angel, the blessing that Yaakov conferred on Yosef was through HaShem Himself. This idea that Yosef is singled out for blessing and that the blessing is directly from HaShem clearly demonstrates the strong connection between Yaakov and Yosef.

The Shabbos connection

The lesson that we can take from the saga of Reuven forfeiting his hereditary right of the firstborn and Yosef receiving it instead is that every week we have the opportunity to be first and foremost. This opportunity arrives with the onset of Shabbos, when Hashem confers upon His beloved people the gift of Shabbos. According to the Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 11:1) Shabbos is the blessing of HaShem that enriches, and one need not add toil with it. Yet, it is possible, unfortunately, for one to squander the holiness of Shabbos if one is

not prepared for its aura and its state of holiness. It is for this reason that HaShem gave us the extra opportunity of Tosefes Shabbos, which the Sfas Emes writes is reflected in Yosef. By adding on to Shabbos during the week, one demonstrates that he is doing his best to prepare for the Holy Shabbos. When one prepares properly for Shabbos and extends the Shabbos into the week, he can be assured that he will eat the fruits of his labors on Shabbos.

Shabbos in the Zemiros

Tzama Lecho Nafshi

This zemer was composed by the great medieval commentator and poet Avraham Ibn Ezra whose name is found in the acrostic of the verses

בְּרָא כֹל בְּחָכְמָהּ. בְּעֵצָה וּבְמִזְמָהּ. מְאֹד נִעְלָמָהּ. מֵעֵינַי כֹּל תִּי, He created everything with wisdom, understanding and forethought, how hidden it is from the perception of all the living. This statement is perplexing. On the one hand we declare that HaShem created the world with wisdom, and on the other hand we acknowledge that this wisdom is concealed from man's comprehension. If we cannot comprehend HaShem's wisdom, what is then point of declaring that

he created the world with wisdom? The answer to this question is that the Kabbalists state that the word *הַקְדָּמָה* is a contraction of the words *הַמָּה*, a power from the unknown. Thus, the essence of HaShem's wisdom is that it is concealed. HaShem's wisdom is a part, so to speak of Himself, and in this world man can never comprehend HaShem's essence.

Shabbos Stories

Talking money and talking Torah

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky writes: The Ponovezer Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kahanamen, of blessed memory, was renowned for his efforts in rebuilding Torah from the ashes of the Holocaust. He established the jewel in the crown of the Torah city of Bnei Brak by building the Ponovez Yeshiva and its myriad affiliate institutions. He built a Yeshiva for pre-teens, another for young men, and still a third for married scholars. He built the Batei Avos, a huge housing complex with hundreds of subsidized apartments for needy families. He built schools for orphaned boys and girls in Bnei Brak, Ashdod, and numerous cities across the State of Israel.

Often, he would visit wealthy patrons in the United States,

Canada, South Africa, and Europe, and appealed to them to contribute monies for the Ponovezer Institutions.

The story is told, perhaps apocryphally, that one particular donor once confronted him in jest.

"Why is it, Rabbi Kahanamen," he wondered, "that all the other Rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva who visit me never mention money? All they talk about is Torah and mitzvos. But you come here and cut right to the chase. You don't talk about Torah or mitzvos. Your appeal, however, is, direct and to the point. You come here and say that you need one hundred thousand dollars to finish a girl's school in Ashdod. Why don't you also give me a speech about Torah, mitzvos, and Jewish continuity?"

Rabbi Kahanamen did not draw back. He took the man's hand and looked him in the eye. Then he told him a profound statement. "You know me well. Many fund raisers talk, 'Torah, Torah, Torah,' but they mean money, money, money. I talk money, but I mean Torah, Torah, Torah." (www.Torah.org)

Shabbos in Halacha

Foods Excluded from This Prohibition

The prohibition against salting does not apply to all foods, but only to those whose quality or texture can be altered by salting. This includes most vegetables, which tend to harden when salted, and beans, which soften when salted. Also included are bitter and pungent foods, whose quality can be improved by salting.

On the other hand, foods in which salt does not effect a real change, but merely adds flavor, are exempt from this prohibition and may be salted in large quantities. This exemption applies to cooked meat, fish and eggs, and similar foods. However, even such foods should not be salted for in advance of eating.

New Stories



Finding Uzi

35 years ago they changed each other's life and drifted apart. Then Facebook brought them together again.

by Shlomo Horwitz

Facebook95TwitterEmailMore55

They warned me: Never set foot in *Sh'chunat Hatikva*. The so-called "Neighborhood of Hope" was anything but.

It was notorious as the most dangerous neighborhood in Tel Aviv and the home of the leading crime bosses in Israel. But as a 20-year old, I figured I knew better. I was part of a group of volunteers who had arrived in July, 1982, at the height of the First Lebanon War, and we were determined to give underprivileged kids a wonderful summer experience by running day camps and taking them on trips unlike any they had ever taken.

A secondary part of our job was to teach the kids English. Many of the kids came from difficult homes and needed all the support and help they could get.

Uzi Mishan was a well-adjusted 10-year-old from neighboring Yad Eliyahu, and his grandparents lived in *Sh'chunat Hatikva*, across the street from me. They were

Holocaust survivors from Greece and, like many in the neighborhood, were not particularly fond of Jewish tradition. They were great people and became close friends of mine, always going out of their way to buy snacks with the best kosher certification so that I would feel a part of their home. Uzi and I became close - he was in my bunk in the summer camp and was very mature for his age. He was a born leader and athlete, and the other children naturally gravitated to him. If Uzi approved of a trip or activity, so did everyone else. He was a great sport and never lost his cool on the soccer field.

But things looked bleak when it came to English. The first time I tried teaching Uzi we were in his grandparents' living room on a blistering hot day. The ceiling fan was lazily moving hot air around the room, making it even hotter.

"Uzi, please read me the top line," I said to him in Hebrew.

Uzi writhed in his chair and read me the ABCs. His heart wasn't in it. Neither was mine.

"Are you bored?" I asked him.

"Yes."

No surprise there.

"Uzi, tell me the truth. What would you rather be learning with me?"

To my great surprise, Uzi replied, "Torah!"

He and his family were completely irreligious. "What contact do you have with Torah?" I asked.

"Every night when my parents tuck me in, I sneak my father's army *Tanach* (Bible) under the covers, turn on a flashlight, and read the stories. You can test me."

"Wow. Okay, who were the 12 tribes?"

He nailed it.

"Who was Avner ben Ner?"

"King Saul's top general". Boom.

"Yoav ben Tzeruyah?"

"King David's top general". Bam.

"Uzi! I can't believe what you know! It's a deal! We'll learn Torah from now on."

He was thrilled and so was I. I resigned from my capacity as an English teacher and began teaching

Uzi stories from the Talmud. Leader that he was, he quickly gathered other neighborhood kids to hear my tales and by the end of the summer, I regularly had 15-20 children listening to me around a tree.

Because of Uzi I decided to teach Torah for the rest of my life.

Based on those experiences I decided I'd be a teacher of Torah for the rest of my life.

We parted ways after the summer, and other than a couple of calls and two short visits when he was 14 and 16, we pretty much lost touch for the next 35 years. But I never forgot what an inspirational person Uzi was, even at this young age.

In fact, I mentioned him this past Yom Kippur when I was running a beginner's workshop at the Etz Chaim Center in Baltimore. We were discussing the purity of a Jewish soul and how it naturally gravitates to God. I thought of Uzi as a paradigm and told my audience about him.

"Whatever happened to him?" someone asked.

"I really don't know," I replied.

"Really?"

I was a little embarrassed. How did I let someone so special slip away from my life?

"Well, I did try once to look up his phone number online, but there were too many Mishans in the phone book, and I didn't want to go through all of them," I said weakly.

It seemed so inadequate when I said it.

And then it dawned on me: Why not try and find him on Facebook?

Right after I broke my fast, I went to Facebook and typed in Uzi Mishan in Hebrew. Several names came up. I looked at the pictures and one guy seemed like he could be the one. But I couldn't tell. The 10 year old I once knew was now 45! Could this be Uzi?

I quickly private-messaged him. "Are you the Uzi Mishan who was in the Hatikva Neighborhood in '82?" I wrote in Hebrew, and signed it as Shlomo Horwitz from Baltimore.

And then I went to sleep. Or tried to. I was so excited I found myself waking up repeatedly. I waited

until 7 AM to check my phone in the kitchen and found the following message:

“Shlomo! *Zeh ani!!* It’s me!!”

Heartfelt Reunion

Three months ago my wife and I went to Israel to our family, and part of that family was Uzi, his wife Celli, and his kids Rom, Ravid and Raz, who live happily in Be’er Yaakov in Central Israel. Reuniting with him was one of the happiest days of my life.



Uzi and the author, reunited after 35 years

As part of our massive catching-up, I learned that Uzi had become a professional wrestler in Israel after his army service. He was intensively physically fit and now runs a successful business as a party planner.

Uzi now knows that I’ve been involved in Jewish education ever since I met him, *because* of him. He told me that he has never stopped attending Torah classes since I studied with him back in 1982, and has studied with a host of rabbis in the Tel Aviv and Be’er Yaakov area.

Uzi also shared something deeply personal with me and urged me to share it with you.

When he was 29, he was diagnosed with a genetic neurological disease called CMT (Charcot-Marie-Tooth), which is incurable. Although some people have mild symptoms, Uzi’s case was so severe that he had trouble walking and moving around. His legs and shoulders were in pain and he had issues with the soles of his feet and his knees. His muscles began to atrophy and get smaller to the point where he had difficulty picking things up. His hands would shake from the strain of even holding a cup of coffee. His doctor told him to start winding down since he’d shortly be disabled and unable to work at his present job.

He was heartbroken and went to his rabbi in Tel Aviv, Rav Yechiel. Rav Yechiel immediately took Uzi

to see the great Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, for his blessings. The venerable rabbi placed his hand on Uzi's head and said a few words of prayer in a low voice. Uzi broke down and cried. He felt a strange sensation running through his body.



Uzi visiting Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, obm

He left the rabbi and over a short amount of time all of his symptoms disappeared. He returned to the doctor who was thunderstruck that this was the same person whom he had just informed that he'd be disabled. The doctor ran additional electromyogram (EMG) exams to detect abnormal neuromuscular conditions, and determined that the underlying disease was still present but all the accompanying symptoms were gone.

Uzi has since gone back to his extreme fitness and can bench press 375 lbs, something unheard of for a patient with CMT. One year ago he had another EMG which still showed that the disease was present. But he is still marvelously strong and fit, and symptom-free. He and his family are grateful to God for this miracle. So am I.

With great joy, Uzi and I have started to learn Torah together once again.

What's an interruption of 35 years between brothers anyway? (www.aish.com)

**Shabbos Ta'am HaChaim:
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