



# PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayaishev ✍️ Rabbi Doni Deutsch

## Best Friend

In Parshas Vayaishev the Torah tells us about the tremendous spiritual test Yosef faced as a slave in Egypt when his master's wife tried to seduce him to sin. The Torah also tells us Yosef's response: "But he adamantly refused; he said to his master's wife, 'Look – with me here, my master concerns himself about nothing in the house, and he placed everything he has in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you ... How then can I perpetrate this great evil ...?'"

The S'fas Emes writes that this pasuk teaches us a great lesson about how to fight the yetzer hara. The first point is *Va'y'ma'ayn*. He simply and adamantly refused. No explanations, no discussion. "It's a non starter, I refuse to do it and there's nothing to talk about." As *Chazal* (Toras Kohanim in Parshas Kedoshim) tell us, "A person should not say 'I have no desire to sin.' Rather, 'I have a desire, but what can I do, my Father in heaven made a decree upon me.'"

However, the S'fas Emes continues to explain, this is only the first response. Once Yosef has made this clear – to himself, to his master's wife and to his yetzer hara – he does go on to seek practical reasons not to sin. And when one looks into it honestly, he will find that there are many practical reasons to do Hashem's mitzvos. And in this particular situation, Yosef finds an ethical reason: "How could I do it? It would be wrong after all that he has done for me ...". This is a very important lesson that can help us understand how to best fight our yetzer hara in many of the difficult *nisyonos* that we too face every day.

However there seems to be a very strong question we can ask on this understanding of the pasuk. After the *va'y'ma'ayn* – the adamant refusal – and after Yosef goes on to explain on a rational basis why he will not sin, he adds two more words at the very end of the pasuk: "Look ... he placed everything he has in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing ... How then can I perpetrate this great evil – **and sin to G-d!**"

Sin to G-d? Isn't that the *yiras shamayim* approach? Isn't that the first part of the pasuk? "I refuse - because that would be a sin against G-d!" Why does Yosef repeat that same idea in the second half of the pasuk, when he is giving the rational, down to earth explanations for why he will not sin?

Perhaps there is another powerful lesson to be learned from Yosef's response. The key to understanding this is found in the famous story in Shabbos (31a) where a would-be convert asks Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while standing on the proverbial one foot. Hillel answers him, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary. Go learn it."

There seems to be an obvious problem with Hillel's response. As we know, Torah laws can be divided into two categories: laws between man and man and laws between man and G-d. Now while Hillel's paraphrase of the Torah's, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' may be a good summation of the laws between man and man, how does that idea address the laws between man and G-d?

One answer to this question given by Rashi is that the 'friend' Hillel refers to is not simply a flesh and blood friend, but rather it refers to Hashem Himself – as the pasuk says, '*Your Friend and the Friend of your fathers do not forsake Him*' (Mishlei 27:10), referring to Hashem.

We need to understand why Hillel referred to Hashem this way. Why not just say "Do as Hashem commanded"? What lesson did Hillel want to convey by referring to Hashem as a Friend?

The answer is that Hillel is teaching us another simple yet very powerful tool for fighting the yetzer hara. In addition to *yiras shamayim*, (i.e., "how can I, a mere mortal, dare to violate the instructions of the Creator?") there is also a very practical and ethical basis on which to observe Hashem's instructions. And that is, the love and appreciation I should feel for all that Hashem has done for me. When struggling with my yetzer hara, I should say to myself, "Hashem is the greatest friend and benefactor I could ever have. He has given me so much pleasure, so much goodness ... and life itself. What kind of a person would I be if I would just disregard the instructions of Someone Who has been so good to me?"

And so Hillel rightfully tells the man that the basis for all Torah laws – both the laws between man and man and the laws between man and G-d – is to be a decent, ethical person. That's all you need to know. The rest is commentary.

We can see this same idea in Yosef's refusal. First, as the S'fas Emes points out, Yosef adamantly refuses to sin. No explanations, no rationalizations. "Just say no." That is the first response to the yetzer hara.

After firmly and convincingly doing that, Yosaif begins to strengthen his position, by reminding himself that in addition to Hashem's commandment, it is the right thing to do on a purely human, ethical level. "After all, my master has been so kind to me. He has entrusted me with so much. It just wouldn't be right to disrespect him in that way and violate his trust." And then Yosef adds, "if that is true, how much more so would it be wrong to violate Hashem's will and disregard all the kindness and trust that He has placed in me."

The Torah tells us about Yosef's struggles and the tools he uses to fight his yetzer hara, so that we too can learn from him.

First, refuse. No ifs, ands or buts.

Second, take a better look at the struggle, and see for yourself how observing Hashem's will is really the better thing to do anyway. Besides *yiras shamayim*, there are other practical, ethical and rational reasons to do the *mitzvos* of the Torah.

And finally, remember that one of the strongest down-to-earth ethical reasons to do each and every one of Hashem's mitzvos, is to think about how much you would push yourself to respect the will of a friend who has helped you a lot.

*And then remember that nobody has done more for you than Hashem.*

# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## Kiddush Hashem

*Rabbi Henschel Plotnik*

**W**e read this week of Yehuda's admission of responsibility in connection with the episode of his daughter-in-law Tamar. The Gemara comments on this: "Yosef, who sanctified Hashem's name in private, merited an additional letter to his name (a yud) — as the pasuk says *Eidus b'yehosef*. (Tehillim 81). Yehuda, who sanctified Hashem's name publicly, merited to have the whole name of Hashem in his own" (Sotah 10b). (Meforshim deal with the obvious question that Yehuda already received his entire name at the beginning of his life -see Torah Temimah Breishis 38:26). Chazal are extolling the virtue of the great mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem and the reward we receive as a result of its performance. One's essence is forever changed and his identity as a M'Kadesh Shem Shomayim is established. The greater public awareness of the Kiddush Hashem, the greater the merit. The Gemara in Brochos (20a) similarly uses an example of someone putting their reputation and dignity on the line as a prime example of Kiddush Hashem. This is illustrated by the drastic action taken by Rav Ada bar Ahava to correct a perceived lack of modesty.

Indeed, the highest calling of a Jew is to give up one's life for the sake of Hashem, thereby fulfilling the mitzvah of "V'nikdashti..." In light of the recent heart-rending events in Mumbai India, where Jews returned their souls to their Maker simply because they were Jews, we should explore some details of this mitzvah and how our Achim Kedoshim performed it.

Given that all mitzvos aseh (positive commandments) require a bracha prior to their performance, this requirement should apply to the mitzvah of giving one's life "Al Kiddush Hashem" as well. Exactly what that bracha is though is not mentioned in the classic poskim. The Sefer Yosef Ometz #483 (from the Chidush) brings a rather lengthy nusach attributed to Rav Asher hy"d of Frankfurt followed by Shima Yisroel. The Shelah Hakadosh mentions a shorter nusach: "asher kidshanu...l'kadesh shmo borabim". This nusach follows the opinion of the Rishonim that any mitzvah that cannot be performed by proxy cannot end with the word "al," but rather, ends with a "lamed" (such as the "l'kadesh" mentioned above). This opinion is quoted in the Pischei Teshuvah in Yoreh Deah (157:6). Rav Ephraim Oshry in his Shu't Mima'amakim writes that he instructed those who asked him during the Holocaust to recite this nusach. He further writes that Rav Elchonon Wasserman hy"d similarly instructed his own son to use the nusach of the Shelah as quoted to him in the name of the Chofetz Chaim. A grandson of the Chofetz Chaim confirmed that his saintly grandfather paskened this way during the murderous rampages of the Russians in WWI.

Interestingly, the Shelah is of the opinion that a bracha is not recited every time one gives his life. For example, if one gives his life to avoid transgressing any aveirah (which is required during a time of decrees against performing mitzvos), there is no bracha. For that matter, the Shelah debates if a bracha is ever recited on a mitzvah of this nature, which one doesn't seek out and would avoid if given the opportunity. Rav Oshry also suggests that if one is not given the opportunity to denounce his Jewish faith r"l to save his life, he may not qualify for the bracha.

However, the testimony of the Gedolei Yisra'el mentioned above indicates that the halacha is not so restrictive. Whenever one is killed because he is a Jew, he is accorded the distinguished title of Kadosh, and should recite a bracha. It is reported that the author of Y'sod V'shoresh Ha'avoda of Vilna disguised himself amongst the gentiles at the public execution of the ger tzedek, Avraham ben Avraham, to hear the bearcha being made and answer amen to it. Harav Shimon Shwab zt"l (Rav Shwab on Prayer p.61) was told by Harav Elchonon Wasserman hy"d of a tradition that the Vilna Gaon instructed the ger tzedek to recite the beracha that we say every day in korbonos, starting with Ata who ad shelo nivrah ... an ending with mekadeish es shimcha b'rabim.

Rav Dovid Povarsky zt"l, Rosh Yeshivas Ponovezh, related the following incident from his teenage years. As he was exercising in a gymnasium in the city of Poltova (for medical purposes), he was notified that a wild group of bloodthirsty Jew-hating thugs was about to enter and kill anyone in sight. An attendant urged him to hide in a bathroom where he would stand a chance of eluding the potential murderers. R' Dovid in the tradition of the Kelemer chinuch, calmly refused. In case he would be killed "Al Kiddush Hashem", he wanted to be able to recite the bracha! (Obviously we cannot learn halacha l'maaseh from such a story without knowing more detail. The point, however, is a powerful one; Yehudim Kedoshim approach the mitzvah of giving one's life "Al Kiddush Hashem" in the spirit of Rabbi Akiva, who yearned for the opportunity to fulfill it to its fullest and purest extent.)

We should seize the opportunity to search deep within ourselves and recommit our lives and our every action to being Mekadshei Hashem. Rebbe Yehudah Hanasi was called Rabbeinu Hakadosh because he lived his life in complete kedusha and tahara. Let us strive to do the same and merit the highest expectation of our Creator — that we live up to our calling as an Am Kadosh.

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