



Parashat Vayeshev



English version

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THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COULD

Anyone who blesses Yehuda is disgusting to G-d. (Sanhedrin 6b) If Yehuda had the power to persuade his brothers to sell Yosef, he had the power to bring Yosef back to his father, as well. (Rashi ibid.) And because he did not take responsibility when he had the power to do so and did not finish the Mitzvah, he was punished by losing his wife and two children. (See Sotah 13b) For if he had the power to start, he had the power to finish. This is so true in our own lives, not only as a halacha (Haye Adam 1; 68), but also as an axiom of productivity.

People who start things and finish them are fueled by an inner sense of responsibility. And not taking responsibility for our given abilities brings us great stress. David Allen, the stress-free productivity guru, once said, *Much of the stress that people feel doesn't come from having too much to do. It comes from not finishing what they've started.* Why is that so? Because if you have the power to start, you have the power to finish. Potential that goes undeveloped is a great cause for stress. I have found this to be true when helping teenagers find themselves. Instead of focusing on all the things that are negative in their lives, I focus on self-development on each person's terms. Voice lessons, speed reading, sports, music, karate, art, dancing, etc. This is why coaching is one of the best therapies. It builds self-esteem, while focusing on potential and responsibility. It is amazing how the stress level of my clients drops, just when we discover together their potential, power and responsibility. Planning together an awesome life of productivity, of actualizing potential, helps so

many clients and teenagers who feel that part of them has been left undeveloped. Why? Because they had difficulty with just that. Actualizing. Finishing. Achieving "coulds".

Nobody ever wrote down a plan to be broke, fat, lazy, or stupid. Those things generally result either from not having a plan of "coulds" or not taking responsibility to reach your goal.

Why do many people with power not take commensurate responsibility for it? There are various reasons; we will mention four, below. The main reason is lack of belief that "with great power comes great responsibility". If you can do something, you do not have the option do it when you feel like it, *when you are in the mood*. It means you are held responsible to do whatever you are able to do. R Chaim Shmulevitz expounded on this at length, especially regarding one's level of spirituality and consistency in learning Torah. Despite R' Akiva's lofty Torah learning, he was punished with an extremely painful death for not learning another level of Torah from R' Eliezer.

Now, let us take this a step further. Why aren't people aware of the fact that responsibility comes along with power? I believe that the answer is that they feel that if they do nothing wrong or bad in life, they are good. Flying under the radar. This can be the greatest mistake of your life. G-d holds it against you, if you are not striving to be the best YOU you can be. Yehuda, after all, did a good thing by selling his brother Yosef. Yet, he was punished for not doing more. Esther was held



responsible for doing her thing in the palace, and not staying complacent, quiet or comfortable. וַיֹּאמֶר מְרַדְכַּי לְהִשָּׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּדַמֵּי בְנִפְלֹט לְהִמְלֹט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְהוּדִים. כִּי אִם־הִתְרַשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי בָּעֵת הַזֹּאת, רַוּחַ וְהַצִּלָּה יֵעָמֹד לַיהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית־אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ. אִם־לָעֵת כְּזֹאת תִּגְעַתְּ לַמְּלָכוֹת. (Esther 4:13,14) All this teaches that if you are in the position to do something great, and you don't, you are held accountable. As the Yerushalmi teaches *Any generation in which the Temple was not built in its day, it is considered that it was destroyed in its day.* (Yoma Chapter1),

One of my favorite things is to meditate on all the things I could do in life. This gives me hope, power, and motivation. I realize that I could be on time for Shacharit; so, as a servant of G-d, אני עבדך, it is my responsibility to be there on time. Not just "If I want to, I could". I could sleep on Shabbat and still find X amount of time to learn. So, it is my responsibility to make sure that I am woken up with ample time to learn. This thought gave me motivation. Because all motivation is dependent on three questions, which are the three tools in the motivation tool box... Why? (Why is it important? And why is *that* reason important?) How? (How can this be achieved? How did others achieve this goal?) Can? (Can I reach this goal? Do I believe in myself?)

What stops us from taking responsibility for our "coulds", from reaching the clouds?

1. We do not tap into our inner power because F3 - Fear, Frustration and Failure- takes over and weakens us. As Rabbenu Bachye says, שהדאגה והיראה מחלישין כח האדם בדרך הטבע ומקריבים ימי מיתתו. Worry and fear naturally weaken the power of man, and bring closer his death (R Bachye Ki Tisa 30, Intro.)
2. We do not have a clear perception of what we really can or cannot do. We see what others are doing, or not doing, and learn from them. It has been said, *The No. 1 reason people fail in life is because they listen to their friends, family, and*

neighbors. (Napolean Hill) *Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.*(Mark Twain) Do you have a Rebbe? He is the only person you should be listening to. That was the power of the Maccabees: they listened to their Rebbe, their father Mattityahu, and they did not listen to or look at anyone else. And this was the reason Yehuda failed the test with selling Yosef, because he did not have his father, his Rav, to ask for advice.

3. The everlasting lie that obsessively controls our thinking, that we can live forever, that we are not time-bound, saps our potential. Our Rabbis teach, אל תאמר לכשאפנה אשנה שמא לא תפנה (Avot 2;4) Put off until tomorrow only what you are willing to die having left undone. (Pablo Picasso)
4. We doubt that we have the ability to do something that is, in fact, within our reach. Yirmiah did not believe in himself, saying that he was but a lad, and G-d told him not to say that again. וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹנָק אֵלַי אֶל־תֹּאמַר גֹּעַר אֲנִי כִּי עַל־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁלְחֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְאַתָּה כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה תִּדְבַר חַ אֶל־תִּירָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם: כִּי־אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי לְהַצִּילָה נְאֻם־יְקֹנָק. *And Hashem said to me, don't say "I am a lad", for wherever I send you, you will go, and whatever I command you, you will speak. Do not fear them, for I am with you, to save you, the word of G-d.* (Yirmiyah 1; 7,8)

The Chida asks, in Chomat Anach, if Yirmiyahu was a lad, a na'ar, why did G-d tell him not to say that? The answer is huge. G-d was telling Yirmiyahu, who was about to face the world alone, You are not just YOU! You are MY MESSENGER!

You are much more than you! You are the mission that G-d brought you down to the world to accomplish!! Each and every Jew is a Yisrael, with the power to fight angels. Or to fight our Yetzer Harah, which is also an angel. The two most empowering days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why, and when you do find out, and you take responsibility for it, you are unstoppable!

THE SECRET OF SELF-DISCIPLINE

Yosef, one of the most handsome men ever, was tested by Potifar's wife in a way that we cannot begin to fathom. The seduction was obsessive. This wicked woman threatened to kill Yosef, to defame him and otherwise cause him harm. It would have been so much easier for him just to sin and get it over with. Whoever learns the Midrashim cannot believe the trials that the Midrash says this woman put him through. What gave Yosef the strength to avoid being with this seductive, married woman?

R' Zacharia Wallerstien draws a beautiful concept from here, a concept that he teaches all teachers, the secret to being the successful mentor. "Never give up belief in your students that they can turn around and become successful! Once you stop believing in the student, you have lost him!" As a coach, I know that the only way a coach can be successful is if he internalizes the following mantra: "There is an invisible sign hanging on everyone's neck, that reads, 'Please! I beg of you! Believe in me!'"

When Yosef was at the threshold of sin, he "saw" the reflection of his father's face in the bedroom, and that gave him the power to run out. What did he "see" that gave him this superhuman strength? The passuk says וימאן, *And Yosef refused* the seduction. The Taamim, the Trup, the tune for that word, is Shalsholet. The Shalsholet looks like a chain, and it is linked to the previous word וימאן that is written in the Parasha earlier. When Yaakov was told by his sons that Yosef was dead, וימאן להתנחם, *he refused to accept consolation*. We know that it is inappropriate to mourn for a longer period than is allowed by Torah law. So, why did Yaakov refuse to be consoled as long as he lived? The answer is because he just could not believe the news; he could not accept that his son, in whom he had invested so much, in whom he had placed so

much hope, who was the source of his power to stand up against Esav, was really, really dead. He believed in Yosef, and he refused to give up on him. "Until I am shown his corpse, I will continue to believe that Yosef lives."

Yosef felt that! He felt that his father believed in him, long distance! He felt that his father did not give up on him, no matter where he would find himself! Egypt, the point of lowest morality on Earth, was not a place where Yosef would be weakened. Even in the face of almost irresistible temptation, Yosef knew that his father believed in him, and that he would remain the one and only, Yosef Hatzaddik! He is the only one with the title Tzaddik, for he is the only one who was able to remain righteous in a test like that, *where no one else believed in him!* No one else, except his own father! *If my father did not give up on me, how can I give up on myself?*

The greatest present you can give your son, the biggest favor you can do for your disciple is to honestly, sincerely, believe in him. Express it in whatever way you can. Believe that he can make it, believe that he can turn around! That is what your son needs from you, more than anything else you can give him! I know; I've coached orphans, and the only thing that gives them the strength to face life challenges on their own is knowing that their deceased father believes in them, long distance!

Until our last moment, G-d does not give up on us, either. עד יום מותו תחכה לו, G-d waits for a person to do Teshuva, until the last day, until the last breath, until there is a lifeless body! This is the greatest motivator for all of us to do Teshuva. For as long as G-d keeps us alive, that means He still believes that we can become who we need to become.

THE INNOCENCE OF CHEESE

There is a custom on Chanukah that women refrain from doing work while the candles of the Menorah are burning. This custom commemorates the

miraculous routing of Syrian Greek troops by Yehudit, daughter of Mattityahu (Maccabee), the Kohen Gadol. Yehudit's victory took place on her



wedding day in that terrible period when all Jewish brides were forced to be with the Greek general just before starting their marital life.

On that fateful day, Yehudit approached the general with a bag containing a flask of wine and a block of cheese. Once in seclusion with him, Yehudit opened her bag and offered the general a taste of enticing cheese. The general could not resist, and ate the salty cheese – which made him thirsty. Yehudit then made her next move: she offered the general the wine she had brought along so that he could quench his thirst. As she had hoped, the wine got the better of the general, who fell into a deep slumber. When the Greek soldiers were shown that their leader had been assassinated, they fled for their lives. This well-known episode is also the source of the custom to eat dairy products during the eight day holiday of Chanukah.

Although this custom and story are well known, the deeper meaning is not. *Why do we commemorate the cheese, but not the wine? If Yehudit's plan was to get the general to sleep, then the main ingredient of her plot was wine. The cheese was just a means to the end of getting the general to thirst for wine. Why, then, do we ignore the wine, and make a big deal about the cheese?*

The answer is inspiring. Every *general knows not to drink wine in wartime*. Cheese, however, is not necessarily on the radar screen of a general at war. If Yehudit would have brought only wine, then her plot would not have gotten off the ground. The only way to have gotten the general to drink wine was to first give him some cheese that would make him thirsty. The failure of the general was in thinking that he could eat cheese, but not get thirsty enough to need a flask of wine to quench his thirst. This is why we commemorate the cheese, but not the wine.

We are all 'generals' in a battle to be better, more G-d fearing, observant Jews. Often we are confronted with temptations that could cause us to make mistakes. The obvious sin is more easily avoided. No one is ordering 'bacon and eggs', but sometimes we could fall into a trap of something (metaphorically, 'the cheese'). We may say to ourselves, 'There is nothing really wrong with this' or 'Only this one time' or rationalize to ourselves 'I know my limits, I won't go too far'. These and other similar situations cross the minds of many 'generals' in the battle for Torah values.

It is not the "wine" that we have to fear. "Cheese" is much more of a threat because it is, we tell ourselves, "only cheese."

**IMPORTANT NOTICE!! THE EFFECTIVE LEARNING
COURSE WILL BE TAKING PLACE NEAR THE MIR 1:45 –
3:15 ON MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS STARTING
AFTER CHANUKAH! RESERVE YOUR PLACE NOW
BEFORE THERE ARE NO SPOTS LEFT!!**

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