Jewish Tribune – Vayechi

**Adaptability – A Blessing and a Curse**

The Gemoro in Sotah (13a) gives some backdrop to the unusual events that take place before Yaakov Ovinu’s levayo in this week’s parsha. Eisov attempts to disrupt proceedings. He claims that he is entitled to the final burial spot in Meoras HaMachpela. The brothers protest. Naftoli is dispatched back to Mitzrayim to bring proof. The burial is delayed. Chushim the son of Don asks why there is a hold up. On being told, he is so incensed at the disgrace to his grandfather Yaakov, he kills Eisov.

How come no one else was bothered by the affront to the honour due to Yaakov Ovinu? Why didn’t anyone else feel as strongly as Chushim?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt’l, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, suggests an answer. Chazal tell us that Chushim was deaf. He was therefore oblivious to the burial arguments and the disgrace to Yaakov hit him suddenly. Yaakov’s children however, adapted to the situation and were slowly drawn into the debate - while Yaakov’s body was waiting to be buried.

Such are the dangers of becoming used to a situation – the curse of adaptability.

A friend of mine once described the traumatic experiences of his first ever summer job. Barely out of high school, he secured a job for a few weeks at a law firm in the City. His main task was to go to court several times a week to deliver legal documents. These documents would conclude proceedings on behalf of a bank against homeowners who did not keep up with their mortgage payments. In effect, he was the legal arm throwing people out of their homes. On occasion, these destitute people showed up in court, sometimes bringing their young children, in a futile attempt to protest and try to stop themselves becoming homeless. I remember my friend telling me how traumatic it was for him.

And yet, after just a few weeks, I met him again and asked him how he was faring. To my surprise and sadness, he had quickly lost sensitivity to the plight of these poor people. Not only had he got use to this situation, but he even resented their appearing in court as it slowed down his ability to get on with his job.

On the other hand, adapting to situations can sometimes be positive and even a blessing. Many ask why Soroh was unable to deal with the news of Akeidas Yitzchok depite being on a greater level than Avrohom. Again, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz gives an answer. Chazal tell us that when Hashem instructed Avrohom to perform the Akeidah, He broke the news to him gently, slowly helping him to understand what was needed. Soroh on the other hand was told the news suddenly and the shock was too much for her to bear.

We are now a year on from the wonderful scenes of the Siyum HaShas in the Metlife Stadium and so many other locations across the Jewish world. The completion of the entire Talmud Bavli needs enormous commitment and fortitude. Learning the entire Shas is a mammoth and overwhelming task; yet, with a page a day, one can adapt to this wonderful practice and achieve greatness. It is not just Daf Yomi that requires a daily commitment. There is the new and excellent Oraysa programme and many others, all of which require using adaptability in a positive sense.

Like many things in life, adaptability can be a blessing and a curse. May we all merit to become accustomed and adapt to uplifting and noble practices.

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