

בְּשִׁיטְיָחָה

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MISTAKES WERE MADE

There are multiple themes that can be found in *Parshas Vayeishev*. Dreams play a large role, as do sibling squabbles.¹ However, at the core of *Parshas Vayeishev*, we find a common thread that binds the story together — mistakes.

Yosef was an exceptional *tzaddik*, one of the few individuals whose very name has the word *HaTzaddik* attached. Yet, as a young man, he was under the impression that his brothers were doing something incorrect.² Certainly his mistake was slight, one that any of us would make. Nevertheless, it was there, and started the story of his journey to Egypt.

As well, the brothers of Yosef were extraordinary *tzaddikim*, but they too were convinced of Yosef's evil ways, and were determined to put an end to his destructive path.³ And although their miscalculation was subtle, the effects were immense.

These were not the only ones whose missteps had severe repercussions. The wife of Potiphar was convinced that her marriage to Yosef was divinely sanctioned, and she would have the opportunity to build the house of Yaakov.⁴ Yet, she was terribly mistaken, and despite her good intentions, the Torah casts her as a persecuting villain.

People make mistakes all the time, but we find here multiple occasions where people were convinced that what they were doing was the correct course of action. Only later did they come to realize their terrible mistake.

The *Mesillas Yesharim*,⁵ quoting the *Gemara*,⁶ explains that our perspective in this world is like one who is trying to see in the dark. An inanimate object may appear to be a human, and a person may appear to be some sort of item. Similarly, we may perceive that we are on the correct path, we are doing what Hashem asks of us, and yet, we are actually doing the exact opposite.

If this is the way of the world, what is the antidote? The *Mesillas Yesharim* reveals this as well. The antidote is a *cheshbon hanefesh* — an accounting of one's actions. Setting aside time and truly considering one's path can spell the difference between the life you live, and the life you lead.

1 Yosef and his brothers, Peretz and Zerach, Er and Onan

2 *Gur Aryeh* on 37:2 s.v. כל רעה

3 *Seforno* on 37:18 s.v. ויתנכל

4 *Bereishis Rabbah* 85:2

5 Chap. 3

6 *Bava Metzia* 83b

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

The importance of *cheshbon hanefesh* cannot be understated, but how does one actually go about this accounting?

There are multiple stages to a *cheshbon hanefesh*.¹ First, one must determine what time period they will be considering. A single day is common, though one may want to expand or narrow that timeframe, depending on the goal.

Next, one should determine what the proper way to act during that time period would be. The focus is not, "What should I be doing," rather, "What would a person of my age, gender, and family life, who was doing everything right, do?" This can take time and deep thought.

After creating this list, one then should make an accounting of what they actually do during that time period. After creating these two lists, one can then compare the two, and find the areas that can use greater focus and improvement.

Cheshbon hanefesh is the first step to a beautiful life of *avodas Hashem*.

1 *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 3

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Included in the requirement to designate time for Torah study is the obligation to set time for contemplation and analysis of one's actions, during which one engages in Cheshbon HaNefesh. - Rabbeinu Moshe Chaim Luzzato zt"l, Mesillas Yesharim ch. 5

DELAYED BY DECADES

Yosef Dovid* slowly put down the phone, not sure of what just happened. It was so unexpected that he simply did not have time to react. But now that the conversation was over, he was able to reflect on what just occurred.

His mind wandered to twenty years prior, maybe even longer, when he first met Chaim Tzvi in *yeshiva*. The two of them hit it off pretty fast, but Yosef Dovid was more of a mentor than a friend, mostly owing to the age difference between the two.

As time progressed, though, something seemed to change. Chaim Tzvi appeared to be avoiding Yosef Dovid, and was curt and even surly in conversation.

Finally he sat down with Chaim Tzvi. "We need to talk, I just want to know what's going on."

Chaim Tzvi was quiet for a long time, when he suddenly blurted out, "I just can't take it anymore, you're controlling my life! Every aspect of it, you're always telling me what to do, and what not to do! Just leave me alone!"

Yosef Dovid was taken aback by the passion and the venom in Chaim Tzvi's voice. And he truly didn't know what Chaim Tzvi was talking about. True, he had given Chaim Tzvi some suggestions here and there, but, as far as he could remember, it was only when asked, and even then, the suggestions were very vague.

But Chaim Tzvi had his mind made up. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize..." Yosef Dovid mumbled, and stood up. Since that conversation, they exchanged very few words, perhaps a nod in the hallway when they were forced to pass each other.

The years passed, and they went their own ways. And then, the phone call. Yosef Dovid normally didn't answer numbers he didn't recognize, but he picked up for this one on a whim.

"Yosef Dovid?" The voice on the other end sounded strained, almost as if someone was crying.

"Yes?"

"Hi, it's Chaim Tzvi. I'm not sure you remember me..."

"Remember you! Of course!" Yosef Dovid exclaimed in surprise tinged with confusion. "What can I do for you?"

There was silence — or perhaps some muffled sobs? "I just called to say that I'm sorry. It's been so many years, but I was recently going through some of the events of my life, and I realized how terribly I hurt you. I have to explain; when we met, I was young, and I really looked up to you. You were a real role model, and I kept comparing myself to you. And, in my mind, I kept falling short. And that's what I took out on you. It really had nothing to do with what you did, it was simply what was in my head. And, well, I'm very sorry."

They spoke for just a couple of minutes more, and agreed to speak again in the future. And through *cheshbon hanefesh*, an apology reached back through twenty years' time, and healed a rift between friends.

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Although the idea of reckoning one's actions makes a lot sense, only those who have truly conquered their *Yetzer Harah* can appreciate the importance of this accounting.¹
- It is not only our biases that undermine and confuse us. The very nature of this complex world confounds and misleads us.²

1 *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 3

2 *Alei Shur*, Vol. II, pg. 537

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