

Parshas Vayeishev – A Few Kind Words Can Change The World – Edward Glyn (*reprint*)

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Taken from Rabbi Ozer Alport's (truly excellent) 'Parsha Potpourri' series

וירא אותם והנם זועפים וישאל את סריסי פרעה ... לאמר מדוע פניכם רעים היום (40:6-7)

Rav Shalom Schwadron points out that the entire miraculous unfolding of events in the upcoming Torah portions is entirely predicated on one chance encounter. The accurate interpretation by Yosef of the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker in prison set in motion a chain of events which altered the course of Jewish history. It led to Yosef's release from jail, his appointment as second-in-command in Egypt, the fulfillment of his dreams about his family bowing down to him, his emotional reunion with his brothers and eventually his father, and the descent of the Jewish people to Egypt where they were ultimately enslaved by Pharaoh and redeemed by Moshe.

However, the pivotal episode of Yosef interpreting their dreams wouldn't have even occurred were it not for one seemingly trivial exchange. Yosef woke up one morning and noticed that his fellow prisoners appeared aggrieved and upset. He chose to initiate a conversation which would literally change the future of all mankind, asking them quite simply, "What's wrong?"

The Alter of Slabodka once gave a discourse on the topic of greeting others kindly and showing an interest in their welfare. He noted that if a person stood next to the synagogue door and poured a glass of milk for each person who passed by, he would rightfully be declared a tremendous ba'al chesed (person who does kindness). However, the Gemora in Kesuvos (111b) teaches that showing another person the white of one's teeth with a warm smile is an even greater act of kindness than giving him milk.

So often, we pass somebody who looks like he could use a kind word, a warm smile, and a little extra attention, yet the evil inclination discourages us from stopping to waste our valuable time on such inconsequential matters. The next time this happens, which will likely be tomorrow, we should remember the lesson of Yosef that nothing that a person does is ever minor, and one has no idea what cosmic chain of events he could set in motion with just a few "trivial" words.

Quiz of the week... with a soupçon of humour...

Question:

Yosef dreamed that the sun, moon, and 11 stars, which represented his parents and 11 brothers, would bow down to him (37:9). Why didn't he see a 12th star, corresponding to his sister Dina?

Answer:

A jokester asked this question to Rav Chaim Kanievsky.

He answered by pointing out that in Parshas Mikeitz, Yosef marries a woman named Osnas (41:45). Who was Osnas, and why would Yosef agree to marry an Egyptian woman? The Daas Z'keinim writes that when Sh'chem defiled Dina, she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter. This daughter was sent away and through a tremendous miracle of Divine providence, she ended up in Egypt where she was known as Osnas and married none other than her uncle Yosef.

The jokester concluded that according to this explanation, Dina wasn't only Yosef's sister but also his mother-in-law, and nobody would imagine his shvigger (mother-in-law) bowing down to him even in his wildest dreams, an answer which brought a smile to Rav Chaim's face.