

Dvar Torah - Vayeishev

What is Murphy's Law and how should we respond to it?

Where can you find Murphy's Law in the Torah?

The answer is most definitely in Parshat Vayeishev. Murphy's Law states that if something can go wrong it will - and usually at the worst time. That's the story of Yosef in our Parasha.

He starts out as the favourite son of his father, but his brothers hate him for it. They gang up against him and then they sell him into slavery. He is taken down to Egypt and sold into the hands of Potiphar. And there, there is a false accusation made against him, and he is plunged into a dungeon in Egypt - forgotten about - languishing there without any future.

But then there is a twist at the end of the parasha. Suddenly things start to get better. The spell of Murphy's law is broken. Yosef correctly interprets dreams and he is elevated to become none other than second to Pharaoh in Egypt. How can we explain all this?

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein zt'l gave a beautiful insight on Parshat Vayeishev. He said it all depends on the dreams. This is a Parsha that is book-ended by dreams. Two and the beginning and two and the end. At the beginning of the Parsha, Yosef is dreaming about himself: his importance and that others will be prostrating themselves before him. At the end of the parasha however, the dreams are not about Yosef, they are about other people: Pharaoh's ministers, their futures and their welfare. Here, Yosef is not telling the world about himself, he is trying to help others understand themselves. According to Rabbi Bernstein, when your dreams are all about yourself, your ego and your importance - you will be on the way down. But when you see your role as helping others achieve their dreams, you will certainly be on the way up.

This is a lesson I have seen to be so true in terms of leadership. It is natural that every person has an ego. However when that ego gets in the way of one's responsibility to others, when one's entire existence is about promoting oneself - it won't work. You'll find yourself, like Yosef, on the way down. Rather, in positions of leadership, we need to see ourselves as existing for the sake of others. It is a gift from Hashem to help other people to help themselves.

So from Parashat Vayeishev we learn the important lesson that if you exist for the dreams of others, Murphy's law need not apply.

Shabbat Shalom