



The Joy of Torah - For Life

Parshas Mikeitz - Mercy to the Extreme!

Shmuz by Rabbi Yisrael Davidowitz

In this week's Parsha, the brothers come down to Mitzrayim in search of food. Yosef accuses them of being spies and he incarcerates them. The brothers realize they are being punished by Hashem and in Perek 42, Pasuk 21, the Torah tells us what the brothers concluded to be the only possible explanation as to why they were being treated so harshly. The pasuk says "we are guilty of seeing our brother's pain, and hearing his pleas and not listening to him, and that is why this trouble has befallen us."

The Sforno explains that the brothers were specifically referring to a cruelty that they had towards their brother as opposed to the sale itself and writes "even though they paskened he was a Rodef, nevertheless, they should have had rachmanus on him." The question is obvious, we know, and the Sforno himself makes very clear that the brothers paskined Yosef was chayiv misa, because he was a rodef, he even goes as far as to say that they were OK having a meal right afterwards and didn't view it as if they even had to be in the mourning. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh says it was a chesed they were doing protecting themselves and it's a mitzva to kill a Rodef before he kills you, so how exactly were the brothers supposed to act any differently than they did?

There are three possibilities, the first is that they weren't supposed to act any differently. Rather, just feel more compassion than they did while doing what they had to do. However, that's not mashma in the words of sforno, because he says, "even though they Paskined he was a Rodef, nevertheless, they should have had rachmanus on him", now just because he's a rodef, does not mean they shouldn't have rachmanus on him. Second possibility is that they made the wrong decision, but it was based on a very small lack of rachmanus or kinah like the Gemara in shabbos is mashma, however that does not seem to fit in to the words of this Sforno either, because then the real aveira was the sale, not the lack of rachmanus, that was just the cause, but the bigger issue, the one that impacted Yosef so profoundly was the sale, so that's what they should be saying they are responsible for, because ultimately it was the wrong psak.

The third and seemingly intended pshat in this episode, according to the Sforno, is that there was an epic conflict between the correct psak (in their minds at this point at least) and an absolute need to have rachmanus on their brother, who is literally pleading for his life. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh seems to say on this that when dealing with tzadikim, it's not appropriate for them to not have rachmanus in this predicament. It seems the Sforno is of a similar opinion, that when faced with a conflict between din and rachmanus, we must have rachamim under certain conditions, albeit, possibly very limited conditions, such as in our case of a Rodef, with one's own brothers, who are tzadikim. Nonetheless, this is a tremendous chidush, if our reading is correct, showing the sheer power and chiyuv of rachmanus that Hashem wants us all to have, and emulating Him as the Av Harachamim that can even overpower din at times.