

VAYEISHEV (GENESIS 37:1-40:23)

The Rabbi and the Baker

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

In this week's Torah Portion, we are introduced to the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers. These were righteous men. (See "Holy Gangsters".) Yet, on some level, there was a spirit of jealousy and competition that led to Joseph being sold as a slave.

Jealousy is what happens when person A. has what person B wants and thinks he should have.

Monsey, New York is town with a very large orthodox Jewish population. Religious book stores and Glatt kosher restaurants abound. Lots of businessmen vie for the trade of the religious consumer.

Two of the biggest challenges to weight loss in this town are "G's Bakery" and "Z's Bakery." (I could, and perhaps even should, identify them by their real names. However, I didn't ask their permission, so we'll leave them as "Z" and "B.") Both of these family-owned bakeries make delicious cakes, Danishes, doughnuts, etc.

A member of the G family makes regular deliveries to the retirement home where I work. He always comes with a smile and a kind word. I would never have the Chutzpah to tell him that I often buy Danishes from Z's Bakery. You don't talk to a businessman about his competitor. It's just not nice.

Last week there was a fire in a strip mall. Several of the businesses in the mall were incapacitated. Z's bakery was closed. The local Getty station was now carrying G's Danishes instead of Z's. (Yes! A Kosher Getty station! Only in Monsey! On Thursday nights they sell hot potato Kugel and Cholent! No kidding!)

However, Z's didn't stay closed for long. Within several days, they were back in business, and I got my Danishes back.

Then I saw an ad that shocked me. Z's Bakery was publicly thanking the local individuals and businesses who had helped them get moving so quickly. Do you know who was on the top of the list? You guessed it -- the G family!

I couldn't wait until Mr. G's next delivery. "What did you do for them?" I asked him.

He told me that they sent two trucks over to take things to their storage house. They also gave them access to ovens and told them to bake whatever they wanted.

I was dumfounded! I was amazed that someone would be so kind to a competitor.

Mr. G shrugged it off. “No one makes a penny unless G-d wants him to,” explained Mr. G in Yiddish-accented English. “All of business success is in G-d’s hands.

“If you always do business with that in mind,” he concluded, “you’ll never have problems with your blood pressure!”

He smiled, blessed me with wishes for success as he always does, and left.

That day we reversed roles. (Or should I say ROLLS?!) A rabbi is a teacher. I don’t know how good a baker I am. But that morning Mr. G became my rabbi!

I had a similar experience several years ago.

I used to attend Services at a local Yeshiva. This Yeshiva had the custom of auctioning off honors on *Simchas Torah*. It is considered very auspicious to receive certain honors on *Simchas Torah* – some claim it is a good “omen” for financial success in the coming year. Therefore, people support the Yeshiva in order to receive an “*Aliyah*,” a call to the Torah. I used to bid for “*Chasan Bereishis*” the opening section of Genesis on *Simchas Torah* morning. Some years I won, and some years I didn’t. (It costs money to make money!)

There was a new face in the Yeshiva. “Rabbi K” had begun attending Services at the Yeshiva. Rabbi K is a nice man. I like him. But he is also a competitor. I am a Mohel. So is he. We work the same crowd. Sometimes people call both of us. If I call back first, I get the Bris. If he calls back first, he gets the Bris.

Now, on *Simchas Torah* night, Rabbi K was bidding for *Aliyahs*. I was actually rooting for him to win. I figured that if he didn’t succeed in buying an *Aliyah* on *Simchas Torah* night, he would probably bid against me for *Chasan Bereishis* on *Simchas Torah* morning. I didn’t want any more competition than necessary.

Rabbi K won the auction. Apparently, he would receive an *Aliyah* on *Simchas Torah* evening. However, when it was time to call him to the Torah, they called up . . . ME!!

Rabbi K explained to me afterwards that he wanted to share the Mitzvah. He did his Mitzvah by supporting the Yeshiva. I did my Mitzvah by being called to the Torah. He gave me a hug and wished me a successful year.

The next morning, I bid for *Chasan Bereishis*. I won the auction. But I didn't get the Aliyah. It was my greatest privilege to call up my "competitor" and very dear friend, Rabbi K.

Yes, I guess in a sense we are competitors. He gets some Brisses that I want, and I get some Brisses that he wants. But I think Mr. G the baker said it best. "No one makes a penny unless G-d wants him to... If you always do business with that in mind, you'll never have problems with your blood pressure!"

Isn't it nice to know that no one can ever take away something that G-d wants you to have?

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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