

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 8 #9, December 11, 2020; Vayeishev; Hanukkah 5781

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.**

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**Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Joshua Cahan and Dr. Tamar Gordon on the Bar Mitzvah of their son Elisha Moshe Gordon-Cahan, brother of Yair Simcha Gordon-Cahan, grandson of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan, z"l, and Elizabeth Cahan, and Dr. Robert & Evvie Gordon. Following the Cahan family tradition, Elisha's Bar Mitzvah is on Shabbat Hanukkah.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

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For the next four weeks, until the end of Sefer Bereishis, the Torah focuses on Yosef, the only of our ancestors to be the primary subject of four parshot in the Sefer. Yosef's is also the only generation in the Sefer where no one in the generation has any direct communication from God. The absence of any direct communication is strange, because Yosef constantly speaks of God and, in particular, frequently responds to questions by stating that God will reveal His plans, interpret dreams, or otherwise let him know how to proceed. How is Yosef receiving messages from God when He never speaks to Yosef or any of his brothers?

God communicated with Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov, usually through dreams during which He identified himself as God, or the God of Avraham (and sometimes also of Yitzhak and Yaakov). Yosef also had dreams, but in none of them did God tell Yosef that He was communicating with him. How did Yosef know that God was sending him messages? Rabbi David Fohrman asks this question and provides an obvious answer. The dreams must have had special information that Yosef could readily understand but that others would not have enough knowledge to discern. I have discussed these points in previous messages, and Rabbi Fohrman's new Parsha series, plus his Devrei Torah at [alephbeta.org](http://alephbeta.org), explain the details very clearly. Devrei Torah from many other scholars also make this point implicitly. I do not have room here to summarize the hints.

We always start reading about Yosef shortly before or during Hanukkah. Since chazal had some flexibility of how to divide the Torah to select when various parts would come during the calendar, an obvious question is why we read about Yosef around Hanukkah.

Purim and Hanukkah share a number of aspects that relate to this question. In davening, we add "Al HaNisim" during the Modem in the Amediah and during Birchat HaMazon (thanks for food). The Modem is a prayer thanking God, and "Al HaNisim" means that we are thanking God for miracles. Purim (fourth Century BCE) and Hanukkah (second Century BCE) were the first two crises facing the Jews after the end of prophecy. While a few prophets were still alive at the time of Purim, prophets generally did not receive or pass along messages outside Israel, even when the very existence of the Jews faced a threat (as it did in Persia). In both Purim and Hanukkah, the question facing the Jews was whether God would save the Jews when God did not intervene directly and we did not have any prophets passing on His messages. This question is the same one that Yosef faced – would God help him even without Yosef receiving any direct communication from God? Yosef had to find a way to see God's hand in his life and understand hidden messages.

Purim and Hanukkah involved crises of faith. The miracles of victory (Hanukkah) and events saving the Jews (Purim) showed that God would, indeed, save the Jews. During Purim, Mordechai knew that God would save the Jews and that Esther's choice was either to intervene with the King and be God's chosen person to send God's plan into action – or

Esther could pass on the opportunity. If so, she would die and God would find some other person to bring God's salvation to our people. How did Mordechai know that God would save the Jews? Rabbi Fohrman said that Mordechai found the answer from Vayishlach, when Yaakov went to meet Esav again after leaving Lavan's home. (See Rabbi Fohrman's Parsha book, chapter on Vayishlach.) When did Yaakov start for home? After the birth of Yosef, when Yaakov felt that his time had come to return to Canaan. We read this story last Shabbat, a few days before the beginning of Hanukkah.

The connections between Yosef and Hanukkah remind me of my days in graduate school, fresh from college philosophy class, where we learned that there is no way to prove or disprove the existence of God. I remember asking Rabbi Cahan how one learned to believe in God. He taught me to look at the world, at the way everything hangs together in a way that could only arise through a master plan. How could such a world have come to be without an incredible mind putting it together? (Rabbi Fohrman's investigation of the precise conditions required for each stage of a Big Bang theory to lead to creation rather than chaos or things falling apart show how science has reinforced this lesson in recent decades.) We must learn to see God in the physical and mathematical beauty and perfection of a sunset, mathematics, music, and so many other treasures in our world. What I am presenting is a pale version of a beautiful lesson that my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, gave me nearly fifty years ago. This lesson enabled me to rise from a very secular upbringing and learn to see God's hand in our world.

This Shabbat we celebrate the Bar Mitzvah of Elisha Moshe Gordon-Cahan, son of Rabbi Joshua Cahan and Dr. Tamar Gordon, grandson of Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, and Elizabeth Cahan, great grandson of Ellis (Elisha) Peilin and Morris Cahan, both of whom Hannah and I knew and remember well. The Cahan family tradition has become to have Bar and Bat Mitzvot on Shabbat Hanukkah, not only so they can all recite my Bar Mitzvah Haftorah, (from Behaalotecha, the same Haftorah). How my beloved Rebbe would have kvelled joining with Elizabeth to enjoy Elisha's Bar Mitzvah!

Shabbat Shalom and Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah & Alan

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

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Hannah & Alan

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**Drasha: Vayeishev: Rest Stop**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1996

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Yaakov's struggles were over — or at least he thought so. He had met the challenge of living 22 years with a conniving uncle; he had held back the malicious advances made by Esav and had appeased him properly. His daughter was rescued from the clutches of an evil prince, and though his children had attacked and decimated the city of Shechem, the neighboring countries did not seek revenge. This week the portion begins "Vayeshev Yaakov," and Yaakov settled. The Midrash tells us that Yaakov wanted to rest. The Midrash continues that the Almighty did not approve of Yaakov's retirement plans. Hashem asked, "are the righteous not satisfied with the World to Come? They would want to rest in this world too?" Immediately, says the Midrash, the incident with Yoseph occurred. Yoseph is kidnapped by his brothers and sold as a slave, thus throwing Yaakov's tumultuous existence into another 22 years of agony.

What exactly is the objection toward Yaakov's desire to rest? Why couldn't the father of the 12 tribes spend the final third of his life in tranquility?

**On the fast day of the Tenth of Teves, during the height of World War II, Rabbi Ahron Kotler took the well known activist Irving Bunim on a train trip to Washington. The war in Europe was raging, Jews were being exterminated, and the two had to see a high-ranking Washington official to plead with him in every possible way — "save our brothers." On the way down to Washington Rabbi Kotler tried to persuade Bunim to break his fast. "Bunim," he explained. "You cannot fast now. You need your strength for the meeting."**

**But Irving Bunim refused to eat. He was sure that he could hold out until the evening when the fast ended.**

**The meeting was intense. Rabbi Kotler cried, cajoled, and begged the official to respond. Finally, the great rabbi felt that he impressed upon the man the severity of the situation. The man gave his commitment that he would talk to the President. When they left the meeting Bunim was exhausted. He mentioned to Rabbi Kotler that he thought the meeting went well and now he'd like to eat.**

**Rav Ahron was quick to reply. "With Hashem's help it will be good. And Bunim," he added, "now you can fast!"**

Yaakov wanted to rest. However, Hashem had a different view. There is no real rest in this world. As much as one has accomplished, there is always another battle — another test. The moment one declares victory, another battle looms.

This week we celebrate Chanukah. The words Chanukah mean "they rested on the 25th (of Kislev)." It was not a total rest. Just one rest from one battle. The Hasmonians had to rededicate the desecrated Temple, re-light the Menorah, and re-establish the supremacy of Torah over a Hellenist culture that had corrupted Jewish life. They rested from physical battle, but they knew that there would be a constant battle over spirituality for ages to come. They established the Menorah-lighting ceremony with flames that have glowed until today proclaiming with each flicker that the battle may be over but the war is endless — until the final rest.

Good Shabbos and Ah Frailechen Chanukah!

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**Vayeishev: The Angels in Our Lives**  
by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2020

Who have been the angels in our lives?

At a critical moment in the story of Joseph and his brothers, there is a turning point that goes by so fast, that if you blink you'll miss it. Joseph travels to Shechem to visit his brothers, yet he searches for them in vain. At that moment, a man sees that Joseph "וְהָיָה תָּעָה בְּשָׂדָה – he was wandering in the fields." (Genesis 37:15), lost and not knowing where to go next. Upon hearing that Joseph is looking for his brothers the man responds casually "Oh, I heard them saying that they were going to Dotan." Seizing on this piece of information, Joseph goes to Dotan, upon which his brothers see him

coming and throw him in the pit which precipitates the entire story of Joseph being taken down to Egypt, becoming a viceroy, testing and deceiving his brothers, and bringing down his father's family and settling them in Egypt.

What would have been had that man never encountered Joseph? This entire story – the second half of the book of Breishit – never would have happened! Were it not for this man, the course of Jewish history would have been radically different. Had Joseph never been sold down to Egypt, it is true that we would have been spared the hundreds of years of oppressive slavery, but we also would never have been redeemed through God's miracles, nor brought to stand at the foot of Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. The entire story of the Jewish People is thanks to that one offhand comment by this anonymous man.

I have often asked myself, who are those people in my life? Who are the people that give us that critical gesturing in the right direction just when we are toeh basedeh – wandering without knowing where to go next, without even knowing exactly what we are looking for? Who has come along for us, just when we needed them, and made a passing comment that changed the course of our lives? Something small, something like: "Oh, maybe you should speak to that professor," or "Have you thought about a career in dentistry – I think you would be very good at it?" or "I think you should see this doctor, he's done wonders for me." A slight nudge in the right direction, and our lives were changed as a result.

Our rabbis tell us that the person who Joseph met was not a man, but an angel. And what is an angel if not that person who brings true blessing to our lives, that person whom we experience as sent by God to rescue us exactly at the time that we need her the most?

For me, personally, there was one person in particular who was that passing stranger, that angel. My wife and I have two boys on the Autism spectrum, one with social-emotional issues. When the boys were young, it took a lot of effort to raise them, and we were often at wit's end. Particularly painful for us and for them was our inability to find a Jewish community for them in which they fit. The Jewish schools weren't working for them and we had to send them to a secular special-ed school. The camps weren't working for them. The shuls weren't working for them. While we provided them with a Jewish education, they had no sense of Jewish belonging. Their community was the special needs one, not the Jewish one.

And then, when we were wandering, lost in the field, came along Shayna, a past student of my wife's, who said to us "Oh you should look into Camp Yofi – it's a part of Ramah Dorom in southern Georgia. It's a weeklong family camp for kids like yours and their parents." And, of course, we said "No, no, it won't work for our kids." But Shayna gave us another little nudge, "No, really. You should take a look; I think it could really be right for you."

So, we took a look. And the program was perfect for us and for our boys. That week at Camp Yofi was a Godsend, and we came back year after year. Our sons felt seen, understood and supported, and we did as well. We had finally found the perfect combination, something we had not imagined possible: a community that was both a Jewish one and a special needs one, a place to belong, a place to call home. Over the next decade, we kept coming back, summer after summer, and then progressed to other similar programs at the other Camp Ramahs. Our boys grew in their Yiddishkeit and in their independence and self-confidence, and became the exemplary young men who they are today, fifteen years later. All of this, because of this one woman's casual suggestion.

There is something about the casualness, the light-handed nature, of these suggestions that is part of their power. It leaves us space to seize on the idea, to embrace it and make it our own. We are not being told by someone what to do; we are just following up on a suggestion that they made.

There have also been a few times when, as I only discovered later, that I had been able to be that man in the fields for someone else.

Around 20 years ago, a parent told me that his daughter was struggling with Orthodoxy and the modern world, and asked if my wife and I would talk with her. We sat down and talked for about an hour. I have to admit that I don't even remember what we said. And then, ten years later, this young woman's father called me to say how that conversation entirely changed the course of his daughter's life. It empowered her to move forward and to pursue the path that was right for her. That short talk had made all the difference.

So I ask us to take a moment to reflect on who the angels have been in our lives. Just think for a few minutes and you will know who they are. Maybe give them a call before Shabbat and say "Thank you for that suggestion you made ten years ago. I can't begin to express my gratitude. It has made all the difference in my life's trajectory." Chances are that they

won't even remember what you are talking about, or consider it to not have been a big deal. For them it was just a passing comment, but for us it was everything.

Let us call them and thank them. If not for them, then for ourselves, so that we can express our gratitude for them, so that we can know who have been the angels in our lives.

Shabbat Shalom!

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### **Vayeishev/Chanuka: Esav's Match** by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2020 Teach 613

The Parsha begins, "These are the descendants of Yakov: Yosef." Rashi wonders: Why is the statement of the descendants of Yakov limited to Yosef? Yakov had many children!

Rashi explains that the statement "descendants of Yakov" is being made in a specific context in which Yosef is the focus. The context is that in the end of last week's Parsha the many Chiefs of Esav's descendants are listed. Yakov, says Rashi, was afraid. "Who can stand up to the multitudes of Esav?" Yakov wondered. Hashem responded, "Your son Yosef is their match."

Rashi explains the contrasting relationship of Esav and Yosef by likening Esav to a person who is loaded up with much straw, to the point that those who see him think he is big and strong. But the wise man realizes that Yosef is like a flame. Yosef can set fire to Esav's straw and destroy it. Similarly, Esav's many Chiefs look like an insurmountable foe, but Yosef is their match.

We wonder: Why exactly is Yosef the match to Esav?

When we consider the life of Esav and his many claims justifying his evil, we find that Yosef was in similar situations and chose righteousness and greatness. Esav claimed that Yakov deceived him in purchasing the "firstborn." Esav claimed that Yakov was wrong in obtaining the blessings which were meant for the son of Yitzchak who would accept perpetuating the family's righteous legacy. Esav justified his anger by claiming he was wronged and distanced himself from righteousness and the Jewish family. Yosef was in a similar situation; but chose the exact opposite.

Yosef was indeed distanced and wronged by his brothers. He was-- against his will-- physically detached from the Jewish family. But Yosef chose a different path than Esav. Instead of allowing anger to set in, he looked to see Hashem's plan. Eventually Yosef discovered it, and declared, "Hashem planned it all for the good," and he bore no grudges.

Whereas Esav chose to distance himself from the Jewish family, Yosef-- even as he was distanced from the Jewish family against his will-- chose to remain connected. "The image of his father, Yakov, appeared to him," and he rejected the advances of Potiphar's wife. In the very areas that Esav failed even in situations of opportunity, Yosef succeeded even in the face of intense adversity. Of all the children of Yakov, it is Yosef who is truly the match for Esav.

In our times, we are experiencing COVID, which tests our fortitude intensely. Despite the benevolence of food distributions, stimulus checks, and the ability to remain in the safety of your home, it is a time fraught with emotional strain. Without Shul's operating normally, there is a distancing which is occurring which we need to address and purposely work on. It is a time to reach out. It is a time to be inclusive.

About two weeks ago a couple approached me for guidance in the area of Shalom Bayis. As they described it, the wife would often lash out, and when she did, the husband would take it personally and would respond in kind. Their relationship was strained, and the entire family was suffering.

We spent a few minutes exploring why she was lashing out. Suddenly the husband interrupted and said, "I get it! When my wife lashes out, it is actually her way of saying that she is hurting and needs my support. The correct response is not to feel distanced, but rather to be understanding and support her."

"Indeed!" I responded. But inside of me I was overwhelmed with happiness by his self-revelation. I thought to myself, "Mazal Tov! If you can realize that and act upon it, you are on to something very special."

Chanuka is a time when we look beyond the straw and fluff that comprise many of the distractions of life. Instead, we look to kindle the flames of eternal value, flames of Torah, of relationships, and of feeling connected. Perhaps we need to be a bit more patient and understanding with ourselves and with others under these circumstances. Perhaps we can look for the good in Hashem's plan, and maintain a positive outlook. As the situation we are in may cause us to feel disconnected, we must strive, as Yosef did to use an attitude that will kindle flames of connection. As we do, we will see the light of positivity take hold. May it blaze a path of goodness and blessing to carry us forward in these complicated times.

\* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

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## **The "Paper Towel Syndrome": Thoughts for Parashat Vayeshev**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel\*

Joseph was talented, capable and God-fearing. He did so much for so many. Yet, he almost always seemed to be forgotten.

This week's Parasha reports that the imprisoned Joseph correctly interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's butler, indicating that he would be restored to his former position. In return for this, Joseph asked the butler to remember him to Pharaoh who could release him from prison where he had been unjustly placed. But the Torah states that the butler "did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him." This repetitious phrase indicates not merely normal forgetfulness, but a conscious effort to eradicate Joseph's good deed from his mind.

Later in the Torah, we learn that Joseph saved the Egyptians from famine due to his correct interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and his practical planning to store food during the seven years of abundance. But no sooner had Joseph died, when a new Pharaoh arose "who did not know Joseph." Of course, he had to have known about Joseph's remarkable achievements on behalf of Egypt. Yet, the Pharaoh preferred to "forget," to make as though he did not know of Joseph.

Before his death, Joseph asks the Israelites to remember him when they ultimately return to their own land. He asked that they be sure to take his remains with them for reburial in Canaan. Yet, when the time of redemption is at hand, the Israelites are busy collecting gold and silver from the Egyptians; Joseph's bones are not on their minds. Only Moses remembers Joseph. Moses sees to it that Joseph's remains are brought out of Egypt during the Exodus. Joseph suffered from what I have called "the paper towel syndrome."

Paper towels are used and then tossed away without an afterthought. They are expendable. Once people have gotten what they need, they unceremoniously discard the used paper. The paper towel syndrome manifests itself when people exploit others, squeeze out whatever benefit they can derive, and then discard these people and forget them fairly quickly. In a healthy society, people are valued as human beings; they are respected and appreciated. In an unhealthy society, people are treated like paper towels—exploited, tossed away, and forgotten. The Joseph narratives in the Torah remind us that the paper towel syndrome affects even the greatest of human beings. Only Moses maintained the loyalty and decency to care for Joseph. Everyone else—Egyptians and Israelites alike—took advantage of Joseph's wisdom and beneficence....but then tossed him away once he no longer seemed to be of use to them.

When the value of human life is measured purely by one's utility, then people cease to be full human beings. Rather, they become things—tools of production. The ones who suffer from the paper towel syndrome are not just the "paper towels" but the exploiters as well. Since they treat others like paper towels, the day will surely come when they themselves will fall victim to their own philosophy of life. They will become paper towels.

In his essay, "The Community," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik underscored that halakha demands high respect for the dignity of others. "To recognize a person is not just to identify him physically. It is more than that: it is an act of identifying him existentially...To recognize a person means to affirm that he is irreplaceable. To hurt a person means to tell him that he is expendable, that there is no need for him." In other words, to recognize a person means to affirm that he/she has human value, that he/she is appreciated, that he/she matters to us. To hurt a person means to treat him/her as a "paper towel," expendable, to be used and discarded.

Certainly, we do not act kindly because we want or expect a show of gratitude. We do what is good and what is right because it is good and because it is right. Yet, how much nicer our world would be if we and others avoided the “paper towel syndrome,” if we all could develop that sensitivity and graciousness to recognize the human dignity of others. Just as others should not treat us as “paper towels,” so we need to be very careful not to treat others as such. If ingratitude and callousness are signs of morally deficient human beings, gratitude and sensitivity are hallmarks of humanity at its best..

\* Jewishideas.org. <https://www.jewishideas.org/paper-towel-syndromethoughts-parashat-vayeshev> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

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## **A Menorah of Spears?**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel\*

With their military victory over the Hellenistic Syrians, the Maccabees entered the Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to the worship of God. According to Jewish tradition, they found one jar of pure oil with enough to last for one day. They lit the Menorah and the oil miraculously burnt for eight days, enough time to produce a new batch of pure oil.

When we tell this story year after year, we tend to imagine that the Maccabees found the beautiful gold Menorah of the Temple in its place, and they simply added the pure oil to it.

Yet, this would be truly remarkable. The Syrians had control of the Temple for a long stretch of time and they surely would have plundered all the valuable items within it. It would have been very unlikely for them to have left an impressive gold candelabrum in its place.

A midrash suggests that when the Maccabees entered the Temple, they indeed did not find the Menorah there. It had already been stolen by the enemies of the Jews. So the Maccabees improvised by putting together a make-shift Menorah made of swords. The midrash surmises that the swords had been left behind by the Syrian soldiers who fled in haste during their defeat.

So the Menorah of the original Hanukkah was made of the swords of our enemies!

This midrash is teaching a profound lesson. The very weapons with which our enemies sought to destroy us—those very weapons were used to spread the light of Judaism! The Maccabees were demonstrating that their victory was not merely successful in a military sense. Rather, it was also—and pre-eminently—a spiritual victory. The enemy’s spears were transformed into branches of the Menorah, bringing light into the Temple, restoring worship of the One true God.

The Haftarah that we read on Shabbat Hanukkah includes the famous words of the prophet Zechariah: “Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit said the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

Not by spears, not by guns, not by missiles, not by terrorism, not by political intimidation: these weapons of our enemies will not prevail. We will transform their weapons into sources of light and peace. We will create a Menorah of righteousness that will inspire the world to a loftier and more spiritual vision.

To quote from the Passover Haggadah, “in each generation they arise to destroy us and the Almighty saves us from their hands.” The Jews seem always to have been the conscience of the nations—and many people do not like a conscience, especially a guilty conscience. They attack us because they are afraid of what we symbolize: a nation dedicated to One God, to an elevated morality, to social justice.

But the ongoing flourishing of Jews and Judaism is our unflinching testimony that the spirit of God will ultimately prevail among humanity. The spears of enmity and warfare will one day be transformed into branches of a Menorah, bringing light and hope to all human beings. May it be soon and in our days!..

\* Jewishideas.org. <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/menorah-spears>

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## **Parshas Vayishlach – A Torah Identity**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

[Note: Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah for Vayeishev/Hanukkah is late. I hope to have it in time to upload at PotomacTorah.org later today.]

We are known as “the people of the book” and for good reason. Torah learning takes great primacy in Jewish life and is a theme that runs through everything we do. Our morning prayers include several blessings thanking G-d for the gift of Torah and prayers for success in our studies. We are enjoined to begin each day with Torah study after our morning prayers, and to set aside time by day and by night for Torah study.

The primacy of Torah is subtly woven into the essence of the upcoming Holiday of Chanukah. The miracle of the oil, showing how Hashem had accepted our repentance and been with us in the war, occurred with the Menorah, the lamp. The lamp was the Temple vessel in whose merit we earned depths of clarity and understanding of Torah. The Syrian Greeks decreed against several mitzvos, and despite that our ancestors took great risks and efforts to observe those commandments. Yet, we have only one custom to commemorate those efforts – the custom of the dreidel, commemorating the efforts of the children to study Torah.

Torah study, wisdom and understanding is at the core of our identity and the foundation for everything else. There are many elements and aspects which make Torah so fundamental. Perhaps, we can see one aspect from a Ramba”n in this week's parsha.

The Torah details for us Yaakov's encounter with Eisav upon returning to Israel. As they are parting ways, Eisav makes several offers to escort and assist Yaakov in his travels and Yaakov rejects them all. The Ramba”n )Bereishis 32:15( notes, based on a Medrash, that this segment is the parsha of exile, and is the source in the Torah for how to approach Eisav when we are in our current exile. The Medash relates that Rabi Yanai would study this parsha whenever he had to travel to the Roman government. One time he did not study beforehand, and he erred in his dealings with the Romans, not following the lessons hidden in this Parsha. Before he reached the border of Israel, they had already swindled him.

This story clearly highlights the value of constant Torah study, yet it is quite puzzling. Rabi Yanai had apparently studied this Parsha many times before on prior trips to Rome. Certainly, he had a great level of clarity on these lessons, as he had mastered all areas of Torah. Certainly, he reviewed these lessons as he reviewed all of his Torah study. Why was it so critical that he review immediately before each trip?

The gift of Torah is far, far more than a history of our people and a set of laws. Torah is the gift of the guidebook to understanding how to function within the world G-d has created for us. It is the handbook for the world and for life itself. Hidden within the stories and laws are the philosophies, meaning and lessons to grow and achieve, to accomplish and succeed and live life to its fullest. As complex as real life is, that is how subtle and complex the Torah's guidance must be and indeed is. In truth, the complexity and depth of Torah is so profound that the Gemara tells us )Chagigah 3a( that in any proper session of Torah study there will always be a new level of clarity and knowledge that did not exist before. There are so many lessons and so many nuances, that it is impossible even to review one's own learning without realizing some new level of clarity.

Rabi Yanai's daily life it seems did not include involvement with Romans. As such, the clarity of these nuances could fade from his mind. In order to prepare properly and be fully aware, it was necessary and appropriate to review and study this parsha in depth before every trip.

The depth and beauty of Torah is endless, and it covers all areas of life. It is only through regular study and review that we can reap the benefits of this priceless gift. With every study, we can find new clarity. By living a Torah life and through



constant review we maintain that clarity. It is this clarity which is at the core of our identity; the study of Torah, the study of G-d's world, and the study of living our lives to their fullest.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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## **Dvar Torah for Vayeishev and Channukah: What Will You Be Thinking About?**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

The first lighting of Channukah is a mere hour away.

As you light, what thoughts and feelings will come to the forefront of your mind?

Perhaps nothing. You might just enjoy the experience of lighting and seeing your Menorah aglow. Perhaps some beautiful memories of past Channukahs will cause you to smile as you ignite the flickering flame.

Or maybe you'll think about the symbolism of the light. How it represents the Light of the Mashiach, the Primordial Light that Adam and Chavah enjoyed for 36 hours (like the 36 total candles we light on Channukah), and the inner spark of the Jew that always is aflame no matter the circumstance.

All of these are wonderful and are sure to brighten your Channukah tonight and/or the succeeding seven.

But if I may, I'll present to you another intention for you to use that may just pep up your Channukah experience even more if you choose to read forward.

### **A Gratitude-Based Channukah Intention That Rests on a Foundation of Fun Facts**

Did you know light has been getting cheaper and more available throughout history?

Based on average wages at the time, to purchase an hour of light (in a sesame oil lamp) in 1750 B.C. Babylon, you would have to work 50 hours.

With the 1800's tallow candle, you would have to work six hours for an hour of light.

A kerosene lamp in 1880 would cost you 15 minutes.

A 1950 incandescent light bulb would light up an hour of your life for 8 seconds of work.

With today's fluorescent light bulbs, the cost has gone down to half a second of work.

That's a 43,200 fold improvement. ("The Rational Optimist" by Matt Ridley p. 20-22)

That means instead of having to work for light, we can spend money, and more importantly time, on other things like our families, Torah study, new ideas to bring benefit to the world etc. We have more time to enjoy the light inside us because we don't have to always worry about the light we use to see people, cook, or read with.

The halacha with Channukah lights is that we can't use their light for our own purposes like reading a book. The advent of this incredible gift of cheap light has made this law rare in practical applicability (except of course in a case of a blackout God forbid).

How wonderful is the ease with which we can shower photons upon ourselves! As we light the candles we can all fill ourselves with gratitude to God that we only need to use oil/candles to fulfill the precious mitzvah of Channukah and connect with our inner light. But there's thankfully no usual need for oil or wax for our outer lights which would require much more time at the office.

May all of our inner and outer lights shine brightly this Channukah and beyond!

Happy Channukah and Shabbat Shalom!

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

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## **Rav Kook Torah** **Vayeishev: The Special Teshuvah of Reuben**

Where was Reuben coming from? Why wasn't he together with the other brothers?

According to the Midrash, Reuben was "occupied with sackcloth and fasting," as he repented for changing his father's sleeping arrangements. (The word vayashov ("he returned") can also mean "he repented.")

The Midrash continues:

*"The Holy One said: No one has ever sinned before Me and repented, but you [Reuben] are the first to repent. As you live, one of your descendants will stand up and be the first to urge repentance. And who was this descendant? Hosea, who called out, 'Return, Israel, to the Eternal your God' (Hosea 14:2)."*

This Midrash is quite difficult. There were a number of individuals who repented before Reuben's time, such as Adam and Cain. Also, why does the Midrash state that Hosea was the first to exhort the people to repent? We find that the mitzvah of teshuvah is already mentioned in the Torah (Deut. 30).

It must be that Hosea informed the people regarding some aspect of teshuvah that had not been taught before.

### **Internal and External Consequences**

The impact of sin is in two areas. Sin darkens the soul's inner holiness. But it also has a negative impact on the world at large. "When the people of Israel do not fulfill God's Will, it is as if they are weakening the great strength of Heaven" (Eichah Rabbah 1:33).

With teshuvah we repair the soul and restore its original purity. But the damage caused in the world at large — this is only repaired through God's kindness. "I, yes, I am the One Who erases your transgressions for My sake" (Isaiah 43:25). The corrective power of teshuvah is a joint effort — partly by us, partly by God.

Nonetheless, it is possible for an individual to also repair the external damage. When one's goal is to elevate all of society, and one's teshuvah is focused on preventing one's own mistakes from harming and misleading others — such an individual increases light and holiness in all of creation.

### **Reuben's Teshuvah**

Reuben attended to both of these aspects in his teshuvah. First he occupied himself in fasting and sackcloth, repairing the damage to his own soul. But his teshuvah did not end there. He then "returned to the pit." An open pit in the public domain — bor b'reshut harabim — is a metaphor for a situation likely to lead to public trouble and suffering.

After repairing his soul, Reuben returned and looked at the pit. He examined the damage that he had caused outside himself, in the public domain. He then worked to rectify his actions so that they would not be a stumbling block for others.<sup>1</sup>

That is why the Midrash states that Reuben was the first to "sin before Me and repent." He was the first to repair not only his soul, but also that which is "before Me," i.e., everything that God created. In the words of the Midrash, what made Reuben's teshuvah unique was that he "started with teshuvah." Reuben aspired to correct the external damage ordinarily repaired by God's kindness.

### **Israel Alone**

Now we may understand the special level of teshuvah mentioned by the prophet Hosea. In the Torah it says, “You will return to God... and the Eternal your God will accept your repentance” (Deut. 30:2-3). This is the common level of teshuvah. We work to repair the damage in our soul, while God corrects the damage we caused in the world.

Hosea, however, spoke of a higher form of teshuvah. He described a teshuvah like that of Reuben — an attempt to repair all the repercussions of one’s errors. Therefore he called out, “Return, Israel, to the Eternal your God.” Hosea encouraged a complete teshuvah, performed by Israel alone.

(Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 191-194.)

1 On a simple level, we may explain that Reuben sinned by upsetting the order in his family when he intruded on his father’s private life. He sought to correct this mistake by restoring harmony to the family, through his efforts to protect his brother Joseph.

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### **What is the Theme of the Stories of Genesis? (Vayeshev 5777)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

One of the most fundamental questions about the Torah turns out to be one of the hardest to answer. What, from the call of God to Abraham in Genesis 12 to the death of Joseph in Genesis 50, is the basic religious principle being taught? What does the entire set of stories about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives, together with Jacob’s sons and daughter, actually tell us? Abraham brought monotheism to a world that had forgotten it, but where do we see this in the actual text of the Torah itself?

Here is the problem. The first eleven chapters of Genesis teach us many fundamentals of faith: that God brought the universe into being and declared it good; that God made the human person in His image; that God gave us freedom and thus the ability to do not only good but also bad; that the good is rewarded, the bad punished and that we are morally responsible for our actions. Chapters 8 and 9 also tell us that God made a covenant with Noah and through him with all humanity.

It is equally easy to say what the rest of the Torah, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, teach us: that God rescued the Israelites from slavery, setting them on the road to freedom and the Promised Land; that God made a covenant with the people as a whole on Mount Sinai, with its 613 commands and its purpose, to establish Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In short, Genesis 1-11 is about creation. Exodus to Deuteronomy is about revelation and redemption. But what are Genesis 12-50 about?

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all recognise God. But so do non-Jews like Malkizedek, Abraham’s contemporary, described as “priest of God most high” (14:18). So even does the Pharaoh of Joseph’s day, who says about him, ‘Can there be another person who has God’s spirit in him as this man does?’ (41:38). God speaks to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but He does likewise to Avimelech king of Gerar (Gen. 20:3-7), and to Laban (31:24). So what is special about the patriarchs?

They seem to teach no new principle of faith. Other than childbirth and rescue from danger, God performs no world-transforming miracles through them. They deliver no prophecies to the people of their generation. Other than an ambiguous hint when the Torah says that Abraham took with him on his journey “the souls they had gathered” (12:5), which may refer to converts they had made, but may equally merely refer to their servants, they attracted no disciples. There is nothing explicit in the text that says they sought to persuade people of the truth of monotheism or that they did battle against idolatry. At most there is a story about how Rachel stole her father’s teraphim (31:19) which may or may not have been idols.

To be sure, a persistent theme of the patriarchal stories is the two promises God made to each of them, [1] that they would have many descendants and [2] they would inherit the land of Canaan. But God also makes promises to Ishmael and Esau, and the Torah seems to go out of its way to tell us that these promises were fulfilled for them before they were fulfilled for the children of the covenant (see Gen. 25:12-18 for the account of Ishmael’s children, and Gen. 36 for those of Esau). About Esau’s children, for example, it says, “These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites” (36:31).

So the question is real and puzzling. What was different about the patriarchs? What new did they bring to the world? What difference did monotheism make in their day?

There is an answer but it is an unexpected one. One theme appears no less than six (possibly even seven) times. Whenever a member of the covenantal family leaves his or her own space and enters the wider world of their contemporaries, they encounter a world of sexual free-for-all.

Three times, Abraham (Gen. 12 and 20) and Isaac (Gen. 26) are forced to leave home because of famine. Twice they go to Gerar. Once Abraham goes to Egypt. On all three occasions the husband fears he will be killed so that the local ruler can take his wife into his harem. All three times they put forward the story that their wife is actually their sister. At worst this is a lie, at best a half-truth. In all three cases the local ruler (Pharaoh, Avimelekh), protests at their behaviour when the truth becomes known. Clearly the fear of death was real or the patriarchs would not have been party to deception.

In the fourth case, Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19), the people cluster round Lot's house demanding that he bring out his two visitors so that they can be raped. Lot offers them his virgin daughters instead. Only swift action by the visitors – angels – who smite the people with blindness, saves Lot and his family from violence.

In the fifth case (Gen. 34), Shechem, a local prince, rapes and abducts Dina when she "went out to visit some of the local girls." He holds her hostage, causing Shimon and Levi to practise deception and bloodshed in the course of rescuing her.

Then comes a marginal case (Gen. 38), the story of Judah and Tamar, more complex than the others and not part of the overall pattern. Finally there is the sixth episode, in this week's parsha, when Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph. Failing, she accuses him of rape and has him imprisoned.

In other words, there is a continuing theme in Genesis 12-50, a contrast between the people of the Abrahamic covenant and their neighbours, but it is not about idolatry, but rather about adultery, promiscuity, sexual license, seduction, rape and sexually motivated violence.

The patriarchal narrative is surprisingly close to the view of Freud, that eros is one of the two primal drives governing human behaviour (the other is thanatos, the death instinct), and the view of at least one evolutionary psychologist (David Buss, in his books *The Evolution of Desire* and *The Murderer Next Door*) that sex is the main cause of violence amongst humans.

This gives us an entirely new way of thinking about Abrahamic faith. Emunah, the Hebrew word normally translated as faith, does not mean what it is taken to mean in English: a body of dogma, a set of principles, or a cluster of beliefs often held on non-rational grounds. Emunah means faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity, honouring your commitments, doing what you said you would do and acting in such a way as to inspire trust. It has to do with relationships, first and foremost with marriage.

Sex belongs, for the Torah, within the context of marriage, and it is marriage that comes closest to the deep resonances of the biblical idea of covenant. A covenant is a mutual act of commitment in which two persons, honouring their differences, each respecting the dignity of the other, come together in a bond of love to join their destinies and chart a future together. When the prophets want to speak of the covenantal relationship between God and His people, they constantly use the metaphor of marriage.

The God of Abraham is the God of love and trust who does not impose His will by force or violence, but speaks gently to us, inviting an answering response of love and trust. Genesis' argument against idolatry – all the more impressive for being told obliquely, through a series of stories and vignettes – is that it leads to a world in which the combination of unchecked sexual desire, the absence of a code of moral self-restraint, and the worship of power, leads eventually to violence and abuse.

That domestic violence and abuse still exist today, even among religious Jews, is a disgrace and source of shame. Against this stands the testimony of Genesis that faithfulness to God means and demands faithfulness to our marriage partners. Faith – whether between us and God or between us and our fellow humans – means love, loyalty and the circumcision of desire.

What the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs tell us is that faith is not proto- or pseudo-science, an explanation of why the natural universe is as it is. It is the language of relationships and the choreography of love. It is about the importance of the moral bond, in particular as it affects our most intimate relations. Sexuality matters to Judaism, not because it is puritanical but because it represents the love that brings new life into the world.

When a society loses faith, eventually it loses the very idea of a sexual ethic, and the result in the long term is violence and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. Women suffer. Children suffer. There is a breakdown of trust where it matters most. So it was in the days of the patriarchs. Sadly, so it is today. Judaism, by contrast, is the sanctification of relationship, the love between husband and wife which is as close as we will ever get to understanding God's love for us.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/theme-stories-genesis-vayeshev-5777/>

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## **Binding Bundles**

By Menachem Feldman \*

So much of our history was shaped by the conflict between Joseph and his brothers, which can be traced back to Joseph telling his brothers about the dreams he dreamed, in which he saw that they would bow to him. As the Torah relates:

*And Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers, and they continued to hate him. And he said to them, "Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the midst of the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright, and behold, your sheaves encircled [it] and prostrated themselves to my sheaf."<sup>1</sup>*

Everything in the Torah is precise. The setting of the dream - the brothers binding sheaves of wheat in the field - was chosen specifically because gathering stalks into bundles is a metaphor for the purpose of the Jew on this earth.

As we look around the world, we often experience the world as concealing the truth of the one G d. Often it is a challenge to feel the presence of the one G d in the chaos around us. How did this disconnect emerge? By what process does the oneness break down into multiplicity?

Let us think about a sentence.

Although a sentence comprises many letters, it is nevertheless able to convey one specific idea, as long as the many letters combine and organize in an orderly fashion to create words, and those words align in a specific order to convey one idea. If, however, the letters that form the words are separated from each other, if their order is lost, then, although the letters themselves are intact, the meaning, the energy and the idea conveyed by the sentence is lost.

The same is true with the creation of the universe. The world was created by Divine speech. G d spoke and the world came into being. Those sentences, "let there be light", "let there be a firmament" etc., conveyed the Divine energy. Somewhere along the way, however, in a process called "the breaking of the vessels", the letters and words separated from each other, they were rearranged, and as a result, the meaning, the purpose, and the divine source, is no longer legible within the universe. What was once a unified sentence that expressed the truth of reality, now appears to be no more than a mix of random, fragmented letters.

And this is where the children of Jacob entered the picture. The twelve tribes of Israel were charged with the mission of collecting and organizing the scattered letters, they were tasked with arranging them in the proper order which would allow the meaning to be conveyed. Thus, in the dream, Joseph and his brothers were in the field binding individual, seemingly random, stalks, and creating a unified bundle.

Living on this earth a person is constantly pulled in many directions. In the same day a person may have to be a father, a spouse, a son, and an employer. He must eat, drink, sleep and groom. He must feed his psychological needs, and nourish his spiritual soul, he must relax and he must invest time in achieving his long term goals. No wonder then that at

the end of a day a person is often drained and uninspired. He feels that too much of his day was spent on trivial matters: overcoming distraction, finding a parking spot, or waiting in line at the coffee shop.

Yet the Jew knows that his task is to collect the various scattered sparks embedded in the various experiences and combine them into one meaningful entity. Moving through the day we take the scattered letters - moments that seem mundane and trivial - and string together a meaningful sentence. We spend our time bundling sheaves of wheat, taking individual stalks and revealing that they can be bound together in a common purpose.

We, the children of Jacob, understand that our job is to demonstrate that there need not be a dichotomy between body and soul. That life does not have to be a collection of meaningless fragmented moments. Every activity, every moment and every detail in life can be an expression of the same intention: to fill our lives, and the lives of the people around us, with a unified purpose, to fill the world with goodness and kindness. We do so by binding the scattered stalks of wheat, revealing the spark of holiness in every experience, organizing the letters and allowing them to express the message that all of the world is an expression of the Divine oneness.<sup>2</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 37:5-7.

2. Adapted from Torah Or Parshat Vayeshev.

\* Director, Lifelong Learning Program, Chabad of Greenwich, CT. © Chabad 2020.

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### **Seven Branches, Seven Truths** By Nechoma Greisman \* © Chabad 2020

The candelabra in the Tabernacle and in the Holy Temple had seven branches. One of the major daily services of Aaron, the high priest, was kindling the candelabra. The verse, however, uses an unusual expression for this task—"when you will raise up the lamps," rather than the more common expression, "to light the lamps." The commentator Rashi explains that the priest had to coax the flame "until it rises up on its own."

Based on a verse in Zechariah which compares the Jewish people to a golden candelabra, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that each of the seven lamps of the candelabra corresponds to one of the seven holy character traits: kindness (chesed), austerity (gevurah), compassion (tiferet), etc.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that one of the conclusions we must draw from this is that there are really several different paths in Judaism. There are seven different ways. We are not all the same, and we are not all meant to be the same. Just as there are seven basic character traits, so too there are seven legitimate and valid ways to be a candelabra—a luminary. You don't have to be a carbon copy of somebody else to be a good Jew. The critical issue is, are you kindled? Are you lit up? If you are lit up, and you are illuminating the surroundings as a candelabra of Judaism, then your way is valid. The Torah teaches us this by the fact that the candelabra does not have one branch, but seven, so that everybody can be themselves and serve G d according to their own personality and way, provided that they are illuminating the world in the way G d wants.

The windows of the Temple in Jerusalem were very unusual. Most of the time, when you build a house, you make the windows in such a way that the light from the outside will come into the house. But in the Temple, the windows were built in such a way that the light from inside could shine out, but not vice versa. This, too, is a lesson to every person—that he is not supposed to be influenced by the "outside" world, by what the street has to offer. Rather, he must kindle his own candelabra and illuminate the world around him, even the street outside.

We mentioned before that there are seven paths, there are seven approaches to Judaism. There is the way of love (ahavah), and the way of fear (yir'ah)—austerity or severity. Everyone is probably familiar with both approaches. We've all gone through school, and have probably experienced teachers who teach with love. The kids love them; they love the kids. There's a feeling of joy and participation. Then we have all had teachers who were very strict disciplinarians. If you made one move, you were out of the room, or standing in the corner, or writing lines a hundred times. Both of them were

teachers; both of them were trying to do the same thing—teach children. But they had different approaches—one with love, the other with fear. Now you might say, “What’s the difference? Do it with love, do it with fear, as long as you accomplish your goals. What’s the difference what method you use?”

However, the Rebbe says that there is a difference. Even though the way of the person who kindles you with fear is legitimate, nevertheless how much better, how much more pleasant it is when your way of kindling is with love . . .

\* Nechoma Greisman was an educator, counselor and speaker who reached thousands of women through her classes and books. Tragically, she passed away at the age of 39 hours after giving birth to her tenth child. This source for this essay is teachings of the late Lubavitch Rebbe.

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## **Selfless Prayer**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

### **Who Is Your Spiritual Mentor?**

The ninth section of the Book of Genesis, Vayeishev, begins the chronicle of Jacob’s son Joseph. Having arrived safely at the family home in Hebron, Jacob has assumed the mantle of leadership; all his children have remained loyal to his Divine ideals and mission. But just when all seems tranquil, Joseph shares his two dreams with the family, one in which his brother’s sheaves bow down to his, and a second in which the sun and moon and eleven stars bow down to him. Joseph’s brothers take this brazen display of conceit as evidence that Joseph is, in fact, the self-centered Esau’s spiritual heir. Jacob, however, approved of Joseph’s dreams, since he himself already envisioned Joseph as his successor.

Joseph said to his brothers, "Please listen to this dream I had." (Genesis 37:6)

Joseph’s two dreams seem to convey the same idea. The reason for the apparent repetition is that they symbolize two distinct stages in the relationship between each generation and its leaders.

In fact, however, Joseph’s two dreams symbolize two distinct stages in the relationship between each generation and its leaders.

Sheaves of grain are made up of individual stalks, which grow discretely from one another, each in its own groove. Binding them into sheaves symbolizes our first task in life: gathering together all of our capacities and talents and uniting them in the work of holiness. Once we have become a "sheaf," we must seek guidance and inspiration from "Joseph," a spiritual leader.

As we mature spiritually, we reach a higher level: having risen above earthly consciousness, we regain our soul’s original heavenly consciousness and shine like a "star." Yet even on this level, we should not rely on our own achievements for inspiration, for this can lead to stagnation and complacency. Rather, we must still continue to turn to our "Joseph"--i.e. our spiritual mentor-- for further insight and inspiration..

-- From: Daily Wisdom #1

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

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## **Parshas Vayeishev – The Focus Of Chanukah**

There is a fascinating Medrash discussing Yaakov's mourning for Yosef. (When Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery, Yaakov thought that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal.) The Medrash notes that the phrase "*Vayeivk oso aviv*" – "and his father cried for him" (Yaakov cried for Yosef) can also be read as "*Vayievk ito aviv*" – "and his father cried with him". Rebi Levi and Rebi Simon explain that this hidden meaning is referring to Yaakov's father – meaning that Yitzchak cried with Yaakov. The Torah is telling us that Yitzchak was prophetically aware that Yosef was alive. However, he would cry when he was together with Yaakov. When Yitzchak would leave Yaakov, he would wash and anoint himself, and eat and drink, knowing that Yosef was alive. However, when he was with Yaakov, he cried "with him" in full measure, as if he too felt the pain of the loss of Yosef. (Once G-d had not given Yaakov the same prophecy he had given Yitzchak, it was not Yitzchak's place to share it with Yaakov. He therefore did not tell Yaakov.) (Bereishis Rabba 84:21)

The Medrash is indeed teaching us a powerful lesson in empathy. However, it seems to fall short of what we would expect. Yitzchak was crying when he was with Yaakov empathizing with Yaakov and sharing in his burden. As Yaakov's father, he certainly could fully experience Yaakov's pain. What happened, though, when Yitzchak left Yaakov's presence? Surely he must have still been deeply aware of Yaakov's anguish. How could he act as if all was right in the world when his son suffering such terrible emotional anguish?

We can philosophically address this question, but it doesn't quite sit right. We know that everything G-d does for us is in our own best interest. This means that if we could see the whole picture clearly, we would have chosen and asked for the circumstances and difficulties we are given down to every minute, precise detail. Yitzchak surely understood philosophically that Yaakov's pain would only be in Yaakov's best interest, and somehow, somehow Yaakov would choose to experience this anguish if he could see the benefit. However, at the same time, we know instinctively that this does not mean we should not cry. Just as we shudder and struggle when taking bitter medicine or undergoing surgery, so too do and should cry and struggle with emotional pain. Even though, Yitzchak understood that Yaakov's pain served a great purpose, Yaakov was currently going through the pain, and had not yet reached that great benefit, whatever it was. How could Yitzchak forget the current pain and anguish of his beloved son, whenever he was not with him?

A message we often heard in Yeshiva, is that the emotions G-d has placed within us are powerful tools to lift us and inspire us when used properly. However, they can be hijacked by our evil inclination and overwhelm us, stymieing our efforts to grow and come close to G-d.

Yitzchak knew himself well and understood that Yaakov's pain was so intense, that as a father he would be overwhelmed by his concern for Yaakov. He could not achieve the growth and accomplishment he needed to when sharing in Yaakov's burden. He, therefore, struck an amazing balance. When he was with Yaakov, he focused on Yaakov's pain – and thereby felt Yaakov's pain to the point that he could fully cry with Yaakov. When he left, he changed his focus to think about the ultimate benefit down the road that G-d intended for Yaakov. In this way, he could fully empathize with Yaakov when with him, and still not drown in the anguish.

This Medrash illustrates for us the power of our own thoughts and the impact of what we focus on. This message is arguably the very essence of Chanukah. The establishment of the holiday was one mitzvah. We light a candle for half an hour each evening to focus and remember that when we strive to connect with G—d, He is waiting for us with open arms. There are no other mitzvos. Only a candle and a short focus session. A deeper awareness, an added focus, can change us and shape us in ways we could never imagine.





# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Chanukah Sameach  
Shabbat Shalom

Volume 27, Issue 9 Shabbat Parashat Vayeshev

5781 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

**A Chanukah Message** - Twenty-two centuries ago, when Israel was under the rule of the empire of Alexander the Great, one particular leader, Antiochus IV, decided to force the pace of Hellenisation. He forbade Jews from practising their religion and even set up a statue of Zeus Olympus in the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem. This was too much to bear, and a group of Jews, the Maccabees, fought for their religious freedom, winning a stunning victory against the most powerful army of the ancient world. After three years of conflict, they reconquered Jerusalem, rededicated the Beit Hamikdash and relit the Menorah with the one cruse of undefiled oil they found among the wreckage. It was one of the most spectacular military achievements of the ancient world. It was, as we say in our prayers, a victory of the few over the many, the weak over the strong. It is summed up in wonderful line from the Prophet Zechariah: "Not by might nor by strength but by my spirit says the Lord." (Zechariah, 4:6) The Maccabees had neither might nor strength, neither weapons nor numbers. But they had a double portion of the Jewish spirit that longs for freedom and is prepared to fight for it. Never believe that a handful of dedicated people can't change the world. Inspired by faith, they can. The Maccabees did then. So can we today.

## The Power of Praise

Reuben is the leader who might have been but never was. He was Jacob's firstborn. Jacob said of him on his deathbed, "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power." (Gen. 49:3) This is an impressive tribute, suggesting physical presence and commanding demeanour.

More significantly, in his early years Reuben consistently appeared to be the most morally sensitive of Jacob's children. He was Leah's son, and keenly felt his mother's disappointment that she was not Jacob's favourite. Here is the first description of him as a child:

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. (Gen. 30:14)

Mandrakes were thought to be an aphrodisiac. Reuben knew this and immediately thought of his mother. It was a touching gesture but it misfired because he presented them to Leah in the presence of Rachel and unintentionally caused an argument between them.

The next episode in which we see Reuben is far more troubling:

Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrat, that is, Bethlehem... While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father's concubine Bilhah ... (Gen. 35:19-22)

If understood literally this would amount to a major sin. Sleeping with your father's concubine was not only a sexual crime; it was an unforgivable act of treason and betrayal, as we discover later in Tanach when Absalom decides to rebel against his father David and replace him as king. Ahitophel gives him the following advice:

"Sleep with your father's concubines, whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute." (2 Samuel 16:21)

According to the Sages, the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally.[1] After Rachel died, Jacob had moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. This, felt Reuben, was an intolerable humiliation for his mother. It was hard for Leah to endure the fact that Jacob loved her sister more. It would have been altogether unbearable for her to discover that he even preferred Rachel's handmaid. So Reuben moved Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's. The verb *vayishkav* should therefore be translated not as "slept with" but "changed the sleeping arrangement."

At this point, however, the text does a strange thing. It says, "Reuben went in and slept with [or changed the sleeping arrangement of] his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it ..." and then signals a paragraph break in the middle of the sentence. The sentence ends: "Jacob had twelve sons." This is very unusual indeed. What it suggests is an audible silence. Communication had completely broken down between Jacob and Reuben. If the Sages are correct in their interpretation, then this is one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of Genesis. Jacob clearly believed that Reuben had slept with his concubine Bilhah. He cursed him for it on his deathbed:

Unstable as water, you will not excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch, and defiled it. (Gen. 49:4)

Yet according to the Sages, this did not happen. Had Jacob been willing to speak to

Reuben he would have discovered the truth, but Jacob grew up in a family that lacked open, candid communication (as we saw a few weeks ago, during our discussion of parshat Toldot). Thus, for many years Reuben was suspected by his father of a sin he had not committed – all because he cared about the feelings of his mother.

Which brings us to the third episode in Reuben's life, the most tragic of all. Jacob favoured Joseph, son of his beloved Rachel, and the other brothers knew it. When he gave Joseph a visible sign of favouritism, the richly embroidered cloak, the brothers resented it yet more. When Joseph began to have dreams of the rest of the family bowing down to him, the brothers' animosity reached boiling point. When they were far from home, tending the flocks, and Joseph appeared in the distance, their hatred made them decide then and there to kill him. Reuben alone resisted:

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him [Joseph] from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. (Gen. 37:21-22)

Reuben's plan was simple. He persuaded the brothers not to kill Joseph but rather to let him die by leaving him to starve in a pit. He intended to return later, when the brothers had moved on, to rescue him. When he returned, however, Joseph was no longer there. He had been sold as a slave. Reuben was devastated.

Three times Reuben tried to help but despite his best intentions, his efforts failed. He was responsible for the one recorded quarrel between Leah and Rachel. His father wrongly suspected him of a major sin and cursed him on his deathbed. He failed to save Joseph. Reuben knew when things were not right, and tried to act to make changes for the better, but he somehow lacked the prudence, confidence or courage to achieve his desired outcome. He should have waited for Leah to be alone before giving her the mandrakes. He should have remonstrated directly with his father about his sleeping arrangements. He should have physically taken Joseph safely back home.

What happened to Reuben to make him lack confidence? The Torah gives a poignant and

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unmistakable hint. Listen to these verses describing the birth of Leah's (and Jacob's) first two children:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. (Gen. 29:32-33)

Both times, it was Leah, not Jacob, who named the child – and both names were a cry to Jacob to notice her and love her – if not for herself then at least because she has given him children. Jacob evidently did not notice.

Reuben became what he became because – so the text seems to imply – his father's attention was elsewhere; he did not care for either Leah or her sons (the text itself says, "the Lord saw that Leah was not loved"). Reuben knew this and felt intensely his mother's shame and his father's apparent indifference.

People need encouragement if they are to lead. It is fascinating to contrast the hesitant Reuben with the confident – even overconfident – Joseph, who was loved and favoured by his father. If we want our children to have the confidence to act when action is needed, then we have to empower, encourage and praise them.

There is a fascinating Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers:

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus – a plastered wall that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya – happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest – a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel – a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arach – an ever-flowing spring. (Mishnah Avot 2:10-11)

Why does the Mishnah, whose aim is to teach us lasting truths, give us this apparently trivial account of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's pupils and how he used to praise them? The answer, I believe, is that the Mishnah is telling us how to raise disciples, how to be a coach, mentor and guide: by using focused praise.

The Mishnah does not simply say that Yochanan ben Zakkai said good things about his students. It uses an unusual locution: "He used to count [moneh] their praise", meaning, his positive remarks were precise and accurately targeted. He told each of his disciples what their specific strength was.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus had an outstanding memory. At a time when the Oral Law was not yet written down, he could recall the teachings of the tradition better than anyone else. Elazar ben Arach was creative, able to come up with an endless stream of fresh interpretations. When we follow our particular passions and gifts, we contribute to the world what only we can give.

However, the fact that we may have an exceptional gift may also mean that we have conspicuous deficiencies. No one has all the strengths. Sufficient if we have one. But we must also know what we lack. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus became so fixated on the past that he resisted change even when it was decided on by the majority of his colleagues. Eventually he was excommunicated for failing to accept his colleagues' ruling (Baba Metzia 59b).

Elazar ben Arach's fate was even sadder. After the death of Yochanan ben Zakkai, he separated from his colleagues. They went to Yavneh; he went to Hamat (Emmaus). It was a pleasant place to live and it was where his wife's family lived. Apparently he was so confident of his intellectual gifts that he believed he could maintain his scholarship by himself. Eventually he forgot everything he had ever learned (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 14: 6). The man more gifted than his contemporaries eventually died while making almost no lasting contribution to the tradition.

There is a delicate balance between the neglect that leads to someone to lack the confidence to do the necessary deed, and the excessive praise or favouritism that creates overconfidence and the belief that you are better than others. That balance is necessary if we are to be the sunlight that helps others grow.

[1] See Shabbat 55a-b

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

"She is more righteous than I" (Genesis 38:26) The biblical drama of the peregrinations of Jacob ended with the patriarch's return to his father's house and homeland in last week's reading of Vayishlah, and now with the reading of Vayeshev the riveting story of Joseph begins. Just as Jacob's exilic wanderings open with his dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, so do Joseph's wanderings begin with his dreams of the brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf and then of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph.

The Joseph story continues at a fast pace, with the brothers' jealousy (a jealousy unto death) resulting in the sale of Joseph into Egyptian servitude and leading to the brothers' deception of their father Jacob, making him think that a savage beast had devoured his favorite son and heir apparent (Gen. 37:1-36).

The biblical account skips a chapter, however, before telling us of Joseph's adventures in

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Egypt; we must wait for that until Chapter 39, after which we remain with Joseph until his death at the end of the Book of Genesis. Chapter 38—a clear interruption of the Joseph story line—provides a fascinating interlude dealing with brother Judah, his three sons, and daughter-in-law Tamar, who enters into an act of deceptive harlotry with her father-in-law because she felt herself thwarted from her anticipated levirate marriage with Judah's third son, Shelah.

But why does this story—replete with intrigue and moral outrage against the wrong party—find its place in the midst of the Joseph story? Let the Bible first finish with Joseph, and then bring in this tale of Judah, perhaps even as important background for the Messianic legacy he is to receive from Jacob on his death bed (Gen. 49:8-10).

And this leads to a second question. Apparently, Messianism is an important factor here, since Judah is the tribe-producer of the Messiah, scion of the Davidic dynasty who will bring the ultimate peace and the ingathering of all the nations.

Perez, the Jacob-like character who pushes ahead and breaks out his elder twin Zerah's initial lead, to emerge first, is the seventh-generation grandfather of Boaz, in turn great-grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:18-22). But why choose a forbidden act of immorality, a father-in-law (Judah) with his daughter-in-law (Tamar), and an act of harlotry at that, which adds even further transgression, as the union which will ultimately produce the Messiah? Ought the Messiah not emerge from a much purer act of sexual love within the context of marriage in accordance with Moses and Israel? The entire Book of Genesis after the choosing of Abraham is concerned first and foremost with who will receive the legacy of the firstborn, which son will be the torchbearer to pass down the baton of Messianism: the responsibility of bringing to the world peace and redemption by teaching compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to the next generation. Our portion Vayeshev begins with Joseph, seemingly the choice of his father Jacob, who gave him the striped tunic of many colors.

But Joseph doesn't dream of uniting heaven and earth, God and world; he dreams of mastery over his brothers, domination on land and in sky, and in his two dreams God and Israel do not appear even once! And moreover gathering sheaves of grain, agriculture, was not the pursuit of the family of Abraham in the Promised Land of Canaan; it was the activity discovered in Egypt, a far more sophisticated and corrupt culture than existed in the Land of Israel. Joseph hankered after the fleshpots of Egypt, not the piety of "Palestine"; Joseph—at least at this point in his life—did not seem worthy of the legacy of the firstborn.

And so the Bible offers another option for the bearer of the familial blessing. You will remember that it was Judah who cleverly saved Joseph's life from death by starvation and scorpions in the pit by offering the brothers financial gain by selling their sibling into Egypt (Gen. 37:26, 27). At this point he marries a Canaanite woman with whom he has three sons; the eldest, Er, he marries off to Tamar. Er dies early, and Tamar is given in levirate marriage to Onan, Er's brother. Levirate marriage enables the brother to grant his hapless sibling a child and heir (even though he is dead) by impregnating—and taking responsibility for—his widow.

Since the child born to Tamar would be considered Er's and not Onan's, Onan refused to give his seed to Tamar. Onan too dies young as a Divine punishment for neglecting his responsibility to his elder sibling.

Shelah is left; Judah is frightened to give Tamar as wife to another of his sons lest that son also die.

Tamar poses as a harlot, seduces Judah, and becomes pregnant with his seed. So Perez and ultimately Boaz and King David will ultimately be born.

Joseph attempts to escape his Abrahamic destiny by looking towards Egypt and its naturalism for his future. Judah likewise seems uninterested in guaranteeing Abrahamic fulfillment. Tamar is desperate to carry Judah's seed and continue the road to redemption. Judah also publicly admits his transgression with Tamar, praising her for being more interested in the Jewish future—by taking responsibility for past generations—than he was. Repentance, responsibility to past and commitment to future are the skill that Messianism is made of. Hence the story of Judah at this junction is a prefiguration of why it is eventually Judah and not Joseph who gives over the familial baton.

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### **The Person in the Parsha** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb** **"The 'Wisdom' of the East"**

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There are jokes which are very funny on the surface, but which, upon reflection, can be quite painful and disturbing. One of them, which was told frequently twenty years ago or more, concerns a matronly woman from the Bronx who seeks to visit a famous guru somewhere in the Far East, perhaps in the mountains of northern India or Tibet.

She boards a plane at John F. Kennedy airport and begins the long and arduous flight, which necessitates several stopovers and the changing of planes. She lands at the closest airport to the remote ashram, or temple, where the guru has his mountain retreat. She finds a bus that takes her part of the way to the ashram and, although she's never even seen a donkey before, summons a donkey cart to continue her trek to her encounter with the guru.

Totally exhausted, she finally arrives at the guru's quarters. To her great disappointment, she learns that the guru has just begun a three-day period of fasting and meditation and cannot possibly be interrupted. Anything but total solitude is forbidden.

She pleads and begs and finally resorts to one of the strategies of persuasion that she learned back in the Bronx. She tells the guru's guards that she only wants to say three words to him.

On the condition that she limits her message to just three words, they allow her access into the guru's inner chamber. There she finds him sitting in the lotus yoga position, totally entranced in his meditation.

She approaches him, but he remains unaware of her presence. Finally, she bends over him and whispers in his ear: "Melvin? Come home!"

I used to tell his story many times, not so long ago, when so many young Jewish men and women, from the Bronx and from elsewhere, left to the Far East in their quest for spiritual truth and a meaningful path in life.

The story always drew laughs from the crowd, but the laughs were inevitably followed by a contemplative silence as the audience began to reflect upon the point of the story. Young Jews by the thousands had become alienated not only from their Jewish roots, but from Western civilization in general.

Although this phenomenon is no longer as prevalent as it once was, Eastern religions remain attractive to many, and not just to young Jews but to a wide variety of individuals in search of a "New Age" alternative to Western culture.

The reasons why so many are dissatisfied with the Western way of life center around the relentless pressures and frantic pace which that way of life entails. Eastern religions offer an alternative which promises serenity, tranquility, and inner peace.

This leads us to a question that surprisingly connects to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23).

The question is: "Is there anything wrong with seeking tranquility and inner peace? Are they not highly desirable components of a healthy and meaningful lifestyle?"

An answer can be found in the words of the Midrash Rabbah that appear in most contemporary editions of Rashi's commentary, although they are absent from earlier manuscript editions.

The first words in this week's Torah portion read: "Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned..." The Bible then

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

narrates the story of Jacob's son Joseph and how he is sold into slavery by his brothers.

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, comments: "Jacob wished to dwell in peace and tranquility but immediately was beset by Joseph's troubles and tribulations."

These words imply that it was somehow improper for Jacob to desire a calm and serene existence. The comment even suggests that Jacob was punished for his wish by suffering the disappearance, and supposed death, of his favored son.

Why? What possible sin would Jacob have committed by hoping for tranquility? Had he not suffered enough during his years of exile? Were the family crises described in detail in last week's parsha not sufficient torture?

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter (the second Rebbe of Gur), the author of the Sfat Emet ("Lips of Truth"), a profoundly insightful Chassidic work, suggests that the calm and peaceful life is not necessarily the religiously desirable. Such a life is conducive to complacency.

"What God wants from the Jew," he writes, "is for him to have a life of constant toil in the service of His Blessed Name, because there is no limit to striving for perfection."

The Torah's ideal is a life of action and involvement in worldly affairs. The Torah rejects the attitude of detachment and passivity which is implicit in the teachings of Eastern religions.

The Torah cannot envision the good life if that life is without challenge. Achievement of inner peace is not the ultimate value, especially not if it results in withdrawal from responsible action within society.

The author of the Sfat Emet led his flock and wrote his works in the latter half of the 19th century. But the important lesson he taught was expressed about a century before, in the words of Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto, the 18th-century Italian mystic, whose work Mesilat Yesharim ("The Path of the Just") contains the following demanding passage:

A man must know that he was not created to enjoy rest in this world, but to toil and labor. He should, therefore, act as though he were a laborer working for hire. We are only day laborers. Think of the soldier at the battlefield who eats in haste, whose sleep is interrupted, and who is always prepared for an attack. "Man is born to toil" (Job 5:7).

The teaching of both of these authors was anticipated by this passage in the Talmud (Berakhot 64a), as translated and elucidated in the Koren Talmud Bavli:

Torah scholars have rest neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come, as in both worlds

they are constantly progressing, as it is stated: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion."

The differences between the ideologies of Judaism and other religions are sometimes subtle and hard to define. But in contrasting Judaism with the religions of the Far East, the differences are quite clear. The latter promise inner peace and serenity and advocate detachment. Judaism makes no such promises. It tells us that life is all about struggle and challenge, and it demands that we be actively involved in improving the world.

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#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

#### **Parshas VaYeshev is Like a Puppet Show with G-d Pulling the Strings**

The Rokeach, one of the early Chumash commentaries, make a very cryptic and enigmatic statement. The Rokeach says Parshas Vayeshev contains 112 pesukim and Chapter 92 in Tehillim (Psalms), which we say Friday night and Shabbos morning (Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos) contains 112 letters. So somehow, Parshas Vayeshev has a connection to the Chapter in Tehillim of Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos.

This is the type of statement that requires explanation. The Rokeach certainly had more in mind than making a type of "Gezerah Shavah" "112-112". What does he mean? What is the connection?

In order to understand this, we need to see a very important Ramban on the pasuk "A man discovered him and behold! — he was blundering in the field..." [Bereshis 37:15]. Yaakov told Yosef to find his brothers. Yaakov instructed Yosef that the brothers were shepherding in Shechem. Yosef went to Shechem and did not find them. Yosef started wandering around. He was found by a "man" (Chazal say he was none other than the Angel Gavriel).

The Ramban writes that Scripture elaborated on this discussion to inform us that there were many reasons for Yosef to return safely to his father. Yosef, upon coming to Shechem and not finding his brothers, had every justification in the world to return home and claim that he tried but was unable to find his brothers. However, Yosef persisted over and above the call of duty until his mission was complete. The point of telling us all this was to emphasize the fact that when a decree is made in Heaven, it will inevitably be carried out. All the efforts and attempts that man might make to avert a Heavenly Decree will be for naught. Whatever Hashem wants to occur, will occur, regardless of all man's efforts to the contrary.

The Ramban uses the Hebrew expression HaGezeirah Emes v'ha'Charitzus Sheker — the decree comes true; the efforts [to avert it] are in vain. This is equivalent to the old Yiddish expression: A mentch tracht un G-t lacht — man thinks and G-d laughs.

The Ramban adds that when it appeared that the meeting between Yosef and his brothers might not occur, Hashem sent a personal guide to make sure Yosef knew how to find them. Logically, Yosef should have turned back and gone home, but the Ribono shel Olam wanted this rendezvous to occur, and He made sure that it did occur. Unlike the simple reading of the pasuk that there was only one "man" who pointed out the way so that Yosef could find his brothers, the Medrash notes that the word "Ish" (Man) is written 3 times to indicate that 3 different messengers were sent to help Yosef at various points in his state of disorientation to locate his brothers. Finding his brothers needs to happen because this is part of the Ribono shel Olam's Master Plan.

Parshas Vayeshev—if we can use such a mundane expression—is similar to a "puppet show." The puppets, as it were, are Yaakov, Yosef, and the brothers. The puppeteer is the Master of the Universe and He is pulling the strings.

Yaakov Avinu is considered the most chosen of the Patriarchs. "A righteous Tzaddik who is the foundation of the world" is too tame an expression to say about Yaakov Avinu. However, Yaakov Avinu makes a basic parenting mistake here. He gives Yosef a Ketones Pasim and shows favoritism amongst his sons. The Talmud says [Shabbos 10b] that a person should never show different treatment to one child over another. A person does not need a Gemara to tell us this. Anyone who has had children knows that they all need to be treated the same. If someone does not treat them equally, the sibling rivalry that already exists will just become inflamed.

So how does Yaakov Avinu make such a mistake? The Torah explicitly states that Yaakov loved Yosef more than he loved all his other children. How could he do that? How could the wise patriarch violate the most basic rule of raising children?

The brothers are convinced that Yosef is a "Rodef" (in pursuit of them with the intention to eliminate them). Convinced that he is about to kill them, they convene a court and rule about Yosef that he is a rodef who is deserving of death. This is Yosef haTzadik (the Righteous Joseph)! They were so off the mark! How do the Tribes of G-d make such a gross error of misjudgment about their brother?

The righteous Yosef suspects his brothers of sexual immorality and of eating flesh from a living animal! How did he make that mistake?

The answer to all these questions is that HaGezeirah Emes v'ha'Charitzus Sheker. This is part of the Ribono shel Olam's Grand Plan, so the normal logical way people act all falls by the wayside. Hashem blinds all the "actors" here, and they do not think or act as they normally would.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

This indeed is one way we can answer the question we discussed in the (non-transcribed) Halachic portion of this shiur. How could Yosef go on this mission? How could Yaakov send him on this mission? It was a dangerous mission—a makom sakana. A person normally may not place himself into an inherently dangerous situation.

Indeed, in other circumstances Yaakov would have never sent Yosef, and Yosef would have never gone. It would have been forbidden. But here they were merely playing roles. This is all part of the Almighty's Grand Plan of getting Klal Yisrael down to Egypt, which was necessary for the construction of the Jewish People.

This is what Rashi means when he comments on the pasuk, "So he sent him from the valley of Chevron (m'Emek Chevron)" [Bereshis 37:14]: "from the deep counsel of the one who is buried in Chevron." Rashi notes that Chevron is on a mountain, not in a valley, therefore, we must interpret the pasuk allegorically to refer to the prophecy of Avraham Avinu, who is buried in Chevron. Avraham had a prophecy that his offspring would be strangers in a foreign land, they would be enslaved there for 400 years, and afterwards they would leave with great wealth [Bereshis 15:13].

How was this prophecy going to occur? Knowing this tradition in the family, would we expect them to voluntarily go down to Egypt? Of course not! That is why all of this needs to happen. Yaakov makes this mistake, Yosef makes that mistake, and the brothers make their mistake. It all needs to occur, because somehow they need to get down there.

When we look at the story of Yosef, when we look what happened to him, the chain of events seem nonsensical. Yosef works for Potiphar. He is a 17-year-old boy, away from his parents. His master's wife tries to seduce him. He withstands one of the most difficult temptations. What is his reward? He is thrown into prison for twelve years. He could certainly have asked, "This is Torah and this is its reward?" We read the story and we say, "What is Hashem doing?" The whole story does not make sense. Of course, we know the end of the story. We know that in prison, Yosef meets Pharaoh's Butler and Baker. He interprets the dreams. Eventually, he becomes second in command to the King of the Egyptian empire. He saves the whole world from famine. Eventually, he brings his family down to Egypt. This is how the Egyptian Exile began.

But what is the overriding theme of the parsha? It is that the Ribono shel Olam will make it happen and while it is happening it is inexplicable. However, with the passage of time, we understand almost everything.

This is the same theme of Tehillim Chapter 92, the paragraph of Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos. Chazal say that Adam composed this chapter. When Adam was created, the Almighty showed him the 6,000 years of world history. Adam expressed his reaction in this Psalm: "How great are your actions, Hashem" [Tehillim 92:6]. He was amazed at the world, at the universe the Almighty created. But he was also amazed at "the extreme depth of Your Thoughts" [ibid.]. The depth of Ribono shel Olam's way of dealing with the world amazed him. He saw the entire scope of 6,000 years of history and how in the end, everything fits in. Adam did not only have the benefit of hindsight but of foresight as well. Adam states: "An empty-headed man cannot know; nor does the fool understand this. When the wicked bloom like grass, and all the evildoers blossom..." [ibid. 92:7-8]. We see how the wicked prosper and how the righteous suffer.

But what is the answer? The answer is, "how deep are Your Thoughts." I know the answer, says Adam, because I see it all.

So Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos and Parshas Vayeshev address the same theme. They address the theme that we cannot understand things while they are happening, but sometimes looking back decades later, we can say, "You know, that was the best thing that could have ever happened to Yosef—that he got thrown into the pit, got sold into slavery, and made his way to Egypt, etc., etc."

That, the Rokeach says, is the connection between the 112 pesukim of Parshas Vayeshev and the 112 words in Chapter 92 of Tehillim. It is the same message. They both teach "How deep are Your Thoughts."

Rav Schwab, in his Sefer on Iyov, says that this is also what the last pasuk of Tehillim Chapter 92 is all about. Sefer Iyov is all about the horrific punishments that Iyov suffered, and how he questioned the Almighty's justice. He could not understand, and he complained. A fellow named Elihu, towards the end of Sefer Iyov, tries to straighten him out. Elihu introduces to him the concept of "Tzadik v'Rah Lo" (A righteous person who suffers at the Hand of G-d). He explained, "That is what is happening to you, Iyov. You are right, you did nothing wrong. But this is a manifestation of 'Tzadik v'Rah Lo'." In one of Elihu's speeches, he uses the words "Essa dayee l'mei'rachok (I will raise my knowledge from afar), u'l'Poalee etein Tzedek (and I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker)" [Iyov 36:3]. Rav Schwab explains that the key to understanding what is happening here is to take the long view (mei'rachok), the long view of history. Someone who is shortsighted will never understand it. It is only because I take the long view that I can say u'l'Poalee etein Tzedek—I can justify what the Ribono shel Olam is doing.

This too is how Perek 92 of Tehillim ends: "They will be fruitful in old age; they will be full of sap and freshness." [Tehillim 92:15] There will be old people who, despite their age, will be full of vigor. They will have all of their faculties and vitality, even in their old age. If someone lives long enough, he can sometimes say, "Now I understand what happened fifty years ago!" Therefore, these old people, who witnessed history and saw what happened, will be able to testify: "To declare that Hashem is upright, He is my Stronghold, in whom there is no injustice." [Tehillim 92:16].

Imagine, says Rav Schwab, if someone had died in the middle of the story of Yosef, for example when Yosef was in prison. What would he have said? "Hashem is unjust." Is this Yosef's reward? The problem is that such a person did not observe for long enough. He did not see the final act. However, people who will be around long enough, as it proclaims at the end of Psalm 92, they will be able to testify that Hashem is upright, my Stronghold, in whom there is no injustice.

### Why is Chanukah Hardly Mentioned in the Mishna and Talmud?

**Chanukah Is Not Just "Them Against Us"**  
Many people ask the following question: Chanukah is an eight-day holiday. There are dozens and dozens of laws in Hilchos Chanukah in Shulchan Aruch. The holiday is packed with halachik detail. And yet in the entire Talmud there are barely two and a half folio (blatt or two-sided pages, primarily in Tractate Shabbos) which mention the holiday of Chanukah and its laws. Other than as very peripheral references, it is not mentioned in the Mishna. There is no Mishna and no Masechta (Tractate of Talmud) that deals specifically with Chanukah.

Purim—also a Rabbinic holiday—is all of one day, and it gets its own Masechta (Megilla) but Chanukah, which is eight days, gets just two and a half blatt as incidental mention in a Masechta dealing with another topic. Why is Chanukah not mentioned in the Mishna?

The Chasam Sofer says something that you need to be the Chasam Sofer to say. He writes that Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, who was the editor of the Mishna was a descendant of the Davidic Dynasty. The Chashmonean heroes of the Chanukah story, despite the fact that they were righteous individuals, did something that was forbidden. They took the position of Melech (King). Kohanim are not allowed to be Melachim. Yaakov's blessing to Yehudah was "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet..." [Bereshis 49:10]. The Chashmonaim, who were descendants of the Tribe of Levi, were in violation of this law when they usurped the monarchy for their own family. Consequently, Rabbeinu HaKodosh, the editor of the Mishna, did not want to give Chanukah the same prominence as Purim, because of this spiritual error that the Chashmonaim made.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

I heard a different explanation as to why Chanukah is not mentioned in the Mishna, in the name of Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik (1903-1993). The Gemara [Moed Katan 26a] says that if someone sees a Sefer Torah being burnt, he needs to tear Kriyah (rip his clothing in a sign of mourning) twice—once for the parchment and once for the writing. The Gemara cites a pasuk [Yirmiyahu 36:27] to prove this point.

Rav Soloveitchik asks that the Gemara in Avodah Zarah [18a] seems to say the opposite. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah mentions that the Romans took out Rav Chanina ben Tradyon and burned him at the stake. They wrapped him in a Sefer Torah and lit it. As the fire was burning, Rav Chanina's students asked him, "Rebbi, what do you see?" He responded, "I see the parchment is burning but the letters are flying away."

Rav Soloveitchik raised the apparent contradiction: From Moed Katan 26a it appears that the letters burn, and a person needs to tear Kriyah over them; yet from Avodah Zarah 18a it appears that the letters fly away unharmed. Rav Soloveitchik resolves the contradiction by explaining that there is a difference between the case where the letters are burnt by a Jew and where they are burnt by others.

The Gemara in Maseches Moed Katan, which rules that one must tear Kriyah twice—once for the parchment and once for the letters – is speaking of a case when Yehoyakim son of Yoshiyahu burned a Sefer Torah [Yirmiyahu 36:27]. The Torah was given to the Jewish nation, and along with the positive comes a negative: a Jew can defile a Sefer Torah. A Jew can destroy even the Kedusha (sanctity) of a Sefer Torah because, since it was given to us, a Jew has a relationship to its Kedusha. He can defile it or even destroy it. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah with Chanina ben Tradyon, however, is speaking of a case where the Romans burned a Sefer Torah. Romans do not have the ability to tamper with the Kedusha of a Sefer Torah. The Letters of the Torah escape their defilement.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that this was the difference between Rome and Greece. The dominant theme of Rome – of Tisha B'Av and of the Destruction of the Temple – is Churban (destruction). The dominant theme of Chanuka is Tumah (defilement). The distinction is the same. Others can destroy but cannot defile the Torah. They cannot burn or affect the Kedusha of the Torah. Ay, Yavan (the Greeks)? The answer, says Rav Yoshe Ber, is that with Yavan, something else happened. Chanukah is not merely about Yavan (the Greeks) but it is about the MisYavanim (the Jews who adapted and wanted to become like the Greeks). The MisYavanim became Greek-Jews or Jewish-Greeks. Therefore, they, because they were Jewish,

they had the power to defile (be m'Tameh) the Torah itself.

In the time of Churban HaBayis (Destruction of the Temple), Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon saw the “letters flying” away because the Romans had no relationship to the Kedusha of the Torah. However, by Yavan, there were also Jews (who have a connection to Kedusha of the Torah) involved, and they have the power to even defile the letters.

Therefore, Rav Soloveitchik says, Chanukah is not given the prominence in the Mishna and Talmud that other Jewish holidays are given, because it is a shame for us. This was not a simple matter of “Them against Us.” This was a matter of “Us against Us.” It was a culture war. It was a fight amongst the Jews themselves. Therefore, to go ahead and give it the prominence that a Haman gets for trying to destroy the Jews (from which they emerged victorious) is inappropriate. The story of Haman and his attempt to wipe out the Jews—that gets more prominence. Chanukah, on the other hand, which speaks of a sordid incident in the history of Klal Yisrael, does not receive the same prominence that other Yomim Tovim receive. Better to keep the details of the story out of the Oral Law.

#### **Dvar Torah**

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

The way in which we light the Chanukah candles teaches us how to achieve our full potential.

**The Famous Debate** The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat brings to our attention the famous debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel – the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel.

According to Beit Shammai, on the first night of Chanukah we should light eight candles, on the second night seven, going down to one on the concluding night.

According to Beit Hillel, it's just the opposite, and this is our practise. We start with one on the first night, two on the second night, and on the concluding eighth night we light eight candles.

According to Beit Shammai, we should be mindful of the days that are left in the festival, while according to Beit Hillel we should concentrate on the days behind us.

Beit Shammai drew a parallel between the lighting of the chanukiah and the descending number of animals which were brought for sacrifice during the festival of Sukkot. According to Beit Hillel, what matters most of all is ‘maalin bekodesh’ – we should continuously strive to reach greater heights of spiritual attainment.

**Chanukah and Chinuch** - I believe that there is a connection between this difference of opinion and Jewish education. The term we

use for education is ‘chinuch’ coming from the same root as ‘Chanukah’ meaning ‘dedication’. I love visiting our schools – I derive so much inspiration from seeing our young children with their passion and enthusiasm for their Yiddishkeit. They love to learn the alef bet, they're proud of what they know, and they really relish those opportunities to sing the songs.

Sadly however, sometimes after an immersive Jewish education at a young age, the dedication to education can start to wane following bar and bat mitzvah – and the commitment can decrease as the years roll on. Beit Hillel however were insistent that actually the opposite should be the case.

We should consolidate what we have learnt and from there climb up one further step as we go higher and higher on the ladder of Jewish attainment and that is what is symbolised through the way in which we light our Chanukah candles.

**A Wise Student** -The greatest accolade we can give to an authority in Jewish law is to say that a person is a ‘talmid chacham’ meaning a wise student. Whatever we know, even the greatest authority amongst us must still be a student.

Like the kindling of the Chanukah candles, we can always climb higher on that ladder towards greatness.

**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 parashah. 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 at the beginning and two at 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 parashah however, the dreams are not about Yosef, they are about other people: Pharaoh's

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

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.

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#### **OTS Dvar Torah**

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**To Live in this Land in Peace**

**Rabbanit Naomi Berman**

Even today, when the people of Israel want to live in Israel in peace, various events occur that shake up their tranquility. The roads are a battleground and soldiers are everywhere. However, we also witness unwavering efforts to continue living life as normal.

As a mother to children in a youth movement, the Saturday night of Shabbat Irgun [the main Shabbat event for the Israeli youth movements], is a mission whose goal is simple: to stay in the theater for just long enough to see my daughter's performance, and no longer. A few years ago I remember arriving exactly on time for my 11-year-old's dance with ultraviolet light, and I planned to leave as soon as it was over.

But immediately after my daughter and her peers left the stage, a presentation was screened onstage of events that had taken place in their Bnei Akiva groups over the past month. The clip was packed with photos of smiling children smeared with gouache paint having the time of their lives. Like any other mother, I was particularly interested in the photographs my daughter appeared in, but this time, the entire presentation caught my attention. In the background, Benny Friedman's song Yesh Tikvah was playing – “There is hope” – as smiling and laughing children appeared on screen from a variety of activities. On the one hand, the power-point was packed with pictures of fun and games; on the other, it resonated with fear and pain.

The song referenced the long and difficult month we had just endured here in the State of Israel, but also focused on the country's unwavering efforts to continue living life as

normal in the face of terror; to continue our routine and live safely in our land. The roads had become a battleground. We were seeing soldiers everywhere, and feelings of anxiety penetrated into every moment of pseudo-calm. But still, the children were smiling. They continued living their lives and doing everyday things, in spite of it all.

The desire to live and reside in Israel in peace has its roots in this week's parsha: "Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojournd..." (Genesis 37:1). Rashi quotes the Midrash:

Jacob wished to live at ease, but this trouble in connection with Joseph suddenly came upon him. When the righteous wish to live at ease, Hashem says to them: "Are not the righteous satisfied with what is stored up for them in the world to come that they wish to live at ease in this world too! (ibid. 37:2). Apparently, the Midrash is addressing the internal contradiction within this verse. Jacob was living in the land (יִשְׂרָאֵל), but the land was one he was residing in (מְגוּרִים) – and this Hebrew word is tied to the word גֵּרִית – the state of being an alien. The land in which Hashem kept his promise to our forefather Abraham was one where, according to the text, "your progeny will be foreigners".

Abraham himself had to grapple with the challenge of living in Israel. At the end of Parshat Noach, at Terah's behest, the family begins its journey to the Land of Canaan:

"Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there." (Genesis 11:31).

Terah never reached his destination, but he went through all of the necessary stages: departing, arriving, and resettling. Later, of course, Abram himself would resume the journey. He took his family, and left: "...and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan..." (Genesis 12:5). Unlike his father, Abram did reach his destination. Unlike his grandfather, Terah, Abram did not go through all the necessary stages. Though he departed and arrived, it seems as though he wasn't immediately able to settle down in his new place of residence.

The Torah even presents a contrast to Jacob's residence in the land of Israel. At the end of the previous parsha, after the tense encounter between Jacob and Esau, the Torah describes the moment they part: "Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land because of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too many for them to dwell together, and the land where they sojournd

could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir—Esau being Edom." (Genesis 36:6-8)

The motive for this journey remains a mystery: "and he went to another land because of his brother Jacob."

Here, too, Rashi mentions the tension between residing as an inhabitant, and residing as a foreigner. Esau left the land of "their residence" for Har Se'ir, a place he could settle in.

On account of Esau, his brother: on account of the bond of indebtedness involved in the decree, "thy seed shall be a stranger etc... and they shall afflict them etc." that was imposed upon Isaac's descendants. He said, "I shall go hence — I desire no part either in the gift of this land which has been made to him (to my father) nor in the payment of this bond" (Rashi's commentary on Genesis 37:7)

Esau's decision was logical and rational. Why stay in a country in which God had promised he wouldn't live in peace? In any case, the Torah immediately diverts our attention from Esau back to Jacob. Jacob, who ended up staying and settling within that same land, had to deal with the same promise. "Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojournd..." (Genesis 37:1).

On that Saturday night, I witnessed Jacob's descendants continuing his tradition. They wished to lived here, peacefully. All kinds of trouble chanced upon them, yet the wish to live here peacefully – gouache paint, smiles and all – remains. And in the background, the lyrics of Benny Friedman's song resonate: "There is hope, if we all sing together. There is faith that is stronger than all of the fear..."

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

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##### **Rabbi Michael Rosensweig**

Al ha-Nissim in Birkat ha-Mazon: A Reflexive Halachic Expression of Chanukah Hoda'ah  
The Talmud (Shabbat 24a) ponders whether al ha-nissim, already presumed to be an obligatory insertion into tefillah on Chanukah (see also Rashi 21b s.v. ve'asaum and the interesting analysis of Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim, no. 507), should also be incorporated into birkat ha-mazon. In assessing this question, the Talmud considers whether the factor of pirsumei nisa (promoting and publicizing the miracle) sufficiently elevates this rabbinic imperative to justify this requirement. The Talmud's conclusion is curiously somewhat ambiguous: "eino mazkir...ve-im ba le-hazkir mazkir be-hoda'ah - he does not recite it; if he chooses to recite it he should include it in the nodeh lecha-thanksgiving section" that parallels its venue in the context of tefillah. Evidently, this insertion is sufficiently appropriate that it does not constitute a gratuitous interruption of the typically integrated birkat ha-mazon text (see mefarhsim ad loc). At the same time, the

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Talmud's formulation hardly constitutes a ringing endorsement of this practice. The initial rejection and subsequent apparently begrudging allowance (depending on the understanding of "eino mazkir") is confusing.

It is reasonable to assume that the fact that there is no explicit obligation to feast on Chanukah precludes any obligation, also initially dampening the enthusiasm for this birkat ha-mazon insertion. Indeed, while there are authorities who promote the concept of a simchah during this period (Rambam's [Hilchot Chanukah 3:3] rendering of "yom tov" in Shabbat 21a) and even poskim who embrace the notion of a Chanukah seudah (see Bach (Orach Chaim 670), Taz (Orach Chaim 682) and resp. of Havot Yair's rendering of the Chanukah "mitzvah" referred to in Rosh Hashana 18b), the more normative view (see Maharam, Maharshal etc. also in Bach and Beis Yosef Orach Chaim, no. 670) perceives an important distinction between Purim and Chanukah with respect to this issue and its implication for the core focus of these respective rabbinic holidays [See Chanukah: A Yom tov of Hallel and Hoda'ah.]

In light of the gemara's equivocal stance, the fact that halachic practice has enthusiastically embraced the recitation of al ha-nissim in birkat ha-mazon is striking indeed. Rambam, for example, after recording the obligation to insert al ha-nissim into tefillah (Hilchot Tefillah 2:13, 10:14), applies the same obligation to birkat ha-mazon- "mosif...ke-derech she-mosif be-tefillah" ( Hilchot Berachot 2:6,13). While he subtly implies that the tefillah insertion is a precedent and paradigm, he does appear to equate the two! Lechem Mishneh (2:6) is puzzled by the mere fact that Rambam seems to codify a birkat ha-mazon obligation, apparently inconsistent with the Talmud's conclusion. [His suggestion that Rambam selectively accepts the authority of the Talmud Yerushalmi on this matter, is intriguing, but does not fully resolve the matter.]

The Shulchan Aruch further escalates the normative status of birkat ha-mazon's al ha-nissim by reversing the order and giving priority to this expression over the more established tefillah context: "kol shemonat yemei Chanukah omer al hanissim be-birkat ha-mazon...u-betefillah"! Moreover, he adds (citing the Tur) that one may insert this recitation as long as one has not yet articulated sheim Hashem in the next berachah. The Rema further codifies the ruling of the Kol Bo that having squandered the opportunity to integrate al ha-nissim into the hoda'ah section, one should still promote the al hannisim themes by reciting an additional "harachaman"! Evidently, notwithstanding the ambiguous Talmudic ruling, halachic authorities developed a deep conviction regarding the propriety, preference, and importance of expanding and intensifying the recitation of al ha-nissim, the text that conveys Klal Yisrael's

acknowledgement and supreme appreciation for what transpired on Chanukah.

The Ravyah (no. 563, [and no. 131], also cited in Hagahot Maimuniyot, Hilchos Berachot 2:13:6) significantly advances the stature of al ha-nissim in birkat ha-mazon. He invokes the principle of "kivan de-kiblu alayhu shavyuhu ke-hov" (when the community commit to the halachic practice it becomes obligatory) applied by Behag (and others) to tefillat arvit (otherwise deemed a "reshut", a discretionary obligation) to contend that Klal Yisrael's instinctive initiative and expanded commitment has established the insertion of al ha-nissim in birkat ha-mazon as obligatory, and that its absence requires that one repeat the birkat ha-mazon!! This is particularly astonishing since the consensus view (with very minor exception of siddur R' Saadiah Gaon, and R. Shmuel cited in Hagahot Mordechai, Shabbat, no. 456) is that the omission of al ha-nissim does not trigger the repetition even of tefillah, where it is certainly mandatory!! Moreover, the problematic character of Ravyah's comparison to tefillat arvit is evident. While tefillat arvit was legislated by Yaakov Avinu and parallels biblical avodot that were completed at night in the Beit ha-Mikdash and thus, possibly has the capacity to be elevated further by commitment and practice, it is anything but obvious that the rabbinic holiday of Chanukah, and the al ha-nissim text that articulates its consequential nature qualifies similarly for such elevation.

However, we have suggested elsewhere that while the details of Chanukah are rabbinic, the stakes and implications both of the decision to wage war in response to shaat ha-shemad (a formal challenge to religious principle- see Rambam Hilchos Chanukah 3:1, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:1-3), and the subsequent ramifications of the neis pah ha-shemen and mitzvah of hadlakat neiros encompassed core biblical halachic principles, including kiddush Hashem and ahavat Hashem. Chanukah reinvigorated Klal Yisrael's special sense of providence and destiny, and deepened its bonds with Hashem, especially through the very targeted vehicles of Torah study and mitzvah observance. These themes are, of course, encapsulated in al ha-nissim, they embody the special theme of hoda'ah that defines Chanukah and the mitzvah of the nerot.

While perhaps there was initially no formal feasting requirement, the overflow of joy, ahavat Hashem, and simchah that attended this holiday may have inspired Klal Yisrael to express their abundant hakarat ha-tov and their profound appreciation for the unique bond cemented by Torah and mitzvot also through this mechanism. Some formulations (see Ravyah, Aterez Zahav on Shulchan Aruch op cit) do, in fact, emphasize the role of se'eudah and mishteh on Chanukah. Moreover, even absent this motif, it should be noted that birkat ha-mazon, the biblical hoda'ah blessing par excellence, may have come to be perceived as

a particularly appropriate and opportune vehicle for maximizing and intensifying the themes of praise and thanksgiving that are so central to Chanukah. Indeed, when the gemar emphasizes that when recited, al ha-nissim should be integrated into the hoda'ah section, it may have actually opened the door for the subsequent expansion!

According to Ravyah, the very fact that this initiative and commitment of shevach and hoda'ah radiated from Am Yisrael validated it as a normative standard, one that could no longer be ignored or dismissed as voluntary or discretionary. To abstain from articulating hoda'ah and hakarat ha-tov in birkat ha-mazon once it was commonly and broadly perceived as a natural and even essential vehicle for these pivotal themes was to confound expectations, an inherent lapse of gratitude and thanksgiving! Thus, the previously discretionary hoda'ah framework of birkat ha-mazon came to demand more, due to the initiative, practice, and commitment of Am Yisrael, than the initially obligatory tefillah recitation.

Ravyah's exceptional ruling regarding the capacity of al hanissim's omission to disqualify birkat ha-mazon was rejected by the consensus of halachists. However, as we have noted, the inconceivability of ignoring and squandering the opportunity to articulate the hoda'ah of al ha-nissim, perhaps especially in the ultimate birkat hoda'ah of birkat ha-mazon, was widely embraced by the halachah. It is really no surprise that a maximalist, mehadrin posture came to be applied to the articulation of Jewish destiny, halachic commitment, Divine providence on the festival of hoda'ah.

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#### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

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##### **To See the Good**

Now it came to pass when Yosef came to his brothers, that they stripped Yosef of his shirt, of the fine woolen coat which was upon him. And they took him and cast him into the pit; now the pit was empty there was no water in it. (Breishis 37:23-24)

...now the pit was empty-there was no water in it: Since it says: "now the pit was empty," do I not know that there was no water in it? For what purpose did the Torah write, "...there was no water in it"? To inform us that there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it. – Rashi

So Yosef's master took him and put him into prison, the place where the king's prisoners were imprisoned, and he was there in the prison. (Breishis 39:20)

It baffles my imagination! How in the world was Yosef HaTzadik able to endure the suffering that he was subjected to and not only rise to the heights of political power he would later attain but to remain a Tzadik!? How did not just crawl up into a ball and withdraw after

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

being thrown into a pit by his brothers, and sold to Egypt, only to be cast into prison, in a foreign country, on totally made-up charges!? How did he do it? What was his secret? How does one remain so ferociously resilient!?

Years ago my wife and I went to visit Rabbi Mordechai Schwab ztl, the Tzadik of Monsey, with a concern that we had. After listening carefully he declared multiple times with great enthusiasm, "Reish Lamed – Shulchan Aruch! Reish Lamed – Shulchan Aruch!" Then he opened up a Mishne Breurah – Shulchan Aruch to Reish Lamed – Chapter 230 and he showed me inside the words, Ragel Adam Lomer – 'Kol Ma D'Avid Rachmana L'Tav Avid!' "A person should accustom himself to say, 'Everything that the Merciful One does, He does for the good!'"

Two footnotes are required here! 1) The requirement is to be in the habit of saying the words even if at the time one does not feel it is so. 2) One should say these words for himself, affirming that truth for himself. One should not say it to another who is currently suffering!

Then he told me a very big secret that I don't mind sharing. He said, "There is a promise that if one says this, he will live to see the good that comes out of that situation!" It was deeply soothing and calming for me to hear his words. I only regret not having the presence of mind at the time to ask him at that moment what is the source of this promise. Years later and whenever I shared this encounter, I would find myself wondering where that promise is recorded.

Now it occurs to me that we might have the primary source right here with Yosef HaTzadik. I don't have any real evidence of what he was reciting at the bottom of the pit when his brothers threw him into a mix of scorpions and snakes, but the Prophet Habbakuk declares, "Tzadik B'Emunaso Yichyah!" – The Tzadik lives by his Emunah-his loyalty to and trust in HASHEM! Even if he was not reciting these exact words, "Ragel Adam Lomer – 'Kol Ma D'Avid Rachmana L'Tav Avid!'" A person should accustom himself to say, 'Everything that the Merciful One does, He does for the good!'" He must have been saying something like that!

Then when he was sold into slavery and taken to a foreign land, on the way down he must have been cogitating on just such a concept. When he was hauled off to prison in Egypt on false charges, he must have been soothing his emotions with words that can be summarized by, "Everything the Merciful One does, He does for the good!" Well, Yosef HaTzadik remained a Tzadik through it all, and ultimately, miraculously, in the end, he did live to see the good!



## In My Opinion CHANUKAH 5781

### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

As we know, it is our tradition is to recite the Hallel service on all eight days of the festival of Chanuka. However, on the great festival day of Purim, a day which also celebrates the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people from disaster and extinction, the Hallel service is omitted from prayers recited on that day.

The rabbis of the Talmud, commenting upon this difference between these two rabbinic holidays, explain that the holiday of Chanukah occurred on the basis of miracles that took place in the land of Israel, and, therefore, the recitation of Hallel is proper, while the miracle and salvation of the Jewish people which we commemorate on the day of Purim took place while the Jewish people already were in exile, and took place outside of the land of Israel.

At first glance, this appears to be a technical and superficial distinction. It represents a distinction between two sets of facts but does not explain the fundamental difference between them. In fact, one would be tempted to say that the miracle of Purim, because it did in fact take place outside the land of Israel in a foreign and hostile environment, should be reckoned as the greater miracle, and should merit more strongly the requirement of reciting Hallel on the day of its commemoration. Over the ages, we have accepted this distinction between the two holidays, but for many, the true difference has eluded our understanding.

As you can well imagine, the issue has been thoroughly discussed over the ages by the great rabbinic scholars and commentators. This distinction is especially difficult for us to reconcile with our limited human logic. We see both the Mishnah and Talmud strongly emphasize the holiday of Purim, which has an entire tractate of the Talmud devoted to it, while the holiday of Chanukah appears to have relatively little discussion.

It is not my purpose in this essay to discuss all the various ideas, insights, and comments that the great scholars of the Jewish people have opined on this subject over the ages. Suffice it to say, this matter has occupied much space, thought, and discussion. We can well understand why this would be the case, since we always strive to attain a deeper understanding and spiritual analysis of the special days in the Jewish calendar, and the lessons they come to teach us in each and every generation, in every situation and society.

It would be negligent on the part of all of us who celebrate these days not to have arrived at some sort of insight regarding the different modes of prayer on these different days and the miracles that the Lord performed for us.

My meager contribution this subject, I think, has a certain validity in our time. Living in the land of Israel means living in a constant moment of miracle. Even though we become accustomed to what we call "normal life" in this country, we are reminded every so often by events that the mere presence of the Jewish people in our ancient homeland is an historical miracle almost unparalleled in the annals of human history.

As such, we become what the rabbis called "accustomed to miracles." And, when a special miracle occurs, we would tend to ignore it, not recognize its validity, or not appreciate its import on all Jewish life for generations yet to come.

The miracle of Chanukah that took place in the land of Israel, has to be emphasized in order that the people would appreciate how extraordinary this special miracle was, and how necessary its occurrence was to Jewish survival and growth. Many times, miracles may go unnoticed simply because of the atmosphere of the miraculous which permeates the land of Israel.

Outside of the land of Israel, human beings always deem life to be normal, regular, and predictable. Even though this is never actually the case, we tend to think in those terms when living in the Diaspora. Because of that mindset, we are certainly aware of every miracle that occurs, even if it is, so to speak, relatively minor and hidden.

In the Diaspora, there is no necessity for us to recite Hallel to appreciate that a miracle occurred. I think that this is the essential difference between life in the land of Israel and life outside of the land of Israel.

Happy Chanukah

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

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## Weekly Parsha VAYESHEV 5781

### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah reading begins with a simple statement that our father Yaakov settled in the land where his father had lived his entire life – the land of Canaan. Why is it so important that the Torah should bother to mention that this land was the land of Canaan? It seems obvious that we know from previous chapters where the family of Yaakov lived, and that it was the land of Canaan that would later be called the land of Israel. What special significance is there now when the Torah adds to the original text the descriptive phrase that it was the land of Canaan?

As usual, in discussing such issues the commentators over the centuries have added their insights and wisdom to help us understand and appreciate the greatness and message of the biblical text itself. Nothing appears in the Torah at random, though there are a few instances when the Talmud does identify certain words and phrases as being additional decorations of beauty on the Torah text. Considering these extraneous words, many explanations and comments have been offered throughout the millennia of Jewish life and scholarship. Each of these elucidations adds understanding to the holiness of the text.

My addition to this wealth of scholarship is the idea that the phrase "the land of Canaan" occurs at the very end of the verse, after it is stated that Yaakov dwelled in the land of his father. The order of the phrases is important because it teaches us an important lesson on how to view our attachment to the land of Israel.

Yaakov came to live there not because it was the land Canaan – its physical location, its landscape, and its geographical structure. Rather, his entire attachment to it was that it was the land where his father had dwelt, and that his father did so under the commandment of the Almighty. Thus, the attachment and bond of the Jewish people, the descendants of Yaakov are not based on purely external considerations. Rather, it is based upon our religious heritage and family tradition that has, over the ages, taught us that this is our home, this is where we belong and where we should live.

Over the long exile of the Jewish people, this attachment to the land has never wavered or waned. It is interesting that even when the Zionist movement had to vote whether to accept the country of Uganda as a substitute for the land of Israel, even the most secular of labor Zionists refused to allow this to happen. For the Jewish people throughout the ages, it was always about settling in the land of Israel and nowhere else. The failed colonies of Baron Hirsch in South America and the rest of the world, as compared to the successful colonies of the Baron Rothschild in the land of Israel, only serve to illustrate this point in historical terms. Yaakov is going home, and he knows exactly where home is located.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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## The Power of Praise (Vayeshev 5781)

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership.*

Reuben is the leader who might have been but never was. He was Jacob's firstborn. Jacob said of him on his deathbed, "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power." (Gen. 49:3) This is an impressive tribute, suggesting physical presence and commanding demeanour.

More significantly, in his early years Reuben consistently appeared to be the most morally sensitive of Jacob's children. He was Leah's son, and keenly felt his mother's disappointment that she was not Jacob's favourite. Here is the first description of him as a child:

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. (Gen. 30:14) Mandrakes were thought to be an aphrodisiac. Reuben knew this and immediately thought of his mother. It was a touching gesture but it misfired because he presented them to Leah in the presence of Rachel and unintentionally caused an argument between them.

The next episode in which we see Reuben is far more troubling:

Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrat, that is, Bethlehem... While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father's concubine Bilhah ... (Gen. 35:19-22)

If understood literally this would amount to a major sin. Sleeping with your father's concubine was not only a sexual crime; it was an unforgivable act of treason and betrayal, as we discover later in Tanach when Absalom decides to rebel against his father David and replace him as king. Ahitophel gives him the following advice:

"Sleep with your father's concubines, whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute." (2 Samuel 16:21)

According to the Sages, the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally.[1] After Rachel died, Jacob had moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. This, felt Reuben, was an intolerable humiliation for his mother. It was hard for Leah to endure the fact that Jacob loved her sister more. It would have been altogether unbearable for her to discover that he even preferred Rachel's handmaid. So Reuben moved Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's. The verb *vayishkav* should therefore be translated not as "slept with" but "changed the sleeping arrangement."

At this point, however, the text does a strange thing. It says, "Reuben went in and slept with [or changed the sleeping arrangement of] his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it ..." and then signals a paragraph break in the middle of the sentence. The sentence ends: "Jacob had twelve sons." This is very unusual indeed. What it suggests is an audible silence. Communication had completely broken down between Jacob and Reuben. If the Sages are correct in their interpretation, then this is one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of Genesis. Jacob clearly believed that Reuben had slept with his concubine Bilhah. He cursed him for it on his deathbed:

Unstable as water, you will not excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch, and defiled it. (Gen. 49:4)

Yet according to the Sages, this did not happen. Had Jacob been willing to speak to Reuben he would have discovered the truth, but Jacob grew up in a family that lacked open, candid communication (as we saw a few weeks ago, during our discussion of parshat Toldot). Thus, for many years Reuben was suspected by his father of a sin he had not committed – all because he cared about the feelings of his mother.

Which brings us to the third episode in Reuben's life, the most tragic of all. Jacob favoured Joseph, son of his beloved Rachel, and the other brothers knew it. When he gave Joseph a visible sign of favouritism, the richly embroidered cloak, the brothers resented it yet more. When Joseph began to have dreams of the rest of the family bowing down to him, the brothers' animosity reached boiling point. When they were far from home, tending the flocks, and Joseph appeared in the distance, their hatred made them decide then and there to kill him. Reuben alone resisted:

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him [Joseph] from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. (Gen. 37:21-22)

Reuben's plan was simple. He persuaded the brothers not to kill Joseph but rather to let him die by leaving him to starve in a pit. He intended to return later, when the brothers had moved on, to rescue him. When he returned, however, Joseph was no longer there. He had been sold as a slave. Reuben was devastated.

Three times Reuben tried to help but despite his best intentions, his efforts failed. He was responsible for the one recorded quarrel between

Leah and Rachel. His father wrongly suspected him of a major sin and cursed him on his deathbed. He failed to save Joseph. Reuben knew when things were not right, and tried to act to make changes for the better, but he somehow lacked the prudence, confidence or courage to achieve his desired outcome. He should have waited for Leah to be alone before giving her the mandrakes. He should have remonstrated directly with his father about his sleeping arrangements. He should have physically taken Joseph safely back home.

What happened to Reuben to make him lack confidence? The Torah gives a poignant and unmistakable hint. Listen to these verses describing the birth of Leah's (and Jacob's) first two children:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. (Gen. 29:32-33)

Both times, it was Leah, not Jacob, who named the child – and both names were a cry to Jacob to notice her and love her – if not for herself then at least because she has given him children. Jacob evidently did not notice.

Reuben became what he became because – so the text seems to imply – his father's attention was elsewhere; he did not care for either Leah or her sons (the text itself says, "the Lord saw that Leah was not loved"). Reuben knew this and felt intensely his mother's shame and his father's apparent indifference.

People need encouragement if they are to lead. It is fascinating to contrast the hesitant Reuben with the confident – even overconfident – Joseph, who was loved and favoured by his father. If we want our children to have the confidence to act when action is needed, then we have to empower, encourage and praise them.

There is a fascinating Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers:

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arach. He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus – a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya – happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest – a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel – a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arach – an ever-flowing spring. (Mishnah Avot 2:10-11)

Why does the Mishnah, whose aim is to teach us lasting truths, give us this apparently trivial account of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's pupils and how he used to praise them? The answer, I believe, is that the Mishnah is telling us how to raise disciples, how to be a coach, mentor and guide: by using focused praise.

The Mishnah does not simply say that Yochanan ben Zakkai said good things about his students. It uses an unusual locution: "He used to count [moneh] their praise", meaning, his positive remarks were precise and accurately targeted. He told each of his disciples what their specific strength was.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus had an outstanding memory. At a time when the Oral Law was not yet written down, he could recall the teachings of the tradition better than anyone else. Elazar ben Arach was creative, able to come up with an endless stream of fresh interpretations. When we follow our particular passions and gifts, we contribute to the world what only we can give.

However, the fact that we may have an exceptional gift may also mean that we have conspicuous deficiencies. No one has all the strengths. Sufficient if we have one. But we must also know what we lack. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus became so fixated on the past that he resisted change even when it was decided on by the majority of his colleagues. Eventually he was excommunicated for failing to accept his colleagues' ruling (Baba Metzia 59b).

Elazar ben Arach's fate was even sadder. After the death of Yochanan ben Zakkai, he separated from his colleagues. They went to Yavneh; he went to Hamat (Emmaus). It was a pleasant place to live and it was

where his wife's family lived. Apparently he was so confident of his intellectual gifts that he believed he could maintain his scholarship by himself. Eventually he forgot everything he had ever learned (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 14: 6). The man more gifted than his contemporaries eventually died while making almost no lasting contribution to the tradition.

There is a delicate balance between the neglect that leads to someone to lack the confidence to do the necessary deed, and the excessive praise or favoritism that creates overconfidence and the belief that you are better than others. That balance is necessary if we are to be the sunlight that helps others grow.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)**

#### **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “She is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26)

The biblical drama of the peregrinations of Jacob ended with the patriarch's return to his father's house and homeland in last week's reading of Vayishlah, and now with the reading of Vayeshev the riveting story of Joseph begins. Just as Jacob's exilic wanderings open with his dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, so do Joseph's wanderings begin with his dreams of the brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf and then of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph.

The Joseph story continues at a fast pace, with the brothers' jealousy (a jealousy unto death) resulting in the sale of Joseph into Egyptian servitude and leading to the brothers' deception of their father Jacob, making him think that a savage beast had devoured his favorite son and heir apparent (Gen. 37:1-36).

The biblical account skips a chapter, however, before telling us of Joseph's adventures in Egypt; we must wait for that until Chapter 39, after which we remain with Joseph until his death at the end of the Book of Genesis. Chapter 38—a clear interruption of the Joseph story line—provides a fascinating interlude dealing with brother Judah, his three sons, and daughter-in-law Tamar, who enters into an act of deceptive harlotry with her father-in-law because she felt herself thwarted from her anticipated levirate marriage with Judah's third son, Shelah.

But why does this story—replete with sex, intrigue and moral outrage against the wrong party—find its place in the midst of the Joseph story? Let the Bible first finish with Joseph, and then bring in this tale of Judah, perhaps even as important background for the Messianic legacy he is to receive from Jacob on his death bed (Gen. 49:8-10).

And this leads to a second question. Apparently, Messianism is an important factor here, since Judah is the tribe-producer of the Messiah, scion of the Davidic dynasty who will bring the ultimate peace and the ingathering of all the nations.

Perez, the Jacob-like character who pushes ahead and breaks out his elder twin Zerah's initial lead, to emerge first, is the seventh-generation grandfather of Boaz, in turn great-grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:18-22). But why choose a forbidden sexual act of immorality, a father-in-law (Judah) with his daughter-in-law (Tamar), and an act of harlotry at that, which adds even further transgression, as the union which will ultimately produce the Messiah? Ought the Messiah not emerge from a much purer act of sexual love within the context of marriage in accordance with Moses and Israel? The entire Book of Genesis after the choosing of Abraham is concerned first and foremost with who will receive the legacy of the firstborn, which son will be the torchbearer to pass down the baton of Messianism: the responsibility of bringing to the world peace and redemption by teaching compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to the next generation. Our portion Vayeshev begins with Joseph, seemingly the choice of his father Jacob, who gave him the striped tunic of many colors.

But Joseph doesn't dream of uniting heaven and earth, God and world; he dreams of mastery over his brothers, domination on land and in sky, and in his two dreams God and Israel do not appear even once! And moreover gathering sheaves of grain, agriculture, was not the pursuit of the family of Abraham in the Promised Land of Canaan; it was the activity discovered in Egypt, a far more sophisticated and corrupt culture

than existed in the Land of Israel. Joseph hankered after the fleshpots of Egypt, not the piety of “Palestine”; Joseph—at least at this point in his life—did not seem worthy of the legacy of the firstborn.

And so the Bible offers another option for the bearer of the familial blessing. You will remember that it was Judah who cleverly saved Joseph's life from death by starvation and scorpions in the pit by offering the brothers financial gain by selling their sibling into Egypt (Gen. 37:26, 27). At this point he marries a Canaanite woman with whom he has three sons; the eldest, Er, he marries off to Tamar. Er dies early, and Tamar is given in levirate marriage to Onan, Er's brother. Levirate marriage enables the brother to grant his hapless sibling a child and heir (even though he is dead) by impregnating—and taking responsibility for—his widow.

Since the child born to Tamar would be considered Er's and not Onan's, Onan refused to give his seed to Tamar. Onan too dies young as a Divine punishment for neglecting his responsibility to his elder sibling. Shelah is left; Judah is frightened to give Tamar as wife to another of his sons lest that son also die.

Tamar poses as a harlot, seduces Judah, and becomes pregnant with his seed. So Perez and ultimately Boaz and King David will ultimately be born.

Joseph attempts to escape his Abrahamic destiny by looking towards Egypt and its naturalism for his future. Judah likewise seems uninterested in guaranteeing Abrahamic fulfillment. Tamar is desperate to carry Judah's seed and continue the road to redemption. Judah also publicly admits his transgression with Tamar, praising her for being more interested in the Jewish future—by taking responsibility for past generations—than he was. Repentance, responsibility to past and commitment to future are the skill that Messianism is made of. Hence the story of Judah at this junction is a prefiguration of why it is eventually Judah and not Joseph who gives over the familial baton.

Shabbat Shalom!

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### **Chanukah: Richness of Spirit**

#### **Rav Kook Torah**

The holiday of Chanukah raises a number of questions:

- Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? After all, there was enough oil to burn for one day, so the miracle was really only for seven days. Since the holiday commemorates the miracle of the oil, we should celebrate for only seven days.

- The minimum requirement is for each family to light one candle each night. It is customary, however, to light with two hidurim (embellishments): every member of the family lights, and the number of candles corresponds to the day of Chanukah. Why do we perform these two hidurim?

- The Talmud in Menachot 28b relates that the Maccabees were unable to obtain a solid gold Menorah for the Temple as the Torah specifies. Lacking the means for such an expensive Menorah, they constructed a simple one out of iron rods plated with tin. Why was there a miracle for the oil but none for the Menorah itself?

Two Hidurim

The truth is, had the Maccabees not found the small cruse of pure olive oil, they could have used any oil. While it is best to use olive oil, any oil that burns well may be used in the Temple Menorah.

The miracle of Chanukah could have been the Menorah burning all eight days with “miracle oil.” But while “miracle oil” is as good as any other oil, it is not olive oil. Thus the miracle of the first day of Chanukah was not the burning of “miracle oil,” but that the Maccabees found ritually pure olive oil. This discovery was quite unexpected, and it enabled them to light with the optimal type of oil.

In addition, since the majority of the nation at the time was ritually impure, the Maccabees could even have used impure oil. The miracle of finding the cruse of olive oil thus allowed them to fulfill two hidurim: lighting on the first day with olive oil, and lighting with ritually pure oil. We commemorate this miracle by similarly performing two hidurim, with every family member lighting, and lighting multiple candles.

Guarding the Inner Spirit

But why was there no comparable miracle with the Menorah itself? Why didn't the Maccabees also find a gold Menorah in the desecrated Temple?

The Menorah corresponds to the material state of the Jewish people. It is a vessel for holding the oil. The olive oil, on the other hand, is a metaphor for the nation's inner spirit.

While it is fitting that the external vessel should be aesthetically pleasing, there are times when the physical reality is harsh and discouraging. During such times, we make do with what we have, even if it means lighting with a Menorah improvised out of iron rods.

However, the spirit - the oil that nourishes the inner flame - must always remain spiritually rich, with all of the hidurim of purity and holiness. This is an important part of the message of Chanukah: the miracle occurred, not with the Menorah, but with the oil. We may suffer physical hardships and deprivation, but our inner spiritual life should always shine with a clear and pure light.

(Silver from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 116-117. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, p. 797)

#### **Rav Aviner**

*Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample: Wedding Hall which also Hosts Non-Kosher Affairs*

Q: If a wedding hall hosts Kosher and non-Kosher affairs, is it permissible for me to work there when there is a Kosher affair?

A: Yes.

Mikveh in Desert

Q: When Bnai Yisrael wandered in the desert for 40 years, where did they immerse?

A: There are many Desert Puddles, big and small, and underground springs.

Q: That is hard to believe...

A: [www.shutterstock.com/search/desert+puddle](http://www.shutterstock.com/search/desert+puddle).

Jews in Exile and Anti-Semitism

Q: Is it proper to wish that Jews in Exile suffer from Anti-Semitism so they make Aliyah?

A: G-d forbid! That is evil!

Son Beating Father in Game

Q: Is it permissible for me to beat my father in a game, or is it forbidden because of Kibud Av?

A: It is permissible.

Living in Parents' Attached Apartment

Q: We are a newly-married couple and live for free in an apartment attached to my parents' house, but my wife does not feel comfortable there. What should we do?

A: It is most important to live in a place where one feels comfortable.

Amen between Netilat Yadayim and Ha-Motzi

Q: If I washed Netilat Yadayim and have not yet made Ha-Motzi, is it permissible to say Amen on someone's blessing over Netilat Yadayim?

A: Yes, since it is the same matter. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 41:2.

Reserve Army Duty and Marriage

Q: I perform a short reserve duty in the Army each year but it is very difficult for my wife. What should I do?

A: Perform the military service and pacify your wife in some way.

Tree which Makes a Mess

Q: My tree makes a mess on my neighbor's lawn. Am I obligated to build a fence, move it, or clean his yard?

A: It is proper to do so. Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:32.

Payments for Child

Q: In the case of a divorce, should the father or mother pay for a child's therapy with a Psychologist and driving lessons?

A: The one who loves him should pay. You can call me to talk.

Milchig Feeding Tube

Q: If I am receiving a Milchig feeding tube, is it permissible for me to eat meat?

A: Yes. A feeding tube is not eating.

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#### **BS"D Parashat Vayaishev and Chanuka 5781**

#### **Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

#### **Strength and Conquest**

Much like a motion picture which is composed of thousands of individual frames passing before the viewer's eye, life too consists of a series of individual time frames of 70 years ("The span of our life is 70 years or with strength 80 years" – Tehillim 90:10). And just as one cannot understand the plot of a movie from a fleeting glance, one cannot decipher HaShem's intent in history from one- or two-time frames or even from a thousand years.

Our parasha relates that Yosef found his brothers in the Valley of Dotan, not far from Shechem. After removing his many-colored cloak, the nine brothers (not counting Yosef, or Reuven and Binyamin who were with Ya'akov at the time) involved in the betrayal lowered Yosef into a pit of snakes and scorpions, before selling him to the Ishmaelites and Midianites, as it says, "Yosef followed his brothers and found them at Dotan" (Genesis 37:17).

On Yom Kippur and on Tish'a Be'Av, we read the heart-breaking saga of the ten martyred rabbis who were cruelly murdered by the Romans, but in fact were divinely sentenced to death for the 1500-year-old sin of Yosef's having been sold into slavery. We weep over the fate that befell these great men and the implications it has had for the Jewish People. Yet, HaShem's ways are mysterious, and no one can fathom the thoughts of the Creator, whose gaze encompasses all generations from Adam to the last man on earth.

The then Mufti of Yerushalayim spent the years of World War Two in Berlin, with his mentor Hitler. The two entered into an agreement: the Mufti would enroll thousands of Moslems from Bosnia and its related areas into the ranks of the S.S.; In return, the Germans, after conquering Palestine, would construct a major death camp where the Jews of the Middle East would be brought to be murdered. But, in November 1942, General Rommel was defeated at the battle of Al Alamein and the murderous plan was averted. The site earmarked for the camp was the very same Valley of Dotan cited above.

The pieces now fit together.

The death of the Ten Martyrs was an atonement for the sale of Yosef. However, the Mufti and the Germans could never have known that the murder of the Ten Martyrs was sufficient to appease the demands of Strict Justice; so that in our time, 2000 years later, calamity would be averted in the Valley of Dotan.

The composers of the Yom Kippur liturgy included the saga of the ten Martyred Rabbis to deliver the incredible, inconceivable and irrational message that yesterday's tragedies pave the way for today's redemption, which only HaShem is capable of performing. Including the overwhelming tragedy of the Shoah which paved the way for the return of Am Yisrael to the holy land through the incredible creation and survival of Medinat Yisrael; which only HaShem is capable of performing. And the ongoing tragedy of 6000 years of Man's inhuman actions towards his fellow man will pave humanity's return to Gan Eden, which only HaShem is capable of performing.

HaShem behind the scenes

Midrash Raba (Beraishet 85) describes the mood in the house of Ya'akov after the selling of Yosef:

The tribes (brothers) were occupied with what they had done in selling Yosef (their conscience); Yosef was occupied with his (loin) sack and mourning; Reuven was occupied with his sack and mourning; Ya'akov was occupied with his sack and mourning; Yehuda was occupied with finding a wife, and the Almighty was occupied with creating the light of the Mashiach.

In every situation in life, as with the sale of Yosef, there is the subjective interpretation of events as viewed by those involved, but also, and more significantly, there is the will of HaShem as He directs the affairs of human beings while standing unobserved behind the curtains "creating the light of the Mashiach".

In parashat Vayishlach, the brothers Shimon and Levi annihilate the entire population of the city of Shechem. What was HaShem's intention in bringing about this seemingly over-aggressive, unbalanced, asymmetric, excessive, disproportionate Goldstonian reaction by nice Jewish boys?

I suggest:

Avraham Aveinu arrived in Eretz Yisrael at a time when the land was occupied by the pagan descendants of Cham, son of Noach. There were cultures and sub-cultures of avoda zara (idolatry), each according to the family breakdown into the ten "nations," of Canaani, Chieti, Emori, etc. Avraham began to advance the teachings of monotheism with much success. He established a yeshiva and a hotel-restaurant where many people gathered to hear the word of God. This was obviously not to the liking of the religious and political establishment of the times, for Avraham was undermining the core beliefs of the people by introducing God and morality, touching on matters such as family, law, treatment of slaves, and much more. But now the charismatic Avraham and his wife Sarah are long gone. Yitzchak is old and unable to see. Ya'akov, the ben Torah, has not been seen in Eretz Yisrael for over twenty years. The only relevant descendant of Avraham is Aisav, with whom the idolaters can get along fabulously, since Aisav is one of their own. So, for all intents and purposes, Yiddishkeit is no longer present in the holy land, and the natives could return to their old ways, uninterrupted by pangs of conscience brought about by those "holy-than-thou" Jews.

Then one day, Ya'akov reappears in Eretz Yisrael with his family and possessions. His arrival could have been like that of the chassidim and chalutzim 100 and 200 years ago, when they bought "a dunam here and a dunam there," a house here and a house there, with no great message signaling their arrival. However, HaShem speaks to people in the language that they understand. To us HaShem speaks as a father teaching Torah to his children; to gentiles He speaks in the language that they appreciate – the language of strength and war.

Ya'akov and Judaism have returned home, and the occupiers have to learn that it is no longer "business as usual". HaShem, as the ultimate playwright, brings about Ya'akov's return on the stage of history in an explosive manner; the city of Shechem is decimated. Ya'akov explodes upon the stage of history – this is what gentiles understand.

When later in his life, Ya'akov and his 69 relatives leave the holy land to join with Yosef in Egypt, the land is once again devoid of Judaism. Four hundred years later the nation returns under the leadership of Moshe and Yehoshua. Moshe defeats the two super-powers of Og King of Bashan, and Sichon King of Emori, and Yehoshua continues to destroy 31 city-states in Eretz Yisrael.

We again entered the land not by "dunam here and dunam there," but in the way that the gentiles understand – strength and conquest.

For two thousand years, the main body of the Jewish nation was in exile with only a small number of Jews left in the land, so that Judaism was not the dominant force here.

Then came the holocaust and the enemies of our people were certain that it was only a matter of time when the world would be "free" from the shackles of Judaism as the Jewish people dwindle and vanish.

Then in 1948, we again leapt onto the platform of history with an eruption that has caught the attention of the world until this very day. We drove back seven standing armies of Arab states in the War of Independence. And we have been victorious in the most dramatic way in all our other wars. And in those conflicts where Tzahal did not excel, it was only because we imposed self-restraint on the fighters.

Indeed, HaShem speaks to all in the language that they understand. We understand the kol demama daka (the soft gentle voice of HaShem), but the Aisavs of the world are impressed only by strength – with which Ya'akov is endowed when necessary.

B careful B healthy B here

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*His Father's Fears*

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

There are many ways to interpret biblical texts. Some commentaries take a literal approach, others probe for deeper meanings. The great Chassidic masters, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov in the mid-eighteenth century, offer us many examples of the latter path.

At times, the effort to discover depths of meaning results in what seems to be a distortion of the plain meaning of the text. Such seeming distortions are often referred to colloquially as "Chassidische Torah." I have personally found that these efforts are very worthwhile and that the seeming distortions reveal essential hidden truths.

The collected writings of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809) contain classic examples of Chassidische Torah. Almost invariably, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak diverges from the plain meaning of the text and ingeniously reinterprets the text in a manner that academicians, along with ordinary readers who prefer to read the Bible literally, find scandalous. However, his ingenuity unfailingly reveals unanticipated layers of meaning that are worthy of reflection. Some would even go so far as to maintain that this approach reveals vital truths that are utterly inaccessible were one to limit his study to the plain text itself.

Before proceeding with an example of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's brand of biblical exposition, a few words about the man and his loving personality are necessary. Legend has it that the founder of the Chassidic movement himself, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, appeared one day before his disciples with drinks and pastries, distributed them to the assembled, and told them to rejoice. They were surprised and asked for the reason for the celebration. The master explained, "A holy soul is about to descend into the world today, a soul who will see only the good in every person, and who will ardently advocate for every member of the House of Israel." The year of that small celebration was 1740. The man about whom the master spoke was Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev.

For more details, and for your inspiration, I refer you to any of the many biographies of this great "defender" of the Jewish people. But I particularly suggest two excellent biographies, one by Samuel Dresner and another by Simcha Raz.

Now, let us turn to the very first verse in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23). The verse reads, "Jacob settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan." The Hebrew for "the land where his father had sojourned" is b'erezt megurei aviv. There is no dispute among the major commentators as to the meaning of those words, although some translators may substitute "had dwelled" for "had sojourned."

Along comes Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, however, who suggests an entirely different meaning of the word megurei. Elsewhere in the Bible, in admittedly very different contexts, that word means "fear," "anxiety," perhaps even "terror."

Consider but three examples from the book of Psalms. There, in chapter 31 verse 14, we have the phrase magor mesaviv, which translates as "terror on every side." Continuing on to chapter 33 verse 8, we have the phrase "mimenu yaguru," which translates as "they will dread him." Finally, in chapter 34 verse 5, we have the phrase "umikol megurosai hitzilani," which translates as "He saved me from all my terrors."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak does not find it necessary to cite any of those verses in Psalms, for he assumes that his reader can easily come up with many other examples that support his thesis. His thesis is simple: One can easily justify the following translation of the first verse of our Torah portion: "Jacob settled in the land of his father's fears, the land of Canaan."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak also assumes that his reader need not be reminded of the significance of the phrase "his father's fears." After all, it was as recently as two weeks ago that we read in Genesis 31:53 of the oath that "Jacob swore by Pachad Yitzchak, the Fear of his father Isaac." Whereas Jacob's grandfather Abraham symbolizes lovingkindness, his father Isaac has come to represent fear and awe in the Jewish consciousness. In this week's Torah portion, then, Jacob is returning to settle in the land where he cannot escape the attitude of fearfulness that characterized his father.

But what is the nature of his father's fear? Was he anxious about the circumstances that confront us all? Was he fearful of his enemies, of natural disasters, of famine? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak responds to these questions with a resounding, "No."

Isaac's fears were of a distinctly spiritual nature. He feared that he might fall short of the Almighty's expectations of him. He was anxious lest he

sin and, thereby, distance himself from his desired and well-earned closeness to the Almighty.

It was to those spiritual fears that Jacob was returning when he returned to his father's land. When he was distant from his father and struggling to adjust to his father-in-law Laban's treacheries, he could not trouble himself to be concerned about his diminished relationship with the Lord. After all, the Lord had promised him, "Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land" (Genesis 28:15). Now that he had returned to that land, he had to recover his "father's fears." He had to be concerned about his relationship with the Almighty and to become afraid, yes afraid, of shemma yigrom hachet, perhaps his sins had caused a breach in his relationship with the Lord.

The selection of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's biblical commentary that I have just shared with you, dear reader, is part of the collection of his teachings known as Kedushat Levi. But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak never stops with just a comment upon the biblical text. Rather, he teaches a practical lesson to his readers, a lesson aimed at connecting his reader to the Jewish people at large.

Thus, he goes on to write as follows: "For each of us must serve the Lord at every moment and every occasion, so that we always rejoice when we see that it goes well for other Jews in the world, and so that if, heaven forbid, the reverse is true, we feel the pain of others and are consciously anxious lest we have sinned and are, thereby, somehow responsible for the misfortunes of others."

Each Jew must rejoice when other Jews are fortunate and must not only suffer along with their misfortunes but must do whatever is possible to alleviate those misfortunes.

Jacob's "father's fears" are not mere neurotic anxieties. Rather, they are based upon a felt connection with others and an abiding concern that one's own failures may somehow affect others in his family, others in his community, others in his nation, and others in the world.

But just feeling empathic is insufficient. We must be concerned enough to rectify our own shortcomings for the ultimate benefit of those around us.

Jacob's return to his father's land was not a mere geographic change of location. It was a change in his sense of responsibility for others. He would now be motivated to better himself so that others could gain from his closeness to the Almighty.

Read more about the life and works of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, and you will learn that he practiced what he preached.

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### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeishev**

*Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya*

#### **Detecting the Wink of the Ribono Shel Olam**

In Parshas VaYeshev, the Torah teaches "Then they took him, and cast him into the pit; and the pit was empty, no water was in it. They sat down to eat food; they raised their eyes and they saw, behold! – a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, and their camels were bearing spices, and balsam, and birthwort – on their way to bring them down to Egypt. Yehudah said to his brothers, 'What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites – but let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers listened." [Bereshis 37:24-27]

Chazal say that no slave ever escaped Egypt. Yehudah's plan, therefore, seemed very reasonable to the brothers. Rather than cause Yosef's death, they could merely eliminate him as a problem by selling him to the Arab traders who were heading down to Egypt.

Rashi raises the question – why was it important in this narration for the Torah to specify the load that the Arabs were carrying in their caravans ("spices, balsam, and birthwort" – all possessing a pleasant aroma)? Rashi answers that this shows the reward that comes to the righteous. Normally, he says, the Arabs would transport foul smelling petroleum and resin, but this time it happened that spices were the cargo, so that Yosef should not be harmed by a foul odor. (It is interesting to note – some things never change – even today the Arabs still sell oil!)

The question is, at this stage of the situation, does it really make a difference to Yosef whether the merchants were carrying sweet smelling spices or whether they were hauling pigs? Look what he has gone through! His brothers kidnapped him, they accused him, they tried and convicted him and then they threw him into a snake pit. In the end, they sell him into slavery. He is headed down to Egypt with little hope of returning home and seeing his father ever again. What kind of "reward" is this that the Ribono shel Olam is giving him that he should have spices to smell rather than oil while he is being transported as a prisoner far away from home? Would he even take notice at such a moment? Is this how the Almighty is "nice" to him? This seems irrelevant at this point. It seems meaningless! What does Rashi mean here?

I saw in a sefer called Nachal Eliyahu an answer in the name of Rav Mordechai Pogromansky, who was known as the "ilui of Telshe". He suggested the following approach – and the underlying idea is certainly a correct concept:

There are two types of ways the Ribono shel Olam can punish a person. One way is that He can say "I have had it with you. You are on your own. Whatever happens to you, happens. I abandon my Divine Providence over your fate and leave you to the vagaries of statistics and 'teva' (natural happenstance)."

Another type of punishment is when the Ribono shel Olam himself is meting out the punishment. He is the one giving the "Patch". It is much more reassuring when the person realizes that even though I am being punished, I know it is the Ribono shel Olam punishing me and I know that He is still thinking about me and He still cares about me. He feels that I need to go through the suffering I am now experiencing, for whatever reason it must be, but I am not just a statistic. I am very much in His Consciousness.

This is a fundamental idea (yesod) which we have mentioned on various occasions. We have cited a very famous observation of Rav Yonoson Eybeschutz [1690-1764] in his Yearos Devash. The Gemara [Brochos 7b] brings a famous drasha on the pasuk "A Psalm of David when he fled from Avshalom his son" [Tehillim 3:1]. This is one of the most tragic scenes in all of Tanach. Avshalom rebels against his own father – Dovid Melech Yisrael! Dovid must flee the capital from his own son Avshalom. When that happened, the pasuk says "A Mizmor (song of praise) to Dovid, when he fled from Avshalom his son." The Gemara asks: Is this a Mizmor? It should rather be an elegy (Kinah l'Dovid), a dirge!

The Gemara explains: Dovid was anxious about a major debt of his which had yet to be paid. The prophet told him he was going to be punished: "Thus sayeth Hashem: Behold I will raise against you evil from the midst of your own household..." [Shmuel II 12:11]. Dovid HaMelech did something wrong and he knew he was going to be punished. This was a price that he was going to need to pay. But he was anxious that the enemy from his household who would rise up against him might be an Eved or a Mamzer who would not have mercy upon him. Dovid was thus expecting that the coup against him would come from some kind of servant or army officer who would be ruthless and cruel to him. When he saw it was his own son, then he was happy.

The Yearos Devash explains: It is not natural for a son to rebel against his father, the king, who was so good to him. When Dovid saw that it was his own son who took up arms against him and was usurping the monarchy, he understood that the "Patch" was coming directly from the Ribono shel Olam. A "Patch" from the Ribono shel Olam means that He is still in charge, He still cares about me, He is still involved with me. That itself is a major consolation.

We once said that this is also the key to understanding a famous phrase from Perek 23 Pasuk 4 of Tehillim: "Your rod and your cane will comfort me." A cane, we understand, is an aid – it is a comfort and it helps. But a rod in Tanach is a tool for administering punishment. How could that be a comfort? It is the same idea. Sometimes a "Klop" from the Ribono shel Olam is comforting. A person realizes that he still has a connection with Hashem.

We see this in life. Sometimes it is amazing to hear, but people go through terrible tzores and yet they still feel a connection to the Ribono

shel Olam. They feel that the Ribono shel Olam is punishing them for whatever reason, but He still is in charge and He still cares for them. That is the meaning here as well. For Yosef to be taken down to Mitzrayim by a bunch of Yishmaelim, who 99 out of 100 times carry smelly petroleum, and against all odds he finds himself riding in a caravan with sweet smelling spices – this was a source of comfort. “G-d still loves me.” It is like a Potch with a wink and a smile. By smelling the sweet aroma, Yosef saw the Wink of the Ribono shel Olam. He saw His smile. This is not normal.

The Gemara [Nedarim 50] says that Rabbi Akiva and his wife, Rochel, were extremely poor. Rabbi Akiva’s wife was the daughter of an extremely wealthy individual who cut her off from his fortune because he was upset that she was marrying an ignorant shepherd. The couple was destitute. They did not have a bed. They slept on straw. Every morning, he needed to pick the straw out of his hair. One night, Eliyahu HaNavi came in the form of a poor person. He told Rabbi Akiva and Rochel that his wife was in labor and they did not have straw. He asked for some straw. Rabbi Akiva and Rochel gave their straw for this ‘woman in labor’ so that she should at least have a more comfortable bed on which to give birth. Rabbi Akiva turned to his wife and said, “You see, there are people who are poorer than us – they do not even have straw.”

The question needs to be asked: If Eliyahu HaNavi is coming to visit, why does he need to come as a pauper asking for straw? Why doesn’t he come as a millionaire and say, “This is terrible that you need to sleep on straw. Here is a bag of gold that will solve your problem!”

The answer is that for whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam wanted Rabbi Akiva to grow in Torah out of a state of poverty. He was the key link in the chain of Torah transmission through the ages. After all his original disciples died out between Pesach and Shavuot, he took five additional students who eventually became the foundational transmitters of the entire corpus of Talmudic literature. For whatever reason, it was part of the Divine Plan that Rabbi Akiva should learn m’toch ha’dchak! But He saw that at that moment, perhaps they were depressed about their poverty – how can we live like this? He therefore sent them a message: There are people worse off than you. That gave them the courage to continue. This is the “Potch with the smile; the Potch that comes with a wink.”

This is what the Almighty did for Yosef as well, and this is what Rashi means “The reward of the righteous”. Even when Tzadikim need to suffer, they still feel that the Hand of the Ribono shel Olam is together with them.

#### ***Reuven’s Sackcloth and Fasting: Why Now?***

The pasuk says, “Reuven returned to the pit – and behold! – Yosef was not in the pit! so he rent his garments.” [Bereshis 36:29]. Rashi asks – where was Reuven when the entire event of picking Yosef out of the pit and selling him to the Arabs was transpiring? He explains that the brothers took turns taking care of their father, and it was Reuven’s turn that day to serve Yaakov. He had gone home to his father, and consequently was not together with the rest of his brothers during that fateful sale.

Rashi then quotes a second interpretation: “He was sitting in sackcloth and fasting, in repentance for the event in Parshas VaYetzei, where he switched the beds in his father’s tent and his father got angry at him.” But make the calculation. How long ago was that? It happened shortly after Rochel died. She died when Yosef was approximately eight years old. Yosef is now seventeen. It happened nine years prior, almost ten years ago! All of a sudden, Reuven decides he needs to do Teshuva because he switched the beds? Why now?

I saw a beautiful interpretation in a sefer called Abir Yosef. We are all subject to negiyus – our biases and agendas. We do not see straight. The brothers hated Yosef. They hated him because they were jealous. Jealousy is the type of thing that can warp a person’s perspective. You do not see straight because you are so obsessed with your jealousy that you cannot see the facts as they are.

Reuven, Chazal say, got cold feet about this whole incident. He said, “My father is going to blame me for this.” This fear put a brake on his

jealousy. Once he put a brake on his jealous emotion, he was able to see the facts as they were. He recognized that Yosef was not a Rasha. Yosef was not trying to kill them. Reuven saw how the negiyus of his brothers – their jealousy and their agenda – warped their entire perspective, and they were not seeing things as they should be seen.

All of a sudden, Reuven had an epiphany and he said “You know what? Just like their jealousy affects their perspective and they do not see things right, so too when I protested against my father, that was also out of a sense of jealousy for my mother. I felt it was not right that my father should move his bed into Bilhah’s tent after Rochel died. I felt strongly that he should have moved his bed into the tent of my mother, Leah. But I now realize that my jealousy for my mother colored my perspective. It caused me to act improperly and do things that were not right.

Just at that moment, Reuven realized how much kinah and emotions of jealousy affect a person’s view of reality. “Just like the brothers were dead wrong, maybe I was dead wrong as well.” That brought Reuven to Teshuva – fasting and sackcloth – at that very moment.

#### ***Chanukah: Once the Shirah Starts – It Must Keep Going***

The Rambam writes [Hilchos Chanukah 4:12]: The mitzvah of Chaunkah is very precious. A person must be particularly careful to publicize the miracle and to add to the praise of the Almighty, and thank Him for the miracles He did for us; even if he has nothing to eat other than from charity funds – he must borrow or sell his clothing to be able to buy oil and wicks and light.

If we pay close attention to these words, we notice a discrepancy. The Rambam begins by saying the goal of the mitzvah is to publicize the miracle (nes), singular. Then he says that we are to add to the praise of the Almighty and thank Him for the miracles (nisim), plural, that He did for us. So, which is it? Is it nes or is it nisim?

I heard a second question on this Rambam from Rav Daniel Lander of Monsey: After lighting Chanukah candles, we say “HaNeiros Halalu” and then we recite “Maoz Tzur.” Maoz Tzur recounts the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt, the redemption from the Babylonian exile, the story of Purim, and the Chanukah story of the struggle with the Greek empire. Basically, it is a brief synopsis of Jewish history: Egypt, Bavel, Purim, and Chanukah.

On Purim we say “Shoshanas Yaakov”. We only mention the story of Purim. What about the rest of the miracles of Jewish history? Why in the Chanukah Pizmon (liturgical poem) do we mention all the major miracles of Jewish history and by Purim, the holiday Pizmon is exclusively about Purim?

Rabbi Lander offered the following answer: The Gemara says [Megilla 14a] that there is a fundamental difference between Chanukah and Purim – namely on Chanukah we recite Hallel and on Purim we do not. There are several explanations why this is the case. Rava, in the Gemara there, explains why unlike the commemoration of the Exodus, where we recite Hallel, in commemorating the Purim deliverance we do not: When we left Egypt, we could indeed say Hallel because we were no longer servants to Pharaoh, but even after the “deliverance” of the Purim story, we were still servants of Achashverosh. The “deliverance” of the Chanukah story was more similar to the Exodus: After the successful Maccabean revolt, we were free men, we were in our own country, and we had our own government. We had the Beis HaMikdash. We were not enslaved to anybody! Therefore, on such a Nes, we say Shirah. On Purim, we were very happy that the decree of annihilation was cancelled. That was a terrific miracle. But after all is said and done, we still were in exile, subject to foreign domination by a Gentile king!

Shirah is an expression of the heart. When you say Shirah, you sing! You express your deepest emotions, your feelings of gratitude to the Almighty for all He has done for you. When people engage in Shirah they do not stop with a single expression of thanks. They give thanks for everything! Therefore, on Chanukah, which justifies Hallel, which is Shirah, once we begin singing His praises, we must express thanks for all the tova He has done for us throughout the ages! Purim has various mitzvos commemorating the event, but they are localized to the exact event that happened “in those days at this time of year.” An obligation to say Shirah does not exist “for we are still slaves of Achashverosh.”

So this is what the Rambam means: A person needs to be particularly careful to publicize the miracle (i.e. – of Chanukah) and to add to the praise of the Almighty and thank Him for the miracles that He did for us (i.e. – during the rest of Jewish history as well).”

A Freileche Chanukah!

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah Chanukah: We can always climb higher!**

The way in which we light the Chanukah candles teaches us how to achieve our full potential.

The Famous Debate

The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat brings to our attention the famous debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel – the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel.

According to Beit Shammai, on the first night of Chanukah we should light eight candles, on the second night seven, going down to one on the concluding night.

According to Beit Hillel, it's just the opposite, and this is our practise. We start with one on the first night, two on the second night, and on the concluding eighth night we light eight candles.

According to Beit Shammai, we should be mindful of the days that are left in the festival, while according to Beit Hillel we should concentrate on the days behind us.

Beit Shammai drew a parallel between the lighting of the chanukiah and the descending number of animals which were brought for sacrifice during the festival of Sukkot. According to Beit Hillel, what matters most of all is 'maalin bekodesh' – we should continuously strive to reach greater heights of spiritual attainment.

Chanukah and Chinuch

I believe that there is a connection between this difference of opinion and Jewish education. The term we use for education is 'chinuch' coming from the same root as 'Chanukah' meaning 'dedication'. I love visiting our schools – I derive so much inspiration from seeing our young children with their passion and enthusiasm for their Yiddishkeit. They love to learn the alef bet, they're proud of what they know, and they really relish those opportunities to sing the songs.

Sadly however, sometimes after an immersive Jewish education at a young age, the dedication to education can start to wane following bar and bat mitzvah – and the commitment can decrease as the years roll on. Beit Hillel however were insistent that actually the opposite should be the case.

We should consolidate what we have learnt and from there climb up one further step as we go higher and higher on the ladder of Jewish attainment and that is what is symbolised through the way in which we light our Chanukah candles.

A Wise Student

The greatest accolade we can give to an authority in Jewish law is to say that a person is a 'talmid chacham' meaning a wise student. Whatever we know, even the greatest authority amongst us must still be a student.

Like the kindling of the Chanukah candles, we can always climb higher on that ladder towards greatness.

Shabbat shalom and Chanukah sameach.

*Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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**Vayeshev: Victim's Collusion**

**Ben-Tzion Spitz**

*Silence is the ultimate weapon of power. - Charles De Gaulle*

Joseph's half-brothers hate him. The hatred is so deep, that they conspire to kill him. However, at the last moment, brother Judah suggests that they sell Joseph into slavery rather than kill him. Joseph is transported from the land of Canaan, south, to the Egyptian empire, where he

becomes Potiphar's slave. Though he excels in his servitude, Potiphar's wife, whose advances upon Joseph are rejected, ultimately accuses Joseph of accosting her, landing him in prison.

Joseph is eventually released, due to his dream-interpretation skills. By successfully interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph is elevated to the post of Viceroy of the Egyptian empire, a role he had been filling for nine years, before he meets his brothers again. Then he starts the strange charade of remaining unrevealed to them, forcing his full-brother Benjamin to come to Egypt, threatening to force Benjamin into slavery on trumped up charges, and only later revealing himself to his brothers, and subsequently they relay his prominence and wellbeing to their father, Jacob.

The big question that vexes many of the commentaries is why didn't Joseph communicate with his family beforehand? Why, when he was in a position of tremendous power, did he not send a message to his beloved father that he was alive and well? Why did he let his father believe he was dead or missing all those years?

The Bechor Shor on Genesis 37:26, takes us back to the original sale of Joseph into slavery to answer the question. The brothers really had intended to kill him, or at the very least to let him die in the pit they had thrown him into. But Judah, a savvy negotiator, declared to his brothers: "We gain nothing by his death. If we sell him, at least we gain something, and it removes our hated brother from our midst." Then they give Joseph a choice: "Either we let you die as planned, or we sell you into slavery on condition that you never reveal your identity or origins to anyone, that you never return home nor contact our father."

Joseph has no choice but to keep his silence and never contact his family. The purpose of the charade with the brothers then becomes clearer. Joseph couldn't just declare that he was Joseph when his brothers first meet him in Egypt. That likely would not have gone well and the family rapprochement wouldn't have occurred. They needed to go through a few steps first to undue the damage of selling him into slavery. When Judah, who initially sold Joseph into slavery then saves Benjamin from a similar fate, they are redeemed. This then allows the brothers, of their own volition, to suspend the enforced silence, to inform their father as to Joseph's wellbeing and to bring him to Joseph in Egypt, which is what they go on to do.

Joseph's silence and collusion with his brothers in his own harsh fate were painful, but he had little other choice. In the end, he was able to overcome his circumstances, and reunite the family.

May we only use silence in a positive way.

*Dedication - To the memory of Chuck Yeager, the man who broke the sound barrier, who passed away this week.*

*Shabbat Shalom*

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

Parashat Vayeshev 5781

This Shabbat, we get into the story of Joseph and his brothers, one that will continue until the end of Genesis. It's a complicated story embedded with much sadness. We will read about the struggles among the brothers that lead to the serious act of the brothers selling their younger brother into slavery in a foreign land. We will accompany Joseph as he goes from being his father's favorite son to being a slave, as he succeeds in gaining status in the house of his master but is then thrown into an Egyptian prison pit because of a libel against him. We will continue to follow as Joseph suddenly rises to greatness, and we will end with Jacob and his family being brought to Egypt with Joseph serving as a powerful Egyptian minister who becomes the patron for his extended family.

When we examine Joseph's personality in light of the words of the scriptures and midrash, we can discern different traits in which Joseph excelled. One of them was loyalty to the education bequeathed to him by his father. Even when Joseph was rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery in a land with a culture so different from the one he knew from his father's home, he courageously maintained the ideological legacy he



brought from home. We see this throughout several events in Joseph's life in Egypt.

When Joseph rose to relative greatness in the house of his master, "who all he had he gave into his hand," the master's wife tried to seduce the handsome, young Joseph. She tried to tempt him day after day but Joseph stubbornly rejected her. He explained his refusal this way:

"Behold, with me my master knows nothing about anything in the house, and all he has he has given into my hand...and he has not withheld anything from me except you, insofar as you are his wife. Now how can I commit this great evil, and sin against G-d?" (Genesis 39, 8-9)

One day, the wife waited for him alone at home, and when Joseph came to the house to do his work, she pulled him toward her. The Talmud describes this situation at its climax, as Joseph breaks in the face of her pleas, but suddenly "the image of his father appeared to him in the window" (Tractate Sota, 36). Joseph recalled the education he had gotten, summed up his courage and escaped from the house.

Later, when in the Egyptian prison pit, Joseph was attentive to the other prisoners. When he noticed two prisoners who felt down, he did not ignore them. He turned to them and asked, "Why are your faces sad today?"; a question that ultimately led to Joseph's release from prison.

Joseph was unique in his strong ideological stance in the face of an impressive Egyptian culture. He was loyal to the values he absorbed in his father's home, the homes of the forefathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph did not adopt the values of his surroundings. He understood that he was different, that he carried a special ideological legacy that he had to implement in his life.

This year, Parashat Vayeshev falls on Shabbat Chanukah. Chanukah symbolizes Jewish-ideological independence. The Maccabees, who fought the Greek-Seleucid conquerors, did not only demand sovereignty. They opposed the conqueror's attempts to impose the Hellenistic culture on the Jewish nation. The independence they fought for expressed more than national ownership of a piece of land. It expressed the right of the Jewish nation to live a spiritual life with loyalty and devotion to the Jewish values they inherited from our ancestors.

This devotion does not come out of nowhere. It is the result of countless generations being willing to make sacrifices for Judaism, in better or worse circumstances, with the deep acknowledgement that Jews have no other life that can be suitable for them. We look upon this long tradition that began with Joseph, continued with the Maccabees and thousands of Jews throughout the generations, and we cannot help but be amazed by the courage, the devotion, and the loyalty. The historical narrative of the Jewish nation calls upon us to learn about this impressive devotion and join the glorious chain of generations of the Jewish people.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

#### **Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

#### **Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayeishev**

**פרשת וישב תשפ"א**

**וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו**

#### **Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning. (37:1)**

*Chazal* infer from the variation in the text describing Yaakov's taking up residence, *vayeishev*, he settled, from that of his father, *migurei*, sojourning, which implies wandering that Yaakov sought to settle, finally to relax in one place with a roof over his head and not worry about what tomorrow would bring. No one questions that Yaakov *Avinu* had his fill of struggles and troubles. Would it be so terrible for him to have a little tranquility? *Chazal*, quoted by *Rashi*, say: *Yaakov bikeish leishev b'shalvah*, the Patriarch wanted to settle down in tranquility. As a result, Hashem sent the Yosef debacle with which to contend. The almighty asks: "Is not what awaits the righteous in the World-to-Come sufficient that they expect to live at ease in this world too?" Apparently, *Chazal* see in the Yosef incident a punishment for Yaakov's desire to live in tranquility. This begs elucidation. Yaakov had no plans to go to a seashore resort to soak up some sun and live a life of abandon. All he wanted was to sit and learn 24/7 and devote himself full time to serving Hashem without dealing with such "interruptions" as Eisav, Lavan, Shechem. Was he asking too much? Furthermore,

Avraham *Avinu* was wealthy and highly respected. Yitzchak *Avinu* was also well-to-do, and he lived a life of full time devotion to Hashem. Was it too much for Yaakov to expect what his father and grandfather had?

*Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl*, explains that material bounty in this world is sanctioned as long as it is acquired through legal, honest and above-board means. Indeed, one can pave the way to *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come, with the manner in which he appropriates and makes use of his material possessions. He can devote his time more freely to Torah study; he can support those who learn, *yeshivos*, *kollelim*; he can help those in need, widows and orphans. He can establish an entire edifice in the World-to-Come, based upon the goals and objectives he sets for his material assets. *Olam Haze*, this world, was not designated specifically for the unholy. The righteous are entitled to have a "piece of the pie" if they use it purposely and properly.

Avraham and Yitzchak had material wealth, but it meant nothing to them. Their focus was on *Olam Habba*. When Avraham spent 25 years in Chevron, the Torah writes, *Va'ye'ehal*, He camped/made a tent. He did not settle. Concerning his 26 years in Plishtim, the Torah writes *Va'yagar*, He sojourned. It was a temporary dwelling. He would not settle in this world. He had time to settle when he achieved his eternal rest. The first time the word *toshav*, settler, is used concerning Avraham is when he sought a place to designate as Sarah *Imeinu's* final resting place. Regarding Yitzchak, the Torah used *gur*, sojourner, not settler.

Thus, *Chazal* sense in the use of the word *va'yeishev* – in contrast to his forbears' *migurei* – a change in attitude, but they never gave any thought or value to their physical/material accoutrements. Material possessions were meaningless to them, because they were just "passing through" this world. Yaakov *Avinu*, however, indicated that he would like to settle and spend his day learning and serving Hashem without all of the challenges that had plagued him until now. He was willing to become a *toshav*. This would have been acceptable, but Hashem wanted to see how Yaakov would handle the challenge of settling down. Soon after, we see Yaakov demonstrating his partiality to Yosef by giving him a multi-colored tunic. Why did he give the son whom he was singling out from all of the others a physical/material gift? He could have given Yosef a spiritual gift. Why did he pick a *kesones pasim*? When the physical/material have value, then we have cause for concern. (We have no question that profound esoteric reasons motivated Yaakov *Avinu's* decision to give Yosef the *kesones pasim* and material value was clearly not one of them. On the surface, however, it appears that the Patriarch gave his favorite son a material gift which provoked even greater envy and animus in the family.)

I vividly remember an incident that left an indelible impression on me. While I ordinarily do not mention names in a story, this time I will, and may it be a merit for the individual. Across the street from the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland was a butcher store owned by Mr. Leo Israel, a Holocaust survivor who worked very hard to support his family. His greatest pride in life was his daughter and her husband, Rabbi and Mrs. Yochanan Greenwald, who were both outstanding educators at Yavne High School for Girls. Mr. Israel's greatest *nachas* was to watch his grandchildren go to school. It meant the world to him. I would stop by every few days and *shmuess* with him. One day he told me that his grandson, Dovie, was starting to learn *Mishnayos*. He was so excited. I said, "Mr. Israel, buy him a set of *Mishnayos*." Two days later, as I walked by the store, he called me in and said, "Rabbi Scheinbaum, *kimt arein*, come in." I came in and, with great dexterity, he lifted a heavy box. With glistening eyes and a beaming smile from one end of his face to the other, he showed me a set of *Yachin U'Boaz Mishnayos*. Not a Segway, a Gameboy, a scooter, but a *Mishnayos*. This was his greatest pride. *Yehi Zichro Baruch*.

**וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן זקנים הוא לו ... וישנאו אתו ... ויקנאו בו אחיו**

**Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all of his sons since he was a child of his old age... so they hated him ... so his brothers were jealous of him. (37:3,4,11)**

The controversy that ensued between Yosef and his brothers was much deeper than sibling rivalry. Certainly, it was understandable that their father favored the son born to Rachel *Imeinu* after years of barrenness. Yosef was an exceptional young man who studied Torah with his father and had much in common with him. Under normal circumstances, they would have overlooked their father's love for Yosef, but they felt that Yosef was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was bent on destroying them and assuming their spiritual position. They simply could not ignore this. Nonetheless, we wonder how the brothers questioned the *daas Torah*, wisdom derived from the Torah, of their father, Yaakov *Avinu*. Once Yaakov determined that Yosef should be treated royally, it became his *p'sak*, halachic decision. He honored Yosef with the *kesones pasim*, multi-colored tunic, as a sign of his favored status. As such, the brothers should have accepted Yosef's authority. To respond with animus was non Torah-like. Indeed, everything that Yosef did became a justification for their hatred.

Some commentators suggest that the brothers actually were prepared to tow the line and accept Yosef. It was Yosef's flamboyant behavior that prevented the realization of this acceptance. *Rashi* notes Yosef's involvement in enhancing his physical appearance. This was not appropriate behavior for the one whom the Patriarch designated to have special status. With status comes responsibility. Yosef was not acting responsibly. Furthermore, his negative reports to their father concerning his brothers' behavior and lack of adherence to Torah law certainly did not endear him to them. Despite all this, we would be hard-pressed to look so askance at Yosef to the point that his life would have no value. In other words, such hatred that would generate a ruling of execution is unusual – especially for such spiritually exalted and morally refined men as Yaakov's sons. Apparently, Yaakov saw greatness in Yosef. Why did they not agree with their father?

The answer lies in the words, *Va'yikanu bo echav*, "His brothers were jealous of him." Jealousy blinds a person. A jealous person sees what he wants to see. Clarity of vision, lucid perspective, becomes blurred when viewed through a lens tainted with jealousy. What was once clear becomes absurd. What was straight suddenly becomes crooked. The situation has not changed. His vision has become distorted. Jealousy engulfs a person like a wall that is impenetrable. He is unable to hear anything positive about the other person. His heart is unable to feel compassion towards him. His mind is unable to cognitively see him in a positive light. The jealous person is cursed – self-cursed. The brothers could neither hear nor see anything positive concerning Yosef. They were jealous.

The *Pele Yoetz* writes that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, attempts to convince a person that no other can compete with him in wisdom and good deeds. He is in a class all to himself. Therefore, when he discovers someone else who is either on a level with him or better than he is, he becomes obsessed and filled with envy, to the point that he cannot function until he is back on top in a class to himself. One might think that the best way to circumvent envy is to eradicate honor, such that people are treated the same regardless of position, financial standing, pedigree, etc. They attempted to do this in the city of Lodz, Poland. *Baruch Hashem*, they were blessed with a wise, holy *Rav*, *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel*, זל, who showed them the fallacy of this approach.

The main *shul* in which the *Rav* davened had a procedure for the disbursement of *aliyos*, being called up to the Torah on *Shabbos*. The *Rav* always had *Shlishi*, the third *aliyah*. *Shishi*, the sixth *aliyah*, went to a *Dayan* or a distinguished, learned member of the *kehillah*, congregation. *Maftir*, the closing *aliyah*, was designated for a *chassan* whose wedding would take place in the coming week or someone who had *yahrzeit*, celebrating the anniversary of the passing of a parent.

The other *aliyos* were allocated to members of the congregation. The position of *gabbai*, the one who handed out the *aliyos*, was not an easy one. Often more than one *chassan* or *yahrzeit* sought *aliyos*, and distinguished guests were always visiting. It became a challenge to satisfy everyone. In addition to the usual demands placed upon the shoulders of the *gabbai*, the issue was exacerbated when one of

the members, who was by nature a boor, uncouth and vulgar, became very wealthy. With his new-found wealth, he purchased a wardrobe fit for a king. He insisted on changing his seat in *shul* from the back to the *mizrach*, up front on the eastern wall (a place reserved for *rabbanim* and the most distinguished members of the community). He flaunted his wealth and spent it in an effort to arrogate himself over others.

One *Shabbos*, he walked over to the *gabbai* and announced, "Today is my birthday. I insist on an honorable *aliyah*, befitting my station in life." The *gabbai* replied respectfully, "*Mazal tov* on your birthday. May you live a long, healthy life. I am sorry to inform you, however, that there are no 'honorable' (the *gabbai* knew exactly what this boor wanted) *aliyos* remaining. It is a busy *Shabbos* with a few *yahrzeits* and *chassanim*." In his coarse manner, the fellow countered, "Heaven help you if you shame me in front of the congregation! I expect no less than *shishi* (the *aliyah* reserved for the *Dayan*)." The *gabbai* did not respond, because one does not debate an oaf. He went about his business, and he proceeded to call the fellow to the Torah for *chamishi*, the fifth *aliyah*. (It is important to emphasize that in a *kehillah* such as Lodz, which was a premier Jewish community, every *aliyah* was honorable.)

Hearing his name and noticing that he had not received the *aliyah* that he had demanded, the man seethed. He walked up slowly to the lectern, and, with fire in his eyes, walked over to the *gabbai*, raised his hand, and slapped him forcefully across the face! The *shul* was in an uproar. Men were outraged. The *gabbai* was a highly respected member of the community. To be so denigrated just for doing his job was contemptible. It took some time for the *shul* decorum to return to normal. (I assume the offender stormed out of the *shul*. Such people never remain long enough to face the music. They leave that to their subordinates.)

On *Motzoei Shabbos*, the *gabbaim* (there was more than one) came over to *Rav Eliyahu Chaim's* home to plead their case. Something had to be done to ensure that never again would such an outrage occur in their *shul*. "Do you have a plan?" the *Rav* asked. "Yes," they replied. "We have an idea about how to prevent this travesty from ever occurring again. We think that all *aliyos* should be the same except for the *Rav's shlishi*. All other *aliyos* would be given out based on need – not honor."

The *Rav* listened and contemplated. Finally, he spoke: "It is frightening that people come to *shul* for the purpose of receiving honor, but it is even more frightening if they cease to seek honor in the *shul*." The *gabbaim* stared at the *Rav* dumbfounded. They were not sure to what he was alluding.

"There is no question," the *Rav* began, "that the pursuit of honor is disgraceful, especially if it leads to slapping the *gabbai* out of anger. Sadly, however, we are all in one way or another subject to the pursuit of honor. One wants an *aliyah*; another wants a front seat; yet another seeks a title or an award. If we do not give people honor in the *shul*, they will seek it elsewhere, in places where it is inappropriate for a Jew to enter. Better we should contend with such issues in the *shul* than have it 'farmed out' to places of disgrace."

This was the perspective of a *gadol*.

**והבור ריק אין בו מים**

**The pit was empty; no water was in it. (37:24)**

*Rashi* comments: There was no water in the pit, but there were serpents and scorpions in it. *Horav Elyakim Schlessinger*, *Shlita* explains the *halachic* ramifications that vary between a pit filled with water and one filled with poisonous serpents and scorpions. It was Reuven who suggested that rather than take action outright against Yosef, they should put him into a pit. Had there been water in the pit, it would not be a direct act of murder. Throwing Yosef into a pit filled with poisonous creatures, however, is no different than tying a person up and placing him in front of a lion, which the *Rambam* rules is active murder. In any event, Yosef was going to die.

*Rav Schlessinger* explains that the brothers were certain that Yosef's righteousness would protect him from the poisonous creatures. This is consistent with *Ramban's* opinion (*Parshas Bechukosai*) that animals can strike a human being only if he is tainted by sin. A *tzaddik*,

righteous person, reigns over animals. The brothers were well aware that Yosef was without sin. Thus, even though serpents and scorpions were in the pit, the brothers would not be *halachically* liable for active murder. What about Yosef starving to death? Ramban posits that causing starvation is also not considered active murder. Thus, it is not punishable by a *Bais Din*, Jewish Court of Law.

A powerful, frightening lesson can be derived from this. Although they knew that Yosef was a *tzaddik* who had no sin, they nonetheless ruled that he was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was liable for the death penalty. Why? He was misguided in his belief and, thus, harmful to the future of *Klal Yisrael*. If one's *shitah*, ideology/judgment, opinion is flawed, misguided, then he presents a grave danger to his followers – especially if he is righteous. At times, innocence and *naïveté* can sully one's outlook in such a manner that it catalyzes harmful decisions.

ותאמר הכר נא למי החתמת והפתילים והמטה האלה ... ויכר יהודה ויאמר צדקה ממני

And she said, "Identify, if you please, whose are this seal, this wrap and this staff." Yehuda recognized and he said, "She is right. It is from me." (38:25,26)

Yehudah and Tamar were progenitors of *Malchus Bais David*, the Davidic dynasty, and *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*, who descends from it. When one peruses the story of Yehudah's encounter with Tamar: how Tamar was prepared to die rather than shame Yehudah; and Yehudah's ultimate public confession despite the humiliation that would ensue, we see that the entire incident revolves around the *middah*, character trait, of *bushah*, shame. Tamar refused to shame Yehudah, because she understood that if word would get out that someone of his spiritual distinction was involved in a less-than-licit affair, it would humiliate not only him, but also what he represented. When Yehudah became aware that he was the one whom Tamar was protecting, he declared *Tzadakah mimeni*, "She is right. It is from me," and he was prepared to accept whatever humiliation would ensue. The obvious question is: Tamar was willing to die, thus snuffing out the lives of three souls. Yehudah is lauded for coming forward and chancing public humiliation. What about the three lives that would otherwise die? Shame is a terrible chastisement to have to endure, but certainly the lives of three innocent souls should take precedence. Why all the accolades?

*Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, derives from here that the power of shame is overwhelming and serves as a powerful deterrent. Public censure, embarrassment, disgrace, destroys people. They will do anything to spare themselves and their family from the pain of disgrace. Yehudah overcame his fear of shame, because, as *Chazal* (*Targum Yonasan ben Uziel*) teach, Yehudah weighed the temporary shame experienced in this world against the eternal shame of *Olam Habba*, and he decided that he would rather endure the fleeting disgrace in this world. Apparently, it was not an issue of the three lives that prompted his decision to confess, but his fear of eternal shame. Tamar understood the effect that shame has on a person, and she was not prepared to hurt Yehudah in such a manner.

We have no idea of the everlasting emotional pain that we cause when we embarrass someone. We live in a time when self-righteous zealots feel that it is necessary to expose every indiscretion of their antagonist – without sensitivity to the lifelong anguish they cause for him, his wife and children. These zealots feel that they are expunging the evil from their respective communities when, in fact, they are committing character assassination in its most ignominious form. I would simply call it murder, because that is what it is. Sadly, these holy men will find some way to justify their unholy actions, because, after all, they are holy. Tamar feared shaming Yehudah, and Yehudah feared shame. Tamar left the decision up to Yehudah, who, as a result of his decision, became the progenitor of *Malchus Bais David* and *Moshiach*.

Shame is a powerful deterrent, as demonstrated by the following story. The *Noda B'Yehudah*, *Horav Yechezkel Landau, zl*, was *Rav* of Prague and one of our most distinguished *gedolim*. His daughter married *Horav Yosef, zl*, *Rav* of Posen. It is related that when the *Noda B'Yehudah* would address his son-in-law in learning, his entire being would shake out of fear of his son-in-law's wisdom. The respect and

admiration that the *Noda B'Yehuda* had for the *Rav* of Posen was extraordinary, but this is in keeping with the fact that the *Rav* of Posen was an unusual *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar.

Sadly, the *Noda B'Yehudah's* warm feelings for his son-in-law were not emulated by his daughter, who publicly treated her husband with contempt. She would shame him, using painful barbs to disgrace him in front of his peers. She would enter a meeting of rabbinic leaders and publicly excoriate him in the most denigrating terms. The people were prepared to quiet her, but their *Rav* asked them to ignore what she said and to show her the deference that she deserved as the *Rebbetzin*. *Rav* Yosef swallowed his pride and never once responded to his wife's mortifying remarks. While no one opened their mouth to the *Rebbetzin*, they did not give her the time of day. She was definitely not one of the community's favorite people.

*Rav* Yosef passed away in the month of Adar, 1801. The community came to pay their respects to their beloved *Rav* whose body, wrapped in a white sheet, was laying on the ground as the *Chevra Kaddisha* recited *Tehillim* near it. Suddenly, his widow, the *Rebbetzin* who all those years had belittled him in public, and, as a result, became the community's least favorite person, entered the room in the presence of the most distinguished members of the community.

"*Rav* Yosef! Confess before the members of the community that it was you who insisted that I humiliate you in public. It was not because I was a bad person or because I did not care for you; you know that this is not true. When we first agreed to marry, you made me promise to act in such an unseemly manner because you were afraid of falling into the abyss of arrogance. Against my will, I accepted your demand, because I am an *ishah k'sherah*, ritually fit and decent woman, who carries out the will of her husband. Who more than I knows that the foolishness that I said about you was untrue?! I know that you were a holy, righteous man!" When she concluded her declaration, everyone in attendance observed that the head of the deceased moved as if in agreement with the *Rebbetzin*.

Exclusive of what we learn concerning the *middah* of *bushah*, we derive a powerful lesson concerning how far a holy man went to prevent himself from becoming arrogant, and the level of devotion of his *Rebbetzin* to carry out his will, even at the expense of her own popularity and esteem.

*Va'ani Tefillah*

הקל ישרעתנו ועודתנו סלה – *Ha'Keil Yeshuaseinu v'Ezraseinu Selah. O G-d our Savior and Helper forever.*

*Yeshuah* – Savior, and *Ezrah* – Helper, are not the same. A savior saves in such a manner that the afflicted, persecuted and troubled subject sees an end to his troubles and pain. A helper does not eradicate the trouble, but rather, comforts and cares for the subject. Thus, he alleviates some of the pain and makes the rest somewhat bearable and with the hope that good will come out of it. This, explains *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, is the meaning of the above phrase. To the one who recuperates from his illness, who is released from pain and suffering, who sees the light at the end of the tunnel, Hashem is his Savior. Some people, however, experience no alleviation of their pain, no diminishing of their troubles. These people are relegated to suffering until the end. To them, Hashem is their Helper. Who purifies them and grants them a special place in the World to Come. They realize that their suffering is part of a process, a process that will allow them to achieve everlasting bliss in *Olam Habba*.

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**Did the Brothers have a Right to Sell Yosef?**

**Rabbi Kaganoff**

Question #1:

How could the righteous brothers of Yosef want to murder him in cold blood?

Question #2:

If I saw someone do something wrong, what should I do about it?

Question #3:

May I inform a parent that I saw his/her child do something wrong, or is this *loshon hora*?

By properly understanding the story of Yosef's sale, we will be able to answer these three seemingly unrelated questions.

Who are these brothers?

When studying the events leading to the kidnap and sale of Yosef, we must remember that all twelve of Yaakov's sons were pure, tzadikim gemurim.[1] In light of their tremendous stature, this already incomprehensible story is that much more difficult to understand.

Had this story taken place in the most dysfunctional family imaginable, we would still be shocked by the unfolding of its events. After all, even if brothers feel that their indulged, nasty kid brother is challenging their father's love for them, would they consider committing fratricide, or any other murder for that matter?

This would apply even to members of a poorly functioning family. How much more so when we are discussing great talmidei chachamim, who constantly evaluate the halachic ramifications of every action that they perform! How can we possibly understand what transpired? In other words, the Ten Brothers were far greater tzadikim than the Chafetz Chayim or Rav Aryeh Levin, greater talmidei chachamim than the Chazon Ish or Rav Moshe Feinstein (this comparison does not diminish the stature of any of these tzadikim; on the contrary, mentioning them in this context shows how much we venerate them). We cannot imagine any of these people hurting someone's feelings intentionally, much less causing anyone even the slightest bodily harm. It is difficult to imagine any of these tzadikim swatting a fly! Thus, how can we imagine them swatting their brother, much less, doing anything that might cause long-term damage?

Since we cannot interpret this as an extreme case of sibling rivalry, we are left completely baffled by the actions of the ten saintly and scholarly brothers. How could these ten great tzadikim consider killing their brother? And, then, decide that selling him into slavery was more appropriate? As we see clearly, for the next twenty-two years, they assumed that their decision had been justified, although they acknowledged that they should possibly have given Yosef a "second chance."

Yosef reports

Yosef was in the habit of reporting to his father dibasam ra'ah (usually interpreted as slander) – actions that he interpreted as infractions. Rashi quotes the Midrash that Yosef informed his father of whatever bad actions he observed in Leah's six sons. Specifically, Yosef reported:

- (1) They were consuming meat without killing the animal properly, a sin forbidden to all descendants of Noah.
- (2) They were belittling their brothers Dan, Naftali, Gad and Asher, by calling them slaves.
- (3) He suspected them of violating the heinous sin of giluy arayos.

Others explain that Yosef accused the brothers of not caring properly for their father's flock.[2] Although Rashi makes no mention of this accusation, it is clear from his comments that, in his opinion, had Yosef suspected them of this, he would certainly have noted it to his father.

Is dibasam ra'ah equivalent to slander?

We must be careful not to define dibasam ra'ah as slander, which usually intimates malice and falsehood, and would imply that Yosef's intentions were to harm his brothers. Without a doubt, the righteous Yosef had no such intent. It is more accurate to translate dibasam ra'ah as evil report. Yosef did share his interpretations of his brothers' actions with his father, but they were not fabrications, and defaming them was not his goal.

Why is Yosef tattling?

Without question, Yosef's goal was the betterment of his brothers. He acted completely lishmah, with no evil intent, just as later, in Parshas Vayigash, he holds no grudge against his brothers, despite the indescribable suffering they caused him.

Indeed, Yosef's motivation was his sincere concern for his brothers. He knew well the halachah that if you see someone sin, you must bring it to the offender's attention, explaining to him that he will achieve a large share in Olam Haba by doing teshuvah.[3] A person giving tochacha must always have the interests of the sinner completely at heart, and consider how to educate the malefactor in a way that his words will be accepted.

Yosef knew, also, that whoever has the ability to protest sinful activity and fails to do so is liable for his lack of action. However, the Seforno comments that, due to Yosef's youth, he did not realize what might result from his reporting to his father about his brothers.

At this point, we can already answer one of the questions I raised above: If I saw someone do something wrong, what should I do about it?

Answer: I am obligated to bring to the person's attention that it is in his or her best interest to do teshuvah and correct whatever he or she has done wrong. The admonition should be done in a gentle way, expressing concern, so that it can be received positively and thereby accomplish its purpose.

Why through Yaakov?

Without question, Yosef's goal in sharing his concerns with his father was that his brothers correct their actions. If so, why didn't Yosef admonish them directly? Yosef wanted his father to take appropriate action to correct the brothers' deeds and, thereby, bring them to do teshuvah. The halachic authorities disagree whether Yosef was guilty of speaking loshon hora by using this approach in this

instance. The Chafetz Chayim contends that Yosef was guilty of speaking loshon hora, because he should have shared his concerns directly with his brothers, rather than first discussing them with his father.[4]

Maybe his brothers are right?

Yosef should have considered that his attempts at tochacha might be successful. The Chafetz Chayim also sees Yosef as having neglected the mitzvah of being dan lekaf zechus, judging people favorably. Since the brothers were great tzadikim, Yosef should have realized that they had a halachic consideration to permit their actions. Had he judged them favorably, he would have considered one of three possibilities:

- (1) That his brothers had done nothing wrong – but he (Yosef) had misinterpreted what he had seen them do.
- (2) Alternatively, his brothers might have justified their actions, explaining them in a way that he (Yosef) might have accepted what they did as correct or, at least, permitted.
- (3) That although his brothers were not right, they had based themselves on some mistaken rationale. If their rationale was mistaken, Yosef should have entertained the possibility that he might successfully have convinced them that their approach was flawed. He should have discussed the matter with them directly, and either convinced them of their folly or gained an understanding of why they considered their actions as justified.

In any case, Yosef should not have assumed that the brothers sinned intentionally. The Malbim's approach

The Malbim disagrees with the Chafetz Chayim's approach, contending that Yosef felt that his rebuking his brothers would be unheeded under any circumstances and possibly even counterproductive, and only his father's reprimand would be successful. If you are certain that the sinner will not listen to you, but may listen to someone else, you may share the information with the person you feel will be more successful at giving rebuke. Yosef felt that, although his brothers would not listen to him, their father could successfully convince them of their errors; therefore, he reported the matters to his father.

In the same vein, a student who sees classmates act inappropriately and feels that they will not listen to his/her rebuke may share the information with someone who he/she feels will be more effective in accomplishing the Torah's goal.

We are now in a position to answer the third question I raised at the beginning:

May I inform a parent that I saw his/her child do something wrong, or is this loshon hora?

If a parent is able to do something to improve a child's behavior, one may notify the parent of the child's conduct. Not only is it not loshon hora, it is the correct approach to use. However, if the circumstances are such that the parent will be unable to do anything to improve the child's behavior, or if one can bring about change in the child's behavior by contacting him directly, one may not inform the parents of the child's misbehavior.

Yaakov's reaction

Yaakov, or more accurately Yisrael, reacted passively to Yosef's tale bearing on his brothers. He did not rebuke the brothers for their misbehavior, which we will soon discuss; but, he also did not reprimand Yosef for speaking loshon hora, or for neglecting to be dan lekaf zechus. Indeed, he demonstrated his greater love for Yosef than for the others by producing with his own hands a special garment for Yosef. Yaakov, an affluent sheep raiser who preferred to spend his time studying Torah, took time from his own learning to hand-weave Yosef a beautiful coat. Indeed, Yaakov felt a special kinship to Yosef for several reasons, including Yosef's astute Torah learning. All of this makes us wonder: why did Yaakov not rebuke Yosef for reporting his brothers?

Was Yosef wrong?

Yaakov agreed with Yosef's assessment that his reporting was not loshon hora, although this does not necessarily mean that he felt the brothers were guilty. I will shortly rally evidence that implies that Yaakov was convinced the brothers were innocent. Nevertheless, Yaakov concurred that Yosef behaved correctly in bringing the matters to his (Yaakov's) attention, rather than dealing with the brothers himself.

Yaakov agreed that the brothers would not accept Yosef's admonition, because they did not understand his (Yosef's) greatness. At the same time, Yaakov realized that Yosef had leadership and scholarship skills superior to those of his brothers. Yaakov therefore gave Yosef the kesones passim, to demonstrate his appointment as leader of the household.[5]

Why did Yaakov not admonish the brothers?

This, of course, leads to a new question. If Yaakov did not rebuke Yosef because he felt that his approach was correct, why do we find nowhere that he rebuked the brothers for their behavior? It appears that Yaakov realized that the brothers had not sinned, and that there was no reason to rebuke them. Shemiras Halashon rallies proof of this assertion, because the Torah teaches that Yaakov had a special love for Yosef only because of Yosef's scholarship and not because of any concerns about the brothers' behavior. (See the Sifsei Chachamim and other commentaries on Rashi, who explain why the brothers had done nothing wrong, and what Yosef misinterpreted.) Yaakov understood that the brothers had not

sinned, and that Yosef had misinterpreted their actions. Apparently, Yosef was indeed guilty of not having judged them favorably (Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch). In fact, because of his mistaken accusation of the brothers, Yosef himself was later severely punished: he was sold into slavery, and for wrongly suspecting his brothers of violating arayos, he was suspected by all Egypt of a similar transgression, as a result of Mrs. Potifar's fraudulent allegation (Shemiras Halashon). Thus, the problem of an innocent man being tried and convicted in the media is not a modern phenomenon – Yosef was punished for a crime he had not done.

Was Yaakov correct?

Was the kesones passim an appropriate gift for Yosef? Was Yaakov wrong in giving Yosef the kesones passim?

Even asking this question places us in an uncomfortable position: it implies that we might lay blame on the educational practices of one of our Avos. Notwithstanding our awesome appreciation of the greatness of Yaakov Avinu, the Gemara criticizes Yaakov's deed: "A person should never treat one son differently from the others, for, because of two sela'im worth of fancy wool that Yaakov gave Yosef, favoring him over his brothers, the brothers were jealous of him, and the end result was that our forefathers descended to Egypt." [6]

Yaakov did not act without calculation. Presumably, seeing Yosef's high standard of learning, his refined personal attributes, and his concern for others' behavior, Yaakov felt it important to demonstrate that Yosef was the most skilled of a very impressive group of sons. Yet Chazal tell us that this is an error. One should never demonstrate favoritism among one's sons, even when there appears to be appropriate reason for doing so.

Were the brothers justified?

At this point, we have presented Yaakov and Yosef's positions on what happened, but we still do not know why the brothers wanted to kill Yosef.

Remember that the brothers were both righteous and talented talmidei chachamim. Clearly, they must have held that Yosef was a rodef, someone pursuing and attempting to bring bodily harm to another. No other halachic justification would permit their subsequent actions.

Seforno and others note that the brothers interpreted Yosef's actions as a plot against them, to deprive them of being Yaakov's descendants. Rav Hirsch demonstrates that the pasuk, vayisnaku oso lehamiso, means they imagined him as one plotting against them – so that he was deserving of death. The brothers assumed that Yosef's goal was to vilify them in their father's eyes, so that Yaakov would reject them – just as Yitzchak had rejected Eisav and Avraham had rejected Yishmael and the sons of Keturah (Malbim). After all, Yosef was falsely accusing them of highly serious misbehavior. The brothers interpreted Yaakov's gift of the kesones passim to Yosef as proof that Yaakov had accepted Yosef's loshon hora against them (Shemiras Halashon). The brothers needed to act quickly before he destroyed them; they were concerned that Yaakov would accept Yosef's plot to discredit them and to rule over them. Therefore, they seized and imprisoned Yosef, and then sat down to eat a meal, while they were deciding what to do with him.

Not a free lunch

The brothers are strongly criticized for sitting down to eat a meal. Assuming that they were justified in killing Yosef, they should have spent an entire night debating their judgment. After all, when a beis din decides on capital matters, they postpone their decision until the next day, and spend the entire night debating the halachah in small groups, eating only a little while deliberating the serious matter. [7] Certainly, the brothers' sitting down to eat immediately after incarcerating Yosef was wrong, and for this sin they were subsequently punished (Shemiras Halashon).

The brothers then realized that selling Yosef as a slave would accomplish what they needed, without bloodshed.

Later, in Egypt, they recognized that they should not have been so hard-hearted as to sell him – perhaps, his experience in the pit had taught him a sufficient lesson, and he was no longer a danger. Not until Yosef presented himself to them in Mitzrayim did they realize that Yosef was correct all along -- he would indeed rule over them, and he had not intended to harm them.

Halachic conclusions

1. When you see someone doing something that appears wrong, figure out a positive way to tell the person what he or she can accomplish by doing teshuvah properly.
2. If you are convinced that you are unable to influence the wrongdoer, while someone else may be more successful, you may share the information with the person who might be able to deliver discreet and gentle admonishment.
3. The information should be shared with no one else, unless, otherwise, someone could get hurt.
4. Always figure out how to judge the person favorably. The entire sale of Yosef occurred because neither side judged the other favorably. Also, bear in mind that we are often highly biased in our evaluation, making it difficult for us to judge.
5. Do not demonstrate favoritism among children, even when there appear to be excellent reasons for doing so.

Concluding the story

To quote the Midrash: Prior to Yosef's revealing himself in Mitzrayim, he asked them, "The brother whom you claim is dead is very much alive; I will call him." Yosef then called out, "Yosef ben Yaakov, come here. Yosef ben Yaakov, come here." The brothers searched under the furniture and checked all the corners of the room to see where Yosef was hiding. [8]

By this time, Yosef had already revealed that he knew the intimate details of their household. They knew that Yosef had been taken to Mitzrayim. They now have someone telling them that he knows that Yosef is in the same room, and there is no one in the room save themselves and Yosef. Nonetheless, they cannot accept that the man that they are facing is Yosef!

Contemplate how these giants of spirit were blinded by their own interests! Is it not sobering how convinced a person can be, despite facts to the contrary, that he is entirely right? We can stare truth in the face, and still not realize that it is Yosef standing before us.

1. Ramban, Iggeres HaKodesh, Chapter 5
2. Seforno
3. Rambam, Hilchos Dei'os 6:7
4. Shemiras HaLashon Volume 2, Chapter 11 [Parshas Vayeisheiv]
5. Seforno
6. Shabbos 10b
7. Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 12:3
8. Bereishis Rabbah; Yalkut Shimoni

## Peeling Away the Parashah's Layers

### Science is not the Yellow Brick Road

Jonathan Rosenblum - Mishpacha Magazine

For Rabbi David Fohrman there is no excitement comparable to discovering chiasms in the Torah

I would be remiss if I did not call readers' attention to the publication of Rabbi David Fohrman's newest work, Genesis: A Parsha Companion. I have written previously about his longer, thematic works: The Beast That Crouches at the Door on the sin of Adam HaRishon and Kayin and Hevel; The Queen You Thought You Knew on Megillas Esther; and The Exodus You Almost Passed Over.

Genesis: A Parsha Companion, the first of a projected five volumes, is much closer to the popular weekly parshah videos produced by Rabbi Fohrman for the Aleph Beta Foundation. Rabbi Fohrman began teaching Chumash many decades ago in the adult education division of Johns Hopkins University, while still in the Ner Israel kollel. And his insights into the parshah hold fascination both for the newcomer to Chumash study and for one well versed in Torah texts and the classical commentaries, though the fascination will be of a different sort.

With respect to the first group, he relates in his introduction an incident in one of his Johns Hopkins classes, in which a medical school professor asked Rabbi Fohrman to comment on what he had been always taught — that the Written Torah is the product of multiple authors and an editorial team, chas v'shalom. But even before Rabbi Fohrman could respond, the student answered his own question: "But I'm having a hard time seeing how that could possibly be true. I mean [based on what we've been studying], it's all so interconnected."

The surprises for the veteran student of Chumash are generated by Rabbi Fohrman's invitation to read the text with fresh eyes — e.g., read the Biblical narrative as if we did not already know what comes next, or we were unfamiliar with Rashi and the other classic commentaries. In other words, read the text as the classic commentators themselves did.

My guess is that every long-time student of Chumash will find at least one piece in the collection too novel to accept. But even then, he or she will have to attend to the evidence that Rabbi Fohrman presents. He is a close reader of the Biblical text in a way that only someone who is deeply in love with that text can be. He sees patterns that we have missed, but seem blindingly obvious after he has laid out the text in front of us.

Let me share just one example of his close reading. Bereishis 5:29 describes Lemech's decision to name a son Noach. "And he called his name Noach, saying, 'This one will bring us ease (yenachameinu) from our work (mimaaseinu) and from the toil (u'mei'itzvon) of our hands from the ground (ha'adamah) that Hashem cursed.' " Nine verses later (6:6-7), the Torah describes Hashem's decision to wipe out man from the face of the earth, and some variant of each of these four terms appears, and in exactly the same order.

It's almost as if Hashem is mimicking the hopes expressed by Lemech for his son. But this time, instead of the root נ-ח being used as a term of consolation, it refers to Hashem's regret at having made man.

What connects the consolation that Lemech expected from his son with Hashem's regret at having created man? Rabbi Fohrman finds the answer in a Midrashic comment, that Lemech foresaw Noah's creation of the first ploughshare, an instrument to ease the cultivation of the ground. More than that I will not give away.

For Rabbi Fohrman there is no excitement comparable to discovering chiasms in the Torah — paired structures in which the first element mirrors in some way the last, the second mirrors the second to last, similar to atbash in gematria. Such structures can occur within a single verse or extend over a long stretch of text, and the connections may be linguistic or thematic. They are, he writes, examples of the Torah serving as a commentary on itself by emphasizing the central element to which both sides of the pattern point.

Chiasms abound in the Torah, though most of us would likely miss them and just wonder why the text seems repetitive. Rabbi Fohrman explicates one in parshas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 17:1–17). The first sets of pairs are relatively simple. At the beginning of the passage, Avraham's age, 99, is mentioned; at the end, his age as of Yitzchak's foretold birth, 100. The next pair of elements consists of Avraham falling on his face, in response to Hashem speaking to him. In the next pairing, Avraham is told that he will be a father of nations, which mirrors a similar description of Sarah towards the end of the passage. Corresponding to that status, Avraham's name is changed from Avram to Avraham, and on the other side of the center point of the passage, Sarai's name is changed to Sarah.

Now, things get a little more complicated than most of us would have seen. Two chiasmic structures within the larger chiasm mirror each other, and both contain a verb with the root  $\text{פ-ר}$ . In the first chiasm, Avraham is told that he will become fruitful ( $\text{v'hifreisi}$ ), and that nations and kings will descend from him. Individuals become nations and unify further under a king. The other side of the chiasm describes what happens to the one who nullifies ( $\text{הפך}$ ) the covenant: he is cut off from the nation, and returns to being an isolated individual.

I have not even exhausted the chiasm or explicated the two middle verses concerning the covenant. That I'll leave to the reader. Just one hint: When all is done, the mystery of the Israelites undergoing circumcision on the eve of going into battle at Jericho, an action contraindicated for any regular army, becomes understood.

Join Rabbi Fohrman as he peels away layer after layer of Torah.

Science is not the Yellow Brick Road

Everyone from politicians to respectable people seeks to wrap themselves in the mantle of science. "Just follow the science," we are told over and over, as if doing so were as easy as following the yellow brick road.

It is not, as the COVID-19 crisis makes clear. A Jerusalem Post article last week, for instance, quoted two experts on the possible long-term dangers of two new revolutionary vaccines based on genetic material produced in a lab (mRNA), which enters cells and takes over their protein-making machinery. Because the form of the vaccine is novel, we cannot know what its long-range effects will be, said one infectious disease expert, while acknowledging that the urgency of producing a vaccine justifies taking

higher risks — among them autoimmune conditions and the persistence of induced immunogen expression.

Another expert, however, felt there was little concern because mRNA molecules are very fragile and not long-lasting. But that, of course, only raises another question — that of the vaccine's long-term efficacy.

If there is one thing we have been told repeatedly, it is that wearing masks protects us and those around us. And we all want to believe that, if only to maintain some feeling of control over our lives. (I, for one, will continue wearing my mask outside the home.)

But a recent Danish study of close to 6,000 participants, published in the Annals of Internal Medicine (after rejection by three prestigious journals), found no statistically significant difference in rates of COVID-19 infection among those who were provided with 50 masks and instructed to wear masks outside the home over a two-month period and those who were not. While far from conclusive — e.g., about half those in the mask-wearing group were not fully compliant — it still raised questions about how powerful a tool masks are.

(Because neither group existed in an environment in which everyone else used masks, the study is relevant, at most, to the protective value of masks, but is not probative with respect to masks' ability to prevent one from transmitting the disease.)

But nothing brings out the difficulty of navigating the science more than dueling op-eds in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal this week. In the former, the dean of Brown University's School of Public Health lambasted Senate hearings on the usefulness of a number of drugs, including hydroxychloroquine, for early stage COVID-19 sufferers. He states flatly, "Trial after trial found no evidence that hydroxychloroquine improves outcomes for COVID-19 patients."

But just the day before in the Wall Street Journal, Dr. Joseph Ladapo, a Harvard-trained MD-PhD and professor at UCLA Medical School, wrote a piece entitled, "Too much Caution is Killing Covid Patients," arguing that doctors should follow the evidence for promising therapies rather than demanding the certainty of randomized controlled trials. When treatment options are few — e.g., quarantine and hope for the best — he writes, "holding out for certainty can be catastrophic."

He mentions at least three drugs that have been used, and found safe, in other contexts for decades. And writes of HCQ, "A meta-analysis of five randomized clinical trials showed that early use of HCQ reduced infection, hospitalization, and death by 24%." Using safe medications at home, he argues, is the optimal public health strategy for preventing hospital overcrowding and death.

What is a layperson supposed to do when confronted by such blatant differences of opinion among experts?

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לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

## **Parshas Vayeishev: Dreams and Prophecy**

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Our Parashah is “bookended” with stories about dreams; both stories featuring Yoseph as the central character. At the end of our Parashah, we are told about Yoseph’s success in the prison of the court of Egypt – and of his insightful explanation of the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners:

Each of the two men – the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison – had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. When Yoseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why are your faces so sad today?” “We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Yoseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.” (B’re sheet 40:5-8)

Yoseph is confident about his ability to explain their dreams – and that confidence is quickly validated, as each of his explanations is played out in Pharaoh’s court. The butler is restored to his position and the baker is hanged. (40:21-22)

Where did Yoseph get this confidence; indeed, where did he get the ability to interpret dreams? The earlier dream sequence in the beginning of our Parashah, involving Yoseph, posits Yoseph not as a dream interpreter; rather, as the dreamer. His brothers and father are the ones who make inferences from his dreams – but he just reports them. When did he learn how to explain dreams?

This question carries extra significance in light of the later story of Yoseph’s redemption from prison. The butler “finally” remembers Yoseph and reports his successful dream interpretation abilities to Pharaoh. This leads not only to Yoseph’s rise to greatness (as a result of his explanation of Pharaoh’s dreams), but ultimately to our terrible oppression and slavery in Egypt. (See BT Shabbat 10b)

### **II. DREAMS AND REACTIONS**

In order to understand Yoseph’s ability to interpret the dreams of the butler and baker – and then those of Pharaoh, let’s look back at the first dream-sequence at the beginning of our Parashah:

Yoseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said. Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (B’re sheet 37:5-11)

Yoseph had two dreams – the dream of the sheaves and the dream of the stars. An in-depth study of the differences between these dreams – surely a worthy enterprise – is beyond the scope of this shiur. We do note, nevertheless, several significant differences in the reaction of his family members to the dreams. Resolving two questions about these reactions and one (seemingly) ancillary issues will help us understand Yoseph’s later confidence and ability as a dream interpreter:

1) Why did Yoseph tell his brothers about his dreams? He already had a tempestuous relationship with them and, surely, relating these dreams would do nothing to reverse that trend.

2) When he told them that he had had the first dream (the dream of the sheaves) – before informing them of the content, they hated him more than before (37:5). After he related the content of the dream, his brothers accused Yoseph of plotting – or, at least contemplating – a “takeover” of the family. After he related the second dream (the dream of the stars), they had no reaction. Note that the dream of the stars is much more impactful than the dream of the sheaves in two ways:

a) Not only are the brothers bowing down (akin to the blessing given to Ya’akov – B’re sheet 27:29), but the sun (father) and moon (mother) are also bowing.

b) Unlike the first dream, where their sheaves bowed to his sheaf, the second dream had the stars, sun and moon bowing to Yoseph himself.

Nevertheless, the brothers remained silent in response to hearing this dream – although they were jealous (37:11). Note that he related this dream twice; to his brothers and, later, to his father in their presence. Why didn’t they react to the second dream – either time?

3) The father, on the other hand, reacted to the second dream in the same fashion as the brothers’ reaction to the first dream – yet he kept the matter in mind; i.e. he waited to see if it would be fulfilled. Why did Ya’akov simultaneously castigate his son for this “egocentric” dream – indicating a dismissive attitude towards it – while waiting to see if it would come to pass?

### **III. YA’AKOV AND HIS \*BEN Z’KUNIM\***

Solving one other difficulty at the beginning of our Parashah will set us on the path to a solution. As we are introduced to Yoseph and the special relationship he had with his father, we are told:

“Now Yisra’el loved Yoseph more than any of his other sons, \*ki ven z’kunim hu lo\* (because he had been born to him in his old age)...” (B’re sheet 37:3)

The Rishonim provide several opinions about the key phrase \*ben z’kunim hu lo\*. Rashi understands it as our translation indicates – since Yoseph was born to Ya’akov when he was old, the father felt a special affection for him. Ramban challenges this interpretation on two points:

b) The verse states that Ya’akov loved Yoseph more than any of his other sons; the implication is that Ya’akov loved him more than

Binyamin, who was born much later and when Ya'akov was much older.

Onkelos translates \*ben z'kunim\* as "wise child". Ramban points out the difficulty with this translation: The verse states \*ki ven z'kunim hu lo\* – he was a \*ben z'kunim\* TO HIM (to Ya'akov). If \*ben z'kunim\* is rendered "wise child", then there is no need for the possessive \*lo\* afterwards. Clearly, the \*ben z'kunim\* position was not an objective description, rather it was relational to Ya'akov.

Ramban then offers his own explanation:

"The custom of elders was to take one of their younger sons as a servant, and he would lean on him at all times, never separating from him. He would be called "the son of his old age" (\*ben z'kunav\*) since he would serve him in his old age...this is what they [the Rabbis] intended when they stated (B'resheet Rabbah 84:8) 'Everything that [Ya'akov] learned from Shem and Ever he passed on to [Yoseph]', i.e. he transmitted to him the wisdom and secret teachings..."

Following Ramban's explanation, Yoseph had every reason to see himself as the heir of the Avraham-Yitzchak-Ya'akov tradition. As the closest and most favored recipient of Ya'akov's wisdom and tradition, Yoseph understood that he was destined to experience some of the same events that befell his father – and to have a similar relationship with God. (See Rashi at 37:2 – "...everything that happened to Ya'akov [also] happened to Yoseph...")

#### IV. YA'AKOV – THE FIRST DREAMER

Among our Avot (Patriarchs and Matriarchs), the only one whom we are told had a dream was Ya'akov. Ya'akov dreamt not once, but twice – on his way out of the Land (B'resheet 28:12-15) and when being beckoned back (31:10-13).

[It is interesting to note that the only other two dreams recorded in B'resheet before Yoseph were nearly identical occasions. God appeared to Avimelekh (B'resheet 20:3-7) to warn him to return Avraham's wife to her husband. God then appeared to Lavan (31:24) to warn him not to attack Ya'akov. These two dreams are not of a category with Ya'akov's – or with the three remaining couplets of dreams – Yoseph's, Pharaoh's stewards' or Pharaoh's. In those dreams, there was a message about the future of the individual or his nation, not a divine intercession on behalf of the righteous.]

It is reasonable to posit that Ya'akov related his dreams, their meanings and their outcomes to Yoseph. The favorite son, heir apparent to the tradition, had every reason to believe that if he dreamt a dream where the "message" of the dream was obvious, that he should regard it as prophecy and the word of God – just as his father experienced.

#### V. DREAMS AND VISIONS

We can now look through the first dream sequence and understand the different reactions of the brothers and Ya'akov – and what Yoseph learned from them. [I recommended a careful review of 37:5-11 before continuing]

It is clear from the opening verses of our Parashah that Yoseph was engaged in a power struggle of sorts within the structure of the family (see Rashi and Ramban on 37:2). Yoseph then experienced a dream – with an obvious implication for that struggle and its [seemingly divinely mandated] outcome. He told the dream to his brothers – and they hated him even more just for telling them! He must have been confused by this (unless he wasn't aware of it) – for why would they not be interested in hearing the word of God, especially as it affects them so directly?

When he relates the dream of the sheaves (only to his brothers – his father does not hear of it), they understand its implication – and berate him for it. What did they find so offensive about his vision?

The verses do not indicate that the brothers disbelieved his dream – but they were offended by it. The brothers had a piece of information which was not yet known to Yoseph: Although father Ya'akov is a prophet – and his dreams are indeed visions from God, that is no longer the case with the next generation. A dream may not necessarily be a vision – it may be the expression of subconscious desires and repressed urges (as conventional psychology maintains). The Gemara in Berakhot (56a)

records two incidents where the local (non-Jewish) governor challenged one of our Sages to predict the content of his dreams of the coming night. In each case, the Sage described a detailed and horrific dream – which so preoccupied the governor that he dreamt about it that night.

An important distinction between a vision-dream and a subconscious-based dream is in interpretation. If the dream is truly a prophecy, its meaning should be fairly evident, as it is not generated by the person's own subconscious – we need not be privy to the psychological makeup of the dreamer to understand the message. A conventional dream, as we are all aware, may take a great deal of sophistication to understand – although that is not always the case.

The brothers were not offended by the dream – rather, by the apparent cause for this dream. They figured that Yoseph must be thinking about his takeover of the family so much that these thoughts have entered his dreams. Their derision and hatred is now clear – but why did they keep silent at the second dream?

There was a tradition in the house of Ya'akov that although a single dream may be caused by internal thoughts and ruminations, if that same dream (or the same "message" clothed in alternate symbolism) occurs twice, it is no longer a happenstance – it is truly God's word. We find this approach explicitly stated by Yoseph when he explains Pharaoh's doubled dream:

The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. (B'resheet 41:32)

When Yoseph reported his second dream to his brothers, they did not increase their hatred – not at the report of the dream nor at the retelling of its content. The fact of the second dream – and its similar implication – was no longer reason for hatred, rather for concern and jealousy.

Ya'akov, however, had heard nothing about the first dream. That is why he, upon hearing about Yoseph's second dream, responds in an almost identical fashion as the brothers did to the first dream:



“What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?”

At this point, Ya'akov surely expected his other sons to have a similar reaction – but they were silent. [Remember from the incident in Sh'khem that these sons were not shy about speaking up in father's presence – their silence here is telling]. After his rebuke, the Torah tells us that his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. Ya'akov must have been surprised by the brothers' silence – and must have figured that this dream was not the first one Yoseph had shared. That clued him in that there may be more to this dream than he first thought – and he kept the matter in mind – i.e. he waited to see if it would be fulfilled.

Yoseph learned a powerful lesson from this encounter – that even if a dream is “just a dream” and not prophecy – this is only true when it is an isolated incident. When the dream is repeated, this is a sign from God and must be understood that way.

We can now return to Yoseph in the Egyptian prison and explain his response to the butler and baker. When he learned that they had both experienced significant and terrifying dreams in the same night, he understood that these were more than dreams. He reasoned that just like a dream that occurs twice to the same person is more than a dream, similarly, if two men sharing a fate have impactful dreams on the same night, their dreams must be divine messages.

His response: Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams – is not presumptuous. He was telling them that their dreams were more than “just dreams” – they were in the province of God and, as such, would not need sophisticated interpretation (as is the case with a subconscious-based dream). They would be fairly easy to understand – as indeed they were. Yoseph earned his reputation as an interpreter of dreams – and his ultimate freedom and final rise to power – not by interpreting dreams at all! He earned it by remembering the lesson from his father's house – that the “doubled dream” is a mark of prophecy, and by applying it intelligently years later in the Egyptian dungeon.

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## Parshat Vayeshev: Yosef

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Parashat VaYeshev turns the focus of the Torah from Ya'akov and his development as a spiritual/moral leader to the character and development of Ya'akov's successors, his sons. Having learned together through the parshiot from the beginning of the Torah until now, it should come as no surprise to us that -- like Adam, Hava, Noah, Avraham, Sara, Yitzhak, Rivka, Ya'akov, Rahel, and Le'ah -- Ya'akov's sons, while gifted and blessed, are not perfect. This faces us with the question we have dealt with in previous weeks with regard to some of the great figures above: **why are these individuals chosen to found the nation with a special relationship with Hashem? The Torah clearly records their sins and exposes their flaws. What makes them great?**

One approach to this question is that taken by some midrashim (rabbinic commentary on the Torah) and medieval commentators: that the figures above, including the twelve sons of Ya'akov, are indeed perfect or close to perfection. This approach requires reinterpretation of the many incidents the Torah reports which appear to show that these figures sinned or were flawed in important ways.

We have been taking a different approach, one which accepts a more literal meaning of the events in the Torah. In answering questions which arise, we look to the text of the Torah itself for answers. This means that we must accept that our founders were far from perfect, but, more importantly, it leaves us with the hard work of understanding what makes them great and what lessons we can learn from them.

Beginning in VaYeshev, the Torah focuses especially on the development of Yosef and Yehuda, and, to a lesser degree, Re'uven. As we learn through VaYeshev, MiKetetz, and VaYigash, our job is to follow these figures through their challenges and triumphs.

1. Yosef and Yehuda: What are their challenges? What do they learn, and how do they learn it? What makes them great?
2. Re'uven: what kind of leader is he? Clearly, something seems amiss, but what is it?
3. In terms of leadership, what is the relationship between Yosef, Yehuda, and Re'uven?
4. What is Ya'akov's role in all this, and how does his position in the family change over time?

### PARASHAT VAYESHEV:

Last week we completed a chapter in Ya'akov's life: his development from "Ya'akov" to "Yisrael," from subtlety, deception, and avoidance of challenges to straightforwardness, strict honesty, and courage. With this week's parasha, the Ya'akov-Eisav rivalry is history and the focus moves to Ya'akov's sons.

### THE TORAH FORESTALLS A MYTH:

By now, we have noticed the recurring theme that the family dynamics of the households of our Avot are somewhat less than perfect: Avraham is beset by the conflict between himself and his nephew, Lot, and suffers through the strife between his wives, Sara and Hagar; Yitzhak and Rivka participate in the competition and conflict between their sons; Ya'akov is the nexus of the competition between his wives for affection and fertility.

The mythical Jewish family is middle or upper-middle class, with a mom and dad, about three kids, no serious internal conflict, no underachievers. Today, the media devote lots of print and airtime to showing us that there are Jewish families of all kinds, some with one parent, some with four parents, some with no kids, some far below or high above middle class, some torn by strife and conflict, some burdened with 'underachievers.' I suppose this is a revelation to those who believe in this "mythical Jewish family," but it strikes me that this "mythical family" certainly did not grow out of Sefer Bereshit, where we find multiple female parents in one family, midlife deaths of wives and mothers, a persistent pattern of childlessness, siblings murdering one another or trying to, children and spouses being thrown out of houses, siblings who sell each other into slavery, strife between parents... never a dull moment. The Torah recognizes the reality of family life and does not hide the uncomfortable truth or try to project an unachievable model for us to follow. May all of our families be happy and healthy... but our often less-than-perfect reality is affirmed by the family snapshots we see in the Torah's album.

We now turn to look at Ya'akov's children, his relationship with them, their relationships with each other, and their development.

### TALENT . . . WHAT A BURDEN!

We begin with Yosef. Yosef has so many things going for him!

- 1) He is his father's favorite.
- 2) His mother is Ya'akov's favored wife.
- 3) He is physically quite attractive.
- 4) He is a leader of rare capability.
- 5) He is a brilliant interpreter of dreams.

Of course, Yosef also faces many challenges:

- 1) He is his father's favorite -- which makes his brothers hate him.
- 2) His mother is Ya'akov's favored wife -- but she dies while he is still young.

3) He is physically very attractive -- but this contributes to his self-absorption (see Rashi) and helps land him in jail later on.

4) He is a leader of rare capability -- but this makes him a threat to some of the other brothers, who are hoping to one day lead the family. It also gives him authority over the others, which makes him unpopular.

5) He is a brilliant interpreter of dreams -- but his own dreams of leadership fuel his brothers' hatred and jealousy.

No characteristic is simply a strength or a weakness. Each can play either role, depending on how we handle it. At this point in his life, Yosef is full of potential, but his youthful lack of wisdom turns some of his assets against him.

### **SIBLINGS FOR SALE:**

How is it that Yosef's brothers arrive at an emotional state where they are ready to murder or sell him? The Torah describes the development of the relationship:

BERESHIT 37:2-4 --

These are the offspring of Ya'akov: Yosef, seventeen years old, shepherded the sheep with his brothers and was the supervisor of the sons of Bilha and Zilpa, his father's wives. Yosef brought evil reports of them to their father. Yisrael loved Yosef better than all of his other sons, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a striped cloak. His brothers saw that his father loved him better than all of his brothers, and they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

Who fires the first shot in this battle? Who first sets in motion the process which ends in Yosef's sale? Surprisingly, the answer is Ya'akov, Yosef's own father.

### **"BEN ZEKUNIM":**

Yosef is his father's favorite because he is a "ben zekunim" -- "the son of his old age." But how much age difference is there between Yosef and his brothers? Several mefarshim (commentators) point out that **Yosef is in fact the same age as several of his brothers!** He is the same age, for example, as Yissakhar and Zevulun. And his own brother, Binyamin, is even younger than he is -- even more of a "ben zekunim" than Yosef is. So what does "ben zekunim" mean, since it can't mean simply a son born in the father's old age?

Mefarshim disagree on the exact definition, but the Ramban's approach is perhaps the closest to "peshat" because it answers our question and also translates "ben zekunim" fairly literally. The Ramban says "ben zekunim" means that Yosef was chosen by his father to \*serve\* him in his old age. According to the Ramban, it was common practice for elderly people to choose one child to serve them, help them perform needed tasks, get from place to place, etc. This child would remain with the parent while the other children went about their business. "Ben zekunim," then, does not mean "a son born in his father's old age," it means "a son who was chosen for his father in his old age."

Ya'akov has chosen Yosef as his "ben zekunim," the son who keeps him company, runs his errands, and helps him perform tasks. This includes a crucial function which Ya'akov passes to Yosef: the task of keeping an eye on his sons (Seforno 37:4 asserts that Ya'akov appoints Yosef to take charge of his brothers in managing the flocks). Yosef, as his father's representative, performs this task by reporting to his father what his brothers are up to, which, as we hear, is not always good. And as we know, the brothers' opportunity to kill or sell Yosef is provided by Ya'akov himself, who sends Yosef off to observe the brothers and return with a report.

### **A LEADER IN THE MAKING:**

While we're on the topic of Yosef's leadership qualities, what evidence is there that Yosef is a talented leader? There is a pattern in Yosef's life which we see repeated several times with regard to leadership: people tend to give Yosef so much responsibility, such a degree of carte blanche to supervise things as he sees fit, that they all but abdicate their own role as leaders. There are four examples of this pattern:

1) Ya'akov:

Ya'akov gives up the role of supervising his sons and appoints Yosef as his field representative. Yosef is in charge not only of the operation of the family business, but also of the flow of information. His father depends on him not just for leadership, but also for reports about what is happening.

2) Potifar:

BERESHIT 39:2-6 --

God was with Yosef, and he was a man of success; he remained in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that God was with him, and that everything he did, God made successful. Yosef found favor in his eyes and served him; he appointed him over his house, and EVERYTHING HE OWNED, HE PLACED IN YOSEF'S HANDS. From the time he appointed him in his house over everything he owned, God blessed the house of the Egyptian because of Yosef, and God's blessing was upon all he had, in the house and in the field. He left ["abandoned," perhaps] all of his possessions in Yosef's hands; HE DID NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIS OWN POSSESSIONS, except the bread he ate . . . .

Not only is Yosef put in charge of everything, but Potifar basically abdicates as master of the house. Potifar actually has no idea what is going on in the house. He trusts Yosef so implicitly that he knows only that his meals arrive and that he eats them.

When the \*mistress\* of the house notices him and begins to make passes at him, we see even more powerfully the degree to which Yosef has become master of the house. She may be attracted to him not just because he is so handsome, but also because he has supplanted her husband as man of the house. She would never have laid eyes on a lowly slave, even a good-looking one, but this slave has become master of the house -- almost husband-like. Because his status has risen, it now becomes possible for her to think of him as a sexual partner (or target).

### 3) Prison Warden:

BERESHIT 39:21-23 --

God was with Yosef and drew favor to him, putting his favor in the eyes of the warden of the prison. The prison warden put all of the prisoners in the prison into Yosef's hands; anything that was done there -- he did it. THE PRISON WARDEN DID NOT SEE ANYTHING UNDER HIS CARE, since God was with him, and whatever he did, God made successful.

Again, we note the pattern above: not only does his superior give him responsibility, he basically gives up his job and lets Yosef do it. Yosef has functionally replaced the warden. Again, a person in authority trusts Yosef so implicitly that he lets Yosef do whatever he wants. The warden himself has no idea what goes on from day to day in the prison. Yosef is such a capable leader, such a natural authority-wielder, that when he arrives, whoever is in charge is so overawed by his capabilities (and so delighted to be free to watch television) that Yosef seems to inevitably replace that leader.

### 4. Paro himself:

BERESHIT 41:38-43 --

Paro said to his servants, "Is there anyone like this man, in whom is the spirit of God?" Paro said to Yosef, "Since God has told all this to you, no one can be as wise and understanding as you. You shall be OVER MY HOUSE; by your word shall my people be sustained, and I SHALL REMAIN GREATER THAN YOU ONLY IN THE THRONE." Paro said to Yosef, "See: I have placed you over all of Egypt." Paro removed his ring from his hand and put it on Yosef's hand, dressed him in linen clothing, and put a gold cape on his neck . . . .

Once again, Yosef demonstrates brilliant leadership, and the authority figure in this scenario -- Paro -- concludes that Hashem is with him. Paro appoints him as his second-in-command and relinquishes control of the single most important activity of his country for the next fourteen years: storing and distributing grain. Yosef **\*\*becomes\*\*** Paro, in effect. This self-replacement is confirmed by Paro's transfer of the signet ring to Yosef: whatever Yosef decrees **\*becomes\*** the will of Paro. Later, when the famine begins and the people begin to starve, they come to Paro -- who tells them to go to Yosef and to do whatever he tells them. Yosef has completely taken over, just as in the previous examples. (The words "over my house" clearly echo Potifar's words in appointing Yosef over his own household.)

### BACK TO THE BROTHERS:

In summary of what we've said so far about Yosef and his brothers, the brothers hate him because:

1) He reports on them to their father (this may explain why Yosef, unrecognized by his brothers when they come to Egypt for food, accuses them of being spies -- because one of the reasons they hated him long ago was for his spying on them and reporting back to his father!)

2) He is the best loved of them all because he does so much for Ya'akov and spends so much time with him.

Clearly, Ya'akov is responsible for putting Yosef in this tricky position. And as we are about to see, there is more to Ya'akov's role.

### KETONET PASIM:

The next thing the Torah says makes the brothers angry is that Ya'akov makes for Yosef a "ketonet pasim," a cloak with stripes -- perhaps colored stripes. But we are not talking about children here. Why does this cloak bother the brothers so much? Certainly, it is understandable that Ya'akov's preference for Yosef angers them. But why does the cloak make things worse? It seems so trivial!

The Ramban (Shemot 28:2) and the Seforno (Bereshit 37:3) suggest that the "ketonet pasim" represents leadership -- kingship. This cloak is not just the ancient Near Eastern version of a nice sweater, it is **"ROYAL"** garb, the cloak of a king (examples from Tanakh: Shmuel II 13:18, Yeshayahu 21:22). This is what it represents to the brothers; this is why it bothers them so much: Not only is Yosef the favorite son in terms of Ya'akov's affections, but he appears to have been selected by Ya'akov to be the family's next leader!

Ya'akov's selection of Yosef particularly challenges Re'uven, the biological first-born and natural choice to lead the family, and Yehuda, who begins to take a prominent leadership role in the family, clashing with Yosef more than once.

All of this is quite a lot of 'baggage' for Yosef to carry around, and none of it seems to be his fault. Yosef's predicament appears to be created by Ya'akov, as the Torah explicitly tells us that the brothers hate him for his cloak and for reporting on them.

### YOSEF KNOWS THE SCORE:

But then the Torah reports that Yosef reports his dreams to his brothers. Usually, when we look at this story, even if Yosef's behavior (trumpeting to his brothers his dreams of ruling over them, 37:5-8) seems inappropriate to us, we assume he is just naive, an immature but talented 17-year-old who assumes his brothers will share his excitement about his bright future.

This is certainly one way to read the story. But there is another possibility, one which makes more sense in the context of the tense and hate-filled relationship the Torah says already exists. It is difficult indeed to believe that Yosef is unaware of the hatred already generated by his father's favoritism toward him (37:3). Ya'akov's preference is no secret -- Yosef actually walks around wearing the sign of that preference -- and Yosef must notice that his brothers seem unable to speak to him without almost spitting at him, as the Torah reports. In this context, how can he not realize that telling his brothers about his dreams of ruling over them will aggravate the situation?

Some suggest (see Hizkuni) that Yosef is attempting to convince his brothers that they should not hate him. He is hinting that his future as a leader is not something his father is giving to him; in truth, Hashem Himself is behind his rise to power. But if so, once he has tried to convince them of this by telling them the first dream, and he sees that their hatred has only grown, why does he report to them another dream which shows them bowing to him again? Isn't it clear to him that this strategy has totally backfired?

The Radak (37:5-7; see also Seforno 37:19) provides an entirely different approach to Yosef's role in this story. He suggests that in the already tense and hate-filled context, Yosef's sharing his dreams of dominating the family is not a naive mistake, but a very purposeful and \*aggressive\* move! Yosef \*knows\* his brothers hate him -- and he wants them to know that one day they will all bow to him! He tells them his dreams not because he is foolish enough to imagine that they will be happy for him, but in order to taunt them!

This view is supported by the fact that Yosef takes more than one opportunity to share these dreams with his brothers. Even if he somehow manages to convince himself the first time around that his brothers might be happy for him, he cannot be foolish enough to expect the same positive reaction the second time.

Yosef, it seems, is not the happy-go-lucky young man we might have imagined, with stars in his eyes and a jumbo helping of naivete. He is quite aware of his brothers' feelings about him, and he responds to their palpable hatred by taunting them with visions of their subservience to him. What we are beginning to see is that the situation is not quite as simple as it might have seemed, and that everyone involved -- Ya'akov, the brothers, and Yosef, all contribute a drop of poison to the relationship between the brothers and Yosef.

All of the elements of the approach we have been developing here answer another question: everyone understands that later on, the brothers deserve (to some degree) the manipulation Yosef perpetrates on them by pretending not to know them and accusing them of espionage. After all, they sold him! Yosef needs to see if they have learned anything since then. But why does Yosef himself deserve to be sold as a slave? And why does Ya'akov deserve to be deprived of his favorite son for 22 years? Are we to say that the whole story is just an accident, just the result of the evil in which the brothers decide to engage? According to our approach, Yosef and Ya'akov have both made great mistakes; both need to learn something important.

### **YOSEF:**

Yosef responds to the animosity of his brothers by putting his future leadership "in their faces": he announces to them that he has dreamed that he will rule over them. And then, for good measure, he does it again. What better learning process for Yosef than to be sold as a slave, the diametrical opposite of a king? This is not to say that Yosef's dreams are only expressions of his arrogant ambitions -- they are not his inventions, they are prophetic. But it was his choice to broadcast them to his brothers, his decision to respond to their hatred with high-handedness. Yosef will learn humility as a slave and prisoner. And then he can rise to responsible leadership.

It is also clear that this is not a lesson that his brothers consciously mean for Yosef to learn: they certainly do not sell him into slavery in order to rehabilitate him. They, of course, are ready to kill him, and only reconsider on second thought and decide to sell him. Their decision seems motivated by squeamishness about murder and perhaps also some greed, but no desire to aid Yosef in his personal development.

Later events show that Yosef has learned this lesson of humility:

1) When he offers to interpret the dreams of Paro's wine steward and baker, he emphasizes that the interpretations come from Hashem and are not expressions of his own wisdom. He gives Hashem all the credit, making himself peripheral, only a vehicle to deliver the interpretation from Hashem. On the other hand, he has not yet totally internalized that his interpretive powers are Hashem's, so he asks the wine-steward to remember him when the steward is released from jail and to try to have him set free. In other words, he still ascribes some credit for his talent to himself, and therefore thinks of his interpreting the steward's dream as a favor \*he\* did for the steward, not as a situation in which he is nothing but the vehicle for the Divine.

2) Yosef's true rehabilitation becomes apparent when he interprets Paro's dream. When Paro gives him the perfect opportunity to take all the credit himself, he gives all the credit to Hashem: "It is not me! Hashem shall respond to Paro's satisfaction" (41:16).

Yosef displays not only humility, ascribing his power to Hashem, but also shows that he now understands leadership on a much more profound level than before. Previously, he had used his prophetic dreams of leadership as a weapon against his brothers. Arrogantly, he had waved in their faces that they would one day bow to him. Of course, this very act showed that he was totally unfit to lead at that point -- part of leadership is being accepted by the group one is leading.

But by now, Yosef has matured; he not only interprets Paro's dream, but even successfully proposes the centerpiece of Egyptian economic-agricultural policy for the next fourteen years (7 of plenty and 7 of famine)! Fresh from jail, a slave shapes the future of the entire region and earns himself the power of second-to-the-king, largely because he couches his policy suggestion as something Hashem has told him. If he had phrased his suggestion as something he had thought of, Paro would either have thrown him out, executed him for chutzpah, or at least rejected his plan, for no king would accept a plan that is not only not his own plan, but which comes from a foreigner-slave-prisoner! As Hashem's plan, however, Paro can and does accept it.

The same Yosef who years before lorded his future supremacy over his brothers now behaves as if he is only a pipeline for Hashem. In order to learn these lessons about humility and leadership, Yosef had to be reoriented. He needed to be sold as a slave in order to see that his destiny was totally in Hashem's hands, that he would be a leader only if Hashem decided he would be, and that if Hashem preferred, he would be slave to an Egyptian minister or rot in an Egyptian jail forever.

### **YA'AKOV:**

Ya'akov has made mistakes as well, and the loss of Yosef is designed to punish him:

1) Singling out one of his sons was bound to end in disaster, but he ignores this danger. In response, Hashem takes from him what is most precious, but which is also the focus of his error: his son Yosef. With Yosef gone, perhaps Ya'akov will approach the remaining sons more fairly.

2) One other sin also catches up with Ya'akov at this point: the sin of dishonestly running away from Lavan's house after twenty years there, sneaking away without taking leave properly:

A) BERESHIT 31:20 --

Ya'akov STOLE [va-yignov] the heart of Lavan the Aramean by not telling him that he was running away.

When Lavan catches up with Ya'akov several days later, he demands an explanation:

BERESHIT 31:26-27 --

Lavan said to Ya'akov, "What have you done, STEALING [va-tignov] my heart, treating my daughters like captives of war? Why did you sneak and run away, STEALING [va-tignov] me and not telling me . . . ."

Ya'akov responds, explaining why he ran away:

BERESHIT 31:31 --

Ya'akov answered and said, "Because I was afraid you would STEAL [ti-gnov] your daughters from me."

Now we look at the way Yosef characterizes his kidnapping and sale:

BERESHIT 40:14-15 --

"For I have been STOLEN away [ganov gunavti] from the land of the Ivrim . . . ."

The Torah gives tremendous prominence to the word "ganav" in the story about Ya'akov's flight from Lavan's house -- and the same word is used here by Yosef in a double formation ("ganov gunavti").

B) Just as Ya'akov's "theft" was a theft from one country to another -- running away from Aram to Canaan -- this "theft" is also from one country to another, as Yosef emphasizes: "I have been stolen FROM THE LAND OF THE IVRIM."

3) Most convincing of all is the exact parallel: Ya'akov explains to Lavan that he "stole away" because he was afraid that Lavan would "steal" his daughters (Ya'akov's wives) away. In return, Yosef, Ya'akov's son, is "stolen" from him.

Next week, we will deal with Yehuda, who deserves a spotlight of his own.

Shabbat shalom

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**PARSHAT VA'YESHEV - Who Sold Yosef?**

Could it be that the brothers DID NOT sell Yosef!

As shocking as this statement may sound to anyone familiar with the story of Yosef & his brothers; a careful reading of that narrative in Chumash may actually support this possibility!

In the following shiur, we explore this fascinating possibility (and its consequences) while taking into account some important geographic considerations.

**INTRODUCTION**

After throwing your brother into a pit to die, would you be able to 'sit down to eat'? The brothers did, so does the Torah tell us (see 37:24-25)! But when they sat down to eat, the Torah DOES NOT tell us if they sat NEAR the pit, listening to Yosef's screaming and pleading; OR if they sat FAR AWAY from the pit - to enjoy some 'peace and quiet'?

So what difference does it make?

Believe it or not, this tiny detail affects our understanding of almost every aspect of the story that ensues. Our shiur will entertain each possibility - showing how this 'missing detail' may be what leads several commentators to conclude that the brothers may never have sold Yosef after all!

However, before we discuss that detail, we must first review the Torah's description of these events, making sure that we understand not only what everyone is doing and planning, but more important - what everyone is thinking!

[We should also point out, that the distance between Hebron, where Yaakov is living, and Dotan, where the brothers are grazing their sheep, is about 100 kilometers. Therefore, the brothers are probably gone for at least several weeks. Certainly, they don't come home to Hebron to sleep at night, rather, they have set up a 'campsite' in the Dotan area.]

**PLAN A - THE BROTHERS / FIRST DEGREE MURDER**

Recall that as soon as Yosef arrives at Dotan, the brothers conspire to kill him (see 37:18-20). However, their plan concerning HOW to kill him is revised several times.

To show how, let's begin with the brothers' original plan to kill Yosef, as soon as they saw him [PLAN A]:

"They (the brothers) saw him from afar, and before he came close... they conspired to kill him. And they said to one another, behold the 'dreamer' is coming. Now, let's KILL him and throw his body into one of the pits..." (see 37:18-20).

Note how the brothers originally plan to kill Yosef immediately (on the spot) and then 'bury him' in a pit - most likely to 'hide the evidence' (should their father later accuse them).

Although Reuven opposes Yosef's murder, he realizes that the brothers would not accept his opinion. Therefore, instead of arguing with his brothers, he devises a shrewd plan that will first postpone Yosef's execution, and enable him at a later time to secretly bring Yosef back home.

[See further iyun for an explanation of why specifically Reuven wants to save Yosef.]

**PLAN B - REUVEN'S PLAN / SECOND DEGREE MURDER**

As you read Reuven's plan, be sure to differentiate between what Reuven SAYS (to his brothers) and what Reuven THINKS (to himself):

"... And Reuven said... 'Do not shed blood, cast him into a pit [in order that he die] OUT IN THE 'MIDBAR' (wilderness), but do not touch him yourselves --'

[End of quote! Then, the narrative continues by informing the reader of Reuven's true intentions...]

"in order to save him [Yosef] from them and return him to his father." (37:22).

Reuven's 'official' plan (that the brothers accept) is to let Yosef die in a less violent manner, i.e. to throw him alive into a deep pit to die, instead of murdering him in cold blood. However, Reuven's secretly plans to later return to that pit and free him.

Note how Reuven even suggests the specific 'pit' into which to throw Yosef - "ha-bor HA-ZEH asher ba-midbar"! Most probably so that he can later sneak away to that pit and save him.

[Compare this to the brothers' original plan to throw him into "one of the pits" (37:20) - possibly a pit closer by.]

Unaware of Reuven's true intentions, the brothers agree.

Yosef arrives, and - in accordance with PLAN B - the brothers immediately strip Yosef of his special cloak and throw him alive into the pit (see 37:23-24). Afterward, the Torah informs us, they sit down to eat (see 37:25).

**WHERE ARE THEY EATING?**

Until this point, the plot is clear. Now, two important details are missing which affect our understanding of the rest of the story.

- 1) WHERE did they sit down to eat, i.e. close by or far away?
- 2) WHERE is REUVEN, eating with them, or off on his own?

Even though the Torah does not tell us, we can attempt to answer these two questions by employing some 'deductive reasoning'.

**(1) Where are the brothers eating?**

Recall that the brothers are grazing their sheep in the Dotan area [see 37:17/ today the area of Jenin, between Shechem and Afula], which is on the northern slopes of central mountain range of Israel. The midbar" [wilderness], that Reuven is talking about, is found some 5-10 kilometer to the east of Dotan (that "midbar" is found along the eastern slopes of the entire central mountain range).

Considering that the brothers throw Yosef into a pit 'out in the MIDBAR', it would definitely make sense for them to return afterward to their campsite in the Dotan area to eat (see 37:16-17). Besides, it would not be very appetizing to eat lunch while listening to your little brother screaming for his life from a pit nearby - see 42:21 for proof that he was indeed screaming. ]

And even should one conclude that it would have been just as logical for them to have sat down to eat near the pit, when we consider the whereabouts of Reuven, it becomes quite clear that they must have sat down to eat farther away.

[Later in the shiur, we will bring textual proof for this assumption as well.

**2) Where is Reuven?**

Considering that Reuven's real plan is to later save Yosef from the pit, it would only be logical from him to either stay near the pit, or at least remain with his brothers (wherever they may be). Certainly it would not make sense, according to his real plan, for him to go far away, and to leave his brothers by the pit!

However, from the continuation of the story we know for sure that Reuven did not stay near the pit, because he RETURNS to the pit only AFTER Yosef is sold! Therefore, if Reuven left the pit area, then certainly the brothers also must have left that area. Hence, it would only be logical to conclude that the brothers are indeed eating away from the pit, and Reuven must be eating with them!

After all, not joining them for lunch could raise their suspicion. Furthermore, the Torah never tells us that he left his brothers.

In summary, by taking the logic of Reuven's plan into consideration, we conclude that Reuven remains with his brothers, as they all sit down to eat AWAY from the pit.

[Obviously, this interpretation does not follow Rashi's explanation that Reuven had left his brothers, as it was his turn to take of his father. See further iyun section for a discussion of how and why our shiur disagrees with that approach, and prefers the approach of Rashbam and Chizkuni.]

## PLAN C - YEHUDA'S PLAN / A 'QUICK BUCK'

Now that we have established that Reuven and the brothers are sitting down to eat at a distance far away from the pit, we can continue our study of the narrative, to see if this conclusion fits with its continuation:

"And the brothers sat down to eat, and they **lifted up their eyes** and saw a caravan of Yishmaelim coming **from the Gilad** carrying [spices]... to Egypt.

Then Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What do we gain by killing our brother ... let us **SELL** him [instead] to the Yishmaelim; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh, and his brothers agreed" (37:25-27).

[From Yehuda's suggestion, it becomes clear that the brothers truly planned to allow Yosef to die in the pit. and were unaware of Reuven's intention to save him.]

If indeed Reuven is still sitting with his brothers, then this new plan (to **sell** Yosef) puts him in quite a predicament, for if the brothers would sell Yosef, his own plan to rescue him would be ruined. Reuven has only one alternative - he must 'volunteer' to fetch Yosef from the pit, in order to free him - before his brothers may sell him.

What happens when Reuven returns to the pit? We'll soon see. But before we continue, we must provide a little background on Israel's geography, which is essential towards understanding the psukim that follow.

## THE ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE

Recall that Yosef met his brothers while they were grazing their sheep in the hilly area of Dotan (see 37:17), north of Shechem. Recall as well that during their meal, the brothers 'lifted up their eyes' and noticed a caravan of YISHMAELIM traveling down from the GILAD (today, the northern mountain range in Jordan), on its way to Egypt (see 37:25).

Now, when we read this story in Chumash, most everyone assumes that this convoy will soon pass nearby the spot where the brothers are eating. However, when we consider the geography involved, it is more probable to arrive at a very different conclusion!

This CARAVAN of Yishmaelim (camels et al.) most likely should be traveling along the ancient trade route (better known as the Via Maris), which crosses through Emek Yizrael (the Jezreel Valley) on its way toward the Mediterranean coast. Therefore, this convoy, now sighted by the brothers as it descends from the Gilad Mountains in Transjordan, must first pass through the Bet She'an valley, continuing on towards Afula and Megiddo in Emek Yizrael, on its way towards the coast. Certainly, it would NOT pass the hilly area of Dotan, for it would make no sense for the caravan to climb the Gilboa mountain range to cross through the Dotan area to reach the coast. Let's explain why.

Dotan, today the area of Jenin (about 20 kilometers north of Shechem) lies about 10 kilometers SOUTH of this main highway (the Via Maris) as it crosses Emek Yizrael. In altitude, Dotan sits about 300-400 meters above Emek Yizrael. Hence, from the hills of the Dotan/Gilboa area (where the brothers are eating lunch), one has a nice view of both the Gilad and parts of the Jezreel valley. However, the trade route itself follows through valley that cuts between the mountains.

This explains why the brothers are able to see a Ishmaelite caravan (convoy) as it was descending from the Gilad towards Bet She'an on its way to Emek Yizrael. Even though it was in sight, it was still far enough away to allow the brothers at least several hours to meet it, when it would pass some ten kilometers to the north. Therefore, in order to sell Yosef to that caravan, the brothers would have to first fetch Yosef from the pit, and carry him on a short trip till they meet the caravan in Emek Yizrael. They have ample time to first 'finish their meal', go fetch Yosef from the pit in the 'midbar' (on their way to the Emek), and then meet the convoy to sell Yosef.

## SOMEBODY GOT THERE FIRST

With this background, we now return to the story of 'mechirat Yosef' in Chumash. Let's take a careful look at the next pasuk, noting its grammar:

"And a group of Midyanite **TRADERS** passed by, and THEY pulled, and they lifted Yosef out of the pit, and THEY sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim for twenty pieces of silver, and brought Yosef to Egypt." (37:28)

[Carefully read this pasuk again, noting the difference between the Midyanim and Yishmaelim and the startling fact that the brothers are never mentioned!]

Based on the wording of this pasuk, it's quite clear that the Midyanim and the Yishmaelim are two DIFFERENT groups of people! To support this, note how the Torah describes the Midyanim as local '**traders**' ("socharim"), while the Yishmaelim are described as international '**movers**' ("orchat Yishmaelim - a transport caravan). Hence, a simple reading of this pasuk implies that a group of Midyanite traders happened to pass by the pit (they most probably heard Yosef screaming), and pulled him out. As these Midyanim are 'traders', they were probably on their way to sell their wares (now including Yosef) to the Ishmaelite caravan.

If this explanation is correct, then the MIDYANIM themselves pulled Yosef out of the pit and sold him. [After all, the brothers are never mentioned in this pasuk.]

[This interpretation also explains why the Torah needs to tell us about both MIDYANIM and YISHMAELIM, for understanding that these are two DIFFERENT groups is a critical factor in the story.]

So where were the brothers during all of this? Most probably, still eating! Recall our explanation above: the brothers had thrown Yosef into a pit out in the 'midbar' and returned to their grazing area to eat. They are far enough away that they do not see or hear what transpired between Yosef and the Midyanim!

And WHERE was Reuven? Again, as we explained above, he must have been eating WITH his brothers. However, as soon as he heard Yehuda's new plan (and the brothers' agreement) to sell Yosef, he would have to get back to the pit (before his brothers) to save Yosef - and that's exactly what he does! [But it's too late.] Note how this explanation fits perfectly into the next pasuk:

"And Reuven **RETURNED** ("**va-yashov**") to the pit, and behold, Yosef was no longer in the pit!;

Then, he tore his clothes." (37:29)

Reuven is not the LAST brother to find out that Yosef was sold (as commonly assumed). Rather, he is the FIRST brother to recognize that Yosef is missing!

What can Reuven do? Shocked, he immediately returns to his brothers [probably by now eating dessert] with the terrible news:

"And he **RETURNED** [**va-yashov**] to his brothers and said, 'The boy is gone! And for myself, what am I going to do?'" (37:30).

Note the word 'va-yashov' [and Reuven **RETURNED**] in both 37:29 and 37:30. This verb proves that the brothers could not have been eating near the pit, for if so, Reuven would not need to 'RETURN' to them. However, based on our explanation above, 'va-yashov' in both psukim makes perfect sense. Since Reuven and his brothers are eating away from the pit, Reuven must first RETURN to the pit, then he must RETURN back to his brothers to tell them the news - hence TWICE the verb 'va-yashov'!

## WHAT DO THE BROTHERS THINK?

At this point in the story the brothers must be totally baffled, for they have no idea what happened to Yosef. Assuming themselves that most probably was eaten by an animal, they don't want their father to think that he may be missing, nor would they want their father to accuse them of killing him - so they plot once again. They will trick their father into thinking that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal on his way to visit them. They dip Yosef's coat in blood and have it sent to their father (see 37:31-32). This plan works, as when Yaakov sees the coat:

"And he recognized it and said, 'My son's "ktonet", "CHAYA RA'A ACHALATU; tarof, taraf Yosef" - he was surely devoured by a wild beast (37:33).



Ironically, the end result of this final plan echoes the brothers' original plan (see "ve-amarnu - chaya ra'a achalatu" 37:20 -compare 37:33). Yaakov reaches the same conclusion that the brothers themselves may have reached, but for a very different reason!

Even more ironic is how the brothers final plan 'to sell Yosef' came true, even though they never sold him; and how (they thought that) their original - for Yosef to die - came true, even though they never killed him.

In retrospect, one could even suggest that the brothers may have never been able to 'gather the courage' to either kill or sell Yosef. Despite their various plans and intense hatred of Yosef, just as they had quickly retracted from their first two plans to kill Yosef (see 37:22 & 26), they most probably would have retracted from their plan to sell him as well.

Nevertheless: they talked; they planned; they plotted - and in God's eyes - are considered guilty, even though they never actually killed or sold Yosef.

#### WHAT DOES YOSEF THINK?

So far, our explanation has followed Rashbam and Chizkuni. [I recommend that you read their commentaries and note how they reach the same conclusion regarding who sold Yosef, even though they don't explain the events in the manner that we did.]

Even though this interpretation seems to explain the psukim quite well, there is a pasuk in Parshat Vayigash that seems to 'ruin' this entire approach. When Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, he states explicitly:

"I am Yosef your brother, whom you SOLD to Egypt"(45:4)

Based on this statement, it's quite clear that Yosef himself thinks that his brothers SOLD him! But if our above interpretation is correct, Yosef should have thought that the Midyanim had sold him, and not his brothers! In fact, this pasuk is most probably the primary basis for the more popular interpretation (advanced by Rashi and Radak - see Further Iyun section) that the brothers indeed did sell Yosef.

The Chizkuni, bothered by this pasuk, explains that Yosef knows that the Midyanites sold him, but since the brothers threw him in the pit, it was the brothers "who CAUSED me to be sold to Egypt".

Alternately, one could explain, based on the above shiur that Yosef truly did think that his brothers had sold him, even though the brothers themselves had no idea concerning what really happened.

To explain why, let's consider these events from Yosef's perspective.

Yosef was not aware of any of the brothers' conversations. All that he knew was that, as soon as he arrived, his brothers took off his coat and threw him into the pit. A short time later, some Midyanim passed by, took him out of the pit, and sold him to the Yishmaelim who, later, sold him to the Egyptians. Yosef, trying to piece together what had happened, probably assumed that his brothers had set it all up beforehand. In other words, he thought that the brothers told the Midyanim that they had thrown Yosef in a certain pit, and that they should take him from there to sell to the Yishmaelim.

If so, then Yosef was totally unaware that it was only 'by chance' that the Midyanim were passing by, nor did he think that the brothers originally wanted him to die in the pit. Rather, he thought all along that his brothers had sold him, even though they had no idea what had happened.

In next week's shiur, we will see how this understanding helps explain Yosef's behavior during his many years in Egypt. It will also explain why the brothers assume that Yosef is either missing (see 42:13) or dead (see 42:22 -"hineh gam damo nidrash"), even though Yosef thinks that his brothers sold him (see 45:4).

[Furthermore, this can also explain why Yosef tells his cellmates (in prison) that he was '**stolen**' from the Land of Ivrim (see 40:15)

#### HASHEM'S PLAN

Even though the brothers had three different plans for 'getting rid' of Yosef, God had a different plan.

The Hand of Providence led the brothers to believe that THEIR 'dream' [to rid themselves of Yosef] had come true. In reality, it was

their plotting that eventually led to the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams to come true.

Finally, as will be seen in the story that follows, this was all part of God's long-term plan for the people of Israel to become a nation in the Land of Egypt, as the forecasts of "brit bein ha'btarim" now begin to unfold.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

#### FOR FURTHER IYUN

##### A. RASHI'S SHITTA

To explain Rashi's 'shitta' (opinion) that the brothers sold Yosef, we must return to the two questions raised earlier in the shiur: i.e. where are the brothers eating, and where Reuven is - and change our conclusions.

According to this opinion, the brothers sat down to eat nearby the pit, and for some reason (see below) Reuven left them.

Then, there are two ways to explain what happened next. Either when the Midyanim came by, the brothers employed their services as 'middlemen' to sell Yosef to the Yishmaelim (see Rashbam's second explanation), OR possibly, the term Yishmaelim is synonymous with the term Midyanim (see Radak).

To explain why Reuven had left his brothers, Rashi offers two reasons- either he went 'home' to take care of his father, or he had taken a short walk to do some 'soul-searching' (see Rashi & Radak).

Re: Rashi's quote of the Midrash that it was Reuven's turn to go home to take care of his father, it would be difficult to consider this pshat, for it's over 100 kilometers from Hebron to Dotan, and hence it would be totally against Reuven's own plan to save Yosef, from him to leave his brothers at a time like this!

One could suggest that this Midrash is not coming to explain pshat about what 'happened', but rather gives us insight regarding how 'frum' the brothers were, and the fact that they cared about the mitzvah of 'kibud av', but their hatred of Yosef was much greater than their love for their father.

If so, what point is this Midrash making regarding the nature of 'sin'at achim'.

Rashi's second opinion, that Reuven was 'fasting', may relate to Reuven's own plan - as discussed below:

##### WHAT'S IN IT FOR REUVEN!

B. For some reason, Reuven is interested in saving Yosef. Why does Reuven suddenly become so dedicated to his father?

One could suggest that Yaakov was quite angry with Reuven since the incident with Bilha (see 35:22), after which he was most likely cursed by his father (see 49:4), and hence lost his 'bechora'. Reuven may have hoped that by saving Yosef from the brothers, he would 'prove himself' once again worthy to his father. This would explain his reaction when he tells his brothers that Yosef is missing - "va-ani ana ani ba". This was his big chance to redeem himself. Now, it only looks worse for him. After all, should Yaakov find out what happened, bottom line, it was Reuven's idea to throw him in the pit! For Reuven, this could have been 'strike three!' [Just a thought.]

##### WHY THE BROTHERS HATED YOSEF

One could suggest that the brothers' hatred of Yosef may have been more than just 'petty sibling jealousy'. Considering that they all realized that they were a chosen family, with great goals for their future, and also realizing that in previous generations, certain children were chosen, and others 'rejected' - they may have felt that it was their spiritual 'responsibility' to 'expel' Yosef from this 'chosen family', considering his behavior.

Examine Yosef's dreams. Compare them to Yitzchak's original bracha to Eisav /Yaakov, and the standard blessing of bechira.

How would this confirm the brothers' fear? Do the brothers have reason to believe that Yaakov is making a mistake by favoring Yosef? Do they have a precedent for 'intervening'?



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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Vayishlach

#### Air Thin

*"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."*

Seeing is believing, but there is far more to see in this world than meets the human eye. Take the air that surrounds you, for example. The air seems empty enough, but take a not-so-powerful microscope and you'll be amazed at how the emptiness of the air teems with all manner of minute particles.

And if you could go further than that, beyond the microscopic, if you'd go beyond the limits of human vision itself, you'd be even more amazed and possibly more than a little frightened.

The fact is that we are all surrounded by myriad incorporeal spiritual beings. Some of these beings are benevolent and others, well, let's just say, they're less than benevolent.

*"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."*

Why does the Torah include the phrase *"before him"*? Ostensibly, the sentence could have equally well been, *"And Yaakov sent angels to Esav, his brother."*

The Mishna (*Avot, Chapter 4*) tells us that if we do even one mitzvah, we acquire for ourselves a defending angel, and if we do one transgression we acquire a prosecuting angel. The mitzvah itself creates that spiritual entity (so inadequately translated into

English by the word "angel"). Every mitzvah literally begets a holy angel.

As in the world beneath, so too it is in the world above.

A defense lawyer will do everything he can to show off his client in a good light, and, similarly, the angel born of a mitzvah pleads for his "client" before G-d's throne in the Heavenly Realms. This angel tries his hardest to advance his client's welfare, not only spiritually but materially too. This angel is really more like a son pleading on behalf of his father, for, like a son, he was created by his "father."

Rabbi Yosef Karo, the *Beit Yosef* and author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the standard compendium of Jewish law, would regularly learn the entire six orders of the Mishna by heart. It is well known that, as a result of this prodigious achievement, an angel would come and learn Torah with him. The book *"Magid Meisharim"* (lit. *The Speaker of Straight Things*) details what the angel taught him, and more. This book is still readily available to this day.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* in his commentary on Tractate Shavuot recounts an amazing story. One Shavuot, he and nine other Torah sages stayed up all night on both nights of Shavuot and they witnessed how the

angel spoke with the Beit Yosef. It started speaking as follows: "I am the Mishna speaking in your throat."

The name of that angel was "Mishna," since that was the mitzvah that gave it life.

At the end of this lengthy testimony, all ten Sages, including Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (the composer of the famous Shabbat song *Lecha Dodi* that is sung in

synagogues every Friday night the world over) signed an authentication of what they had seen and heard.

*"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother"*

Yaakov didn't want to employ the services of those angels who stand before G-d's throne. He sent only angels that were the offspring of his good deeds, the ones that were "before him."

- Source: *Lev Eliyahu*

## Chanukah

### The Dreidel's Secret

#### The Dreidel

A children's game, played in the firelight of a cold winter night, the Chanukah Menorah silently glowing in the window... The dreidel. Its four sides spinning around the still point in the turning circle; spinning so fast that its sides blur into nothingness... The dreidel. So seemingly insignificant - and yet this little dreidel contains the story of the Jewish People; the history of the whole world...

Our story starts not with the miracle of Chanukah, but 1,437 years earlier, with Jacob's ladder. Jacob had a prophetic dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached from the ground to the heavens. These angels weren't Hollywood extras with fluorescent tubes over their heads - they were, in fact, incorporeal spiritual messengers - the protecting forces of four great kingdoms. Four kingdoms that would in the future dominate and exile the Jewish People: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

At first, Yaakov saw the angel of Babylon ascend the ladder 70 steps and then he came down: The Jewish People were in the Babylonian exile for 70 years. The protecting angel of the Empire of Persia and Media then climbed up the ladder 52 steps before he descended: The Jewish People were in exile in Persia 52 years. Then the angel of the Empire of Greece climbed 180 rungs - the domination of Greece lasted 180 years. Finally, the protecting angel of the Roman

Empire climbed up the ladder, but *he didn't come down*. Yaakov feared that this final exile would never end, until Hashem promised Yaakov - *If he will rise up like an eagle and make his nest among the stars - even from there I will bring him down*.

We are still in that final exile, in the softly asphyxiating embrace of Rome's spiritual heirs....

#### The Four Kingdoms

##### BABYLON

In the year 3338 (587/6 BCE), the first of our Holy Temples was razed to the ground by the Babylonian Emperor *Nebuchadnezer*, and the majority of the Jewish People led into exile by the Assyrian Emperor *Sancheriv*. Why was it such a tragedy that the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) was destroyed? The Beit Hamikdash represents a unique pipeline between Hashem and Man. When it was destroyed, this flow of spiritual energy was severed. The level of this connection is linked to the word "*nefesh*" - soul ("*When a soul will bring an offering*"... *Vayikra* 2:1). *Nefesh* begins with the letter *Nun*, and *Nun* represents the kingdom of Babylon.

##### PERSIA

As we know from the story of Esther, Haman was interested in finding the final solution of the Jewish

problem - genocide. The exile of Persia and Media represents the threat to the "guf" - the body of the Jewish People, the physical threat of annihilation. *Guf* begins with *Gimmel*, which stands for the kingdom of Persia and Media.

## GREECE

Greece, on the other hand, represents the attack on the Torah itself - *the sechel* - the wisdom of Israel. The Greeks weren't interested in the physical destruction of the Jewish People; rather they wanted to destroy the spiritual core of Judaism - the Torah - and leave a Hellenized hulk that would conform to the Greek norms of aesthetics - drama and the superficial wisdoms. *Sechel* begins with the letter *Sin* - that's the letter of the kingdom of Greece.

## ROME

The fourth kingdom, Rome, is a summation of all the other exiles. At the beginning of their domination, the Romans, like the Babylonians, stopped the bringing of offerings in the Temple. Then, they destroyed the second Holy Temple and inflicted unthinkable carnage on the "guf," the body of Jewish People: After the massacre of Betar, they used Jewish blood as fertilizer for seven years.

At first, Rome was the intellectual scion of Greece, but with the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in 313 CE, the Catholic Church became the spiritual heir of the Roman Empire. After the demise of the influence of the Church, the mantle of Rome was subsequently worn by secularism and materialism - the spiritual incarnation of Rome in our own times. Rome is all the exiles rolled into one and thus it is represented by the Hebrew word "*HaKol*," meaning "all." Its first letter is the letter *Heh*.

## Where is the point at the center of a circle?

Can you define it? And yet it exists. Just like the letter 'yud' in the Hebrew alphabet - a single dot - from which the whole universe was created - the threshold of existence. The still point in the turning circle - and around that dot turns the whole world.

The Jewish People are that little dot - so infinitesimally small, and yet around this dot, the world turns. What is the opposite to that little dot?

What is the opposite of the central point that occupies no space? Direction. North, South, East and West. Expansion in four directions. Four is the antithesis of the One. Four is the number of the kingdoms who stand eternally opposed to the Jewish People. Eternally opposed to He who is One. And to His reflection in this world - the Jewish People.

Take another look at our dreidel spinning.

What do you see? Four sides. Spinning around a central point that occupies no space. And when those sides spin - they themselves cease to have direction anymore. Now, in the blur of their whirling - *they are a circle, a reflection of the still small point at its center.*

What is it that is carved on the sides of our dreidel?

*Nun, Gimmel, Sin, Heh...* On the surface, those letters stand for "*Nes Gadol Hayah Sham - A great miracle happened there*" - the commemoration of a miraculous victory of a faithful few over the might of the Greek Empire. But on a deeper level, the dreidel is a microcosmic representation of the four kingdoms, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome spinning around the center, the Jewish People.

And the Hand that spins the dreidel comes from Above...

Every empire thinks that it will last forever, but the Hand that spins only spins the dreidel of history for predetermined time. And then each Empire, despite its vainglorious boasting, falters on its axis... finally crashing.

Sources:

- *Ramban, Ber. 28:12*
- *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 35*
- *Maharal, Ner Mitzvah*
- *Bnei Yisasschar, Kislev/Tevet, Essay 2:25*
- *Ibid. - Commentary on Bnei Yisasschar; Rav Nachman Bulman, zatzal*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Vayishlach and Vayeshev

### *Pesachim 16-22 and 23-29*

#### Is Almost Good Enough?

*We learned in a beraita: Shimon Ha'Amsoni, and others say it was Nechemia Ha'Amsoni, would explain the meaning of every appearance of the word 'et' in the Torah. When he reached, "Fear [et] Hashem, your G-d," he stopped. His students asked him, "Rebbi, all appearances of the word 'et' in the Torah that you already explained, what is their fate?" He answered, "Just as I received reward for explaining them, likewise I receive reward for stopping to explain them." Rabbi Akiva came and explained: In the verse "Fear [et] Hashem, your G-d," the word 'et' comes to include Torah scholars.*

In our Hebrew language studies nowadays we are accustomed to understand the word *et* as a part of speech without real meaning, but as serving the purpose of introducing a definite direct object. However, in Torah studies it is assumed that everything in the Torah has meaning. Every word, every letter and even the crowns on the letters. So what does the word *et* mean in the Torah? The simple answer is that the word *et* appears in the Torah to include something that is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, but is similar in nature to the definite direct object that follows it in the verse.

With this in mind, one of our Sages (Rabbi Shimon Ha'Amsoni or Rabbi Nechemia Ha'Amsoni) initially explained the meaning of the word *et* in various places in the Torah. In one place, he said, it means one thing and in another place it means something else – but each time the attributed meaning is similar to the definite direct object word that appears explicitly in the verse. However, the word *et* in the verse, "Fear [et] Hashem your G-d," posed an impasse. The Sage rhetorically asked, "What can be included by the word *et* that should also be feared in the same way that Hashem is to be feared?" Therefore, he did not assign the word *et* in this verse any special meaning.

When his students asked him regarding the status of every other *et* in the Torah that he had already successfully explained, he told them, "Just as I received reward for initially explaining their meanings, likewise I will now receive reward for retracting my original teachings", concluding that nothing new is included from any *et* in the entire Torah.

Rabbi Akiva, however, reasoned otherwise. He taught that every *et* in the Torah includes something new, including the one in the verse that teaches the mitzvah of fearing Hashem. Here, says Rabbi Akiva, the word *et* comes to include Torah scholars. This means that just as there is a mitzvah to fear Hashem, there is likewise a mitzvah to fear Torah scholars. Although, of course, the equation of Torah scholars to Hashem is not exact, we should be in awe of their greatness in a manner that is similar to – but not equal to – our awe and fear of Hashem. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avot (4:12) teaches, "Rabbi Eliezer the son of Shamua would say: The

dignity of your student should be as precious to you as your own; the dignity of your colleague, as your awe of your Torah teacher; *and your awe of your Torah teacher as your awe of Heaven.*” (Rashi)

Maharsha explains the different views of the first Sage and Rabbi Akiva in the following manner. The impetus for first Sage to offer interpretations for every *et* in the Torah was to honor Hashem and His Torah by showing that not even one word in the Torah is superfluous. Since this Sage’s purpose was to honor Hashem in this way, he reasoned that he would achieve that same goal by avoiding any interpretation of the word *et* that would include anyone in the same category with Hashem.

Rabbi Akiva, explains the Maharsha, reasoned that it was indeed correct and appropriate to include Torah scholars from the word *et* – not in the sense of fear of retribution, but rather in the sense of awe and respect. He viewed this not as disrespect to the honor of Hashem, but rather as a tribute to Torah scholars, who learn Hashem’s Torah.

• *Pesachim 22b*

## With All Your Might

Rabbi Eliezer says, “If the Torah says ‘[And you will love Hashem, your G-d...] and with all your life,’ why does the Torah also say, ‘And with all of your might’? And, if the Torah says, ‘And with all of your money,’ why does the Torah also say, ‘And with all your life’? Rather, the Torah is saying to you: If there is a person whose life is more dear to him than his money, therefore the Torah says, ‘And with all your life;’ and if there is a person whose money is more dear to him than his life, therefore the Torah says, ‘And with all your money?’”

The basis for this teaching is a verse in the Torah that is part of our daily prayers in the first paragraph of the Kriat Shma: “And you will love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul (i.e. life) and with all your might (i.e. money). This is one way that *Chazal* explain the words in the verse. There is a mitzvah to love Hashem, even in certain situations – such as being faced with choosing idol worship or sacrificing his life or all of his money. Rabbi Eleizer explains why the Torah specifies this expression of love as being willing to part with both his life and his wealth, and does not just state the greater sacrifice (presumably giving up his life), from which we would logically know that he would of course need to make the lesser sacrifice in order to show his love for Hashem by not transgressing.

He explains that the Torah addresses a person of any mindset: A person who values his life more than his money must choose to forfeit his life, and a person who values his money over his life must be prepared to forgo all of his money to show his love for Hashem, if needed.

It may perhaps sound strange to some people to hear that there are people (or even one sane person) who values his money more than his life. However, the commentaries explain this value system of life versus money is not necessarily a general one, the way a person thinks throughout his life. Rather, the verse deals with only one relevant point for making the ultimate sacrifice that is required by this verse to fulfill the mitzvah of loving Hashem without a limit. This point in time is the moment if and when a person is faced with the choice of giving up all of his money (or his life, depending on the specific demand) in order not to worship the idol. What is more important to him *then*?

Perhaps he is *very* elderly and *very* infirm and he greatly desires to leave his wealth to his wife, children, charitable organizations, places of Torah study, and other worthy and needy causes? If, at that moment and under those circumstances in his lifetime, he is given the choice of relinquishing all his wealth or be killed, it is not unreasonable that he would find his money dearer to him than his life. At that point in time, the money might very well be his priority – perhaps by a long shot. In this case, the mitzvah to love Hashem requires him to part with his money, despite it being that which is truly what is most dear to him.

[\*Note: Please skip the following paragraph if you are not a fan of renowned Jack Benny stories. One of the longest laughs in radio history occurred during the Jack Benny show. Mr. Benny, who was notoriously parsimonious, was late in arriving at the studio. His sidekick asked him why he was so late. He told him that he was mugged on the way. The questioner continued to wonder how that accounted for his extreme lateness. “Does it really take that long to be robbed?” Jack Benny answered in his deliberate manner, “The robber threatened me with the ultimatum, ‘Your money or your life’?! And, I was thinking...”]

• *Pesachim 25a*

*Ohr Somayach wishes all of our  
friends, alumni and readers of Ohrnet  
Torah Magazine a festive and  
luminous Chanukah that will light up  
our lives with good health, much  
happiness and success.*

*Chanukah Somayach!*



## VAYISHLACH

### Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov's leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word *nisa* in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, "The sons of Yaakov were twelve." Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife's name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn't see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means "travel". It does not mean "we will travel." This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean 'we' as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two triplet sisters.
15. 35:18 - *Ben-Yemin* means "Son of the South." He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be "foreigners in a land not their own." Therefore Esav said, "I'm leaving. I don't want the Land if it means I have to pay the bill of subjugation in Egypt."



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# Q & A

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## VAYESHEV

### Questions

1. *"These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...."* Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "*hand*" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

### Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

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# Q & A

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## CHANUKAH

### Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanukah take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanukah.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "shamash"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanukah?
12. What three *mitzvot* did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanukah?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanukah except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanukah indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanukah?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanukah?

### Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol*. (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1, and the "Al Hanissim" prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer "Al Hanissim". (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
10. No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
11. When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah. (Ibid. 684:3)
12. Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
13. They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
14. They were stronger and more numerous. ("Al Hanissim" Prayer)
15. It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
16. Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanukah. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
17. If we break up the word into two parts — *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month.
18. Hallel. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
19. They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. ("Chanukah" means inauguration.)
20. Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Vayishlach - Chanukah

#### Pick your Wax

With Chanukah just around the corner, people are already thinking about how exactly they will light their Menorah and what sort of candles they will use. Of course, ideally one should opt for using olive oil to light Chanukah lamps, but, nonetheless, for various reasons, using wax candles remains a popular choice as well (see *Rema to Orach Chaim* 673:1). In this essay we will encounter four different words for “wax” — *donag*, *shaava*, *kira*, and *nechot*. In doing so we will seek out the etymologies of these words to figure out if/how they differ from one another.

The word *donag* appears four times in the Bible (Mic. 1:4, Psalms 22:15, 68:3, 97:5), but never in the Mishna or Talmud — except for the fact that Rav Nachman’s wife was named Donag (*Kiddushin* 70a). Whenever *donag* appears in the Bible it denotes “wax” as something that easily melts in fire.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 29:20) connects the word *donag* to the Biblical Hebrew word *tenuch* (“ear lobe”), ostensibly invoking the interchangeability of DALET and TAV, as well as GIMMEL and KAF. Rabbi Hirsch explains that wax is similar to an ear lobe because wax is malleable and pliable, just like the fatty ear lobe is.

Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg writes in *Shorashei Leshon HaKodesh* (Warsaw, 1897) that the word *donag* is a portmanteau of the words *dei* (“enough”) and *nogah* (“light”), an allusion to wax’s usefulness in lighting candles and providing light.

More scholarly-oriented etymologists are at a loss to explain the origins of the word *donag*. The prominent linguist Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906-1984) suggests in his dictionary that this word is derived from the Akkadian word *dumqu*, which means “clear” or “shiny” — a clear reference to wax’s translucence. Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) concludes that *donag* is of uncertain etymology, mentioning Even-Shoshan’s theory as just a possibility. He then cites Dr. Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888) who compares the Hebrew *donag* to the Arabic word *danj* which means “the remainder of the honeycombs.”

In Mishnaic Hebrew the common word for “candle wax” is *shaava* (typically pronounced *shayva* in more Yeshivish circles). This word appears six times in the Mishna, thrice in *Shabbat* (2:1, 8:4, 22:3) and thrice in *Keilim* (10:2, 17:17, 24:7), but it never appears in the Bible. When the Talmud (*Shabbat* 20b) discusses the Mishnaic word *shaava*, it explains that *shaava* refers to the “refuse of honey” (*pesulta d’dwsha*). In other words, the Talmud explains that *shaava* refers to the honeycomb, which is the source of bees’ wax — a by-product of the honey-making process.

All three times that the word *donag* appears in Psalms, the Targum renders the term in Aramaic as *shaava*. However, the one place it appears outside of Psalms (Mic. 1:4), the Targum translates it into a slightly different word, *she’ei’ita* (which Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur in *Metrugaman* suggests is actually a mistake and should really say *shaavita*). Either way, both *shaava* and *she’ei’ita* seem to be

derived from the two-letter root SHIN-AYIN, which means “smooth” (see our essay “Smooth Sliding & Glad Gliding” about the word *shua/shiia*). This, of course, relates to the silky smooth texture of hardened wax.

When the Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 85:4) teaches that Judah’s father-in-law Shua (Gen. 38:2) was a prominent figure in his locale, it highlights this point by referring to him as a “The Candle of the City.” Rabbi Matisyahu Strashun (1817-1885) explains that this appellation is actually a pun on the name Shua, which is spelled with the same letters as *shaava* – the material from which the best candles are made.

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 20b) actually translates the Mishnaic word *shaava* into the seemingly Aramaic word *kerosa*. However, the truth is that this word and its variations, such as *kira* (*Bava Metzia* 40a, *Berachot* 56b, *Shabbat* 110b, 133b) and *kiri* (*Pesachim* 8a, *Yevamot* 76a) are not actually Aramaic words, but rather are loan-words derived from *cera* in Latin and/or *keros* in Greek.

Interestingly, according to some commentators there might be another word for “wax” in Biblical Hebrew. When the Torah describes Joseph’s brothers seeing an Ishmaelite caravan heading to Egypt, it mentions that this caravan was transporting, *inter alia*, *nechot* (Gen. 37:25). Later in the Joseph story, when Jacob sent his sons with gifts to appease the Egyptian viceroy, one of the special delicacies from Canaan that Jacob sent was *nechot* (Gen. 43:11). Now, the word *nechot* is generally understood to be a sort of spice, often identified as “ladanum” (although Ibn Janach writes that *nechot* are “carobs”). However, according to the Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 91:11), *nechot* is *shaava* – “wax.” Professor Zohar Amar adds that in the list of things that Jacob sent the viceroy, the item that immediately precedes *nechot*

is “some honey” (*me’at dvash*), which may have led to the supposition that *nechot* is something related to honey (i.e. beeswax).

In fact, Targum Jonathan and Targum Neophyti (to Gen. 37:25, 43:11) translate *nechot* as *shaava*. Moreover, Rashi (to Gen. 37:25) cites Targum Onkelos (there) as also rendering *nechot* as *shaava*. This assertion is somewhat difficult because our editions of Targum Onkelos (Gen. 37:25, 43:11) actually translate *nechot* as *shaaf*, which apparently means “smear” (see *Chullin* 111b). Nachmanides (to Ex. 30:34) takes Onkelos’ translation to mean that *nechot* refers to “olive oil.” The Vilna Gaon’s son, Rabbi Avraham Vilner, reads Onkelos as saying *saaf*, which he connects to the Biblical Hebrew word *seif* (“branch”) that appears in Yechezkel 31:8. Despite all of this, we can validate what Rashi writes in the name of Targum Onkelos, based on what Rabbi Yosef Teomim-Frankel (1727-1792) suggests in *Iggros Pri Megadim*, that *shaaf* is just a variant of *shaava* – presumably because the letters PEH and VAV represent phonetically similar sounds and can thus be interchangeable.

To summarize: Everybody agrees that there are two Hebrew words for “wax”: *donag* in Biblical Hebrew and *shaava* in Mishnaic Hebrew (and Targumic Aramaic). These two words seem to focus on different properties of wax. *Donag* focuses on either wax’s malleability, its role in bringing light or its translucent appearance; while *shaava*, on the other hand, seems to emphasize wax’s smooth texture. The word *kira* and the variations thereof are not really Hebrew or Aramaic words, but come from Greek/Latin. Finally, the Biblical word *nechot* is typically understood to refer to “spices,” but some commentators explain it as another term for “wax.”

*We wish all of Ohrnet Magazine’s readers - and all of  
Ohr Somayach’s alumni and friends - a healthy  
winter.*

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD? cont.

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Vayeshev — Chanukah

#### To Be a Wise Guy (part 1 of 2)

Jewish tradition has long viewed the Menorah — eternally associated with the holiday of Chanukah — as a symbol of wisdom (see Bava Batra 25b). The Menorah illuminates and enlightens us both in the literal sense and in the proverbial sense. It therefore befits us to offer a discussion of the different forms of knowledge and wisdom as an ode to the festival of lights. In this essay we will explore three Hebrew words associated with knowledge (*chochmah*, *tevunah/binah*, and *daat*), and explain how altogether these three words form the basis of Jewish epistemology.

We begin our discussion with the term *chochmah* (“wisdom”), a form of knowledge associated with a *chacham* (“wise man” or “sage”). The Mishna (*Avot* 4:1) asks, “Who is a *chacham*?” before answering, “One who learns from all people.” Thus, the *chacham* casts a net as wide as possible, looking to accrue wisdom from all possible sources of information. The Talmud (*Tamid* 32a) says that a *chacham* is somebody who can foresee future consequences that had not yet come to fruition. In this explanation as well, the *chacham* holds wide-ranging wisdom, which allows him to be sensitive to all possible consequences of a given course of action. The Talmud (*Chagigah* 14a) further asserts that a *chacham* is defined as a student who makes his teachers wiser, again showing that the *chacham* typifies broadening one’s scope of wisdom.

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini explains that *chacham* denotes the opposite of “simpleton,” as *chacham* can refer to anyone who has mastered as certain body of knowledge. That body of knowledge could be something as trivial as

carpentry (Isa. 3:3, 40:20), snake-charming (Psalms 59:6), or other technical/engineering skills (see Ex. 31:6). Even cunningness and political ingenuity can be considered a form of *chochmah* (see II Sam. 13:3) — even if used negatively (Jer. 4:22). That said, Rabbi Bedersi clarifies that when the Bible speaks of a *chacham* (especially in the Book of Kohelet), it refers specifically to a *religious scholar* — a sage who has mastered the Torah and the Divine Arts.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the words *chacham* and *chochmah* to the two-letter root CHET-KAF, which refers to “waiting” or “delaying.” The word *michakeh/choche* (“waiting” or “anticipating”) in Hebrew (see Isa. 30:18, Hab. 2:3, Dan. 12:12, Iyov 32:4) is derived from this root, as is the word *chakah* meaning “fish net” (Iyov 40:25, Isa. 19:8, Hab. 1:15), a trap which one sets and then “waits” for the fish to enter. In the same way, a *chacham* is a wise man who is not hasty or rushed in his studies, but rather patiently “waits/delays” to deliberate over the material more thoroughly. (Rabbi Pappenheim also argues that the word *cheich*, “palate,” comes from the word *chakah*, because the open fish net resembles a person’s mouth opened wide in anticipation of food.) The Aramaic verb *chayach* (“to smile”) and the Modern Hebrew noun *chiyuch* (“smile”) are likely also derived from the word *cheich*.)

The term *tevunah/binah* refers to the form of knowledge acquired by the *navon*, whom the Talmud (*Chagigah* 14a) says is *meivin davar m’toch davar* (“understands one matter from within [another] matter”). This connotes a deep comprehension that allows the learner to derive



new ideas from a lesson he or she had previously learned.

Rabbi Bedersi relates *tevunah/binah* to the word *bein* (“between”). This is because a *navon* must equally be able to apply relevant data to whatever he is considering, and, at the same time, exclude irrelevant information. The discerning *navon* is thus expected to be able to tell the difference “between” this datum and that datum, allowing him to efficiently analyze all relevant data and derive new conclusions.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the term *tevunah/binah* to the biliteral root BET-NUN, which refers to “building.” The verb *boneh* (“builds”) refers to building a physical structure; *even* (“rock”) and *teven* (“straw”), to materials used for building a physical edifice; *ben* (“son”) and *bat* (“daughter”) are the result of building one’s progeny; *avnayim* (“birthing stool”), to the place on which that building can come, and so on. *Binah* relates to this core meaning because it essentially refers to the ability to “build” on a given idea by applying it to something else and extrapolating further. (The English word *maven* in the sense of “expert” actually derives from the Hebrew *meivin*, “he understands,” by way of Yiddish.)

Most authorities use the term *tevunah* and *binah* almost interchangeably. While Rabbi Pappenheim admits that he has not seen other sources that address the difference between these two words, he proffers his own explanation, based on his understanding of the implications of an initial TAV. In a nutshell, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *binah* refers to the ability to understand the big picture even if it is comprised of many different components, while *tevunah* refers to the ability to break down the overarching big picture into its smaller components.

The Vilna Gaon (to Proverbs 2:2-3, 2:6) differentiates between *binah* and *tevunah* by explaining that *tevunah* refers to the “reflection” that qualifies one’s *chochmah* or *binah*. The Vilna Gaon in *Chemdah Genuzah* (to Proverbs 1:1) writes that *binah* refers to understanding something on

one’s own terms, while *tevunah* refers to understanding something so thoroughly that one can explain it to others (see also Zohar, *Vayakhel* 201a). Rabbi Shlomo Brevda (1931-2013) points out in *Leil Shimurim* (p. 26) that this latter source runs counter to the aphorism often cited in the “Yeshiva World” in the name of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (1853-1918): “A deficiency in being able to explain something is a sign of a deficiency in one’s actual understanding.”

Let’s summarize what we have learned until now. *Chochmah* refers to the intake of knowledge or raw data as it comes from many different sources. On the other hand, *tevunah/binah* refers to the intellectual acumen required to process that knowledge and the ability to understand information in such a way that one can induce further. In the next article, part 2, we will learn how *daat* is the offspring of the “marriage” between *chochmah* and *tevunah/binah* (see Ramchal’s introduction to *Klach Pischei Chochmah*). For now, we will focus on sharpening the differences between *chochmah* and *tevunah/binah*.

The Malbim explains that *chochmah* refers to a practical form of wisdom, while *tevunah/binah* connotes a more abstract form of understanding. He explains that the term *chochmah* applies only when the opposite of *chochmah* is also a possibility. In other words, when there is something that can be done in two ways, such that one way is the “smart” way of doing it while the other way is the “dumb” way of doing it, the intelligence needed to choose the “smart” approach is called *chochmah*. In line with this, the Malbim explains that *chochmah* primarily refers to that which can be experienced. It refers to the “smart” way of acting/behaving.

That said, the Malbim explains that true *chochmah* can come only by way of Divine revelation, because with anything less it cannot be known for certain that it is the “smartest” of all options. When we speak of non-revelatory *chochmah*, it is only a borrowed term to refer to what we can only assume to be the “smartest” possibility.

By contrast, the Malbim explains that *binah* refers to a more abstract form of cleverness. When a person can understand complex allegories or solve riddles, this draws on his or her *binah*. One who acquires *binah* has the ability to take into account everything that he or she has perceived – either through their senses or intellect – and use all of that information to arrive at intelligent, logically sound conclusions. *Binah* is thus the ability to think through and process what one has beheld. In the Malbim's model, the term *daat* refers to the “certainty” of the resultant knowledge and conclusions that come through *binah*.

Another way of putting it: *Chochmah* represents the raw information found in the Written Torah and its limitless planes of interpretation, *binah* represents the Oral Torah that processes and elucidates that information, and *daat* is the careful balance between the infinite wisdom of the Written Torah and the more concrete lessons of the Oral Torah. This approach is found in the *Zohar* (see *Matok M'Dvash* to *Yisro* 85a), the Vilna

Gaon's *Biurei Aggados* (*Bava Kama* 92b), and the Vilna Gaon's commentary to Proverbs (1:8, see also the glosses to his comments on Proverbs 10:13).

Using this paradigm, Rabbi Eliyahu Tzion Sofer explains that the Hellenistic Syrian-Greeks specifically opposed the concept of *binah*, because they denied the significance of the Oral Torah. They essentially had the Written Torah in front of them in the form of the Septuagint, but to them the Oral Torah was nothing worth pursuing. We may add that this is why the poem *Maoz Tzur* refers to the Jewish People as “the Children of *Binah*” when describing their victory over the Greeks and the establishment of Chanukah as a special holiday. The Jewish People's commitment to the Oral Torah (*binah*) turned the tide against Hellenism and led to the Hasmonean victory.

*To be continued....*

*For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rcklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rcklein@ohr.edu)*



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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## COMING BACK TO LIFE EVERY DAY – PART 2

*“My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure. You created it, You fashioned it, You breathed it into me, You safeguard it within me, and eventually You will take it from me, and restore it to me in Time to Come. As long as the soul is within me, I gratefully thank You, Hashem, my G-d and the G-d of my forefathers, Master of all works, L-rd of all souls. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores souls to dead bodies.”*

The text of our blessing is acknowledging that our souls belong to G-d. Not just that, but each soul is unique and it has been embedded within us by G-d. Its function is to give us the capability to fuse the disparate concepts of spirituality and physicality together during our time in this physical world. But the blessing also reminds us that our time here is transient and that at some point we will return our precious soul to its Maker. It is as if the blessing is imploring us to use our time wisely and not allow ourselves to become distracted by the physical to the point that we lose sight of our spiritual selves.

The words, “You safeguard it within me” are a stark reminder that the soul is able to coexist with the body only because G-d allows it to. And that we are in this world to fulfill a purpose. Additionally, we have each been allotted a specific amount of time in this world by G-d. The blessing is reminding us that we must endeavor to maximize our lives, so that when the time comes to return our souls to our Maker we are able to do so in the most accomplished way possible.

Therefore, the blessing emphasizes the fundamental idea that we must spend our time in the pursuit of spiritual goals because, ultimately, it is only the spiritual that can make the transition from this world to the next.

In 1920 in communist Russia, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson was hauled up in front of the “All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption” – commonly known as the Cheka, the precursor to the dreaded and loathed GDU – for his religious activities. All religious endeavors were regarded as being anti-establishment, and, therefore, seditious. It was an especially serious accusation, which carried with it a punishment of exile or even execution, depending on the whims of the “judges” who heard the case. When confronted by a “court” that was comprised of rabidly atheist communists, Rabbi Schneerson was not in the least bit intimidated and he would not back down from his intent to continue teaching Torah. He stated, absolutely and clearly, that he would not abandon his goal regardless of any threats they made against him. One of the “judges” was so enraged by his remarks that he drew his pistol and pointed it straight at the Rabbi. “This little toy has made many a man change his mind,” he said with an arrogant sneer. Rabbi Schneerson looked at him and calmly replied, “Your little toy can only intimidate the kind of man who has many gods and but one world. I, however, have only one G-d and two worlds, and, therefore, I am not impressed by your little toy!” *To be continued...*

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Vayishlach

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit milah*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister.

G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

## Vayeshev

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the Mashiach.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## Vayishlach

### Humanity Prevails

Already in the womb, Yaakov and Esav had drawn out their battle lines. Their vigorous movements in utero, which propelled Rivka to seek answers from G-d, gave expression to a struggle that would endure for the rest of time. Rivka is told *there are two nations in your womb, and two states; they will be different from each other, starting from your innards one state will become mightier than the other, and the mighty one will serve the lesser.*

Rivka is informed that she carries two nations who represent two different social systems. One state will be built on spirit and morality, on man's human soul. The other will be built on cunning and power. Spirit and strength, morality and power will oppose each other. From the day of their birth, the two will go their separate ways. When one state will strengthen, the other will weaken, the scales constantly rising and falling between these two states. All of history is but one struggle to determine who will gain the upper hand: the book or the sword.

In this week's Torah portion, the fateful encounter between the now adult brothers — each with a tribe of wives and children — teaches us more about this struggle. Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children. He is the hard-working family man. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe. Yaakov represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. The struggle between them and the outcome of this struggle foreshadow a raging battle that has haunted humanity for thousands of years. In the words of Rav Hirsch:

*Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?*

The night before this fateful encounter, Yaakov experiences an even more fateful encounter — with his brother's angel. This adversary wrestles with Yaakov the entire night, as Yaakov attempts to protect himself. The angel realizes that he cannot prevail against Yaakov, and he is able only to injure his thigh. The angel then asks to be released, for the dawn is breaking, but Yaakov refuses let him go until the angel blesses him: "You will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have become the commanding power before G-d and men, since you have prevailed."

The goal of history — realized at daybreak — is the recognition that happiness and progress depend on those principles which Yaakov has lived by throughout the ages. No longer shall he be known as "Yaakov" — he who holds on to the heel — but rather, "Yisrael" — he who shows the world that G-d towers above all.

There is one highlight of the brothers' encounter which hints to Yaakov's ultimate triumph. After sending several delegations with gifts, Yaakov himself sees Esav from the distance, approaching with 400 men. Yaakov arranges his wives and children and goes ahead of his camp to greet his brother and bows to

him. Esav ran to meet Yaakov, *embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and they [both] wept*. Here we see that Esav was overcome by genuine human emotion. A kiss can be an affected gesture; not so tears that flow at such moments. The kiss *and* the tears show that Esav too is a grandson of Avraham.

These tears foretell that Esav too will gradually and eventually lay down his sword. Brute force will give way to humaneness. Yaakov will be the one to provide him with the opportunity of showing to what extent the principle of humanness has prevailed in his heart. When the strong respects the rights of the strong, this is merely discretion, but when the strong, as Esav here, throws himself on the shoulders of the weak and casts away the sword of aggression, it is clear that justice and humanness have prevailed in his heart. The *mightier* will serve the *lesser*, as Rivka was told.

▪ Sources: Commentary, Ber. 25:23; 32:8; 32:27-32; 33:4

## Vayeshev

### Chanukah: The Power of Minority

We Jews represent a mere .02% of the world population. A minute minority indeed. Not for naught has this been the case since the inception of our history. The fact of our minority was revealed as an essential feature of our mission. *Not because you are more numerous than any other peoples did G-d take delight in you and choose you; for you are the smallest among all the peoples.* (Devarim 7:7).

What better time than Chanukah, when we celebrate the victory of the few over the many, to reflect on this unique aspect of our nationhood?

Our minority status begins way back with our forefather Avraham the *Ivri*. He was called *Ivri* – the one from over there – our Sages note, because the entire world stood at one side, championing polytheism, and Avraham stood alone, on the other side, resolute in His monotheistic truth and piety. Within our people too, it was the minority that preserved Hashem's Will against rebellion of the masses. After the debacle of the golden calf, Moshe called out, "Whoever is for G-d, join forces with me!" Only a single tribe, the Levites, responded to the call. Out of the twelve spies sent to assess the Land, only Yehoshua and Calev remained loyal to G-d, standing firm against a panicked people prepared to return to Egypt. The events recorded in the books of the Prophets repeat this phenomenon over and over again. One man, with firm conviction and passionate commitment, stood up for the Law of G-d and saved the people: Gidon, Ovadiah, Eliyahu, Elisha – each resisted the misguided masses and set the nation straight.

In the Chanukah story, this hallmark of our history is most apparent. The nation was rapidly assimilating to the Hellenistic culture surrounding it. One man, Matisyahu, raised five sons so mighty in spirit and so staunch in their commitment that they took on G-d's cause *alone*. It is the victory of these few great and pure souls – the victory won for the loyalty to G-d's Law – that we celebrate on Chanukah.

Our history of three-and-a-half millennia attests time and again to the triumphant perseverance of a tiny, powerless minority. Every page of our history reminds us: the fate of truth and right can never be hopeless, even if their cause is supported only by a minority.

But what *advantage* does a minority confer? Is there no merit and power in numbers?

A minority is likely the most fertile ground for cultivating spiritual truth. A victorious majority will all too often become unfaithful to its own cause. Once its struggle is a matter of the past, the members of the majority lend their minds and spirits to new aspirations. The core values which were once the fuel of its life, now immune from challenge, are left to wither – no further development or nurturance are pursued. A majority often imagines that its cause owes its victory to its numbers, when in fact its numbers were once won on account of its cause. Because the focus is on numbers, a majority is often content to preserve its numbers, or perhaps increase them. But the underlying cause remains just that – underlying. It lies, buried under new ambitions, often of a different character. This may explain why some of the largest religions are underdeveloped theologically.

Not so for the minority. By virtue of its continuing struggle, it perpetually breathes new life into its cause. Survival of the minority depends on its ability to keep awake within it a vibrant spiritual reserve. Because the numbers and power of the majority always beckon, the minority is impelled to immerse itself, over and over again, in the content of its cause. A minority must educate its ranks not only to the truth of its cause, but to the character required to defend its cause. This, in turn, requires that each individual have access to knowledge and research – to make these truths personal ones. There can be no mindless masses if a minority is to survive. Hence, in our Jewish minority, the teaching and dissemination of our cause – the Torah, G-d's truth – occupies the most splendid and prominent place in life. The mind and spirit of the Jew are so immersed in this fountain of truth that there is not one house of study without new insight. The result is a rich and ever-growing reservoir of spiritual thought and strength. And, precisely because membership in the minority often requires sacrifice – material wealth and prosperity usually reside in the majority – the minority will likely be composed of more purely motivated supporters.

The fact of our minority is hardly a cause of despair. Its unique features have enabled us to live a noble existence for millennia. We are assured:

There is still within it a tenth consecrated to G-d; even though it will be destroyed again and again, as the oak and the beech tree whose trunk remains though they shed their leaves, still the trunk will remain holy seed.  
(*Yeshayahu* 6:13)

- Sources: *Collected Writings II, Kislev IV*, pp. 233-248



# THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 6 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

Generally speaking, there are several separate “Unknown Days” that occur during the month of Iyar. I refer to them as such as they do not seem to have much in the way of observance, and even that observance is minimally observed by much of Klal Yisrael.

## **Pesach Sheini**

The 14th of *Iyar* is dubbed *Pesach Sheini*, “a second *Pesach*.” This commemorates the day when those who were unable to bring the annual *Korban Pesach* (special *Pesach* sacrifice of a Pascal lamb) at its proper time, on *erev Pesach*, were given a second chance to offer this *Korban*. Although technically not considered a true holiday, and despite the fact that it is (astonishingly!) not listed in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days when *Tachanun* is not recited, nevertheless, the custom for many is not to recite *Tachanun* on *Pesach Sheini* in order to ‘tap into’ the merit this particular day had during the times of the Beit Hanikdash. Although the *Pri Megadim* maintains that *Tachanun* should be recited on *Pesach Sheini*, as the original day it commemorates was meant only for individuals in unique circumstances, and its absence of mention in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that *Tachanun* is not recited speaks volumes – nevertheless, most later authorities rule that one should not say *Tachanun* on this day.

There is an interesting common custom associated with *Pesach Sheini*: eating matzah. But this is not something noticeable in a *shul*, and many simply take it on as an addition for the day, but certainly not as a mandated observance.

## ***BeHa”B***

There is a semi-annual period of three days of fasts that many are not aware of: a series of “Days of *Tefilla*” colloquially known as *BeHa”B*. This acronym stands for Monday (*Beit*, referring to the 2nd day of the week), Thursday (*Hei*, the 5th day of the week), and the following Monday (*Beit*). These days are generally observed on the first Monday, Thursday, and Monday following the earliest Rosh Chodesh after *Pesach* (Rosh Chodesh *Iyar*), and likewise after *Succot* (Rosh Chodesh *Marcheshvan*).

The custom of utilizing these specific days for prayer and supplication is already mentioned almost 900 years ago by the *Baalei Tosafot* and its importance is reiterated by the *Tur*. Unbeknownst to many, this practice is actually codified in halacha by the *Shulchan Aruch* as a proper *minhag* custom.

## Whose Minhag Is It, Anyway?

Both the Tur and the Rema refer to *BeHa”B* as a German-French custom, and the *Shulchan Gavoah* (and seconded by the *Kaf Hachaim*) writes that this was not the *minhag* in Spain, implying that Sefardim are not beholden to keep *BeHa”B*. Although the *Shulchan Aruch* dedicates an entire, albeit brief, chapter to *BeHa”B* in Orach Chaim 492, in other writings he refers to public fasting on *BeHa”B* as an “Ashkenazic *minhag*.”

Yet, it is not just the general Sefardic populace who does not recite *BeHa”B*. Already in his time the Taz noted that even among Ashkenazic communities *BeHa”B* observance was not widespread. But, nowadays, among many Yeshiva communities, and especially in Eretz Yisrael, reciting *BeHa”B* twice annually is de rigueur.

## Why Now?

The reason most commonly mentioned by the *Poskim* for these days of prayer following the holidays of Pesach and Succot is that over the extended holidays, when there is a mitzvah of feasting and *simcha*, it is more likely that people may have “stumbled” in some area due to improper behavior and inadvertent sin – and *BeHa”B* is meant to help rectify any possible offense. This idea is based on *Iyov* (in Ch. 1:5) who would offer sacrifices after “*Yamei Mishteh*,” or “Days of Feasting.” These sins might be due to a variety of probable offenses, including: mingling at a festive meal or even at a Torah lecture in the Shul (!), Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed related transgressions, *Chillul Hashem*, or the overabundance of merriment and gastronomical pleasures.

Other explanations offered to explain why *BeHa”B* was established include:

1. To entreat Hashem to strengthen our bodies, especially at the time of changing seasons when many are likely to get ill.
2. To beseech Hashem that we should have abundant harvests after Pesach and plentiful rains after Succot.
3. To commemorate Queen Esther’s original 3-day fast (which actually was at Pesach time, and not Purim time). This is pushed off until the first opportunity after Chodesh Nissan. (The *Taanis Esther* that we observe before Purim is not really due to Esther’s actual fast as recorded in the Megillah, but rather to commemorate that when the Jews went to war against the anti-Semites of their day, they fasted.)

Yet, interestingly, although *BeHa”B* is traditionally meant to be a fast day, still, very few actually fast due to the fact that in our generations people are considered weaker. Instead, we make do with *Selichot* supplication prayers (and perhaps words of *Mussar*), with the majority also reciting *Avinu Malkeinu*. This rationale is cited in many authoritative *sefarim*. This certainly holds true with *BeHa”B*, as it is based on a *minhag* and not an actual Biblical source.



## Monday, Thursday, Prayer Days...

Monday and Thursday are considered especially potent days for prayer, as Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah on a Thursday and returned with it on a Monday. A mnemonic to showcase this is the first verse read on a public fast day *Haftara* (Yeshaya 55:6), “*Dirshu Hashem **B’H**matzo*” – “Seek out Hashem when He is to be found.” The letters *Beit* and *Hei* show that an auspicious time when Hashem may be found is on Monday and Thursday. Therefore, Mondays and Thursdays are preferable for fasting and prayer. For whichever reason *BeHa”B* was established, we certainly should not let this golden opportunity for *tefilla* pass us by.

But what happens when there is a convergence of Pesach Sheini and *BeHa”B*? During this exceptional year, 5781, the third and final day of the “Chodesh Iyar *BeHa”B*” is on Pesach Sheini. So what does Klal Yisrael do? Which holiday do we observe?

*To be continued...*

*Written l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzecha l’yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad.*

*This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder’s excellent article on this topic.*



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## **A Letter to My Brother in the Maghreb**

By Dr. Meir Buzaglo \*

Many years have passed since we were last in touch, but I have nevertheless never forgotten you. How could I? Seeing as my mother and father, my brothers and my sisters always remind me of you—in the way they talk and dress, in their generosity.

One cannot simply just erase hundreds of years.

I'm writing to you because I'm worried.

The world about us is rapidly changing. There are many cases of people taking decisions for others, not always with a humane approach, and rarely out of love for Man or God. Even as I write, the image rises before my eyes—boarding the boat in Casablanca, dressed in my best clothes, six years old—my family and I returning to what we then called Palestine. A very dramatic event that defies description, the realization of a dream, coming home after hundreds of years. Not because this home was in any way luxurious, and not because Morocco was foreign to us. Our parents decided to go to Jerusalem, not to Canada and not to France. We returned to the home we had left thousands of years ago, yet somehow it was here that our Moroccan identity stood out. At first it was hard. Mother wanted to return immediately, to get back to her Arab friends, but with time she got used to it; she learned Hebrew and was adored by all the residents of the housing project where we lived, Jews from all ends of the world.

And, to be sure, the songs, the music, the accent—they've all remained with us. Years later, I returned to Morocco for a visit with my wife, a Lithuanian immigrant, to Casablanca, where my family's roots are. I was stunned by the depth of my emotions. We will never forget the goodness; we will always recall the life we shared. It wasn't always idyllic, but then again, is there any place that is always idyllic?! And nevertheless, I am a zealous defender of the Maghreb; I listen to stories of the great rabbis of Morocco, about the life we shared in the Atlas Mountains.

Not only I, but my children as well, have a deep affection for Morocco—despite their having been born in Jerusalem and not knowing a word of Arabic.

Why haven't I written before? I'm not sure, but I do know why I'm writing you now. The world about us is going crazy. The Middle East, Iraq, Syria, Libya—but it doesn't stop there. Egypt is in an upheaval, and stormy clouds cover France and England. Racism and cruelty are rearing their ugly heads. And I ask, haven't we, Jews and Arabs, originating in the Maghreb, a role to play? I mean those among us who are friends, those of us who know about living a shared life? There are problems, to be sure. Who can remain apathetic, faced with the depths of suffering of Gaza's residents? And who can remain apathetic to the thousands of missiles fired on Sderot's residents? The suffering of Jews and Arabs cries out.

Let's leave it to God to find who is to blame; our concern is about healing and about prevention.

Today, it seems, we are far from any solution. There were periods of progress in the Israel-Palestine arena, yet these were stopped short with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and bitter intifadas. Iranian Shi'ite fanaticism is now penetrating a conflict that initially was about land; Hezbollah is taking advantage of Palestinian suffering to promote Iranian expansion; and Islamic State is charging onward in a rampage of destruction. Not only are we not making any progress but the conditions necessary to overcome these problems drift farther out of reach with every passing moment. The name of Lord is being invoked in vain by those seeking destruction rather than prayer.

This is when I remember Morocco.



Despite the fact that my home is in Israel, it seems inconceivable that life in Morocco was just a coincidence. And I ask the Muslim Moroccans, was it just a coincidence that you hosted us for hundreds of years? Were not the lives of my fathers and forefathers in Morocco God's will? A history that can be linked to the present? A ray of light in this period when darkness is closing in on us? Only God knows. And nevertheless, we are obliged to try to begin thinking in exceptional ways. As I sit here and write, I hear of similar interest in the Maghreb, in France and in Israel as well. And I do not speak in Israel as a private individual.

There is a cultural ferment about Moroccan Jews in Israel the likes of which we have never seen before. It is apparent in piyyut and music, certainly, as well as in film, theater, and literature. This is not about people who, as I was, were born in Morocco but about Israeli-born young people who seek to give Morocco and Arab culture a place in their lives. This is a significant resource in a region that speaks only in the language of destruction.

Haven't we, as children of the Maghreb and Andalusia (who once raised the world to the lofty heights of philosophy, literature, science, and art, to a shared life of tolerance and shared faith) a human mission of the first order? Do we dare turn our backs on this mission and let others who have less understanding than we decree our fates here? Should this be the case, a covenant is called for. Let's leave agreements to states, and contracts, too. We are talking about an oath; an oath of lovers of the Lord and His children against those who sell their souls to suffering, destruction and ruin. Let us take this oath as we see before our eyes the lives shared by our mothers and fathers, the simple values of beauty and kindness that so characterize us of the Maghreb.

I have a modest contribution to make, together with my friends in the Tikun Movement, which I lead.

We plan to hold meetings in Jerusalem with artists, academics, and young people who can teach us about this friendship. This involves only an incubator, for now. And I thank our Muslim friends who have consented to join us. We need all the blessings we can get in order to succeed. I need your blessing.

\* Professor of Philosophy, Hebrew University. He is one of the founders of the Tikkun Movement, which works for joint life of Jews and Arabs in Israel. This article originally appeared in the Jerusalem Post, December 2, 2014.. Reprinted in honor of the historic restoration of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel, Hanukkah 5781.



