

Potomac Torah Study Center

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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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Aviv Atzili, his wife, two children, and nephew were among the initial hostages from Kibbutz Nir Oz, abducted on October 7. In the past few days, Liat (originally feared dead) and the three children have been released, but Aviv ben Telma is still a hostage. We continue to pray for Aviv's speedy release and give thanks for the release of the rest of his family.

What happens when Jews have no other country to welcome them in case of attacks from an Anti-Semitic country? Study the story of Greek Jews under Nazi attack during World War II. Dr. Michael Matsas has spent much of his adult lifetime documenting this story. For the horrifying story, go to <https://illusionofsafetygreece.com/> and read his absorbing story. For a more complete presentation, read *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War*, available from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Greece during World War II is one example of why we Jews and the world need a safe Israel.

Hanukkah Samaich! Remember v'tain tal started last Tuesday at Maariv (until Pesach).

Hanukkah always comes during the period with the shortest days of the year (in the Northern Hemisphere), and always during the time when we read about the struggles of Yosef and his brothers. Rav Kook asks why the sages choose to observe only Hanukkah among several Jewish military victories that our ancestors win because of miracles. Rav Kook observes that pure oil is a metaphor for a kernel of true faith in the depth of the Jewish soul. All generations need the strength and purity of inner faith to protect the Torah from the corrupting influence of foreign beliefs and values. Our

sages realize that Greek wisdom, once acknowledging Torah values, honors and strengthens Torah. Of all our holidays, Hanukkah is the one that does not have a festive meal or wine. We reject the hedonist delight in wine, parties, and naked wrestling matches – all as contrary to Judaism. We only accept and learn from the intellectual side of Greek culture, the heritage from Greece that enhances Torah.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine observes that the war against Hamas is similar to that of the Maccabees – a war against barbaric violence, glorification of suicide, using human shields, and choosing to glorify victimhood as a way of life. Beit Shammai proposes starting Hanukkah with eight candles the first night and going down one each night. Hillel in contrast argues that we should start with one candle and add another each night. Halacha is with Beit Hillel. However, during Sukkot, we start with thirteen bulls in the korbanot the first night and subtract one each day – a parallel to what Beit Shammai proposes for Hanukkah. Rabbi Rhine observes that Beit Shammai's proposal makes more sense for Hanukkah, because we celebrate a weakening of the forces of evil each night during the holiday.

Each generation in Sefer Bereishis encounters sibling rivalry, and every generation before Yaakov's children ends with at least one sibling being rejected (not included in Hashem's promises to our Avot). Rabbi Marc Angel observes that Yosef's brothers when young view the family situation as a zero sum game. What one brother (Yosef) gains, the other brothers lose. One aspect of their struggle is that the previous generations end up with one brother rejected (Yishmael and Esav) and the other brother (Yitzhak and Yaakov) selected to receive Hashem's blessings. After having encountered famine in Canaan and Yosef's protection in Egypt, the brothers learn to accept a higher philosophy of life based on love, family loyalty, and cooperation.

Rabbi David Fohrman and Rabbi Muskat-Brown point to the story of Yehudah and Tamar as a key to the brothers starting to move away from a family history of deception to follow Yisrael's example of living a life of honesty. When the family realizes that Tamar is pregnant and unmarried, and off to be executed, she states that she is pregnant by the man whose signet ring, coat, and staff she has. She uses the same language that the brothers had used years earlier when they presented Yosef's coat to their father – please recognize these items. Yehudah, who could have remained silent, has the integrity to go public, recognize that they are his items, and state that he made Tamar pregnant (although not knowing at the time who she was). Rabbi Fohrman observes that a signet ring, staff, and special coat are items that a king would have – and that Yehudah's honesty is when he becomes the political leader of B'Nai Yisrael and ancestor of King David.

The parallel of Hanukkah to Sukkot raises the tradition that the seventy distinct nations of the world will at some time come to Jerusalem and join B'Nai Yisrael in recognizing Hashem as the true God. This time, however, is in the future. For now, our enemies are at our borders (sometimes crossing into our territory), and many from other nations continue to hate and attack us. The most dangerous enemy today is Hamas, and we continue to learn more about the evil violence Hamas has been bringing on our people. The latest information is that Hamas has raped many Jewish women, especially hostages, damaged sensitive parts of their bodies, and made them scream to kill rather than maim them. In the past few days, we have learned that Hamas has also sexually violated numerous male hostages. Hamas has committed numerous war crimes in these vicious attacks on our people. Meanwhile, the Internet is full of statements of well known people – especially many actors and university personnel – who ignore the war crimes and blame Israel for trying to protect our citizens and free our hostages. Nat Lewin, the distinguished expert on Constitutional Law, has just published a discussion of recent Supreme Court decisions that demonstrate that university presidents who permit hate speech and violent speech (let alone actions) against Jewish students are violating the law that the Supreme Court has reinforced many times in recent years.

Israel continues to fight the evil of Hamas in Gaza, and we might need to bring the war to Lebanon before long. One message of Hanukkah is that the dark days of early winter end soon, and the world will return to more light and warmth. History demonstrates that Hashem fights with Israel behind the scenes, and we shall prevail. We all hope that this victory over evil will come soon rather than after an extended period.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was familiar with evil, from the Nazis in Germany when he was a child, to the dangers in the Orient when he was a Navy chaplain, to anti-Semitic attacks in Potomac, MD, and the constant

dangers in Israel, which he visited numerous times. He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah on Shabbat Hanukkah, so this Shabbat brings back many memories of Hanukkah with the Cahans for our family.

Shabbat Shalom and Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah and Alan

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. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Aviv ben Telma (hostage in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivvia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samaich

Hannah & Alan

Vayeishev; Hanukkah: How Does a Nation Survive?

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5770

You are the Source of Blessing HASHEM our G-d- Who performed miracles for our fathers in those days at this time! (2nd Blessing when Lighting the Chanukah Candles)

At this time: In actuality – now! There is in every year a trace of the miracles that occurred back then, in those days. (Kidushas Levi)

Where might one find a trace of the miraculous nowadays? Here are eight suggestions to contemplate.

1 – Rabbi Yaakov Emden wrote in the early 1800's (Consider how much has transpired since then!): Many have tried to injure us but they were not able to destroy or wipe us out. While all the great ancient civilizations have disappeared and been forgotten – The Nation of Israel who clings to HASHEM is alive today! What will the wise historian answer when he examines this phenomenon without prejudice? Was all this purely by chance?! By my soul, when I contemplated these great wonders of our continued existence, they took on greater significance than all the miracles and wonders that HASHEM, Blessed be He, performed for our fathers in Egypt, in the desert and when they entered the Land of Israel. And the longer this exile extends, the miracle of Jewish existence becomes more obvious to make known G-d's mastery and supervision over Nature and History.

2 – My wife has an uncle that survived seven concentration camps. At his grandson's Bar Mitzvah he had this to say about the Jewish experience of World War II; *"We lost all the battles but we won the war!"*

3 – The mother of a close friend experienced twice, as a sixteen year old girl, being lined up by the Nazis, before a mass grave they were forced to dig and falling into that pit with all the murdered corpses. Then in the stealth of night, she crawled out from underneath the pile, running naked into the cold, as the bullets from the firing squad somehow skipped over her. She went to Israel after the war and started life again. Alive today she has children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren proudly lighting Menorahs this Chanukah!

4 – An all American electrical worker – hard hat, motor bike riding, non-academic type with tattoos on his muscular arms – discovered a picture of some rabbinic looking figure in his mother's attic. He asked his mother, "Who is this?" She told him, "This is your great-grandfather." He queried, "He's in our family?" She quipped, "No! You are in his family!" He was stirred to study Torah and today he is a massive Talmud scholar, in his own right and the father of a sizable household.

5 – A Russian Jew that had submitted himself to getting his circumcision when he was in his mid twenties and for whom I was his Sandek at the Bris, urged his secular minded older brother to do the same for more than a decade. Last year the older brother came to New York for the Bar Mitzvah celebration of his nephew. It was Chanukah time. He witnessed the children lighting the candles, and something inside him melted. So he acquiesced to his brother's pleadings and he got a proper circumcision. He danced with extreme joy, at the Bar Mitzvah celebration, claiming all the while he felt completely different. Within a short time, dramatic changes occurred. Now he is looking for a life partner to help him keep Shabbos.

6 – In the year 1800, it is estimated that there were 25,000 Jews in the Land of Israel. Now, the number is approximately 6 million.

7 – In nine months a newly formed baby grows from 1 cell to 2 trillion cooperative cells. When rapidly replicating, the DNA code is precisely transferred to each cell. After instantly proofreading and correcting, the margin of typo – error is about one mistake in 50 million pages!

8 – Thinking of my wife I penned this tiny poem: A Flower gently bends- Concrete slabs-Tends a petal ear- To hear angel songs-Amidst a cacophonic roaring panic- In time, the will to live- Overwhelms the desire to oppress And a gentle flower bends Concrete slabs-A nation survives-As a soft young girl from the Bronx lights Shabbos lights- And dreams of the miracle Growing in her heart-Let all that hurry by...pause and wonder- To Whom does a flower stretch? To Where does a candle point? And how does a Nation survive?

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5770-vayeshev/>

Overcoming the Disease of Hatred: Thoughts for Parashat Vayeshev

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Joseph's brothers were deeply jealous of him: *"they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him"* (Bereishith 37:4). They resented that their father showed favoritism to Joseph. They were infuriated by Joseph's dreams of lordship over them. They were so filled with enmity, that they were ready to murder Joseph. They showed no remorse once Joseph had been sold into slavery and was out of their way.

Yet, as the story unfolds, the brothers' worst fears about Joseph actually came true. Joseph did rise to lordship over them, and indeed had extraordinary power over all of Egypt. When the family was reunited in Egypt, Jacob continued to show favoritism to Joseph. While Joseph's brothers each represented one tribe of Israel, Jacob designated two tribes for Joseph — Menashe and Ephraim.

Given the profound jealousy and hatred the brothers' harbored toward Joseph during his youth, one would expect them to have even more jealousy and hatred once Joseph's pre-eminence over them was confirmed by the passage of time. Yet, the Torah gives no indication of their ongoing malice toward Joseph. We no longer hear that they hate him or that they

cannot speak peaceably to him. We see no jealousy when Jacob demonstrates favoritism to Joseph. We hear no expression of anger when Joseph receives a double inheritance.

What happened to their jealousy and hatred?

When they were younger, the brothers viewed life as a zero sum game where there can only be one winner. If Joseph wins, we lose. If Joseph is destined to have power over us, then we must destroy him or we ourselves will end up losing the game. Hatred and jealousy eat away at the brothers. They think that any gain by Joseph will necessarily entail a loss for them.

With the passage of time, they saw that Joseph indeed had great power, wealth, and wisdom, and that he was still favored by his father. But the brothers now had a new insight: it doesn't matter! We can live our own lives happily and successfully even if Joseph has all these advantages over us. We are not in competition with him after all. Life is not a zero sum game where only one side wins. Life can be lived fully and happily in a cooperative framework rather than in a competitive rat race for power. Joseph's great success does not in any way diminish from the self-worth of the brothers.

When the brothers came to understand that jealousy and hatred were self-destructive, they could rise to a happier philosophy of life dominated by love, family loyalty, and cooperation.

Much of the hatred in our world stems from an undeveloped sense of selfhood. People feel jealousy and hatred toward others who they fear are smarter, stronger, or more successful. They think that only one side can win; if the others are succeeding, then we must be losing.

Demagogues thrive on the rhetoric of hatred, stirring up the basest fears of a frightened humanity. They sow feelings of malevolence and mistrust into society. They stereotype the "enemy" and rob them of their human dignity. The rhetoric of violence and hatred leads to violent and hateful acts.

Those who inflict the suffering thereby show themselves to be humanly inferior to their intended victims.

Erich Fromm has written of the "syndrome of decay," that "prompts men to destroy for the sake of destruction, and to hate for the sake of hate." Because of frustrations, feelings of inferiority and malignant narcissism, many people direct their lives onto the road of hatred and death. People who suffer the syndrome of hatred are at root unhappy people, who begrudge happiness and success to others.

Until people can rise above the "syndrome of decay," they fritter away their lives in destructive patterns. They focus on hatred...and the hatred eats away their souls and poisons their lives.

Sad to say, some of the most vicious demagogues spew forth their hatred in the name of God and religion. They invoke God's name in fanning hatred and violence against those whom they perceive as their enemies. This gross betrayal of the religious message of love and peace does vast dishonor to humanity and to God. This demagoguery saps life of happiness and creativity, turning it into a maelstrom of hatred, violence and destruction.

Those who hate become victims of their own hatred. They lock themselves into an ugly and endless strife, depriving themselves of a healthy, loving life.

Joseph's brothers learned to overcome jealousy and hatred. They learned to escape the "syndrome of decay" that eats away at the fiber of life. They learned that life is not a zero sum game; that their winning did not depend on someone else losing; that all humans could live so much more happily and meaningfully if they adopted a syndrome of love and cooperation.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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 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 during its year end fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/overcoming-disease-hatred-thoughts-parashat-vayeshev>

Israel at War

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Our prayers are with the people of Israel as they once again are compelled to defend themselves against the forces of terror, hatred and destruction. We pray that the time will come, speedily and soon, when Israel and its neighbors will live in peace and friendship, enabling all the people of the region to prosper and enjoy God's blessings.

War is ugly. It has been a scourge of humanity from time immemorial and it continues to plague humanity today. War entails fighting and killing enemies. It entails a vast commitment of resources to mobilize and arm one's forces and to strengthen one's defenses. It involves heavy financial, social and psychological costs. It entails casualties and loss of life. War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook taught: *"We must see life in two dimensions, as it is, and as it should be. Absolute righteousness is always rooted in how things should be, but provisional righteousness which touches more on acting in the present, is built on how things actually are...The two are connected, like alternating horizons on a long journey."* (Igrot Ha Reiyah, 194).

How things should be: peaceful, with love prevailing among humankind. How things are: warlike, with hatred and violence spreading like wildfire.

How are we to deal with this dichotomy? We are to maintain our commitment to absolute righteousness, peace, a world of love and harmony. At the same time, we must deal with harsh realities with strength and courage. Even while engaging in ugly warfare, our dreams need to be squarely focused on peace.

As I write these lines, Israel is engaged in an ugly war. Hamas terrorists have launched a massive attack on Israel, firing thousands of missiles at Israeli cities and towns, killing hundreds, taking captives, wounding thousands. Their hatred of Israel knows no bounds; they intentionally aim at Israeli civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces have mobilized for a protracted war.

Anyone who knows anything at all about Israel, knows that this is a country that wants peace, that strives for peace, that has sacrificed incredibly to attain peace. But in spite of Israel's desire for peace, its enemies preach hatred, violence, terrorism, and the most vicious anti-Israel, anti-Jewish propaganda.

War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer. But we must view life in two dimensions: as it is, and as it should be. As it is: we must fight in order to maintain ourselves and our nation. As it should be: we are fighting for a righteous, loving and peaceful world.

Hashem oz le'amo yiten, Hashem yevarekh et amo bashalom. God will give strength to His people, God will bless His people with peace.

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samaich.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/war-and-peace>

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 spears. The midrash (Pesikta Rabbati 2:1) surmises that the spears 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 spears 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!

Chanuka and Vayeishev: Counting, Up and Down

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The Yom Tov of Chanuka is uplifting. After the Jews experienced the miraculous victory over the Syrian-Greeks, the Jews arrived at the Beis Hamikdash and found that it had been desecrated. In what had been a well-stocked and vibrant place of service, they were only able to find one jug of oil that had not been defiled. They used the oil of that jug to light the Menorah. Miraculously it lasted for eight days until they could obtain freshly pressed oil.

To commemorate this, the Rabbis of the time legislated a Mitzva to light a Menorah for eight nights. In our time we are familiar with the ruling that we should light one light on the first night, and add one each night, until on the eighth night there are eight lights. This indeed is an opinion in the Talmud (Shabbos 21), the opinion of Beis Hillel. This opinion understands the Mitzva of Menorah based on the approach of, *"We rise in holiness."* Thus, we start with just one and keep adding, symbolizing the Jew's life journey of constantly growing and increasing in holiness and illumination.

There is, however, in that same passage of the Talmud, another opinion. The opinion of Beis Shammai maintains that the proper way to observe the Mitzva of the Menorah is by starting with eight lights and then diminishing a light each day, until on the eighth night we are left with just one light. The Talmud explains this opinion by saying that it is like the bulls of Succos, where the Torah (Bamidbar 29) instructs us to bring thirteen on the first day and then to diminish the amount we bring each day. Certainly, there is precedent to starting with a large number and then diminishing one each day. But why indeed is this done with the bulls of Succos, and what is the connection to the lights of Chanuka?

The commentaries explain that the bull Korbanos of Succos represent the nations of the world. By starting with 13 and diminishing one throughout Succos, a total of 70 Korbanos are brought (13+12+11+10+9+8+7) (with a theme of diminishing). These Korbanos represent a diminishing in the seventy nations of the world. Surprisingly, the Medrash Rabboh invokes the verse from Tehillim 109(exclaiming incredulously, *"Their response to my love is that they hate me."* Why, if these Korbanos represent a diminishing of the nations of the world is it considered an act of love for which we expect them to love us?

It is well known that each nation represents a certain quality. At the time that the Torah was given, Hashem offered it to the nations of the world. Each nation rejected the Torah because of the quality that it was predisposed to, and the Torah forbade. For example, one nation was known to be murderers. That was the banner they lived by. So, they rejected the Torah because the Torah forbade murder. Another nation was deep into immorality. This was their banner. So they rejected Torah because they had a credo they did not want to change. When the bulls were brought in diminishing sequence, it was not intended to weaken or destroy the people. It was meant to weaken the terrible predispositions to bad behavior that each nation has which hamper them from peace, prosperity, and personal greatness. Indeed, it should be expected that the nations love us for using our holiday time with Hashem to diminish the stranglehold that bad habits and identity have over them. Yet incredulously we note that although the Jews are doing great good for the world in diminishing evil, the nations generally do not appreciate.

It is worth noting that we, in current events, have a similar experience. The current war against Hamas is a war against evil and barbaric violence. It is a war against the glorification of suicide, using human shields, and choosing to ensconce victimhood as a way of life. One would expect the people of the world to recognize the intensity of the challenge and to applaud the efforts to eradicate Hamas. Indeed, some people do. But the fact that there are not more such people — as the Medrash sees it — is surprising.

Both the opinion of Beis Hillel (who says to increase the lights of Chanuka each consecutive day) and the opinion of Beis Shammai (who says to decrease the lights of Chanuka each consecutive night) have validity. The Malbim (Bamidbar 19)

writes that typically the opinion of Beis Hillel is the way we understand our world, but the opinion of Beis Shammai is how things occur in heaven. When we won over the Syrian-Greeks and rededicated the Beis Hamikdash we certainly increased light in the world. But in heaven we achieved a precious victory similar to the bulls of Succos that are brought in descending sequence. We weakened the stranglehold that the Syrian-Greeks had on humanity to think that their achievements in science, arts, and sports could replace Torah, morality, and G-d. As a result of their victory the people of the world would be more able to appreciate G-d and a code of moral behavior. The victory was not just one for the Jews, to have freedom of religion. The victory was a diminishing in the forces of evil.

It is said that one of the reasons that Israeli intelligence did not consider the threats leading up to the October 7th massacre as credible threats is because the threats were so far reaching and destructive, they seemed like the general fantasy preaching that goes on all the time in Hamas controlled territory. In fact, in Hallel we declare, *"May the nations of the world praise Hashem."* Why, the commentaries ask, do we wish that the nations of the world praise Hashem? Because only they know what kind of dramatic destructions they plan, and Hashem thwarts them. This is the type of ideology that was diminished by the bulls of Succos and by the victory of Chanuka. It is the type of victory we hope for in our time as well.

The Halachic ruling of lighting the Chanuka Menorah is like Beis Hillel — we light an additional light each night. But the opinion of Beis Shammai, to diminish lights each night, is not wrong. Beis Shammai's opinion speaks to a simultaneous result in heaven which is similar to the effect of the holy Korbanos brought on Succos in the Beis Hamikdash. It speaks of the effect of those lights that were kindled with sacrifice and dedication. It speaks of a weakening of the forces of evil among the nations. It speaks of bringing closer a time prophesized long ago Yeshaya 2 and Micha 4(when the nations of the world will be released from the stranglehold of bad and they will then flow to Tziyon to learn and be inspired by the words of Torah and its moral teachings.

May our ascending lights of Chanuka illuminate the world. May they be effective in bringing about the great hidden effects and victories they represent.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a Happy Chanuka!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Vayeishev -- Truth Be Told

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2023

In this week's parsha we learn of the difficult episode of the kidnapping and sale of Yosef. While Yosef is home learning Torah from Yaakov, his older brothers are watching the sheep. Yaakov sends Yosef to check on his brothers and the sheep. When Yosef arrives, his brothers overpower him, throw him in a pit and ultimately sell him as a slave to a merchant caravan on the way out of the country. This began the events which led to our ancestors settling in Egypt, the slavery which ensued, and ultimately the birth of our nation and the Exodus.

In the middle of this incident, the Torah shares a seemingly irrelevant detail, telling us that Yosef got lost on the way to his brothers, and is informed by a stranger that his brothers have moved on to Dosan. Yosef continues to search and indeed finds them in Dosan. In addition to being irrelevant, the wording in these verses is also difficult. The Torah tells us that a man "found Yosef," as if the man had been searching for Yosef. When Yosef asks the man where his brothers went, the man responds with a lengthy statement saying, "They have left from here for I have heard them say, "Let us go to Dosan." Why didn't the man simply say, "They went to Dosan"?

Rash"i)Bereishis 37:15(tells us that this detail is indeed of great relevance. The Medrash tells us that the "man" in this verse was the angel Gavriel, and he was in fact looking for Yosef. The Be'er Basadeh)ibid.(explains that for mystical reasons, G-d had decreed that our nation's history should begin through the sale of Yosef, but it almost didn't happen. Yosef got lost when searching for his brothers and was ready to give up and return home. The angel Gavriel was sent to set him back on the path and ensure that our nation's birth could be set in motion.

Following the understanding that this man was the angel Gavriel, Rash"i (Bereishis 37:17) explains that this was the reason for his lengthy response to Yosef's simple question. Yosef had said he was searching for his brothers. Gavriel was responding to this statement by saying, "They have left from here," meaning they have traveled away from brotherhood. The second clause also had a second meaning. The word "Dosan" can mean law. He was telling Yosef that he had heard the brothers saying they were going to sit and judge whether or not Yosef was trying to kill them, and whether or not they needed to kill him first in self-defense. (Having misunderstood several of Yosef's actions, they suspected he may have been seeking to be Yaakov's only heir.)

We need to understand why Gavriel was sharing this information with Yosef. The future of the Jewish people, and indeed the entire world, required that Yosef find his brothers and be sold down to Egypt as a slave. Gavriel had been sent to ensure that these events took place. Why then would he attempt to scare Yosef away and warn him that his brothers were currently planning to kill him?

The Ramba"n (Bereishis 37:17) explains that this second meaning was a matter of integrity and was only for Gavriel himself to hear. Gavriel had a dilemma. Yosef had asked where his "brothers" were. If Gavriel were to respond saying, "They are in Dosan," that would imply he was talking about the same brothers which Yosef was asking about. Gavriel was fully aware that those "brothers" no longer existed. They no longer shared brotherhood. To complete his mission, he had to answer Yosef's question without acknowledging the brotherhood. Gavriel, therefore, chose this sentence with a double meaning. Yosef only saw the direct meaning and went to find his brothers. At the same time, Gavriel maintained his honesty for himself, knowing that his words contained a second message. He had stated -- for his own sake -- that the brotherhood had ended.

Honesty is one of the most fundamental character traits in a Torah personality. The Gemara tells us that truth is G-d's signature.)Shabbos 55b(Even a slight inaccuracy is a violation of the G-dliness and nobility innate within us. Gavriel had to clarify that he wasn't agreeing to Yosef's wording, even if he was the only one who understood what he meant. Perhaps most important of all is that we be honest with ourselves.

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Beware Your Dreams: They May Just Come True

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter * © 5783

The conclusion of the book of *Bereishit* talks to its earliest beginnings. The particular story of Yosef and his maturation encapsulates the universal meta-narrative of the book of *Bereishit* as a whole; the position of humans in creation vis a vis God and vis a vis each other.

Yosef's dreams come true at the end of *Bereishit* but not in any way he expected or wanted. Yosef has two dreams which attest to his superiority over his brothers which he naively shares with them. Naiveté is the only plausible explanation for Yosef's behavior; he is coddled and loved by his father and the son of the true beloved wife. Yosef has inherited his mother's beauty along with her unconscious sense of entitlement. It was naiveté that blinded Yosef to the destructive impact of his foolish behavior upon his brothers.

Yosef's transformation from a naïve and unreflective boy to a mature and sensitive man is the story of these last chapters of the Book of *Bereishit*. Crucial steps of Yosef's developmental process can be captured at moments which characterize Yosef's level of self-identification with God. There are three such moments.

1. When the baker and the wine steward of Pharaoh approach Yosef with their dreams, Yosef responds with these words:

*Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell your dreams to **me**.*)40:8(

"Interpretations belong to God," but tell **ME**?? Yosef sees himself as representing God to the ministers of Pharaoh. These words are audacious and presumptuous. In truth they even seem impious. These words may not be a product of conscious hubris, yet they do indicate a deep seated sense of self that has expanded beyond healthy proportions. The arrogance of Yosef's response is made clearer by juxtaposing it with his more refined response to Pharaoh after two additional years in the Pit.

2. *And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "**It is not in me**: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."*)41:16(

It is not I at all, Yosef is quick to point out to Pharaoh; the wisdom is God's and I am a mere instrument. The two additional years in the Pit have taught Yosef a painful lesson in humility.

The third instance requires a close reading of Yosef's original dreams. In the first dream, the sheaves of the brothers bow down to the sheaf of Yosef)37:7(. They do not bow down to Yosef himself but rather to a representation of him. The second dream has the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowing down to Yosef **himself**)37:9(. This nuance is fundamental. When the brothers bow down to Yosef the first time)42:6(, they bow down to him as the dictator of Egypt. There is no acknowledgement, of course, of Yosef **qua Yosef** and his mastery or superiority over them. This is the fulfillment of the first dream in which the brothers prostrate themselves before a representation of Yosef – not Yosef himself. This fulfillment of the first dream by itself is hollow. It actually means nothing if the brothers bow down to Yosef when they are unaware of his true identity.

It is the fulfillment of the second dream, in which the brothers knowingly bow down to Yosef, thereby acknowledging his mastery, which Yosef most desires. When this dream finally is fulfilled it is the last thing that Yosef wants.

¹⁶ And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, "Thy father did command before he died, saying, ¹⁷ 'So shall ye say unto Joseph, "Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren and their sin, for they did unto thee evil.'" And now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him. ¹⁸ And his brethren also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are thy servants.")50:16-18(

Finally the brothers prostrate themselves before him consciously; they know before whom they are bowing and in doing so acknowledge his mastery over them. This should be the grandest moment in Yosef's suffering-filled life, yet he meets this moment with tears of pain. This moment provides the third instance of the level Yosef's self-identification with God.

3. *And Joseph said unto them, "Fear not; for **am I in the place of God?**"*

Those words, **Hatahat Elohim ani**, capture the development and maturation of Yosef; his religious and human evolution is intertwined. As a naïve youth, Yosef's dreams tell us that he was seeking dominance over his brothers and desired their fear and respect, the fear and respect due him as a divine child. At the end, Yosef the mature man wants only to be reconciled with his brothers and integrated into his family; he desires only their love and brotherhood. When he looks back he sees the foolishness of his youth – how could he ever have thought himself as deserving divine adulation? "**Am I in the place of God?**"

The evolution of Yosef as an individual symbolizes the universal odyssey upon which humanity embarks at the outset of the creation story. In the summary words of Yosef to the book of *Bereishit*, “**Am I in the place of God?**” there is an echo of its opening chapters,

*⁴ And the serpent said unto the woman, “Ye shall not surely die; ⁵ for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and **ye shall be as God**, knowing good and evil.”)3:4-5(*

Yosef’s words should be read as a response to the serpent. The serpent’s temptation to humankind is **to be as God** through possession of the secret knowledge which grants the power to dominate and exploit. Yosef has been there, been there in his family relations and his relationship with Egypt. His response rings clear; **am I in the place of God?**”

Individuals and societies, just as Yosef, must grapple with and respond to the challenge and the temptation of being created in the image of God. What shall we choose; the path of domination and exploitation or that of interdependence and brotherhood?

* Founder and dean of the Har’el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har’el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Vayeitzei and Hanukkah

By R. Haim Ovadia

I do not have a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia. Watch this space for his insights on most weeks.[

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia’s Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Torah from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah:

What We Are Celebrating on Channukah

by Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

There is a well-known contradiction between the liturgy and the Talmud regarding what we are celebrating on Chanukah. During the holiday we insert the Al Hanisim poem in our prayers. The poem commemorates the Maccabees military victory over the Greeks. In evocative language the poet describes how against all odds the ill equipped Maccabees defeated the well-armed Greeks, and that subsequently the Rabbis instituted an eight-day holiday celebrating the victory.

The Talmud, however, offers a very different reason for the celebration. It describes the development of the holiday as following:

What is [the reason for] Hanukkah? ... For when the Greeks entered the temple, they defiled all the oils therein. When the Hasmonean dynasty defeated them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest. It contained sufficient oil for one day’s lighting only; yet a miracle happened and it lasted for eight days.)Bavli, Shabbat 21B(

According to the Rabbis, Chanukah celebrates the Divine miracle that happened to the oil.

In the more than four pages of Talmudic discussion about Chanukah there is not one mention of the military aspect of the holiday. If one were to just read the Talmud, without paying attention to the liturgy, one would have never known that Chanukah also commemorates Jewish political sovereignty. The absence is so glaring that one is left with the impression that Chazal deliberately suppressed any mention of the military component of the holiday.

Our liturgy predates the Talmud. The liturgy was composed early in our history,)historians are not certain about the precise date the Al Hanisim poem was composed(while the Babylonian Talmud was redacted ca. 499 CE. The liturgy was accordingly composed while the Jews still enjoyed sovereignty. The Talmud, however, was primarily compiled after the destruction of the temple, when the Jews were living under foreign rule.

Clearly the sages who authored both the liturgical and Talmudic texts believed that both events happened, namely their enemies were defeated and that the oil miraculously lasted for eight days. Nevertheless, prudence dictated that they emphasize different aspects of the miracle at different times.

Since the liturgy was composed during an era when the Jews still had power, it made sense to celebrate Jewish military prowess. By the time the Talmud was written, however, they no longer controlled their destiny. They were now ruled by oppressive foreign rulers. Emphasizing their past military victories would now be fatal. The ruling Romans would have interpreted their celebration of past glories as a subtle attempt at subversion and rebellion. In response, Chazal decided to shift the focus of the holiday away from the military victory and instead chose to highlight the miracle of the oil.

Emphasizing a different miracle has significant implications for the nature of the holiday. The military victory is primarily a political celebration. The miracle of the oil, on the other hand, is by its nature religious, it does not imply political aspirations.

That change also resulted in a significant sociological transformation; it turned Chanukah into an inclusive and egalitarian holiday. Military victories celebrate warriors, who historically tend to be men. As a matter of fact, this cultural phenomenon has consequently become codified in Jewish law. Halakha explicitly prohibits women from joining the battlefield. In the early stages of the holiday when the tradition emphasized the war, the holiday was primarily about male warriors and largely celebrated by men. The switch in the holiday's focus changed that orientation. War is gender specific, religious observance is not!

For Chazal the miracle of the oil symbolizes the Jews' religious prowess during that time. From their perspective, the fact that the laws of nature were superseded during those eight days was proof that they were living just and righteous lives. Living righteously is gender-neutral. Men and women are equally able to create a just society, making them deserving of a world that transcends natural limitations. This shift in the understanding of what Chanukah is about transformed the nature of the holiday; it now became egalitarian and all-inclusive.

This transition is hinted at in the Talmud. Concluding a lengthy debate which, although not explicit, is quiet clearly about the question of whether the holiday celebrates the war or the miracle of the oil, the Talmud emphatically declares: now that we have concluded that the mitzvah is to light)i.e. that we are celebrating religious victory,(certainly women must light as well since they too were part of the miracle. In other words, since we are no longer celebrating the war, there is no reason to exclude women from the Chanukah rituals. The holiday is now for women and about women as much as it is about men.

This change is also codified. The Halakha accordingly is that men and women are equally obligated in the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles.

In its final iteration, Chanukah was conceived by the Rabbis as a familial and egalitarian holiday. The candles remind us that when we strive to live lives filled with holiness, we can transcend the limitations that life, society and even nature imposes upon us. The obligation to create such a world is gender-neutral. During this celebratory time, all of us -- men

and woman, adults and children, fathers and mothers -- are charged with the task of *"to help create a holy world, one that is kind, just and where no person is neglected or left behind"* -- it is a holiday celebrated by all people for the sake of all of humanity.

* Rabbi of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn, New York. Ordination in 1986 from Rabbi Yechezkel Roth, dayan of UTA Satmer. Rabbi Katz also has extensive Judaic teaching experience. **Note: Hebrew in the original omitted because of problems converting software.**

<https://library.yctarah.org/2023/12/vayeishev5784/>

Vayeishev and Chanukah: Unity Among All Jews

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Chanukah is here. The festival of eight nights of lights. A holiday celebrating Maccabean military might, and light, and resistance against the effort to stamp Jewish tradition out of sight.

While we light our candles and eat our donuts and latkes, let us remember all our heroes, from the Maccabees to the IDF, who have given their lives so we can live and worship with relative freedom.

Let's also remember that Chanukah and its light symbolises the unity of the Jews in their struggle.

It serves as a salve to our Torah portion this week, where Jacob's sons fight with their brother Joseph and end up selling him into slavery. While Jews are certainly no strangers to arguments, here is a case where divisive conflict and fighting ends badly. Many commentators point out that we read the story of Joseph during Chanukah to contrast the story of the Maccabees.

The book of Maccabees, a Jewish book that did not make it into the Bible, tells us of the struggles the Maccabees went through trying to convince their fellow Jews to join them. They knew that Jews needed to be unified to win and restore the Temple. And, in the end, they succeeded.

It shows a story of unity and encourages us to follow that path, rather than one of division.

It is this light that gives us inspiration and hope during the darkest of times. It is this unified light that we turn to, collectively, this year. May we merit to see all Jews united and safe, living in their land, just like our ancestors saw on Chanukah.

Shabbat Shalom and Chanukah Samaich,

Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Chanukah: The Hellenist Challenge

"When the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all of the oils. After the Hasmoneans defeated them, they searched and found but one cruse of oil, untouched and sealed with the seal of the High Priest. The cruse had only enough oil for one day, but a miracle occurred and they

were able to light from it for eight days. The following year they established these days as a holiday for praise and thanksgiving.”)Shabbat 21b(

We may ask a number of questions on the Talmudic account of Chanukah:

The Jewish people have fought many battles in their long history. Some of these battles were accompanied by miracles, such as the walls of Jericho that fell and the sun that stood still during the battle at Givon. Why was only the Hasmonean victory chosen to be commemorated as a holiday for future generations?

Why celebrate a military conflict in which the Temple was defiled and many Jews were lost to a foreign culture?

Why is there no mitzvah to celebrate Chanukah with a festive meal, unlike other holidays? Why only ‘a holiday of praise and thanksgiving’?

What is the significance of the miracle of the undefiled cruse of oil?

Culture Clash

The military victories of the Greek empire brought about the spread of Greek culture and philosophy, and the superficial charm of Hellenism captured the hearts of many Jews. These new ideas undermined fundamental teachings of the Torah and central mitzvot. The danger was so great that this clash of cultures could have caused permanent damage to the spiritual state of the Jewish people.

The Talmud emphasizes the significance of the small cruse of oil in the rescue of the Jewish people. The sealed jar of pure oil is a metaphor for the kernel of pure faith that resides in the depths of the Jewish soul. It was this inner resource of pure holiness that guarded the Jewish people in their struggle against Hellenism.

The Sages understood that Chanukah needed to be established as a permanent holiday. They realized that the battle against an overwhelming foreign culture was not just the one-time struggle of the Hasmoneans. All generations require the strength and purity of inner faith to protect the Torah from the corrupting influences of foreign beliefs and values.

The Contribution of Hellenism

The Sages also realized that this conflict with Hellenism, despite its disastrous short-term effects, would ultimately bestow great benefits. This is a basic rule of life: those challenges that confront us and threaten our beliefs and way of life will in the end invigorate the sources of truth. Greek wisdom, after it has acknowledged the Divine nature of Torah, will serve to further honor and strengthen the Torah and its ideals. Therefore it is fitting to celebrate these days, despite the trauma of the Hasmonean period.

Significantly, the festival of Chanukah is celebrated without feasting and wine. There were two sides to Hellenism: its intellectual aspects – Greek philosophy, literature, and so on — and its popular culture of physical pleasures and crass entertainment. One might mistakenly think that Hellenism’s positive contribution also includes its hedonistic delight in wine, parties, and naked wrestling matches. Therefore we specifically celebrate Chanukah with spiritual rituals — lights and Hallel, praise and thanksgiving. For the true contribution of Hellenism is its intellectual side, that which posed such a grave challenge to the Torah in the times of the Hasmoneans. It is this aspect of Greek culture that will defend and enhance the Torah in the future.

)Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 109-111. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III on Shabbat 21b)2:13.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/HANUKA60.htm>

The Angel Who Did Not Know He Was an Angel (5780)

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

The story of Joseph and his brothers, spread over four parshiyot, is the longest and most tightly-scripted of all the narratives in the Torah. Nothing is there by accident; every detail counts. One moment, however, seems gloriously irrelevant – and it is this that contains one of the most beautiful of the Torah's ideas.

With great speed, we are introduced to the broad lines of the story. Joseph is envied and hated by his brothers. So deep has the animosity gone that they cannot talk peaceably with one another. Now the brothers have left home to tend their sheep, and Jacob tells Joseph to go and see how they are doing. This encounter will set in motion the central drama from which all else will follow: the moment when the brothers sell Joseph into Egypt as a slave.

But it nearly didn't happen. Joseph arrived at Shechem where he expected his brothers to be, but they were not there. He might well have wandered around for a while and then, failing to find them, gone home. None of the events that take up the rest of the Torah would have happened: no Joseph the slave, no Joseph the viceroy, no storage of food during the years of plenty, no descent of Joseph's family to Egypt, no exile, no slavery, no exodus. The entire story – already revealed in broad outlines to Abraham in a night vision – seemed about to be derailed.

Then we read the following:

A man found [Joseph] wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. Gen. 37:15-17

I know of no comparable passage in the Torah: three verses dedicated to an apparently trivial, eminently forgettable detail of someone having to ask directions from a stranger. Who was this unnamed man? And what conceivable message does the episode hold for future generations, for us? Rashi says he was the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra says he was a passer-by. Ramban however says that *"the Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a guide without his knowledge."*

I am not sure whether Ramban meant without Joseph's knowledge or without the guide's knowledge. I prefer to think both. The anonymous man – so the Torah is intimating – represented an intrusion of providence to make sure that Joseph went to where he was supposed to be, so that the rest of the drama could unfold. He may not have known he had such a role. Joseph surely did not know. To put it as simply as I can: he was an angel who didn't know he was an angel. He had a vital role in the story. Without him, it would not have happened. But he had no way of knowing, at the time, the significance of his intervention.

The message could not be more significant. When heaven intends something to happen, and it seems to be impossible, sometimes it sends an angel down to earth – an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel – to move the story from here to there. Let me tell the story of two such angels, without whom there might not be a State of Israel today.

One was a remarkable young woman from a Sephardi family who, at the age of seventeen, married into the most famous Ashkenazi family in the world. Her name was Dorothy Pinto; her husband was James de Rothschild, son of the great Baron Edmond de Rothschild, who did so much to support the settlement of the land in the days before the proclamation of the State.

A critical juncture occurred during the First World War that would eventually lead to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the placing of Palestine under a British mandate. Suddenly, Britain became absolutely central to the Zionist dream. A key figure in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, was in Britain, experimenting and lecturing in chemistry at Manchester University. But Weizmann was a Russian immigrant, not a prominent member of British society. Manchester was not London. Chemistry was not politics. The most influential and well-connected Jewish family was the Rothschilds. But

Edmond was in France. James was a soldier on the battlefield. And not every member of the British Rothschilds was a Zionist.

At that moment, Dorothy suddenly assumed a leading role. She was only nineteen when she first met Weizmann in December 1914, and understood very little of the political complexities involved in realising the Zionist dream. But she learned quickly. She was perceptive, resourceful, energetic, delightful and determined. She connected Weizmann with everyone he needed to know and persuade. Simon Schama, in his definitive account of *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel*, says that “young as she was... she combined charm, intelligence and more than a hint of steely resolution in just the right mixture to coax commitment from the equivocal, enthusiasm from the lukewarm and sympathy from the indifferent.”

His judgement on the effect of her interventions is that “*through tireless but prudent social diplomacy she had managed to open avenues of influence and persuasion at a time when they were badly needed.*”¹ The result, in 1917, was the Balfour Declaration, a milestone in the history of Zionism – and we should not forget that the Declaration itself took the form of a letter to Lord (Walter) Rothschild.

Dorothy's husband James, in his will, left the money to build the Knesset, Israel's parliament building. In her own will, Dorothy left the money to build a new Supreme Court Building, a project undertaken by her nephew Jacob, the current Lord Rothschild. But of all the things she did, it was those connections she made for Chaim Weizmann in the years 1914 to 1917 that were surely the most important. Without them, there might have been no Balfour Declaration and no State of Israel.

The other figure, who could not have been less like Dorothy de Rothschild, was Eddie Jacobson. The son of poor Jewish immigrants, born in New York's Lower East Side, he moved with his family to Kansas City, where he met a young man called Harry Truman. They knew one another in their youth and became close in 1917 when they underwent military training together. After the end of World War I, they opened a haberdashery business together. It failed in 1922 because of the recession.

From then on, they went their separate ways, Jacobson as a travelling salesman, and Truman successively a county administrator, Senator, Vice-President, and then when F.D. Roosevelt died in office in 1945, President of the United States. Despite their very different life-trajectories, the two stayed friends, and Jacobson would often visit Truman, talking to him about, among other things, the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

After the war, the position of America vis-à-vis the State of Israel was deeply ambivalent. The State Department was opposed. Truman himself refused to meet Chaim Weizmann. On 13 March 1948, Jacobson went to the White House and persuaded Truman to change his mind and meet Weizmann. Largely as a result of this, the United States became the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel on 14 May 1948.

Many years later, Truman wrote:

"One of the proudest moments of my life occurred at 6:12 p.m. on Friday, May 14, 1948, when I was able to announce recognition of the new State of Israel by the government of the United States. I remain particularly gratified by the role I was fortunate to play in the birth of Israel as, in the immortal words of the Balfour Declaration, "a national home for the Jewish people."

Two people, Dorothy de Rothschild and Eddie Jacobson, appeared on the scene of history and connected Chaim Weizmann with individuals he might otherwise not have met, among them Arthur Balfour² and Harry Truman. They were like the stranger who connected Joseph and his brothers, but with infinitely more positive consequences. I think of them both as angels who did not know they were angels.

Perhaps this is true not only about the destiny of nations but also about each of us at critical junctures in our lives. I believe that there are times when we feel lost, and then someone says or does something that lifts us or points the way to

a new direction and destination. Years later, looking back, we see how important that intervention was, even though it seemed slight at the time. That is when we know that we too encountered an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel. That is what the story of Joseph's stranger is about.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Simon Schama, Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel, Collins, 1978, 196-98.

]2[Weizmann had met Arthur Balfour already, but without Dorothy he would not have had the influence that he eventually came to have over a whole circle of leading politicians. of victory. Only those who are capable of feeling both can defend their bodies without endangering their souls.

Around the Sabbath Table:

]1[Why do you think the story of Joseph and his brothers is so detailed, and so full of plot-twists?

]2[Can you think of a time where the direction of your life was changed by an "angel who didn't know they were an angel"?

]3[What will your unique contribution to history be? How will you discover what history needs from you?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayeshev/the-angel-who-did-not-know-he-was-an-angel/>

Judah, Tamar, and the Indomitable Flame of Chanukah

By Jonah S.C. Muskat-Brown * © Chabad 2023

Hide and Seek

As a young child, Rabbi Avraham the Malach, son of Rabbi Dovber, the Mezritcher Maggid, burst into his father's study in tears.¹

While playing hide-and-seek with his friends, he explained, he had hidden so well that nobody could find him. After some time, he reasoned that his friends' prolonged silence meant that he had won the game and he decided to come out of his hiding spot to reveal himself and claim his reward.

As soon as he emerged, however, he noticed that they had all turned to playing other games and had given up trying to find him. He cried to his father at the thought of everyone having abandoned hope of him ever returning, thinking he had disappeared forever.

In many ways, the young boy's pain is similar to our collective relationship with G d throughout history.

Shortly after their creation, Adam and Eve, the first humans, played hide-and-seek with G d in the Garden of Eden. They first hid in shame and embarrassment of their new self-awareness;² shortly thereafter, it was G d's turn to hide. Sadly, He has hidden so well throughout our dark and difficult years of exile that, over time, we began to forget His existence and ultimately stopped looking for Him.³

But, in truth, the connection has never been severed.

Our Loyalty

We always read the puzzling narrative of the incident between Judah and Tamar in close proximity to the seemingly unrelated holiday of Chanukah.⁴ The Torah describes how Tamar, twice widowed from Judah's two sons, concealed her identity, dressed as a harlot, and had relations with her father-in-law, Judah. Before engaging in this act, she requested that he leave his ring, garment, and staff with her as collateral in lieu of payment for their brief encounter.⁵

Three months passed, and someone informed Judah that his daughter-in-law, Tamar, had become pregnant through harlotry. Ignorant of the fact that he was responsible for her pregnancy, Judah ordered that she be taken out and executed. Tamar then quickly revealed the security belonging to the one with whom she had relations. Judah immediately identified his belongings and took ownership for what he had done.

Tamar merited to birth twin boys, one of whom gave lineage to the future Messiah.

We are each crafted with a literal spark)or essence(of G d buried within us,⁶ and we can never lose our deep connection with our Source despite how we might behave at times.

Rabbi Avraham Dovber of Avritch teaches that the same way that Judah accused Tamar of being immodest or unfaithful, G d accuses us of betraying our relationship with Him.⁷

But when we kindle the Chanukah lights three months after experiencing a heightened and intimate closeness with Him during the High Holidays, we point to our soul and cry out in protest, "The spark of Yourself that You left within us when You went into hiding three months ago is still there! We still believe in the potential for closeness between us and that we can rekindle it!"

The Flame Within

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, took this one step further. He taught that symbolically, we are each a candle yearning to be kindled.⁸ The candle's wax is analogous to the body, while its wick symbolizes the soul. Neither fuel nor wick, body or soul, serve any positive function unless joined with the other, with the common purpose of creating a flame.

In truth, each of us has a small jug of oil buried deep within, still bearing the seal of the High Priest)more specifically, the seal of G d(that the Syrian-Greeks)or any oppressor(can never access.⁹ This is why, after re-entering the Holy Temple following the war with the Syrian-Greeks, the Jews insisted on searching for oils specifically bearing the seal of the High Priest,¹⁰ and did not begin producing new oil from the onset even though it was indeed permitted to do so.¹¹

The Courage to Kindle Our Own Light

We can debate whether the miracle of Chanukah centered on the war between the clashing Jewish and Hellenistic values)and armies(¹² or whether it focused on the small jug of oil burning exceedingly longer than expected.¹³

But perhaps the greatest miracle in this story is that during the darkest hour of the darkest month in the Jewish calendar, we have had the courage, year after year, to set that oil alight and brighten up the world around us.

When all seems dark and lost, when our enemies – both external and internal – attack our personal Temple and desecrate our Holy of Holies, Chanukah empowers us to stand up and dispel that darkness with light.

For no matter how bleak reality may seem, darkness cannot exist alongside light – even just the tiniest of flames. Each of us, without exception, has the strength buried within to ignite that spark.

We need to be the light we want to see in this world, igniting our own souls and inspiring others to kindle theirs, as well.

How many times do we have aspirations we keep dormant because we convince ourselves that we will ultimately fail? How many times do we give up on our dreams before even beginning to work toward them? We cannot pass up opportunities because we believe others will shine brighter or burn longer. We each bring a light for which the world has been waiting for so many years.

Now is our time to shine!

Adapted from *Expanding Potential: Journeying Beyond Who We Think We Are*, published by Mosaica Press.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Likkutei Sippurim 3.
2. Genesis 3:10.
3. *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, Parashat Tzav.
4. Genesis 38:1–26.
5. Ibid., 38:20–23. Judah attempted to send payment to Tamar but was unable to locate her. He decided to let her keep his items to save him from the embarrassment of others finding out what he had done with her.
6. Genesis 2:7; Tanya 2.
7. Bat Ayin, Parshat Vayeishev, Drushim L'Chanukah.
8. Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership* (New Milford: Toby Press, 2010), pp. 445–446.
9. *Sefer Hamaamarim Milukkat*, vol. 2 (Kislev-Shevat), Parshat Mikeitz 5738.
10. Shabbat 21b.
11. *Orach Chaim* 673:1.
12. Al Hanissim prayer.
13. Shabbat 21b.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5730623/jewish/Judah-Tamar-and-the-Indomitable-Flame-of-Chanukah.htm

Vayeishev: Humility and Success by Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky *

Potiphar's wife sought to seduce Joseph. When he resisted her advances, she falsely accused him of seducing her. In response, Potiphar sent Joseph into prison, where the warden put Joseph in charge of the inmates.

The warden of the prison could not find fault in anything that was under his]Joseph's[charge, for G-d was with him, and G-d granted him success in whatever he did.)Gen. 39:23(

The Torah previously noted that G-d granted Joseph success when he was the servant of Potiphar. But the additional words used in that context – “]G-d granted him success[to his hand” – imply that in his position as Potiphar’s servant, people perceived Joseph’s success as his own accomplishment, attributing it to his good luck.

In contrast, when Joseph was in prison, Joseph was so self-effacing that no one presumed that his success was his own doing. Moreover, the more Joseph was humbled, the more he was blessed with unusual success, since humility makes a person worthy of receiving Divine blessing.

Being a servant is humbling, yet servants retain some sense of self. A prisoner, in contrast, is viewed as an unwanted burden best kept removed from society. Thus, being a prisoner led Joseph to a deeper sense of selflessness and humility than before, making him more worthy of receiving G-d’s blessings.

His success while in prison was therefore much greater than it had been when he was Potiphar’s servant.

Similarly, cultivating selfless devotion to G-d makes us worthy to receive G-d’s blessings for success in all that we do.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Gut Shabbos and a bright and joyous Chanukah,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

How to Change the World

In his Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance), Moses Maimonides makes one of the most empowering statements in religious literature. Having explained that we, and the world, are judged by the majority of our deeds, he continues: Therefore we should see ourselves throughout the year as if our deeds and those of the world are evenly poised between good and bad, so that our next act may change both the balance of our lives and that of the world. [1]

We can make a difference, and it is potentially immense. That should be our mindset, always.

Few statements are more at odds with the way the world seems to us most of the time. Each of us knows that there is only one of us, and that there are seven billion others in the world today. What conceivable difference can we make? We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, dust on the surface of infinity. Is it conceivable that with one act we could change the trajectory of our life, let alone that of humanity as a whole? Our parsha tells us that yes, it is.

As the story of Jacob's children unfolds, there is a rapid rise of tension among his children that threatens to spill over into violence. Joseph, eleventh of the twelve, is Jacob's favourite son. He was, says the Torah, the child of Jacob's old age. More significantly, he was the first child of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel. Jacob "loved Joseph more than all his other sons" (Gen. 37:3), and they knew it and resented it. They were jealous of their father's love. They were provoked by Joseph's dreams of greatness. The sight of the multi-coloured robe Jacob had given him as a token of his love provoked them to anger.

Then came the moment of opportunity. The brothers were away far from home tending the flocks when Joseph appeared in the distance, sent by Jacob to see how they were doing. Their envy and anger reached boiling point, and they resolved to take violent revenge.

"Here comes the dreamer!" they said to one other. "Now let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits – we can say that a wild animal devoured him – then we shall see what comes of his dreams!" Gen. 37:19–20

Only one of the brothers disagreed: Reuben. He knew that what they were proposing was very wrong, and he protested. At this point the Torah does something extraordinary. It makes a statement that cannot be literally true, and we, reading the story, know this. The text says: "When Reuben heard this, he saved him [Joseph] from them" Gen. 37:21

We know this cannot be true because of what happens next. Reuben, realising that he is only one against many, devises a stratagem. He says, Let us not kill him. Let us throw him alive into this pit in the desert, and let him die. That way, we will not be directly guilty of murder. His intention was to come back to the cistern later, when the others were elsewhere, and rescue Joseph. When the Torah says, Reuben heard this and saved him from them, it is using the principle that "God accounts a good intention as a deed." [2] Reuben wanted to save Joseph and intended to do so, but in fact he failed. The moment passed, and by the time he acted, it was already too late. Returning to the cistern, he found Joseph already gone, sold as a slave.

On this, a Midrash says: Had Reuben known that the Holy One blessed be He would write about him, "When Reuben heard this, he saved him," he would have lifted Joseph bodily onto his shoulders and taken him back to his father. [3]

What does this mean? Consider what would have happened had Reuben actually acted at that moment. Joseph would not have been sold as a slave. He would not have been taken to Egypt. He would not have worked in Potiphar's house. He would not have attracted Potiphar's wife. He would not have been thrown into prison on a false charge. He would not have interpreted the dreams of the butler and baker, nor would he have done the same two years later for Pharaoh. He would not have been made viceroy of Egypt. He would not have brought his family to stay there.

To be sure, God had already told Abraham, many years earlier: "Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and there they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years." Gen. 15:13

The Israelites would have become slaves, come what may. But at least they would not have had this happen as a result of their own family dysfunctions. An entire chapter of Jewish guilt and shame might have been avoided.

If only Reuben had known what we know. If only he had been able to read the book. But we never can read the book that tells of the long-term consequences of our acts. We never know how much we affect the lives of others.

There is a story I find very moving, about how in 1966 an eleven-year-old African-American boy moved with his family to a hitherto white neighbourhood in Washington. [4] Sitting with his brothers and sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them, but no-one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition. All the fearful stories he had heard about how whites treated Blacks seemed to be coming true. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, "I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here."

As he was thinking those thoughts, a woman passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, "Welcome!" Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks and cream cheese and jam sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home. That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him realise, at a time when race relations in the United States were still fraught, that a Black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were colourblind. Over the years, he learned to admire much about the woman across the street, but it was that first spontaneous act of greeting that became, for him, a definitive memory. It broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it *Civility*. The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. "In the Jewish

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tradition,” he notes, such civility is called “chessed – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God.”

“Civility,” he continues, “itself may be seen as part of chessed: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard.”

He adds: To this day, I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever.

A single life, says the Mishnah, is like a universe.[5] Change a life, and you begin to change the universe. That is how we make a difference: one life at a time, one day at a time, one act at a time. We never know in advance what effect a single act may have. Sometimes we never know it at all. Sara Kestenbaum, like Reuben, never did have the chance to read the book that told the story of the long-term consequences of that moment. But she acted. She did not hesitate. Neither, said Maimonides, should we. Our next act might tilt the balance of someone else’s life as well as our own.

We are not inconsequential. We can make a difference to our world. When we do so, we become God’s partners in the work of redemption, bringing the world that is a little closer to the world that ought to be.

[1] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Teshuva 3:4.

[2] Tosefta, Pe’ah 1:4.

[3] Tanchuma, Vayeshev, p. 13.

[4] Stephen Carter, *Civility* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 61–75.

[5] Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5 (original manuscript text).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin **What Constitutes Guilt?**

“And there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver, and they brought Joseph down to Egypt.” [Genesis 37:28]

Who bears the ultimate responsibility for a criminal act? Is it the person who plans the crime, or the one who pulls the trigger or stabs with the knife? Is it the agency that sets up the act, the terrorist inciters, the mercenary for hire, or even the disinterested parents or apathetic society that nurtured the evil intent leading to the villainous deed? An ambiguous verse in Vayeshev dealing with the sale of Joseph initiates a difference of opinion amongst biblical commentators that have relevance to this important question.

Let’s consider this scene of déjà vu. We know that Isaac was actually blind when he gave the blessing to his favored son, Jacob. Now, we

find Jacob is equally blind in his relationships with his own sons, for ‘Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors’ [Gen. 37:3]. This infuriated his brothers. ‘And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him’ [Gen. 37:4]. The Talmud declares:

“A person must never favor one child among the others; because of a piece of material worth two selahs that Jacob gave to Joseph more than his other children, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter degenerated until our forefathers were forced to descend to Egypt.” [Shabbat 10b]

Apparently, our Sages felt that Jacob bore ‘ministerial responsibility’ for the tragedy of the brothers, although his sin was certainly inadvertent. Jacob suffers grievously for his mistake in family management, believing for twenty-two years that his beloved son is dead. But he certainly is not the main culprit.

Joseph doesn’t do anything to assuage his brothers’ feelings: he recounts his dreams that flaunt his superiority and eventual domination over the other family members [Gen. 37:5–11]. Then, in a fateful move, Jacob sends Joseph to Shekhem to see ‘whether all is well with his brothers, and well with the flock’ [Gen. 37:14]. Sighting Joseph from a distance and clearly aggrieved by their father’s favoritism, Joseph’s brothers conspire in their hearts to kill him. They tear off his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit. Shortly afterwards, the brothers spy an approaching caravan, prompting Judah to suggest that since killing isn’t profitable, they should rather sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite caravan and tell their father he was devoured by a wild beast.

Undoubtedly, the moment Joseph is sold into slavery is one of the turning points in the Torah. It is considered the most heinous crime of the biblical period – the sin of sibling hatred foreshadowing the Jewish divisiveness that led to the destruction of the Second Holy Temple and its aftermath of tragic exile and persecution.

However, when we examine the verse recording the sale of Joseph, it’s hard to figure out who actually sold the hapless brother.

“And they [the brothers] sat down to eat bread, and they lifted up their eyes and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming. And Judah said, Come, let us sell [Joseph] to the Ishmaelites. And there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they brought Joseph down to Egypt.” [Gen. 37:27–28]

Although the brothers spotted Ishmaelites, it seems that it was the Midianite traders who

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actually passed by and captured Joseph in order to sell him. After all, the phrase, ‘they drew up and lifted him out’ seems to refer to the Midianites.

So, who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit to sell him? Rashi [ad loc] suggests that it is the brothers of Joseph, ‘bnei Yaakov,’ and not the Midianites. Rashi draws on Joseph’s comment twenty-two years later when he reveals himself to his brothers: ‘I am Joseph whom you sold into Egypt.’ Rashi argues that the initial biblical verse describing the sale seems ambiguous precisely in order to inform us that Joseph was sold many times before ending up in Egypt: the brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites, the Ishmaelites to the Midianites, and the Midianites to the Egyptians.

Nahmanides agrees that it was the brothers who did the selling, but suggests that the Midianite traders hired the Ishmaelite caravan drivers, thus explaining the usage of both nations interchangeably.

In contrast, Rashbam maintains that the brothers were not the ones who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit, and therefore not the ones that sold him. Yes, the brothers put him into the pit, abandoned him and certainly would have sold him had the opportunity arisen. However, before the brothers had a chance to sell him, Midianite traders came by, pulled Joseph from the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites. The twenty silver shekels lined the pockets of the Midianites, not the pockets of the brothers. According to Rashbam, the brothers had nothing to do with the actual sale. However, this leaves us with the problem: how do we understand Joseph’s declaration to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt?’ [Gen. 45:4].

I think that this difference between interpretations may be understood as conflicting views regarding the nature of responsibility. Rashi understands the initial verse to mean that the brothers themselves lifted Joseph from the pit and personally sold him, because otherwise it contradicts Joseph’s words later on, ‘I am Joseph whom you sold.’ For Rashi, the words are facts, not metaphors, and although responsibility can have all kinds of shades and meanings, ultimate responsibility can only fall upon the person who actually carries out the deed. According to Rashi’s logic, since Joseph held the brothers responsible, they must have executed the actual act.

Rashbam’s concept of responsibility differs. He argues that although the brothers did not actually pull him out of the pit and sell him, nevertheless they must still share responsibility for the events that unfolded as a result of the sale. Their initial act of casting their brother into the pit was done with murder in their hearts. Rashbam casts guilt upon everyone who shares in unleashing the forces of evil,

even those whose hands remain clean while others do the actual dirty work.

I share the view of Rashbam. One must do something – not merely think something – in order to be responsible, but the one who sets the ultimate crime in motion by his action, even though he might not have perpetrated the act of the sale itself, must nevertheless certainly take responsibility. Hateful intentions cannot create culpability, but placing an individual in a vulnerable position – like casting him into the pit – inciting others to participate in that hatred as well as actively aiding and abetting the perpetrators of the crime, certainly makes one a partner in crime who must assume a share of the guilt.

But there is a twist in this portion, and Joseph engages in a little historical revisionism. A much wiser and more mature Joseph looks upon this incident from the perspective of Jewish history, sub specie aeternitatis, under an eternal gaze. From his vantage point, twenty-two years later, he continues ‘But now do not be sad, and let there not be reproach in your eyes because you sold me here; it was in order that you might live that God sent me [to Egypt] before you...to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you [for a momentous deliverance]. And now, it was not you who sent me here but God...’ [Gen. 45:5–8]. Hence Joseph may very well be holding the brothers responsible for the sale even though it may have been the Midianites who actually committed the transaction – not only because he wishes to implicate them in guilt, but mostly because he wishes to involve them in redemption. For Joseph, the act that began as a crime, concluded – owing to divine guidance and Joseph’s own quick-wittedness – as the salvation of the family of Israel. Joseph is anxious to restore family unity – and to look upon the sale from a divine perspective.

The brothers are responsible both for the crime, as well as for the good that resulted from the crime. Although Jewish tradition never forgave the brothers for their cruelty to their brother (witness the Eleh Ezkera dirge which traces the Hadrianic persecution which cruelly took the lives of ten great rabbis back to the sale of Joseph), Joseph praises God for having extracted salvation from sin; triumph from transgression.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb** **No Favorites on Chanukah!**

Envy is surely one of the most insidious of human emotions. It is a self-destructive emotion, because it often leads a person to act against his own best interests, as he attempts to redress the situation that caused him so much envy. It is also damaging to relationships with others and can have disastrous social effects.

Our sages include envy, along with lust and the search for glory, in their list of items that are sure “to drive a person from this world.”

That envy can lead to great national tragedy is one of the lessons of Jewish history. This week’s Torah portion describes the deterioration of a family brought about by the envy that Joseph’s brothers had toward him. This envy led to the hatred which motivated them to sell him into slavery.

Hatred between brothers, and the consequences of this hatred, is sadly at the root of Jewish history. Sinat chinam, unwarranted hatred, remains a stubborn problem in the ongoing story of our people.

Interestingly, the Talmud blames Jacob for the brothers’ treacherous deed, and for the future course of the history of his descendants. It comments:

“One should never favor one child over his other children, for it was the mere two shekels worth of silk, which Jacob gave to Joseph over and above that which he gave to his other children, that caused the brothers to be envious of him, leading eventually to our forefathers’ descent into Egypt.”

The multicolored garment, with which Jacob showed special favor to his son Joseph, provoked the envy of the other brothers, and the rest is Jewish history.

Can we discern any connection between the favoritism demonstrated by Jacob, and condemned by our sages, and the festive holiday of Chanukah?

I think we can, and I share this admittedly novel idea with you, dear reader.

The central mitzvah of Chanukah is, of course, the lighting of candles each of the eight nights. Strictly speaking, this mitzvah can be fulfilled by the head of the household lighting a single candle on behalf of the entire family—*ner ish u’beito*, a candle for the master of the house on behalf of the entire household.

However, the prevalent custom is that every member of the family, every child, every boarder, and every guest kindles his or her own menorah. No favorites here. Everyone gets to light a menorah.

Can it be that this custom arose as an antidote to the tendency some parents have to play favorites among their children? Can it be that the central message of Chanukah is that all children have an equal role to play in this holiday, and, moreover, in the very destiny of the Jewish people?

I have found no source in our literature for this interpretation. But nonetheless, it feels right to me. I personally find it dramatically significant that on the very Sabbath in which we read of

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how Jacob singled out Joseph from his other children, we also celebrate Chanukah and light candles in a manner in which no one child is singled out as superior, in which all have an equal share.

The lessons of Chanukah are many, and perhaps in future columns I will explore some of them with you.

But here is a novel lesson, and a very important one. Envy can wreak havoc in a family. One way for parents to avoid this poisonous emotion is by treating all their children fairly and equally, and not by playing favorites.

One of the wise sayings of Ben Sira, the Jewish sage whose work did not quite make it into the Bible, but which has much to teach us, is that “envy and wrath shorten life...”

Wise parents will take this lesson to heart and not discriminate among their children. Instead, they will learn the lesson of Chanukah and give all children an equal role in celebrating this beautiful holiday, the “festival of lights.”

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **Three Lessons From the Story of Yosef and Potiphar's Wife**

Yosef was serving in the house of Potiphar. Potiphar’s wife had her eyes on Yosef. She tried to seduce him on a daily basis, but Yosef refused. “And it was on that day that he entered the house to do his work – and not one of the men of the household was there in the house...” (Bereshis 39:11).

Rashi quotes a Gemara (Sotah 36b) where Rav and Shmuel dispute the intent of this pasuk. One of them says Yosef entered the house to do his (regular) work. The other one treats the word *melachto* (his work) as a euphemism indicating that Yosef actually entered the house in order to have an affair with Potiphar’s wife. However, the image of Yosef’s father Yaakov appeared to him from the window and he backed off from that aveira (sin).

Given the context (according to this second opinion that Yosef was about to commit an aveira), it indeed took a miraculous event to stop him. The Medrash comments that a Roman matron asked Rav Yossi how it was possible for this 17-year-old boy, who was cut off from his family and sent alone to a very promiscuous society, to resist this persistent attempt to seduce him? It is this question that the Gemara in Sotah comes to answer: His father’s image appeared to him in the window and told him, “If you do this, you will forever be cut off from me and my entire family.” That stopped Yosef.

There are three lessons that I would like to bring out from this incident:

Lesson #1

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says that we see from this Gemara how important it is for a father to maintain his integrity and importance in the eyes of his children. Yosef was stopped from committing this heinous crime by the threat that he would be cut off from his father's family. This is predicated on the assumption that association with his father and the family was very important to Yosef. Yosef saw Yaakov as the trunk of a tree, and himself as a branch thereof. Yosef wanted to be part of that tree.

A father who does not maintain his dignity and integrity in front of his child reduces his child's incentive to stay a part of the family tree. "So I will be cut off from you – big deal!"

Rav Yaakov writes that this is one of the fundamentals of Chinuch – that a father should be admired by his children. Just as the Talmud (Chagiga 15b) says that a Rav should be comparable to an angel, so too a father must be a significant role model, someone to whom his children look up and admire.

Lesson #2

The Chasam Sofer asks a question in Parshas Vayechi that I had never previously seen. Yosef calms his brothers (after Yaakov's death), by telling them that he is not angry at them. They planned evil against him but Hashem worked it out for good. This was all part of the Divine plan that Yosef should save the world from famine.

The Chasam Sofer asks: We know that Yosef was saved from the wiles of Potiphar's wife by his father's image appearing to him from the window. However, when the ten brothers wanted to sell Yosef, why didn't they see the image of their father in the window? Yosef was one son who was about to do something wrong. Hashem miraculously helped him resist doing so, by showing him the image of his father in the window. Why didn't Hashem do the same for the ten brothers, as they were about to sell Yosef?

The Chasam Sofer answers: Yosef himself had this very question. He asked himself, why me? Why didn't Hashem do this for my brothers as well, and save them from the grievous aveira of selling their brother into slavery? Yosef's conclusion was that Hashem wanted them to send him to Mitzrayim. This was all part of a Divine Plan. Clearly, Hashem did not want to intervene and save Yosef from going down to Mitzrayim. The Grand Plan was that Yosef should be brought down to Mitzrayim, and eventually be able to sustain not only his family but the entire world as well.

Therefore, when the brothers came to Yosef after Yaakov's death and were afraid that Yosef would take revenge on them, he told them not to worry. "I know this was not your fault. Maybe you should not have done it, but it was

all part of the Ribono shel Olam's calculations."

The Ramban writes in this week's parsha HaGezeira Emes v'ha'Charitzus Sheker (loosely translated, what G-d wants to happen is going to happen and all the machinations of human beings is not going to matter a whit). We don't know or understand why Hashem wants certain things to happen. In the case of Yosef's sale to Mitzrayim, in hindsight, Yosef felt he knew why it happened.

That is why Yosef could deal generously with his brothers. He had this question about the miraculous appearance of his father in the window, which stopped him from committing the aveira. That did not happen to stop his brothers from committing their aveira. This was the proof to him that his sale into slavery was ultimately the Will of G-d.

Lesson #3

I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Milchamos Yehudah: Even if the reason why the Ribono shel Olam allowed the brothers to sell Yosef was so that Yosef would go down to Mitzrayim, why did the Ribono shel Olam want Yosef to be put through the test of Potiphar's wife? Why did that happen?

According to the Milchamos Yehudah, there was a very specific reason. The reason is because the Almighty knew that the Jews would eventually need to go down to Mitzrayim. This was already prophesized to Avraham at the Bris bein haBesarim. Hashem knew that Mitzrayim was an amoral country – a land immersed in promiscuity. How were Jews going to be able to survive in the promiscuity and lewdness that permeated Mitzrayim? The answer is that the fact that Yosef was able to withstand this test and not succumb to the aveira of arayot (forbidden sexual relations) made it possible for Jews to amazingly never succumb to the aveira of adultery the entire time they were in Mitzrayim (with the exception of one woman and that was a case of mistaken identity).

How did that happen? Societies affect people. Mitzrayim was full of promiscuity and yet, that did not affect Yaakov's descendants. Yosef's ability to withstand temptation set the pattern and set the standard of sexual morality in Klal Yisrael, which saved those who came later.

That is the way it has been in every single galus that the Jewish people have experienced. The Ribono shel Olam puts Tzadikim in those places who are the pioneers and trail blazers that help give strength to those who came later to withstand negative influences.

Consider this: What is the biggest nisayon in America? It is the nisayon of money and materialism. It is the overwhelming desire to earn and accumulate money. We are now two weeks into "the Season." It is just incredible what people buy. They go into debt. They

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spend thousands of dollars for things they don't need. One woman was quoted in the paper as saying that "There is nothing in the world that I need which would cause me to camp out all night in front of Walmart to be able to purchase it at a big discount." But she is a lone voice. There are hundreds and thousands of people who camp out in front of Walmart and Best Buy to get their "Door Buster Sale Items."

Even without this "Season" – what is the national pastime in America? It used to be Baseball, perhaps Football. No. Now the national pastime of America is shopping. It is money. To make money, to have money, to spend money. That is the nisayon of this country, at least at this stage.

The Milchamos Yehudah writes that just as Hashem sent Yosef down to Mitzrayim to set a standard so that those that follow would not stumble in matters of sexual immorality, so too Hashem sent people to America in the early days who were moser nefesh (self-sacrificing, fully dedicated) for Torah, who were willing to live in poverty in order to build Yeshivos.

When I was a bochur in Yeshiva, Rav Kulefsky did not own a car. He shared a car with a bochur. Can you imagine a Rebbi sharing a car with a bochur? There was a hole in the floorboard of that shared car. You could see the pavement while sitting in the driver's seat!

Rav Henkin refused to take more than \$60 a month from Ezras Torah because he wanted the money to go to Tzedakah. Rav Moshe Feinstein lived in a little apartment on the Lower East Side. These people lived in poverty because they said learning Torah is more important than having money.

What did they accomplish? Today there are thousands upon thousands of Bnei Torah in Eretz Yisrael and in America – in Lakewood and in Baltimore and New York and Yerushalayim and all over – sitting and learning al Taharas haKodesh, and it is tough! With all the stories of rich fathers-in-law and subsidies, people live hand to mouth. People live b'Dochak to be able to learn Torah.

It is not like someone who lives in poverty during medical school training or someone who scrounges around during the first years of law school, who later will become a top-notch doctor or a Wall Street attorney and start making \$150,000 a year. After people learning in Kollel are forty years old, some of them may never get a job. There won't be opportunities for them. There are more people learning Torah today than there are jobs available. That is the reality, but they do it anyway.

That is a revolution. The people who created that revolution are the people – the Roshei Yeshivos – who came here in the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s and set the standard that

Limud haTorah is more important than making a buck.

That was the purpose of Yosef being tested by Potiphar's wife. The Ribono shel Olam put him to that test, which he successfully passed, so that his children and descendants after him would be able to withstand such nisyonos in Mitazrayim.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

To be 'shomer mitzvot' does not mean to keep mitzvot!

That is the surprising view of the Or HaChaim Hakadosh. If that's the case, what does being 'shomer mitzvot' mean? The Or HaChaim explains that it means 'to look forward to the performance of mitzvot.' He derives this from a passuk that we're all familiar with from our kiddush on shabbat: "Veshamru Bnei Yisrael et hashabbat la'asot et hashabbat," which we usually translate as, "and the people of Israel shall keep the shabbat to perform the mitzvot of shabbat."

The Or HaChaim points out that 'la'asot et hashabbat' surely means 'to do shabbat' – to perform the mitzvot of shabbat, which we usually call 'keeping' shabbat, so if that's the case what is 'veshamru b'nei yisroel' – 'and the people of Israel shall keep'?

With regard to shabbat, he explains, it means to look forward to each and every shabbat.

Where does he derive this from?

It's from Parshat Vayeishev. In Parshat Vayeishev, we read about the dreams of Joseph. The reaction of his brothers in Bereishit 37:11 was, "Vayekanu bo echav," – "His brothers were jealous of him,"

But what was the reaction of his father Yaakov? "V'aviv shamar et hadavar" – "and his father was shomer this matter," meaning Yaakov knew that Joseph's dreams were prophesy and therefore he looked forward to the day when he would see the fulfilment of these dreams, when the rest of the family and all of society would pay homage and respect to Joseph who would be a great ruler.

Shamar therefore means to look forward to, and as a result to be 'shomer mitzvot' means to have a passion for mitzvot. To be 'oseh mitzvot' of course means to fulfil the mitzvot, but from here we learn a very relevant and important lesson for us today. Is it not only important to technically and practically carry out mitzvot, through which we can tick a box with their fulfilment. If we want to preserve our tradition and guarantee that future generations will be as passionate as we are about mitzvot, we should celebrate them and perform them with hitlahavut, absolute passion. We are so fortunate and privileged

through the Torah, to have a code of law and a guide to a fulfilling meaningful and joyous existence. Let us therefore be truly 'shomrei mitzvot' looking forward to the performance with passion of each and every precept that Hashem has gifted us.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Reflections of Rav Soloveitchik on

Chanukah by Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

When the Rambam wrote the Mishneh Torah, he stated that his purpose was: "...so that the entire Oral Law might become known to all without difficulty... I have called this work Mishneh Torah, for a person will be able to first read the Written Torah and afterward read this [Mishneh Torah] (Introduction to the Mishneh Torah).

Given the Rambam's stated objective, there is much to be learned from the content and context of the Rambam's Hilchot Chanukah. When codifying the Biblical holidays, the Rambam lists them in calendrical order, and Rav Yosef Karo, in his Shulchan Aruch, follows suit. Rav Karo discusses the rabbinically instituted holidays of Chanukah and Purim in calendrical order as well. The Rambam, however, codifies Chanukah and Purim in historical order, placing Purim before Chanukah. Furthermore, the Rambam does not codify them in distinct treatises, but as one treatise, Hilchot Megillah v'Chanukah (The Laws of Megillah and Chanukah), as if they constitute one holiday. Additionally, while the Rambam generally discusses only the halachic dimensions of each holiday, he opens the laws of Chanukah with a review of the holiday's backstory. What explains these various oddities in the Rambam's codification of Chanukah?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the shift in order and style of the laws of Chanukah reflects the stated purpose of the Mishneh Torah – to systematically summarize the Oral Tradition. Therefore, when organizing the rabbinic holidays, the order chosen was one consistent with the halachic development of these days. Purim is the holiday where the legal battle was waged over the ability to institute holidays not prescribed in the Torah:

Our rabbis taught: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied to Israel, and they neither took away from nor added anything to what is written in the Torah, save only the reading of the Megillah [the holiday of Purim] (Megillah 14a).

The establishment of Purim set the precedent for establishing additional rabbinic holidays such as Chanukah. This idea is accentuated in the language used by the Rambam to codify the rituals of Chanukah, in which he regularly inserts references to the Purim holiday.

These days are known as Chanukah. Eulogies and fasting are forbidden just as they are on

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Purim, and the kindling of lights is a mitzvah... just like the reading of the Megillah. All who are obligated to read the Megillah are also obligated in the kindling of the Chanukah light (Laws of Chanukah 3:3-4).

Unlike the Shulchan Aruch, written only with the aim of offering a practical guide for contemporary observance of halacha, the Mishneh Torah both delineates and defends the entirety of the Oral Tradition, leading the Rambam to explicitly anchor Chanukah in the precedent of Purim.

Similarly, since the Chanukah experience took place after the canonization of the Written Law, the story of Chanukah is the only holiday in which both the story and its legal juridical components are part of the Oral Tradition. Therefore, Maimonides must include both the stories and laws of Chanukah.

Rav Soloveitchik further noted that the only place the story of Chanukah is found in the Talmud is in Tractate Shabbat (21b). Why is the story taught there, and not in the tractate of Megillah, which focuses on rabbinic holidays?

Though Chanukah and Shabbat are distinct experiences, each plays off the other. Chanukah's holiday experience brings the light found in the Jewish home and allows it to radiate into the public thoroughfare. The laws regarding the menorah's location and time of lighting are determined by pedestrians' ability to see its illumination in the public thoroughfare.

Yet this goal is only achievable when a Jew also experiences Shabbat. Shabbat is celebrated by retreating from the public arena of life. We experience Shabbat primarily within the privacy of our home, our spiritual epicenter. Introducing the festival of Chanukah in the middle of Tractate Shabbat reminds us that we can only perfect the public thoroughfare when the private arena is strong and vibrant. Conversely, if the Shabbat experience leads to a permanent withdrawal from broader society, it becomes an obstacle to achieving the divine purpose of the chosen people.

As we usher in this Chanukah season, let us commit ourselves to the sacred synergy between Shabbat and Chanukah, to both calibrating our personal spiritual compass and fulfilling the mission of Knesset Yisrael as "a light unto the nations".

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Behind the Image Of His Father

"The image of his father appeared to him."

With these words Chazal encapsulate where Yosef drew his strength from to overcome the temptation of the wife of Potifar. On a basic

level we can understand that Yosef was simply reminded by his father's image of the values his father had taught him in his youth. Perhaps there was more than just Yaakov as an individual that strengthened Yosef and enabled him to make the correct decision in whose merit he would eventually be called Yosef Hatzadik.

Yosef had already been separated from his father for some time when the episode of Potifar's wife occurs. During this time Yosef no doubt thought much about his father; he must have replayed in his mind countless times the last moments he had spent with Yaakov. The Torah tells us explicitly where their last meeting occurred. Yaakov sent Yosef from "Emek Chevron" - the Valley of Chevron - to locate his brothers. Chazal noted the significance of Chevron, the burial place of Avraham, being the place where Yaakov and Yosef parted. Undoubtedly the image of his father standing and waving goodbye to him in the shadow of the burial place of his great-grandfather Avraham was etched in Yosef's mind. When the image of his father appeared at the moment of truth, it was not just Yaakov's face that appeared. Yaakov as the grandson of Avraham and all that was represented by that image flashed in front of Yosef's eyes.

Avraham's relationship with Hashem, which encompassed being the forefather of the nation of Hashem and being the recipient of Eretz Yisrael, would be passed on to his children. The Torah highlights that Avraham's legacy would not go to all his biological descendants, rather only to Yitzchak. זרעך אחרריך - your descendants that follow you" would carry the legacy, from Avraham to Yitzchak and from Yitzchak to Yaakov. Chazal tell us that part of the covenant with Avraham required his descendants to marry those who would preserve that legacy. As such, great care was necessary to find the proper match for Yitzchak. The daughters of Canaan would not be able to preserve that legacy. Yitzchak had instructed Yaakov not to marry the daughter of Canaan for the same reason.

Yosef's test was specifically in this area of Kedushas Yisrael. Yosef had to choose between committing an act that would be the antithesis of bringing descendants of Avraham into this world and remaining steadfast to the legacy of his forefathers. At that moment, Yaakov's image appeared to him with the background of Chevron to remind him that he too could be a link in this holy chain. However, he could only be so if he preserved that sanctity to enable him to eventually bring his own children into this world with sanctity and purity.

Perhaps Me'oras Hamachpela served as the background for this image of Yaakov for another reason. There are two fundamentally different ways to view death. One's perception of the essence of life will impact one's

thoughts about death: if life is all about physical pursuits, death is the absolute end of such an existence; however, one whose life is a spiritual one continues to live on even after his physical demise, since the spirit lives forever. Yaakov standing in front of the burial place of his grandfather symbolized the Torah's concept of life and death. Although Avraham's body was laid to rest, his soul lived on and his spiritual legacy continued to serve as an inspiration to his descendants for eternity. Yaakov had been chosen to continue this legacy. Esav lived for the physical moments, as was evident by his decision to trade the opportunity to be the first born who would continue the heritage of Avraham and Yitzchak. Because of his attitude, Esav could never carry on the spiritual traditions of his father and grandfather. It was Yaakov who dwelled in the tents of Torah who would continue this heritage.

Yosef's moment of challenge required of him to decide what his life was all about. Was life a pursuit of instant gratification and physical pleasure, or was life meant to be the opportunity to perfect oneself spiritually? To succumb to his temptation would have placed Yosef in the realm of Esav and all those who traded their spiritual treasures for a bowl of soup. It was at this moment that Yaakov appeared to him with Chevron in the background. Upon seeing this image, Yosef remembered the lessons he had learned about what life was really all about.

Yaakov's image appeared to Yosef when he needed it most. Yosef drew the strength and inspiration from the appearance of his father against the background of Chevron to retain his place as a link in the glorious chain that would become Klal Yisroel.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Essence of Chanukah

The Mitzva of Chanukah is a candle, (Ish U Beiso) each man and his household... Tractate Shabbos 21B

Of all the important tasks of life almost nothing is more important and significant on both an individual and a national level than raising children. It's not an exaggeration or cliché to say so. It's no mistake that the verse which describes the Jewish People's descent into Egypt mirrors the Talmud's primary prescription for the Mitzvah of Chanukah, "These are the names of the Children of Israel who came down to Egypt, Yaakov (Ish U Beiso) each man and his household." Rav Hirsch points out in his Haggadah that when it came time for the grand exodus the Jewish People were configured as families around the hearth of the table eating the Karbon Pesach, as we sit ever since on that same night. We came down as families. We left as families. The survival unit and basic building block of

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the nation is the family. We are a nation of families.

It is no mistake that Chanukah is a family centered, child focused Yom Tov. The expression, the name Chanukah has as its roots in the world Chinuch, education! You would think that since Chinuch – Educating children is such a critical task then like every other activity in Jewish life there would be a handbook, a Code of Jewish Law with precisely defined "dos and don'ts", but there is not. We have very few detailed instructions. King Solomon penned these words, "Educate the child according to his way, and so when he grows older, he will not depart from it". This is one of the only general instructions we have to chew on, focused on this subject. There can be no monolithic approach. Every child has his way!

The Piaseczna Rebbe writes in his introduction to Chovos HaTalmidim, which is a must-read for parents and teachers, "Each and every parent and teacher knows that the small children and young students who stand before them today will not remain small and young forever." This beautiful phrase reminds the parent and teacher to see the child, not only as he is here and now but to see him as he will be in the future. It helps emphasize the second part of the famous verse, "educate a child according to his way...". That "way" must take into consideration the future of the child.

Rabbi Kalish from Waterbury told our teachers years ago that we too often forget that vital second part. He said that for example, two boys missed Davening in the morning. "I have enough leverage to get them to come to Davening tomorrow but more importantly I want them to come in 30 years. Educate the child according to his way so that when he grows old, he will not depart from it. It may not be worth winning a battle if the war will be lost in the end.

Just learning to consider the future slows down the response time of the adult and changes the education task from a management job to a leadership role. What's the difference? A child spills a glass of milk. A manager is upset and lectures the child about not being so clumsy and reminds them to be more careful next time. This may or may not work in the short run but it will likely have no lasting, long-term value. The child may be a little scared for now but he or she has not learned or really changed. A leader sees the future and realizes that this 8 year-old will be in our house for the next 10 years and we have that amount of time to teach them in a non-confrontational and reactive way, and to train them about where to place a glass of milk on the table so it will not spill. A manager is reactive to past events. A leader sees the future. He sees the future in the present.

The Piaseczna Rebbe further writes, "Parents and teachers have to be aware that their

mission is to discover and nurture the children of HASHEM and Gedolei Yisrael. They must view their children and students as great Neshamos that are still immature – and themselves as responsible to help them flourish and grow.” Implied in this statement is that education is less about pushing information in but mining out latent talent out from within, not teaching children what to think but how to think.

And so, we declare when lighting the Menorah, “These candles are holy and we have no permission to make use of them, but rather only to see them in order to give thanks to Your great name for Your miracles, and Your wonders, and Your salvations!” The children we have are not ours. They are not for us! They are here to express, in their own way, the great wonders of HASHEM and Chinuch may just be the essence of Chanukah!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Yosef: Then and Now

One of the greatest character transformations in all of Tanach occurs at the beginning of this week’s parasha.

The Yosef we were introduced to before was a very different person, the focus of so much hatred and envy, as we saw in last week’s parasha. They hated him for two reasons: he was a snitch, telling his parents about all his siblings’ failings; and for him telling his dreams about everyone, including his parents, bowing down to him. He was totally self-centered.

The Yosef we meet after he leaves prison is totally different. After being the focus of such hatred, and several attempts on his life, he spends the two years in prison contemplating and thinking about himself and what he can do differently.

Once he stands before Pharaoh, he is asked how can he understand dreams, he answers with one word, the transformational word – “bil’adai”, it is not I, but G-d, Who tells me what is happening. I am not the one to be lauded, I am purely a vehicle for G-d. Yosef is no longer self-centered, he is G-d-centered. He is no longer self-righteous, he is now self-effacing.

He is totally transformed. Seeing himself as a vehicle for G-d’s goodness, and the change that G-d wants to perform in the world, I aim humbly to be that change.

May we all emulate Yosef, living our lives in a G-d-centered world, where we use our G-d-given talents not for self-aggrandizement which never wins friends and influences people, but rather for self-effacement, to serve a cause greater than ourselves, because ultimately that is what makes the biggest difference in the

world and makes an impact on the lives of others.

Extinguishing Evil or Spreading the Light? by Rabbi Shalom Rosner

Yosef is the only one of the twelve tribes to whom the Torah attributes two reasons for his choice of name. First, we are told that Rachel selected the name Yosef because אֶת אֶלֹקִים אָתָּה הָרָפְתִּי, “G-d has taken away my reproach” (Bereshit 30:23). In the very next verse, Rachel provides an additional explanation for naming her son Yosef – לִי בֶן אֲחֵר (may Hashem grant me yet another son). These two reasons for Yosef’s name exemplify Yosef’s two strengths, the first concerning the past – (removing Rachel’s past suffering) and the second looking towards the future (Rachel requesting another son in the future).

Yosef transmitted these two strengths to his own sons as evidenced by their names. One was called Menashe כִּי נִשְׁכַּח אֶת כָּל עֲמָלִי, “G-d has caused me to forget all my toil and all my father’s house” (Bereshit 41:51), relating to forgetting a painful past. The other was named Ephraim כִּי הִפְרִי אֶלְקִים בְּאֶרֶץ עֲנִי, “G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction,” (ibid. 41:52) relating to Yosef’s present and future.

In Jewish tradition, the actions of the fathers foreshadow the fate of their descendants. Yosef’s two children represent middot that we all must internalize. Our people are referred to as she’erit Yosef, the remnant of Yosef, and haben yakir li Ephraim, my precious son Ephraim. We are all Yosef’s children, and so we are all Menashe and Ephraim. They represent two of our kochot (strengths): Menashe represents turning from evil – help me root out my pain, my difficulties, the negative. Ephraim represents doing good, gaining the positive. We need to incorporate both “סוּר מִרָעָה” (avoiding evil) and “עֲשֵׂה טוֹב” (actively pursuing good).

The people of Israel are never referred to as “the children of Menashe” because turning from evil is not the ikar, the main goal of our nation. Instead, we are called “the children of Ephraim” because the ikar is to actively pursue good and to bring the light of Torah to the world. Focusing on doing good will eventually lead to eradicating evil.

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin and Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg both suggest that these two middot may serve as the root of the well-known debate between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai concerning the lighting of Chanukah candles. “Beit Shammai maintains: On the first day, eight candles are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced. But Beit Hillel says: On the first day one candle is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased” (Shabbat 21b).

Fire accomplishes two different things; it destroys and removes, and yet it also illuminates and shines. Both qualities of fire

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are necessary to our spiritual growth. We must root out our yetzer hara and our negative tendencies, and we must also focus on the positive, by actively spreading the light of the Torah.

The Maccabim accomplished both of these goals. They first worked to burn out the Greek mentality, the Hellenistic nature of so many of the Jews of their time. They then actively purified the Beit HaMikdash and rekindled the menorah’s lights and the light of Torah and mitzvot.

What was the Maccabim’s primary goal? Which aspect of their extraordinary accomplishments do we remember most? This is the core issue debated by Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. Beit Shammai posits that we descend from lighting eight candles to one, to underscore that the main objective is to root out the negative, symbolized by progressively reducing the number of candles that we light throughout the holiday. However, Beit Hillel argues that the main objective is to spread light – that the darkness will automatically disappear with the addition of more light – and so we are to increase the light by adding a candle each night.

Our custom follows that of Beit Hillel – that our primary objective is to spread light like Ephraim, not to extinguish evil like Menashe. This Chanukah, may we follow the example of Ephraim and Beit Hillel, and enlighten those around us with the beauty of the Torah.



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subject: **Tidbits for Vayeishev - Shabbos Chanukah - In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL**

Chanuka

On Erev Shabbos Chanukah, many daven Minchah early in order for Minchah to precede the lighting of the Menorah (to avoid the appearance of a tartei d'sasrei - an inherent contradiction - of lighting Shabbos' Menorah lights and then davening Friday's Minchah). Menorah lighting may not occur before plag hamincha (approximately 1 hour before shekiah), and should be performed just before lighting Shabbos candles. The Menorah should contain enough oil to burn until a half hour after tzeis hakochavim (approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes after Candle Lighting; note that many shorter 'colored candles' do not meet this criterion).

Throughout Chanukah, Al HaNissim is added in Bircas Hamazon and Shemoneh Esrei. On Shabbos Chanukah, the complete Hallel is followed by two Sifrei Torah being taken out. Seven Aliyos are leined from the weekly Parasha (Vayeishev). Maftir of Chanukah is leined from the second Sefer Torah. The haftarah of Chanukah follows. Av Harachamim is omitted. (Some add Psalm 30 for Chanukah at the end of davening). Tzidkas'cha is omitted at Minchah.

On Motzaei Shabbos, one should return home without delay and light as soon as possible. The minhag varies as to whether Havdalah is followed by Menorah lighting, or Menorah lighting is followed by Havdalah. If one is away for Shabbos Chanukah, it may be preferable to light Menorah at his host on Motzaei Shabbos before departing, especially if one will be returning home late. Consult your Rav.

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Teves. Rosh Chodesh is on Wednesday, December 13th. The molad is Tuesday night at 8:01 pm and 3 chalakim.

On Wednesday, December 13th, Chanukah coincides with Rosh Chodesh, and the full Hallel is recited. Kerias Hatorah includes two Sifrei Torah; the keriah of Rosh Chodesh is leined from the first Sefer in three aliyos (the first two aliyos of the usual four are leined together), followed by one aliyah for Chanukah from the second Sefer. Mussaf of Rosh Chodesh follows.

Davening ends with Barchi Nafshi after the Yom (some add Psalm 30 as well).

There is a praiseworthy minhag of giving gifts to our children's melamdin (R' C. Palaggi zt"l). This sets an example of hakaras hatov for your child and displays the importance of chinuch. A gift accompanied with warm words of thanks is a tremendous source of chizuk for our Rebbeim and teachers. The first opportunity for Kiddush Levanah is Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Miketz, December 16th. The final opportunity in the USA is Tuesday, December 26th.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Kamma 36 • Yerushalmi: Shevi'is 62 • Mishnah Yomis: Yevamos 13:2-3 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 39a-41a. Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Summary - VAYEISHEV: Yosef is the favorite son • Yosef's dreams • The brothers plan to kill Yosef • Reuven persuades them to put him instead in a pit • While Reuven is away, Yosef is sold to Egypt-descending merchants • Yehuda and Tamar • Tamar bears Yehuda twins, Peretz and Zerach • Yosef is sold to Potiphar and rises to become his trusted advisor • Potiphar's wife tempts Yosef • Yosef is wrongfully accused and imprisoned • Yosef is given responsibilities in the prison • Yosef correctly interprets the dreams of the wine steward and the baker • Yosef remains in prison.

The second Sefer Torah is opened for the keriah of Chanukah which corresponds to the Korbanos Ha'nesiim and corresponding day of the Chanukas Hamizbeiach.

Haftarah: The haftarah of Chanukah (Zecharia 2:14-4:7) is leined. The haftarah discusses the Chanukas HaMenorah during the Second Beis Hamikdash.

For the Parsha Table

מִסֵּרְתָּ גְבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים וְרַבִּים בְּיַד קְטָנִים וְטָמְאִים בְּיַד טְהוֹרִים "You placed the mighty in the hands of the weak, the many in the hand of the few, the impure in the hands of the pure" (Al HaNissim - Chanukah)

While we understand that generally the more powerful army and the larger numbers of fighters would generally win the battle. However, righteousness and purity are not necessarily a weakness in battle. Why then do we recount "וְטָמְאִים בְּיַד טְהוֹרִים", which indicates that the pure defeating the impure is miraculous in nature?

Rav Yitzchak Feigelstock zt"l explains that aside from being far outnumbered by the nations of the world, Klal Yisrael faces another seemingly insurmountable problem in that essentially the art of war belongs to the nations of Esav and is their specialty (see Rashi Bereishis 49:5). When Klal Yisrael engaged in war, such as by Yehoshua at the City of Ay, they were eventually victorious only through miraculous means that only came about when the battle was fought according to the dictates of Hashem and with complete emunah and bitachon. When we engage in mere natural methods, Am Yisrael does not have the means to succeed. It is only when the battle is put forth with the proper spiritual structure that we can conquer our enemies. Therefore, we thank Hashem for enabling our victories by giving us the spiritual means and ability to supernaturally conquer our enemies.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Dec 6, 2023, 8:52 AM subject: Rav Frand - What Was Yehudah Thinking? What Was Tamar Thinking?

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeishev

What Was Yehudah Thinking? What Was Tamar Thinking?

For a variety of reasons, Parshas Vayeishev is a difficult parsha to understand. One of the more difficult parts of the parsha is the story of Yehuda and Tamar. Tamar married two of Yehudah's sons and they both died. There was a form of yibum (levirate marriage) in those days, and Yehudah was saving his third son for subsequent marriage to Tamar, but was hesitant to allow that marriage to go forth. At any rate Tamar appears at the crossroads as a zonah (prostitute) and Yehudah, without realizing that it was his daughter-in-law, hires her services. Yehudah has relations with this woman who he thought was a zonah, and she becomes pregnant from him. When Yehudah learns that his daughter-in-law is pregnant, he assumes she

had been unfaithful to his third son and ordered her to be put to death. Tamar proves to Yehudah that she was pregnant from him, and he responds, “She is more righteous than I.” (Bereshis 38:26) The Medrash asks, how is it that Yehudah, patriarch of one of the Twelve Tribes of G-d, could do such a thing? What prompted him to have relations with a zonah that he happens to see at the crossroads? The Medrash answers that the Ribono shel Olam sent Yehudah “Malach ha’meh’unchal ha’tayvah” (an Angel appointed over the attribute of human sexual desire). In effect, Yehudah was almost forced into this unseemly act. He didn’t want to do it, but somehow a spiritual entity “forced him” to do it. The reason this malach was given such a mission was that it was part of the Divine Plan that the Davidic monarchy, and ultimately the Moshiach himself, would descend from this union. So this Medrash explains Yehudah’s action. It was not part of Yehudah’s normal behavior to consort with zonahs. Fine. But what about Tamar? What was Tamar thinking? Did she not realize that her father-in-law Yehudah was a tzadik? How in the world did she expect that she could dress up as a zonah and entice him to have relations with her so that he might father a child through her? I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Avir Yaakov: The observation is that a person needs to do what he needs to do! Somehow, she knew that she needed to bear a child from Yehudah’s family. She saw that Yehudah was not letting her marry Shelah. If the only way for her to conceive from a member of this family was to dress up as a zonah and try to seduce Yehudah into a relationship, that is what she had to try, regardless of how far-fetched an idea this plan was. This is a basic principle in Avodas Hashem (Divine Service). We cannot always pause to ask ourselves “What are the chances of this happening? What are the statistics? Is this going to succeed or is it not going to succeed?” It does not work like that. “Ours is not to reason why, ours is just to do and die” (Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Charge of the Light Brigade”) If every Rosh Yeshiva who came to America in the 1930’s and 1940’s would have thought “How is this going to happen?” then no yeshiva would have ever been built. Ner Yisroel started with four talmidim (students). You do what you need to do, despite the fact that the odds of success may be slim, and you need to hope for the best. That is what Tamar was thinking.

Were You More Handsome Than Yosef? There is a very beautiful and powerful Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:10) that needs explanation. The Rambam writes: If a person sins, not because he is overcome by lust or passion, but he does it simply out of spite for the laws of the Torah, because “he doesn’t care,” he has made a Chillul HaShem (desecrated the Name of G-d). (In other words, besides punishment for whatever aveira (sin) he committed, he will also be punished for the aveira of Chillul HaShem.) The Torah uses this expression of Chillul Hashem in connection with taking a false oath. Similarly, anyone who abstains from an aveira or does a mitzvah, not for any ulterior motive, neither out of fear nor to seek honor, but simply for the sake of being in compliance with the will of the Creator, blessed be He, has made a Kiddush HaShem (sanctified the Name of G-d). Who does the Rambam marshal as an example of someone who made a Kiddush HaShem by abstaining from aveira, not out of fear or to seek honor, but for the sake of being in compliance with the Divine Will? The Rambam marshals the example of Yosef abstaining from having relations with his master’s wife. A dramatic passage in the Gemara (Yoma 35) states: A poor person, a rich person, and a wicked person each came (to Heaven) to be judged. The poor person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah? If he answers “I was poor and I was busy earning my living” they ask him “Were you poorer than Hillel (about whom the Gemara relates his great dedication to learning and studying Torah despite his great poverty)?” The rich person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah? If he answers “I was rich and was occupied with my properties” they ask him “Were you richer than Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom (about whom the Gemara relates his great dedication to Torah study despite the great wealth he inherited from his father)?” The wicked person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah. If he answers “I was very handsome and was

absorbed in my passions” they ask him “Were you more handsome than Yosef?” (The Gemara proceeds to discuss the great efforts Potiphar’s wife made to try to seduce Yosef, and Yosef’s steadfast refusal to listen to her arguments.) The Gemara concludes that Hillel serves as the “prosecutor” of the poor, Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom serves as the “prosecutor” of the wealthy, and Yosef serves as the “prosecutor” of the wicked. This is what the Rambam alludes to when he cites the righteous Yosef as the paradigm of Kiddush Hashem. There are two problems with this Rambam. Problem #1: The Gemara (Sotah 36b) says that Yosef was actually about to commit an act of adultery with Potiphar’s wife until the image of his father, Yaakov, appeared to him in the window, convincing him to back off. Now if we were tempted to do an aveira and we suddenly miraculously saw our father’s image in the window, we would also stop. Why then does the Gemara cite Yosef as the paradigm of someone who successfully withstood the temptation of his evil inclination? It is possible that when the Gemara says that “the image of his father appeared to him in the window” the Gemara is alluding to this not being the first time that the image of Yaakov appeared to Yosef. Yosef lived his life by always asking himself “What would my father do in this situation? What would my father say?” Since Yosef lived his life like that on a daily basis, the mention of “his father’s image appeared to him in the window” is not talking about a supernatural event. There was no miracle here. Yosef always saw his father peering at him through the window. He always asked himself “What would my father do?” If we lived our lives like that, we would also abstain from giving into sinful temptation. Many times, I told the story of Mr. Harry K. Wolport. The old timers in Baltimore remember him. Harry K. Wolport was a businessman. He was a talmid of Rav Boruch Ber. He learned in Kamenetz and came to the United States of America in the early 1900’s. Every one of his Jewish acquaintances felt that they needed to keep their stores open on Shabbos to survive in business. He was tempted to keep his store open on Shabbos as well. But he said, “I cannot do this to Rav Boruch Ber!” Rav Boruch Ber used to appear to him in the window because Mr. Wolport kept that image in front of him. That is how he was able to withstand the temptation to open his store on Shabbos. When a person lives his life like that on a daily basis, such visages in the window are not supernatural. Problem #2: Why does the Rambam chose the story of Yosef as the paradigm of stopping to do an aveira “not out of trembling and not out of fear and not for the sake of honor”? Why Yosef? The Chiddushei HaRim says that if after 120 years, we go to Heaven and they ask us “Why didn’t you stop sinning like Yosef did?” we have a simple answer to that question: “I am not Yosef”. They don’t call me “Yissacher haTzadik” (the righteous one). They call me “Yissacher.” Yosef is given the attribute “HaTzadik”. “What do you want from me? I am not Yosef!” “Why don’t you make a siyum every year on the entire body of Torah literature like Rav Chaim Kanievsky?” The answer is obvious: “It is because I am NOT Rav Chaim Kanievsky.” Rav Elyashiv used to learn in the Beis Medrash on Erev Pesach. Why don’t you do that?” The answer is “It is because I am NOT Rav Elyashiv!” I am not Rav Elyashiv and I am not Rav Chaim Kanievsky and I am not Yosef haTzadik. The Chiddushei HaRim answers: Yes, you are Yosef HaTzadik, because that is what Yosef HaTzadik did for Klal Yisrael. He gave us the spiritual strength to withstand temptation. That is why the Rambam marshals the act of abstention of Yosef haTzadik. Just like Avraham Avinu gave us the spiritual ability to be a martyr for Kiddush HaShem. Rav Chaim of Volozhin explains that all the patriarchs put qualities of self-sacrifice and other spiritual powers into our spiritual DNA. Yosef gave us the ability to say “No.” That is one answer to this second problem. I was told that the Brisker Rav also gave an answer to this question of why the Rambam uses the example of “like the act of abstaining by the righteous Yosef.” The Brisker Rav says that when Potiphar’s wife is trying to seduce Yosef, he gives her a list of reasons why it would be inappropriate for him to do that (Bereshis 39:8-9) “Look – my master concerns himself with nothing in the house, and all that he has, he placed in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate

this great evil?" Finally, at the end of his list, Yosef adds "And I would be sinning before Elokim." The Brisker Rav said Yosef's final remark is his key argument. Every other argument can be answered with an excuse. "He wasn't such a good boss; he made me work too hard; he wouldn't mind anyway; he is fooling around himself..." All these justifications can be offered. A person can rationalize everything. There is only one thing that cannot be rationalized: "And I would be sinning before Elokim." The Brisker Rav says this is the meaning of this Rambam. When a person is faced with such temptation, he should remember Yosef haTzadik. Yosef haTzadik overcame his temptation by remembering "And I would be sinning before Elokim." Any person who keeps that in mind, will not do an aveira.

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org> subject: Covenant and Conversation Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Speech Therapy VAYESHEV Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

From Vayeshev to the end of the book of Bereishit we read the story of Joseph and his brothers. From the very beginning we are plunged into a drama of sibling rivalry that seems destined to end in tragedy. All the elements are there, and it begins with ominous parental favouritism. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. The Torah says this was because "he had been born to him in his old age." But we also know it was because Joseph was the first son of his beloved Rachel, who had been infertile for many years.

Jacob gave this favouritism a visible symbol, the richly ornamented robe or coat of many colours that he commissioned for him. The mere sight of this coat served as constant provocation to the brothers. In addition there were the bad reports Joseph brought to his father about his half-brothers, the children of the handmaids. And by the fourth verse of the parsha we read the following:

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him, *velo yachlu dabro le-shalom*.

Gen. 37:4 What is the meaning of this last phrase? Here are some of the standard translations:

They could not speak a kind word to him. They could not speak peacefully to him. They could not speak to him on friendly terms.

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz, however, recognised that the Hebrew construction is strange. Literally it means, "they could not speak him to peace." What might this mean? Rabbi Eybeschutz refers us to the command in Vayikra 19:17:

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprimand your neighbour and not bear sin because of him.

Lev. 19:17 This is how Maimonides interprets this command as it relates to interpersonal relations:

When a person sins against another, the injured party should not hate the offender and keep silent . . . it is his duty to inform the offender and say to him, why did you do this to me? Why did you sin against me in this matter? . . . If the offender repents and pleads for forgiveness, he should be forgiven. Hilchot Deot 6:6 Rabbi Eybeschutz's point is simple. Had the brothers been able to speak to Joseph they might have told him of their anger at his talebearing, and of their distress at seeing the many-coloured coat. They might have spoken frankly about their sense of humiliation at the way their father favoured Rachel over their mother Leah, a favouritism that was now being carried through into a second generation. Joseph might have come to understand their feelings. It might have made him more modest or at least more thoughtful. But *lo yachlu dabro le-shalom*. They simply couldn't bring themselves to speak. As Nachmanides writes, on the command: You shall not hate your brother in your heart:

"Those who hate tend to hide their hate in their heart."

We have here an instance of one of the Torah's great insights, that conversation is a form of conflict resolution, whereas the breakdown of speech is often a prelude to violent revenge.

The classic case is that of Absalom and Amnon, two half-brothers who were sons of King David. In a shocking episode, Amnon rapes Absalom's sister Tamar:

Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate tunic that she wore; she put her hand to her head and went off, weeping as she went.

And Absalom, her brother, said to her, "Has your brother Amnon been with you? For now, my sister, be silent; he is your brother. Do not take this affair to heart."

And Tamar remained, forlorn, in the house of her brother Absalom. When King David heard all about this affair, he was absolutely livid. And Absalom would not speak a word to Amnon, neither good nor bad, for Absalom despised Amnon for having violated Tamar, his sister.

2 Samuel 13:19-22 Absalom maintained his silence for two years. Then he invited all of David's sons for a feast at the time of sheep-shearing, and ordered his servants to wait until Amnon was drunk and then kill him, which they did.

Hate grows in silence. It did with Absalom. It did with Joseph's brothers. Before the chapter ends, we see them plot to kill Joseph, then throw him into a pit, and then sell him into slavery. It is a terrible story and led directly to the Israelites' exile and slavery in Egypt.

The Talmud (Brachot 26b) uses the phrase, *ein sichah ela tefillah*, which literally means, "Conversation is a form of prayer," because in opening ourselves up to the human other, we prepare ourselves for the act of opening ourselves up with the Divine Other, which is what prayer is: a conversation with God.

Conversation does not, in and of itself, resolve conflict. Two people who are open with one another may still have clashing desires or competing claims. They may simply not like one another. There is no law of predetermined harmony in the human domain. But conversation means that we recognise one another's humanity. At its best it allows us to engage in role reversal, seeing the world from the other's point of view. Think of how many real and intractable conflicts, whether in the personal or political domain, might be transformed if we could do that.

In the end Joseph and his brothers had to live through real trauma before they were able to recognise one another's humanity, and much of the rest of their story – the longest single narrative in the Torah – is about just that.

Judaism is about the God who cannot be seen, who can only be heard; about the God who created the universe with words and whose first act of kindness to the first human being was to teach him how to use words. Jews, even highly secular Jews, have often been preoccupied with language.

Wittgenstein understood that philosophy is about language.

Levi Strauss saw cultures as forms of language. Noam Chomsky and Steven Pinker pioneered study of the language instinct. George Steiner has written about translation and the limits of language.

The Sages were eloquent in speaking about the dangers of *lashon hara*, "evil speech;" the power of language to fracture relationships and destroy trust and goodwill. But there is evil silence as well as evil speech. It is no accident that at the very beginning of the most fateful tale of sibling rivalry in Bereishit, the role – specifically the failure – of language is alluded to, in a way missed by virtually all translations. Joseph's brothers might have "spoken him to peace" had they been open, candid and willing to communicate. Speech broke down at the very point where it was needed most.

Words create; words reveal; words command; words redeem. Judaism is a religion of holy words. For words are the narrow bridge across the abyss between soul and soul, between two human beings, and between humanity and God.

Language is the redemption of solitude, and the mender of broken relationships. However painful it is to speak about our hurt, it is more dangerous not to do so. Joseph and his brothers might have been reconciled

early on in their lives, and thus spared themselves, their father, and their descendants, much grief. Revealing pain is the first step to healing pain. Speech is a path to peace.

**Vayeshev & Chanuka –
A Midrashic Connection**

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This is from a speech I gave at an even on Chanuka 29th of Kislev, 5741 based on a vort of my grandfather Rav Michel Kossowsky ZTL (in the sefer תועפות הרים).

In Shir Hashirim, we find the passage: “הדודאים נתנו ריח” The Mandrakes gave forth fragrance, ועל פתחיו כל מגדים And at our door all types of precious fruits.” These mandrakes refer to the plant that Reuven found and gave to his mother. The Midrash explains that “The Mandrakes gave forth fragrance” alludes to Reuven’s attempt to save Yoseph from his brothers by advising them to throw him into the pit instead of killing him. He intended to wait until his brothers would leave and then return to the pit to save Yoseph. Our sages teach that the pit itself was dangerous, containing snakes and scorpions.

The Midrash continues to explain that the second half of the passage, “And at our door all types of precious fruits,” represents the Ner Chanukah, The Menora, we light at the doorpost, which is so precious to us, because it reminds us of the miracle of Chanukah and the story of the Maccabees. What does the Midrash mean by such an explanation? Why does it connect Reuven’s plan to save Yoseph with the story of Chanukah and its lights? My grandfather Rav Michel Kossowsky ZT”L answers in Toafos Harim that to understand the Midrash, we must remember that Yehuda also had a plan for Yoseph. It was Yehuda’s plan to sell Yoseph as a slave to an Egypt bound caravan. In this way, his life would be saved, even though he would be forced to live in Egypt.

Superficially it would appear that Yehuda’s plan was better for Yoseph. After all, he would have a better chance to survive as a slave in Egypt for the rest of his life, than even for a short period of time in a pit full of snakes and scorpions! Who knows if Reuven would be in time to rescue Yoseph from such imminent danger! Our sages, however, didn’t see it that way. To them, just the opposite was true. They condemn Yehuda for his suggestion to sell Yoseph into Egypt, and praise Reuven for his intention. Why?

It appears that in the eyes of our sages, to be sold to Egypt could be considered a fate worse than death. For what kind of life would Yoseph be forced to live in Egypt? Yoseph had been brought up in ideal Jewish surroundings. He was Yaakov’s favorite student from among all the children and grandchildren. To Yoseph, God’s teachings and commandments were directly transmitted through Yaakov, from Yitzchok and Avraham. He was their spiritual heir, the one amongst all the brothers who earned the name Yoseph Hatzadik, Joseph the Righteous. What would his fate be in Egypt, a wicked land, a slave society, corrupt and evil in all the ways abhorrent to Judaism? So young and impressionable, how could Yoseph keep his ideals strong? How could he resist assimilating? Later events indeed did show how difficult this was, and that Yoseph managed to survive as a Jew only by superhuman moral heroism and by God’s miraculous intervention. Reuven’s plan was truly dangerous, but it was the only way Yoseph’s spirit could be saved; the only way to keep him in an atmosphere of Kedusha.

The Midrash teaches that this is precisely the lesson of Chanukah as well. For the Greek tyrants would have only been too glad to let us live – provided we lived as Greeks! They wanted us to become part of their culture. They even built us theatres and stadiums! They outlawed Torah and Mitzvot; seeking to turn us away from God and His commandments. Indeed, they succeeded for a time, only too well. Many Jews succumbed. The MISYAVNIM, turncoat Jews, Hellenists, made common cause with the Greek tyrants. Against the Jewish Hellenists as against the tyrant Greeks, the Maccabees rose. They risked their lives to remain devoted to Hashem. Better death than assimilation! The lights of Chanukah remind us of this struggle;

of this triumph; of the triumph of the spirit of our people. They commemorate our victory in a life-and-death struggle to preserve the spirit of our forefathers.

The lesson of the Midrash, linking Reuven’s plan and Chanukah, is clear. Living in surroundings of a Torah way of life, can be a matter of life and death. Often, to resist the corruption that exists in the world around us, we must be a Yoseph Hatzadik or a Yehuda Hamakabi.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/parsha-insights-5757-vayeishev-2/>
Yosef and Chanukah

Parshas Vayeishev

Chanukah

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Posted on December 5, 2023 (5784)

In a parsha laden with intriguing episodes, the sale of Yosef by his brothers certainly stands out. The question shouts at us, how could tzadikim of the magnitude of the sons of Yaakov Avinu, the shivtay kah, commit such a grievous sin.

Both the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh and the Sforno deal with this issue. The Ohr HaChaim deals with it in a more technical manner so I will discuss the Sforno’s pshat. He explains that the shvatim when they saw Yosef coming, assumed that he was not coming to check on their welfare, but rather to either find some fault on their behalf, or to cause them to sin. This would either lead to their father cursing them or their being punished by Hashem, thereby leaving Yosef alone as a ‘blessed’ son. If Yosef was trying to kill them in this world, and certainly in olam habah, then he was considered a rodef, one who is actively in pursuit with intention to kill. The halacha in such a situation is that one is obligated to take the initiative and kill the rodef. The ten tzadikim sat as a beis din and this was the clear halacha which they decided upon.

The fact that they were tzadikim and were still considered as such even after the sale can be illustrated by their names being on stones of the breast plate of the Cohen Gadol as a reminder before Hashem. We see that their state of mind was that they had not sinned by their calmly sitting afterwards and having a seuda. Whereas Bnei Yisrael after killing Shevet Binyamin sat and cried to Hashem, and even Daryavesh was distraught after throwing Daniel into the lions den, they sat calmly and had a seuda!

Lastly, when confronted by the harshness of the second in command to Paroah they knew that it must be midah kneged midah from Hashem for some sin they had committed. They care takingly scrutinized the previous twenty one years without finding any sin for which they might deserve it! (We’d probably find ample cause with a cursory look at our past twenty one minutes!) Finally, when they reviewed the events of twenty two years past, they understood that this was punishment, not for the sale itself, but rather for their harshness and lack of sympathy to Yosef, midah kneged midah! However, as Hashem, who sees deep inside each individual testifies, the brothers were jealous of Yosef. Even if these feelings didn’t influence their judgment, they were held accountable for them.

Where did this jealousy stem from? Yosef was a “ben zekunim” of Yaakov Avinu, and was therefore given the ksonas pasim, the special silk coat. Rashi’s second pshat quotes the Targum that ben zekunim means a wise son to whom he passed the teachings that he had absorbed from Shem and Ever. The Klay Yakar explains that the reason that he taught Yosef as opposed to the other sons is simply that Yosef displayed more of an interest.

I, however, saw in the name of Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky zatz”l, that the teachings of Shem and Ever were different than the regular Torah teachings of the Avos and were particularly pertinent to Yosef and not to his brothers. The Toras Avos was to set up a yeshiva in every place that they would find themselves, teach to others, and proclaim the name of Hashem to all. Shem, who lived in the generation of the flood and Ever, who lived in the generation of the tower, found it impossible to begin yeshivas. Their Torah was how to survive amongst terrible resha’im. How not to be affected by the surroundings which are acting contrary to the will of Hashem. This was the

Torah that Yaakov learned for 14 years on his way to Lavan, far different than the Torah he had learned as an “ish tam yoshev ohalim”, for 63 years. Yaakov foresaw that Yosef would need this Torah and not his brothers, and therefore taught it only to him. The brothers misunderstood their fathers intentions and thought that they were being treated as an Esav or Yishmael and were therefore jealous. This jealousy set the stage for the galus of Mitzrayim.

As we celebrate this Shabbos Chanuka, we have to realize that the golus of Yavan also had jealousy at its very root. Chazal say that the Yevanim darkened our eyes with their decrees. Chazal choose one decree which seems to epitomize the deeper intentions of the Yevanim. “Write on the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the Elokay Yisrael.”

The Siftei Chaim expounds beautifully on this medrash. “On the horn of an ox.” They wanted to remind us of the chait ha’agel. The Yevanim believed that as a result of that sin, Hashem had rejected us. On a deeper level, Hashem has two ways of dealing with this world; the natural and the supernatural. On the ‘maaseh hamerkavah’, the face of a lion is to the right and the face of an ox is to the left. The ‘stronger’ right hand side symbolizes the hanhagah of the supernatural, the strength and the dominion of the lion. The ox on the ‘weaker’ left symbolizes the ‘natural’ events of the world. The plowing and the planting which allow us to have nature serve our needs. When Moshe Rabeinu was leading us through the wilderness, we merited the miraculous hand of Hashem. The manna, the clouds, the well of water, etc. The mistake of Klal Yisroel was their thinking that if Moshe was no longer with them to bring them to the level of the miraculous, then they were supposed to now drop down to the level of the natural. This was exemplified by the calf that they made. Not a denial of Hashem, but rather a symbol and a reminder that all the natural events which would occur were in reality the ‘hidden’ hand of Hashem. However, for Klal Yisroel to deal on such a level was a spiritual catastrophe which led to actual idol worship.

The Yevanim, along the same lines, wanted us to write on the horn of the ox. The ox which symbolizes the natural and it’s horn which symbolizes it’s strength. They were extremely jealous of the miraculous bond between us and Hashem. They wanted us to accept that Hashem only deals, even with the Jews, on a natural level. That there is no special relationship between us and Hashem.

“You have no portion.” Portion, in this context means a partnership. Hashem has made us partners with Him in this world. As the Nefesh HaChaim writes, every act that we, Klal Yisroel do, affects the influences which will come down to this world. Hashem has, in effect, handed the reins over to us. The ‘tov’ and ‘ra’ in this world are brought about by our acts of drawing close to Hashem or by, c”v, distancing ourselves from Him.

Rav Brevida came to the Yeshiva and spoke about how we all want to make the big decisions. Nuclear disarmament, peace with Syria, pullout from Chevron. In reality, of course, we can’t make those decisions. We must settle for the little decisions; should I go to minyan, should I make the seder, should I speak the lashon horah. What we must realize is that it is those ‘little’ decisions which will determine those big issues. That is our portion, our partnership, with Hashem. The bracha that can be in this world is in our hands to bring. That, the Yevanim, couldn’t handle. They wanted us to write that we have no portion, no partnership.

“In Elokay Yisroel.” Hashem runs this world through a command structure of agents. Many of these agents were, at different stages of world history, worshiped as idols. As if they had some power, independent of Hashem. They do have power, and therefore can carry the same name as Hashem, elohim, but only as delegated by Hashem. The name of Hashem which refers to this aspect of Him being the power source is Elokim. That’s why we say, Hashem Elokim Emes. The only true power source. Elokay Yisroel refers to our actions having the ability to either turn on, or turn off, that power. We have that partnership with Elokay Yisroel and we affect that power with our ‘little decisions’. With our adherence to Torah and mitzvos and our conquering of that olam hakatan, ourselves. The Yevanim wanted to have

that control through their connection to the natural. External beauty as opposed to inner perfection. “No portion in Elokay Yisroel.”

May Hashem give us the meiras einayim, the clarity of vision, to realize the unique and central role that we play in this universe. To recognize the special partnership that we share with Elokay Yisroel, and with the vigor of a lion, to accept that responsibility and act accordingly. May that bond be strengthened to the point that we too will light the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash.

Good Shabbos.

Yisroel Ciner

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/finding-miracles-in-the-darkness/>

Rabbi Kenneth Brander President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone
This Hanukkah I’m celebrating a different kind of miracle

We don’t have to look as far back as the Maccabean story to find wonders worth commemorating

Hanukkah feels different this year. The vanquishing of our enemies that occurred in the days of the Maccabees during their war against the Greeks seems distant this Hanukkah. As we light our flickering candles, still shrouded in the darkness of the murderous pogrom on the seventh of October, with 136 hostages from 10 months to 83 years old still being held in Gaza, and the tragic aftermath of so many fallen, how can we possibly rejoice and celebrate this year?

Unlike many other rituals, the lighting of the Hanukkah candles is accompanied by two blessing (three on the first night). Following the standard blessing for performing a mitzva, a commandment, one recites the blessing of She’asa Nissim, giving thanks to God for the miracles performed “in those days, at this time.” Yet if we carefully examine the formulation appearing in Rambam’s Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Megillah v’Chanuka 3:1), we will notice that some of the manuscripts have a slightly different version, which reads “bayamim hahem uvizman hazeh,” which translates as “in those days and at this time.” With the addition of a single letter vav, these editions of Rambam offer an entirely new meaning to this blessing: that just as miracles took place long ago, miracles continue to surround us in every generation to the present day.

... these have been unimaginably difficult weeks for the families of the murdered and the kidnapped, for the fallen, wounded and the displaced, for the soldiers serving in every corner of this country, and for all of Am Yisrael. But even within this darkness, the light of unity and volunteerism is shining brightly.

This year, I am celebrating the miracle of solidarity. Grassroots efforts have popped up overnight like nothing Israel has ever seen. Meals have been distributed, people have been welcomed into homes, and thousands of reservists, 130% of those called up, have reported for duty. The amount of donations: food, clothing, toys, rides, visits, hugs, army supplies, medications, and more that have been offered to those in need has been astounding. Our collective resolve in the face of the horrors is nothing short of miraculous, and a reminder of what we are capable of when we band together.

And I am celebrating the miracle of heroism. In the face of the horrors of October 7th, so many heroes have risen to defend our brethren. I carry with me the memory of Ohr Torah Stone alumnus Elhanan Kalmanson z”l, who drove with his brother and nephew to Be’eri on the morning of October 7 on their own and managed to rescue dozens of victims. I am thinking of Aner Elyakim Shapiro z”l, who protected a packed public bomb shelter by throwing the hand grenades that terrorists had tossed inside back out and finally falling on the last one to absorb the impact to protect others. And at the same time, those continuing to celebrate life, including Aner’s sister who got engaged just last week, have exhibited tremendous courage to push on despite the pain and the grief. This Hanukkah, I bask in the light of the heroism of our soldiers – including countless members of the OTS family. The courage of their families and of all those maintaining the homefront is as much a divine gift as the Maccabean initiative.

And I am celebrating this state, and what it means to live in the Jewish homeland in the 21st century. Even in the wake of the largest pogrom since the Holocaust, we cannot lose sight of our good fortune. Never again can we be decimated, for we have a land of our own and the resolve needed to defend it. To witness the return of the Jewish people to our sacred homeland is a living miracle, and it is the anchor of our confidence in these uncertain times.

Bayamim hahem uvizman hazeh, in those days and at this time. In the midst of the grief and the fear, there are miracles all around us, just as there were long ago. Like the Maccabees, we face a challenging threat, but we are resolutely committed to our cause. As we move forward, our challenge is to not lose sight of these miracles, to be inspired by them, empowered to persevere until the darkness of this moment is overtaken by a great, shining light.

No matter what comes, we can face it together.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz The Value of a Good Deed - Parashat Vayeshev

In Parashat Vayeshev, we read about the story of “the sale of Joseph.” Jacob’s sons envied Joseph, who was beloved by his father and dreamed dreams of ruling over the family. They took advantage of a moment when they were away from their father’s house to sell Joseph into slavery. This story is one of the most complex narratives in the Torah because, despite the brothers’ intention to remove Joseph from their path, their actions eventually led to the realization of Joseph’s dreams. He became a viceroy in Egypt, brought the entire family there, and became the leader of the family, just as he had dreamed. However, the original plan of the brothers was more sinister. As the Torah describes their conversation when they saw Joseph approaching: “*And they said one to another: ‘Behold, the dreamer comes. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, An evil beast has devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams.’*” (Genesis 37, 19-20) This plan was not executed because Reuben, the eldest brother, intervened and suggested an alternative: “*And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said: ‘Let us not take his life.’ And Reuben said to them: ‘Shed no blood; cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him.’*” (Ibid Ibid, 21-22) At this point, we do not understand what Reuben hoped to achieve. What is the difference between murder and throwing Joseph into a pit where he would die from hunger and thirst? But the Torah reveals Reuben’s motives. He did not intend to leave Joseph in the pit but “to deliver him out of their hands, to restore him to his father.” Reuben sought to prevent the young brother’s murder and the grief of their father, thinking that once the brothers left the place, he could return to the pit, lift Joseph out of it, and save his life. In the end, Reuben’s plan failed. Joseph was taken out of the pit and sold into slavery. However, we want to dwell on Reuben’s proposal and properly assess it. Reuben, being the eldest among the brothers, naturally should have hated Joseph more than the others because if Joseph’s dreams were fulfilled, Reuben would be ousted from his natural position as the firstborn and leader of the brothers, and Joseph would take his place. Despite this, Reuben was the one who sought to save Joseph from a cruel fate and return him to their father. In the Midrash, we find an interesting thought about Reuben’s deed. The sages say: “*If Reuben had known that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would write about him ‘And Reuben heard and delivered him out of their hands,’ he would have taken him on his shoulders and brought him to his father.*” (Leviticus Rabbah 34, 8) Even though Reuben chose a morally correct action, he did not evaluate it properly. If Reuben had known that the Torah would appreciate his choice and present him as the one who saved Joseph, he would have put more effort into rescuing him and bringing him back to their father. Reuben did not consider his act important enough, so he settled for the suggestion of throwing Joseph into a pit and for the plan – that failed – of saving him later. Reuben’s moral

choice was not assessed properly and therefore it was not done correctly. When we perform a good deed, it is essential to reflect on the meaning and value of the deed, as well as its consequences on ourselves and our surroundings. This is illustrated in the relationship between parents and children: when a parent behaves morally, aside from the deed itself, they impart a way of life that their children are likely to adopt and pass on to future generations. If we evaluate our actions appropriately, it will lead us to perfect deeds, deeds we can be proud of, and that will influence not only ourselves but everyone around us. *The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Dec 7, 2023, 8:55 PM subject: The Jewish Heart is Beating Stronger than Ever - Chanukah Essay by Rabbi YY

The Jewish Heart is Beating Stronger than Ever

No, We Have Not Betrayed Our Mission: Yehudah, Tamar and a Chanukah Drama

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

The Judah-Tamar Drama

It is a fascinating story: (1) Judah has three sons, Er, Onan and Shalah. His oldest son, Er, married a woman named Tamar, but died prematurely, without children. His bereft father, Judah, suggested to his second son, Onan: “Consort with your brother’s wife and enter into levirate marriage with her, and establish offspring for your brother.”

Here, we are introduced, for the first time, to the concept of levirate marriages, discussed later in the book of Deuteronomy: “When brothers live together, and one of them dies childless, the wife of the deceased man shall not marry outside to a strange man; her brother-in-law shall come to her, and take her to himself as a wife, and perform a levirate marriage. The first-born son whom she bears will then perpetuate the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be obliterated from Israel.”

One of the great biblical commentators, Nachmanides, writes that this mitzvah embodies “one of the great mysteries of the Torah” and that even before the Torah was given, people knew of the spiritual benefits of a levirate marriage. The biblical commentators explain that the child born of the union between the brother of the dead man and his former wife -- both of whom are intimately connected with the deceased man -- is considered the spiritual son of the deceased. The Kabbalists even explain that the first-born child of the levirate marriage is a reincarnation of the soul of the first husband, bringing the deceased man, as it were, back to life.

So Judah suggested to his second son Onan to marry his brother’s widow and perpetuate the legacy of the deceased brother.

Now, Judah’s second son also died prematurely without having any children. Judah refused to allow her to marry his third son, Shalah. This put her in an impossible situation: she could not go out and marry anyone else, because she was bound to Shalah, but her father-in-law would not allow her to marry Shalah.

Now, during those early times prior to the giving of the Torah, Nachmanides explains, other relatives, in addition to brothers, used to carry out this obligation of levirate marriages. So following the death of both of Tamar’s husbands, she went and lured her former father-in-law, Judah, into a relationship with her, that impregnated her. As a guarantee that he would pay her for the relationship, Judah gave Tamar his seal, cord (2), and staff.

“Some three months passed,” the Torah relates (3), “and Judah was told, ‘Your daughter-in-law Tamar has committed harlotry, and she has become pregnant by harlotry.’”

“Take her out and have her burned,” said Judah.

“When she was being taken out, she sent word to her father-in-law, saying, ‘I am pregnant by the man who is the owner of these articles. Identify, I beg you, these objects; who is the owner of this seal, this cord, and this staff?’”

“Judah immediately recognized them, and he said, ‘She is right; it is from me [that she has conceived]. She did it because I did not give her to my son Shalah.’”

A Spiritual Story

The stories in the Torah are not just tales of ancient Jewish history. They also reflect spiritual timeless experiences that take place continually within the human soul. In his commentary on the book of Genesis, Nachmanides wrote: "The Torah discusses the physical reality, but it alludes to the world of the spirit (4)."

Here is a classical Chassidic interpretation on the episode of Judah and Tamar, treating the story as symbolic of the inner spiritual life of the Jew. Betrayal and Its Consequences

The name Judah, or Yehudah, containing within it the four letters of the name of Hashem, symbolizes G-d. Tamar is the Hebrew name for a palm tree, representing the Jewish people and their bond with G-d (5). The Talmud explains (6), that "just as the palm tree has but one 'heart,' so too do the Jewish people have only a single heart, devoted to their Father in heaven." (The heart of the date palm is its sap. Unlike the saps of other trees, like the olive or almond tree, the sap of the palm is found only in its trunk, but not in its branches or leaves. This is the meaning behind the Talmudic statement that the palm tree possesses only a single "heart" (7)).

The intimate union between Tamar and Judah, the Jew and G-d, occurs during the sacred days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. During those days, G-d, or Judah, exposes Himself to His people, evoking within them a yearning to transcend and to become one with G-d.

But then, some time passes, and the spiritual inspiration of the High Holy days wears off. Judah is informed that "Tamar, your Kallah (8), has committed harlotry, and she has become pregnant by harlotry." The news arrives to G-d that His bride has gone looking elsewhere for bliss.

At one point during our lives, we may be inspired to connect to the deeper Divine rhythm of life. Yet, the cunning lore of numerous other gods captivates our imaginations dulls our vision. We substituted the G-d of truth with the ego-god, the power-god, the money-god, the temptation-god, the addiction-god, the manipulation-god, and the god of self-indulgence.

What is even sadder for Judah is the news that "Tamar" is so estranged that she became pregnant by harlotry. This symbolizes the stage in life when the Jew rejects the G-d of his forefathers permanently and decides to build his future with superficial sources of gratification.

"Take her out and have her burned," says Judah. The purpose of the Jew is to serve as the spiritual compass of human civilization, to bear witness to the truth of the One G-d, the moral conscience of the world. When the Jew loses sight of the *raison d'être* of his existence when he believes that his salvation lies in the fact that the world loves him, that he was praised in an editorial of The New York Times, his existence is in danger. The world will come to loathe him, and he will have no anchor.

The Truth Emerges

The great Jewish mystic, the Arizal, Rabbi Isaac Luria, writes that "the judgment that began on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is completed some three months later, during the days of Chanukah." That's why it is at this period of time, three months after the intimate union between Judah and Tamar, that Judah (the metaphor for G-d) is "informed" regarding the spiritual status of Tamar (the Jewish people) and the verdict is issued that Tamar has no future.

"When Tamar was being taken out, she sent word to Judah, saying, 'I am pregnant by the man who is the owner of these articles. Identify, I beg you, these objects. Who is the owner of this seal, cord, and staff?'"

During that fateful time, when the "prosecuting angels" have almost been successful in demonstrating to G-d that the Jewish people have become alienated, at that very moment, the Jew sends word to G-d, saying, "I am pregnant by the man who is the owner of these articles!" The information you received that I abandoned you, is a blatant lie! Gaze into the deeper layers of my identity and you will discover that I belong to You, that my intimacy is shared only with You, G-d. "I am pregnant from Judah and not from anybody else!" the Jew declares.

"Identity, I beg you, these objects. Who is the owner of this seal, cord, and staff?" For during the festival of Chanukah, when the judgment of Rosh

Hashanah is finalized, the Jew kindles each night a wick, or a cord, soaked in oil, commemorating the event of the Jews discovering a sealed single cruse of oil after the Greeks had plundered the holy Temple in Jerusalem (9).

The Jew further points to the staff in his arm (10). In order to preserve his faith, he was forced time and time again, for millennia, to take the wandering staff in his arm, abandon his home, wealth and security, and seek out new territory where he could continue to live as a Jew.

"Identity, I beg you, these objects. Who is the owner of this seal, cord, and staff?" the Jew asks G-d. "It is to this man that I am pregnant!" Our loyalty and commitment remain eternally to the owner of the "seal" and "cord" of the Chanukah flames; our deepest intimacy is reserved to the owner of the "staff" of Jewish wandering.

Sure, the insanity of exile and the traumas of millennia have confused so many of us. But -- as we have all seen since the last Hamas-Israeli war on October 7th, 2023 -- the Jewish heart is beating stronger than ever. The Divine holiness embedded in the core of every Jewish soul is shining.

Who Is the Traitor?

"Judah immediately recognized the articles, and he said, 'She is right; it is from me that she conceived. She did it because I did not give her to my son Shelah.'"

When G-d observes the burning flames of the Chanukah menorah, He immediately recognizes that indeed, His people have never left Him. True, the Jew does fall prey at times to the dominating external forces of a materialistic and immoral world, yet this enslavement is skin deep. Probe the layers of his or her soul and you will discover an infinite wellspring of spirituality and love.

"If the Jew has, in fact, gone astray here and there, it is my fault," G-d says, not his. "Because I did not give Tamar to my son Shelah." Shelah is the Biblical term used to describe Moshiach (11), the leader who will usher in the final redemption. G-d says that for two millennia I have kept the Jewish nation in a dark and horrific exile where they have been subjected to horrendous pain and savage suffering. Blood, tears, and death have been their tragic fate for twenty centuries, as they prayed, each day and every moment, for world redemption. But redemption has not come.

How can I expect that a Jew never commits a sin? How can I expect that a Jew never seeks a nest in the outside gentile world, when I held back for so long the light of Moshiach?

"It is I, G-d, who is guilty of treason," G-d says. Not the Jew. Tamar is an innocent, beautiful palm tree, which still has only one heart to its Father in heaven.

Cold Soup

Rabbi Manis Friedman once shared the following thought (12):

Three thousand, three hundred and fifteen years ago G-d asked us if we would marry him. We had an extraordinary wedding ceremony, with great special effects--we were wowed. After the wedding, He said, "I have a few things I'd like you to take care of for me so, please... I'll be right back." He hasn't been heard from since. For more than three thousand, three hundred years. He has sent messengers, messages, postcards--you know, writing on the walls... but we haven't heard a word from Him in all this time.

Imagine, a couple gets married, and the man says to his new wife, "Would you make me something to eat, please? I'll be right back." She begins preparing. The guy comes back 3300 years later, walks into the house, up to the table, straight to his favorite chair, sits down, and tastes the soup that is on the table. The soup is cold.

What will his reaction be? If he's a wise man, he won't complain. Rather he'll think it's a miracle that the house is still there, that his table and favorite chair are still there. He'll be delighted to see a bowl of soup at his place. The soup is cold? Well, yes, over 3300 years, soup can get cold.

Now we are expecting Moshiach. If Moshiach comes now and wants to judge, what's he going to find? Cold soup?

He will find an incredibly healthy Jewish people. After 3300 years we are concerned about being Jewish, which means we are concerned about our relationship with G-d.

Yes, if Moshiach comes today, he'll find that our soup is cold. We suffer from separation anxiety. We suffer from a loss of connection to our ancestors. We suffer a loss of connection even to our immediate family. The soup is cold. The soup is very cold. But whose fault is that? And who gets the credit for the fact that there is soup altogether?

We are a miracle. All we need to do is tap into it. We are the cure. Not only for ourselves, but also for the whole world. So let Moshiach come now and catch us here with our cold soup because we have nothing to be ashamed of. We are truly incredible. When G-d decided to marry us, He knew He was getting a really good deal.

A Jew is a child of G-d. A Jew is a prince. A Jew is the holiest of the holy. A Jew is truly one with G-d. And even when you look at yourself in the mirror and you feel disloyal, the truth is that your ultimate loyalty remains to G-d, to truth, to holiness, to purity.

Moshiach is ready to come. May we see him now!

(This essay is based on the writings of the Chassidic Masters (13))

1) Genesis, chapter 38. 2) "Pethila" in Hebrew literally means a string or a wick. Judah gave her the string that he used to bind his sheep (Sechel Tov on Genesis 38:18). Many commentators, including Rashi, translate the word to mean a wrap or cloak. 3) Genesis 38:24-26. 4) Commentary on the opening verse of Genesis. 5) See Hoshanos recited on the third day of Sukkot. Psalms 92:13. 6) Sukkah 45b. Megilah 14a 7) Rashi ibid.; cf. Ritva. 8) In Hebrew, "Kalasecha" (Genesis 38:24). This can be translated as "your daughter-in-law," or, literally as your kallah, your bride. 9) Shabbas 21b. 10) The Hebrew term for "the staff," "v'hamateh" has the same numerological value as the word "Hakeli," the vessel, symbolic of the menorah in which we kindle the Chanukah flames. Hence, this verse is alluding to the three components of the Chanukah lights: the menorah, the wick, and the oil, all of which testify to the eternal allegiance of the Jew to G-d. 11) Rashi Genesis 49:10. 12) http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2540/jewish/Cold-Soup.htm 13) Bas Ayin Parshas Vayeishev, authored by Chassidic Master of Safed, Rabbi Avraham of Avrutch (1765-1840). He was a disciple of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Bardeitchev and of Rabbi Nachum and Rabbi Mordechai (Reb Matele) of Chernobyl.

<https://en.yhb.org.il/revivim1072/>

The Commandment to Serve in the Army – Saving Jewish Lives Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

IDF soldiers fulfill two great commandments: saving Jewish lives, and settling the Land of Israel * During wartime, soldiers must be willing to enter dangerous situations where the risk outweighs the potential rescue * The commandment to conquer and defend the land overrides the preservation of individual lives * The prohibition of murder is absolute * If evildoers present a person with two options: either murder so-and-so, or be killed – one should choose death, rather than transgress and murder another person

At present, when our heroic soldiers endanger themselves on the battlefield for the sake of saving the nation and state, it is fitting to re-emphasize the tremendous sanctity of the commandment they are fulfilling with their very bodies. The soldiers fulfill two great commandments, each one a general commandment equal to all other commandments: the first is saving Jewish lives, and the second is settling the Land.

Saving Jewish Lives: We are commanded that if we see a fellow Jew in danger, we must make an effort to come to his aid, as the Torah says: "Do not stand by your brother's blood" (Leviticus 19:16). And for this, one must be willing to take certain risks. All the more so, when the entire Jewish people is in danger, that there is an obligation to make effort toward saving the Jewish people. Our Sages already said in the Mishnah: "Whoever saves a

single Jewish life, it is as if he saved an entire world" (Sanhedrin 4:5). Therefore, one who takes part in sustaining the entire nation, it is as if he literally sustained an entire world. And this is an absolute, obligatory war (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 5:1).

Defending the Land: We are commanded to inherit and settle the Land of Israel, meaning that the land should be under Jewish sovereignty, and settled with Jews across its entire length and breadth. And this commandment is equal to all other commandments (Sifrei, Re'eh 53).

These Commandments Override the Preservation of Individual Lives Indeed, there is no commandment to endanger oneself in a situation where it is probable that the would-be rescuer will be killed in order to save individual Jewish lives. However, during wartime, when it is necessary to endanger soldiers in order to win the battle, soldiers must be willing to enter situations where the danger outweighs the potential rescue. As Maran HaRav Kook wrote, the principle of "ve'chai ba'hem" ('and you shall live by them', i.e., the words of the Torah), from which we learn that pikuach nefesh (saving lives) overrides all commandments in the Torah, does not apply during warfare, since the laws for the public differ from those for the individual. And for the sake of sustaining the public, individuals must be willing to enter danger (Mishpat Kohen 143). Based on this, the responsa Tzitz Eliezer (13:100) wrote that also the principle of "chayecha kodmim le'chayeh chavercha" ("your life takes precedence over your friend's life") does not apply during warfare, "rather, all war recruits are obligated, together as one person, to sacrifice, each one his soul, for the sake of saving the life of his fellow. And this too is included in the laws of the public, and under the guidelines of national conduct and ordinances."

Similarly, the commandment to conquer the Land of Israel, and thereby defend it, overrides the preservation of individual lives, since the Torah did not intend for us to rely on miracles. And since there are casualties in every war, the commandment to conquer the Land obligates us to endanger lives on its behalf (Minchat Chinukh 525, 614; Mishpat Kohen p. 327). All the more so, there is a commandment to fight in order to defend sections of the Land of Israel already under our control.

Spilling Blood – Be Killed, Rather Than Transgress From the general commandment, we continue to the specific commandment to sacrifice one's life rather than transgress one of the three severe prohibitions – idol worship, forbidden relations, and spilling blood. We will deal here with spilling blood. If evildoers present a person with two options: either murder so-and-so, or be killed – one should choose death, rather than transgress, and murder another person.

The Talmud relates an incident of a man who came before Rabba, head of the Tumpedita academy, with a dire question: the city ruler commanded me to murder so-and-so, and if I do not do so, he will kill me; is it permitted for me to murder him in order to save my life? Rabba responded: be killed, and do not kill, for who is to say that your blood is redder – perhaps that man's blood is redder?! (Sanhedrin 74a).

Even When It Seems His Life Takes Precedence Even when it seems to a person "that his blood is redder than his fellow's," meaning, that his life takes precedence over his fellow's life because he is young and healthy, while being told to kill an elderly man who no longer recognizes those around him – even in such a case, he should be killed, and not kill that person. This is because the reasoning of "who is to say your blood is redder" is not the reason that a person must surrender himself to be killed rather than kill his fellow – it is merely illustrating the logic of the law. The law itself stems from the fact that murder is absolutely prohibited. Thus, under no circumstances may a person save himself by murdering his fellow (Mishpat Kohen 143 p. 319).

Surrender Your Fellow or We Will Kill You Also, when one is not being asked to murder a person with his own hands but to cause his death – he should be killed, rather than transgress. For example, if they demanded that he surrender a person to criminals or enemies, or reveal to them where he is hiding so they can kill him – he should be killed, and not surrender. This is

because accessories to bloodshed (abetting murder) also fall under “be killed, rather than transgress” (Razah, Nimukei Yosef, Ramban, Chinukh 296). Similarly, if they demanded he provide a weapon so they can kill someone, without which they would be unable to kill him – he should be killed, rather than surrender the weapon (Ritva, Radbaz 4:92). And similarly, if they demanded he throw someone to a predatory animal thereby causing his death – he should be killed, and not throw him (Minchat Chinukh 296:25). Likewise, if they demanded he testify false testimony in order to execute someone – he should be killed, and not testify false testimony (Chatam Sofer, Ketubot 19a).

A Group is Demanded to Surrender One for Execution If a group of people are demanded to surrender one of them for execution, no matter who, under the threat that if they do not hand one over, they will kill them all – they should all be killed, and not hand one over for killing (Tosefta Terumot 7:23). This is because the prohibition of murder is absolute, and even to save many, it is forbidden to transgress the prohibition of murder. Some halachic authorities permit them to cast lots to decide whom to surrender (Tiferet LeMoshe, Yoreh Deah 157). Others forbid casting lots to decide whom to surrender, since only via ruach ha’kodesh (Divine spirit) is it permitted to employ lots (Chadrei Deah 157, Nachal Yitzchak, Choshen Mishpat 87:3). The Meiri wrote that if they demand handing one over for execution, and if not, they will kill everyone, and there is present a treifah person – i.e., one who sustained an injury to a vital organ that will likely cause his death within a year – it is permitted to hand him over in order to save the rest (brought in Shayarei Kneset HaGedolah notes to Beit Yosef Yoreh Deah 157:36). However, actively killing him is forbidden – Degel Reuven; Tzitz Eliezer 9:17).

One Who Sacrifices Himself to Save His Comrades is Called Holy When Gentiles demand one person for execution or else they will kill everyone, it is permitted for one of them to volunteer to surrender himself in order to save his comrades, similar to the self-sacrifice of the martyrs of Lod. The daughter of a Roman ruler was found murdered, and the Jews of Lod were threatened that if the murderer was not surrendered, they would all be killed. Lulianus and Papius volunteered, saying, we killed her; they were executed, saving all their brethren (Rashi Bava Batra 10b). Our Sages said of the Lod martyrs: “Those executed by the government – no one can stand in their enclosure” (Pesachim 50a).

It is Permitted to Surrender One Like Sheba Ben Bichri If the demand is to surrender a specific person for execution like Sheba ben Bichri, and if not, they will kill everyone – they should surrender him, and not be killed (Yerushalmi Terumot 8:4). Sheba ben Bichri was a scoundrel who incited Israel against King David, and when Yoav the army commander waged war against him, he fled to the city of Abel Beit Maacha, and fortified himself there. Yoav laid siege on the city, with the goal of destroying it, and killing its inhabitants who had assisted the rebellion. “A wise woman called out from the city ‘Listen, listen! Tell Yoav to come here so I can talk to him!’ He approached her, and the woman said ‘Are you Yoav?’ ‘I am’, he replied. She said to him ‘Listen to what your handmaid has to say’. ‘I am listening’, he said... ‘I am one of those who seek the welfare of the faithful in Israel. But you seek to bring death upon a mother city in Israel! Why should you destroy the LORD’s possession?’” Yoav replied, “Far be it, far be it from me to destroy or to ruin! Not at all! But a certain man from the hill country of Ephraim, named Sheba son of Bichri, has rebelled against King David. Just hand him alone over to us, and I will withdraw from the city.” The woman assured Yoav, “His head shall be thrown over the wall to you.” The woman came to all the people with her clever plan; and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri and threw it down to Yoav. He then sounded the horn; all the men dispersed to their homes, and Yoav returned to the king in Jerusalem” (II Samuel 20:16-22).

When the Gentiles Demand a Specific Person who does Not Deserve Execution In the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan, even if the one whom the Gentiles are demanding to be surrendered is not legally liable for execution, since on account of him the Gentiles are coming upon the whole group, they

may surrender him in order to be saved. In contrast, according to Reish Lakish, only if the one they request deserves death like Sheba ben Bichri, may he be surrendered. But if he does not deserve death, it is forbidden to surrender him, thereby causing his death in order to save themselves. The halachic authorities are divided over whom the law follows.

The Story with Ola ben Koshev and Elijah’s Revelation The Yerushalmi (Terumot 8:4) tells of Ola ben Koshev who fled from the government and hid in Lod, near Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. The Romans surrounded Lod, and threatened that if he is not surrendered, they would destroy the city. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi went to Ola ben Koshev and convinced him to surrender himself. Before then, Elijah the prophet was accustomed to frequently reveal himself to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and from then, on ceased to appear. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi fasted several fasts for Elijah to return and reveal himself. Elijah appeared and argued “Do I reveal myself to informers?!” Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi replied: ‘But did I not act legally, for if someone specific is sought he should be surrendered?’ Elijah responded: “But that is not the way of the pious.”

Some halachic authorities say the law follows Rabbi Yochanan, that it is permitted to surrender the one sought by the Gentiles despite not being legally liable for execution, and as Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi practiced (Ran, Ritva, et al). Others say the law follows Reish Lakish, and Ola ben Koshev would have been permitted to surrender, since he was liable for execution by the government (Rambam 16).

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Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha - Chanukah For the week ending 14 December 2019 / 16 Kislev 5780

Chanuka: A Bochur's Perennial Predicament

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

One fascinating issue that affects many thousands annually is the quite contemporary question: Where is the proper place for a Yeshiva Bochur to light his Menorah? Since the phenomenon of having a yeshiva where students not only eat but also dorm is relatively recent, there is not much early Rabbinic or halachic literature on this exact topic. Bochurim are not really guests, and might be getting their spending money from their parents - who are usually paying their tuition; yet, many do not live at home. So, they do not seem to fit into any clear-cut category. What is a striving student to do? A ‘Fiery’ Debate Contemporary authorities use precedents as clues to ascertain the proper solution for the Bochur Dilemma. One relevant debate is that of where a guest who generally eats at another’s house but “comes home to roost” is supposed to light his Chanukah candles. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 677, 2), quoting the Tur and Rosh (See Gemara Shabbos 23a, passage about Rav Sheishes), states that a guest (Achsanoi) is required to light his own Menorah, or at least contribute to the host’s Chanukah candle expenses. However, if this guest, even a son who’s hanging out at his parents’ place, has his own apartment (that opens to a public thoroughfare) where he sleeps, then he must light his Menorah there. The reason is because of Chashad, suspicion. Since passersby know that our Achsanoi has his own pad, and will notice whether or not there was a lit Menorah there, they will suspect that he did not light a Menorah at all, not realizing that he eats his meals out and possibly would have kindled where he ate. Accordingly, it would seem that the place where one sleeps is considered his key “dwelling place”. However, the Rema (ad loc.),[1] citing the Rashba (Shu”t HaRashba vol. 1, 542),[2] asserts that one should light his Menorah in the place where he eats. He explains that “nowadays” since we light indoors,[3] the ‘Pursumei Nissa’ engendered by kindling the Chanukah lights, is no longer actually meant for random passersby, but rather for the people living in the house. If so, there is no reason to be worried about Chashad, as his family and friends would know that he eats in one place and sleeps in another. Therefore, he rules that such an Achsanoi would light his Menorah where he eats, and not where he sleeps. Many great authorities, including the Bach, Magen Avraham, Taz, Pri Chadash, Pri Megadim, Chayei Adam, Aruch Hashulchan, and Mishna Berura,[4] all agree with the Rema, that a guest who eats in one place yet sleeps in another, should light his Menorah where he eats. The Taz adds proof to this from the halachos of Eruvei Chatzeiros, where we find that the main dwelling place of one who sleeps in one location but eats in another, is considered where he eats. [See Gemara Eruvin (72b - 74b) and Shulchan Aruch and main commentaries (Orach Chaim 370, 5).] Accordingly, it would seem that a Yeshiva Bochur might fit into this category, as he (hopefully) eats in a different location than

where he sleeps. So where should he light? The Yeshiva’s dining room or in his dira / dorm room?

Dura Daze Several authorities, including the Chazon Ish, Rav Aharon Kotler, the Steipler Gaon, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky,[5] mv”r Rav Yaakov Blau,[6] and Rav Asher Weiss,[7] maintain that the Rema’s ruling still holds true and rule that the proper place for a Bochor to light the Menorah is the Yeshiva’s dining room.

However, many other contemporary decisors question the application of the halacha of a guest pertaining to the average Bochor, due to several reasons, including: A Bochor’s “dwelling place”, where he feels “at home” and considers his own personal place, storing all of his belongings, etc. is in his dira / dorm room, and not in the yeshiva’s communal dining room. Students have no personal stake in the dining room; they eat and leave, similar to a restaurant. Therefore, many consider it a stretch to consider a dining room as a Bochor’s “prime dwelling place”. Many Yeshiva dining rooms are locked throughout the day and only open mealtimes. How can it possibly be considered someone’s personal place if he is denied entry most of the time? It is possible that a Yeshiva Bochor’s din is more comparable to the case of the shepherd (or talmid) that lives in the field yet eats at someone’s house, that for him, regarding the halachos of Eruvei Techumin, the Techum follows the place where he sleeps, and not where he eats.[8] For those living in Eretz Yisrael, nowadays most people do light the Chanukah licht outdoors, potentially making the Rosh’s shitta once again the core ruling. Ergo, Chashad might once again be a problem. Therefore, one living in Eretz Yisrael should need to light where he sleeps.[9] Due to these concerns, many contemporary decisors, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, the Minchas Yitzchak, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, Rav Binyomin Zilber, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer, Rav Nossan Gestetner, Rav Menashe Klein, the Rivevos Efraim, and the Nitei Gavriel,[10] all rule that the main dwelling of a Bochor is his dira / dorm room, and that that is the preferred place where he should light his Menorah. Yet, several of these Poskim assert that in order not to come into a halachic dispute and to better satisfy all opinions, that it is preferable that the Bochorim should eat at least one meal a day in their dorm room. Others advocate contributing to someone lighting in the dining room’s Chanukah candle expenses, or lighting again there without a bracha.

Safety First Yet, it must be stressed that many of these Poskim qualify their ruling, explaining that if the hanhala of the Yeshiva forbids lighting Menorahs in the dorm due to the ever possible threat of fire, R”L, and instead orders the Bochorim to light in the dining room, then that is indeed what they must do.[11] Most Yeshivos, especially in Chutz La’aretz, practically follow this minhag, and lighting in the dining room is de rigueur.

Sefardic Illumination Sefardic Bochorim have a bit of a different issue. Sefardim predominantly follow the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling of only the head of the household, functioning as an agent of sorts, lighting one Menorah for the entire family.[12] Poskim are divided as to whether these Sefardic Bochorim who eat and sleep in Yeshiva are considered part of their father’s household or not. Many contemporary authorities, including Rav Ovadia Yosef, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul, the Tefilla L’Moshe, Rav Ezra Attiah, and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach,[13] rule that a Sefardic Bochor may not light in his Yeshiva at all, as he is exempted by his father lighting at home.[14] However, others Sefardic decisors, including the Yaskil Avdi, Rav Shalom Mashash, and Rav Yehuda Adess,[15] maintain that a Bochor living in Yeshiva is deemed ‘his own man’ and therefore even a Sefardic Bochor would be required to light his own Menorah, or join in with someone else lighting (preferably an Ashkenazic Bochor) in his Yeshiva.[16] This is also how many Ashkenazic poskim ruled for Sefardim, including the Chazon Ish, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, the Az Nidberu, and the Shevet Halevi. Rav Wosner adds that it is nevertheless preferable that these Sefardic Bochorim should have kavanna specifically to not be yotzei with their fathers’ lighting.[17] Every Bochor should ascertain from his Rav or Rosh Yeshiva which opinion the Yeshiva follows before Chanukah, to mitigate any potential halachic mix-ups. The Gemara teaches, and is later codified in halacha, that someone who is scrupulous withkindling Ner Shabbos and Ner Chanukah will merit having sons who are Talmidei Chachamim.[18] Therefore, it certainly seems worthwhile and apropos that our budding Talmidei Chachamim should be meticulous in making sure that their lighting of the Menorah is truly “mehadrin min hamehadrin”. [1] Also in his Darchei Moshe (Orach Chaim 677, 1).

[2] See the Taz’s (Orach Chaim 677, 2) explanation of the Rashba’s intent. Although others argue that this was not necessarily the Rashba’s true intent, nonetheless, in the words of the Pri HaSadeh (Shu”t vol. 2, 70) “we need to pasken like the Rashba, according to the Taz’s understanding”. [3] See Darchei Moshe (Orach Chaim 671, 9), Rema (ad loc. end 8), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 54), and Buir Halacha (677 s.v. pesach). [4] Bach (Orach Chaim 677 s.v. uma”sh HaRosh), Magen Avraham (ad loc 6 & 7), Taz (ad loc 2), Pri Chadash (ad loc.), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eshei Avraham 5), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 154, 32), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc 3), and Mishna Berura (ad loc 11). The Rema, as well as several others, maintain that in their times, even the Rosh would agree to the Rashba’s ruling. [5] These decisors’ opinions are cited in Ma’aseh Ish (vol. 4, pg. 132), Shu”t Teshuvav V’Hanugos (vol. 2, 342, 11), Orchoh Rabbeinu (vol. 3, pg. 25 – 26, new edition 5775, vol. 3, pg. 152 – 154; however, it is known that although ruling this way lemaaseh, the Steipler Gaon was not so happy with the setup of many Yeshivah dining rooms, explaining that they are too much like restaurants), Rav Shimon Eider’s Sefer Hilchos Chanukah (pg. 37, footnote 32), and Emes L’Yaakov (on Tur / Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 677, footnote 591). A similar ruling is given by the Pri HaSadeh (Shu”t vol. 2, 70). However, the Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon qualify their ruling, maintaining that if the Bochorim can eat two of their daily meals in their dorm rooms during Chanukah, then it would be preferable for them to light there. [On the other hand, see footnote 10, citing Rav Moshe Sternbuch’s concern with this.] See also Rav Eliyahu Schlesinger’s Mitzvas Ner Ish U’Beito (vol. 1, Ch. 5, 10, and footnote 34) who writes that the ikar follows those who know how a bochor should light in the Yeshiva’s dining room; yet, he concludes in the footnote that there are many valid opinions and therefore “d’avid k’nur avid, d’avid k’nur avid”, whichever shitta one decides to follow, he is acting correctly. [6] Chovav HaDard (Neiros Chanukah, Ch. 1, footnote 59; at length). After weighing the issue, Rav Blau explains that Yeshiva Bochorim are not the true Baal HaBritim, as technically speaking, the Yeshiva hachula can expel them if it wishes to do so. Hence, they are considered on some level as Bnei Bayis of the Rosh Yeshiva. Therefore, he maintains that the whole Yeshiva campus is considered one living place for all students, and they therefore should light where they eat. He adds that if one wants to davka light where he sleeps, he should have in mind not to be yotzei with the lighting in the dining room, as me ikar hadin, since all students are all considered Bnei Bayis, only one of them technically has to light. Yet, it should be noted that Rav Blau zt”l did not address a case where the students rent their own private dira that is not part of Yeshiva’s campus. In such a scenario, it seems that he would argue that the Bochorim should light where they sleep, as then, they are not

considered true Bnei Bayis of the Rosh Yeshiva. [7] Kuntress Minchas Asher B’Hilchos Chanukah (5772, 5). He maintains that from the words of the original Rishonim grappling with this issue (the Rosh and Rashba ibid.), it certainly seems that they would cover the case of a Yeshiva Bochor, as even in those days, one who always eats his main meal at his friend’s house does not have a set seat at his friend’s house, and still eats small meals and snacks in his own place. And even so, the Rishonim still maintain the place of eating’s preference over the place of lodging for Chanukah candle kindling. Accordingly, the Yeshiva dining room is still the preferred place to light. Rav Weiss concludes that even so, if one cannot fulfill the Mitzvah with all of its nuances properly in the dining room, then it is preferable that he should light where he sleeps. [8] Case based on Gemara Ervin 73a. See Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 409, end 7), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 14), Machatzis HaShekel (ad loc.), and Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eshei Avraham 14). However, Rav Asher Weiss (Kuntress Minchas Asher B’Hilchos Chanukah 5772, 5, 2) points out that the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 370, 10), when citing this ruling, concludes with “Tarich l’yun”, which both the Machatzis HaShekel (ad loc. s.v. mashma) and Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eshei Avraham, end 10) understand to mean that the Magen Avraham himself was unsure if this rule that applies to Eruvei Techumin would apply for Eruvei Chatzerot. If so, continues Rav Weiss, it certainly would not by Neiros Chanukah! [9] It is well known that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt”l maintained this very strongly, that nowadays in Eretz Yisrael, with no problems regarding lighting outdoors, one must do so. Consequently, Chashad becomes a problem again and therefore one must light where he sleeps. Recently, a talmid of Rav Elyashiv’s ruled for a visiting relative in Eretz Yisrael who was eating out over Shabbos Chanukah, that although the ikar place for lighting Shabbos candles is where one eats [see Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 263, 9), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (ad loc. 1), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 5, 14), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (57, 8), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 3 & 4), and Mishna Berura (ad loc. 40 & 41)], nevertheless, one must first light the Chanukah Menorah where he was sleeping. [10] Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu”t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah vol. 3, 14, 5; Orach Chaim vol. 4, 70, 5; and Orach Chaim vol. 6, 45), the Minchas Yitzchak (Shu”t vol. 7, 48), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Mo’adim vol. 1, Ch. 14, 5, pg. 273–275 and Ma’adanei Shlomo, Mo’adim vol. 118–119), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (cited in Shvus Yitzchak on Hilchos Chanukah pg. 112; also in Ashrei Halach, Orach Chaim vol. 3, pg. 269 – 270, 36), Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Shu”t Shevet Halevi vol. 3, 83), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu”t Teshuvav V’Hanugos vol. 2, 157, 7 s.v. u’l’yanan & 342, 11; Mo’adim U’Zmanim vol. 6, 88, and vol. 8, Lekutei Ha’aros to vol. 6, 88; in the latter source he adds that it should not help if one changes his usual eating place just for Chanukah, as the halacha should follow his usual year-round routine as that would be one’s ikar keveyana dira), Rav Binyomin Zilber (Shu”t Az Nidberu vol. 5, 38, 2), Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer (Shu”t Even Yisrael vol. 9, l’yananim, 51; see also Halichos Even Yisrael, Moadim vol. 2, pg. 346, 12), Rav Nossan Gestetner (Shu”t L’Horos Nossan vol. 6, 44, 5–6), Rav Menashe Klein (Shu”t Mishnah Halachos vol. 11, 538), the Rivevos Efraim (Shu”t vol. 4, 163, 2), and Nitei Gavriel (on Chanukah pg. 16) [11] See Emes L’Yaakov, Halichos Shlomo, Shu”t Az Nidberu, Shu”t Shevet Halevi, Shu”t Mishnah Halachos, and Mo’adim U’Zmanim (ibid.). The reason is that according to several shittos, the dining room is the preferred locale for lighting; and even according to the majority who argue, nevertheless, most hold that it is still second best. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu”t Igros Moshe ibid.) writes that it is preferable that different Bochorim take turns watching the Menorahs in the dorms to make sure that a fire does not break out [12] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 671, 2), based on Tosafos (Shvus 21b s.v. hamehadrin). See also Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Vayeishev, Hilchos Chanukah 16) who writes that the minhag in Baghdad was even for a married son living in his own wing of his parent’s house to first hear his father’s brachos and lighting and then light himself in his private quarters – without a bracha, as he was already yotzei with his father. [13] Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu”t Yechaveh Daas vol. 6, 43), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Darchei Halacha Glosses to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 139, 28), Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Kovetz Zichron Yehuda vol. 1, pg. 104), the Tefilla L’Moshe (Shu”t vol. 2, 52), Rav Ezra Attiah (quoted in several of the above sources), and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo and Ma’adanei Shlomo ibid.). [14] Interestingly, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Chazon Ovadia on Hilchos Chanukah pg. 150 – 151; also cited in Yalkut Yosef on Moadim pg. 231, 2) and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo ibid., footnote 22; however, he prefers that the Sefardi Bochor join into someone else’s lighting) maintain that even if a Sefardi Bochor is in a different country and time zone than his parents (ex. an American Sefardi boy learning in Eretz Yisrael), he nevertheless should still not light his own Menorah, as he is still considered part of their household, since the father is still sending him allowance, paying his tuition and expenses etc. However, most other poskim (including Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul and Rav Mordechai Eliyahu) do not agree, and in this instance maintaining that the Bochor is required to light his own Menorah. See sefer Toras HaYeshiva (Ch. 12) at length. [15] Shu”t Yaskil Avdi (vol. 7, Hashmatos 8), Rav Shalom Mashash (cited in R’ Moshe Hartz’s sefer Mikraei Kodesh, Hilchos Chanukah Ch. 9, 26, footnote 93; see also Shu”t Teshuvav V’Hanugos, Orach Chaim 7), and Rav Yehuda Adess (Sefer Shimeit Chanukah, 14) [16] Accordingly, all the Sefardim can get together and light one Menorah. Alternatively, the Sefardi Bochor might fulfill his obligation by the Menorah lighting in the Beis HaMidrash (see Shu”t Yechaveh Daas ibid.). [17] Chazon Ish (Ma’aseh Ish vol. 4, pg. 131), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (cited in Shvus Yitzchak ibid.), the Az Nidberu (ibid.), and Shevet Halevi (Kovetz M’Beis Levi on Moadim pg. 118, 3, [18] See Gemara Shabbos (23b); Rashi (ad loc. s.v. banim), Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos Ch. 5, 1), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 363, 1), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 13), and Mishna Berura (ad loc. 2). See also Shu”t Hadolaks Ner Chanukah from the Raavad’s son. There are additional ways of understanding this passage as well; for example, see Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 264, 38).

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BY Rabbi Moshe Hauer 07 DEC 2023

On August 31, 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave an epic address at Harvard University in which he said “character is higher than intellect.” Those five words should guide the presidents of Harvard, Penn, and MIT and their colleagues as they attempt to dig themselves out from their shameless and disastrous testimony to Congress and find the path forward for American “higher” education.

Decades before the current tsunami of university antisemitism, Harvard professor Dr. Robert Coles used Emerson’s phrase to diagnose the problem he was already observing in universities. “Institutions originally founded to teach their students how to become good and decent, as well as broadly and deeply literate, may abandon the first mission to concentrate on a driven, narrow book learning—a course of study in no way intent on making a connection between ideas and theories on one hand and, on the other, our lives as we actually live them.”

Knowledge must never be divorced from values. The United States is an international leader in science, technology, and medicine, yet we consider our primary contribution to the world the American values of human dignity, justice, and freedom. When we worry about China or Russia winning the race to Mars or to energy independence, it is not only our national pride that is at stake. We are fearful of seeing that powerful knowledge in the wrong hands.

We have that same fear today as we observe the hateful rhetoric and chants filling the classrooms and quads of America’s leading universities. We are horrified by the character and values of those claiming the knowledge and pedigree provided by these institutions and we are fearful of what their future as civic, scientific, and political leaders portends for this country.

American Jews have been at the vanguard of fighting for liberal values. Jews will be the last to shut down academic debate or to exclude anyone’s perspective from the classroom. Jewish tradition celebrates vigorous intellectual argument as essential to the pursuit of truth, but it insists that knowledge must never be divorced from values. The Talmud (Kidushin 31b) synthesized these ideals elegantly and practically when it noted that father and son, teacher and student, may argue like enemies in their determined pursuit of truth but will not leave the study hall until their love for each other is made clear. That vision of academic debate bears not the slightest resemblance to the poisonous rhetoric of teachers and students that have made these university environments hostile to Jews. As the prophet

The Chanukah candles provide a stark reminder that knowledge alone casts a dark and menacing shadow but when fused with values provides much light. That light can chase away the darkness and confusion currently enveloping our university campuses and their leadership and move them away from their spineless and valueless equivocation to instead guide their institutions to provide a genuinely higher education, staffed and led by men and women who are not just good teachers but good examples, educating their students to be good and decent, and building a future that reflects the prioritization of character over intellect.

It happens in the realm of men's and women's ritual roles as well. Hashem created women and men equal. But in our small mortal minds, equality means homogeneity. Men and women must be exactly the same. And so, in certain non-traditional ideological camps, efforts have been made to ensure

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I cringe at the blind leading the blind and then searching in dictionaries for the truth.

Unfortunately, authenticity, outside the source of total truth, is nowhere to be found. Newspapers (except for this one) are filled with lies. Broadcasts are filled with deviations. Images are altered, so that they speak falsehoods. Books are filled with fake history. And of course, periodicals are filled with fake current events. So where can we find out what authentic means? My father used to use an expression, “Ah Russishe emes. A Russian truth.” The reason behind the expression was that the official Soviet newspaper was called Pravda. In Russian, Pravda (правда) means truth. The Yiddish version of the paper was called פֿראַוַדאָ means truth. The Yiddish version of the paper was called “Emes,” the Hebrew word for truth. The problem is that instead of spelling it on the masthead as alef, mem, tov, they spelled it in a cockamamie, Russian perversion, ayin, mem, ayin, samach. And thus, even their name was a lie.

People are searching for the truth, but it eludes them. But the lies they buy, sometimes in innocence, become their mantra of their search for world peace and tikkun olam. As much as it is hard to believe, the Jewish neshamos, pleading for Palestinians and protesting alongside Arab-influenced brutes, certainly think that they are altruistic, peace-loving saviors. But once the authenticators are truly fabricators, the stories concocted and the narratives recited become (for lack of a better word and equally abhorrent) their gospel. An askan once requested to get a certain mission accomplished with the Russian government through a group of heretics who claimed to want to help the kehillah. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik allegedly rejected the idea and countered with the following story: There was a group of conniving thieves who came up with a daring plot. They dressed up like policemen and government officials, with badges and uniforms, and went to a very wealthy man who was known to store his cash in a safe. They told him that they suspect that there were counterfeiters on the loose and they had to verify his cash to ensure that the bills were not fraudulent. Although he was not suspected of being a counterfeiter, they said, they would have to inspect his cash. They issued him an official receipt for 5,000 rubles and said they would give it to the official bank where the money would be inspected and certified. All he would have to do is wait 24 hours, go to the bank, present the receipt, and he would get his cash back.

The man complied. After all, these men were policemen and government agents.

The next day, he went to the bank and presented the receipt for his cash and the certificate of authenticity, but all he received from the banker was a puzzled look.

“What are you talking about? What is this paper?”

The man was indignant. “Don’t play games! This paper is the receipt. I got it from the police for giving you all the cash!”

The banker shook his head. “Nobody brought us cash. You must be insane!”

The fellow was flabbergasted. “What do you mean? The police came and they brought you cash!”

“We never received any cash from policemen. Your receipt is worthless!”

The man began to scream. “How could you say that? They were dressed like policemen! They must have been policemen.”

The banker sighed. “You fool! They may have been dressed up like policemen. They may have even carried guns like policemen, but they were not policemen. They were fakers.”

Rav Chaim explained the obvious: “They may look like askanim and dress up like them as well, but they are not the ones to help us. They will do more harm than good.”

People are indeed for authenticity, but the places in which they look are mired in misrepresentations. And the purveyors of authenticity are dealing deceit.

I am reminded of the story that Rav Noach Weinberg used to relate: A young man entered the portals of Yeshiva Aish HaTorah for a few days and then decided to leave in order to pursue his quest across the Land of Israel. After two weeks of spiritual hunting, including stops at shuls in Meah Shearim and visits to holy sites in Tiveriah and Tzefas, the student returned to Yerushalayim and headed straight back to the yeshiva. “Rabbi Weinberg,” he

exclaimed, “I spent two weeks travelling the length and breadth of Israel in search of spirituality, and I want you to know that I found absolutely nothing!”

Rav Weinberg just nodded. “You say you traveled the entire country and did not find any spirituality?”

“Yes, sir,” came the resounding reply. “None whatsoever!”

“Let me ask you,” Rav Weinberg continued, “what is your opinion about the Israeli Bafoofsticks?”

“Bafoofsticks?” the student countered. “What’s a Bafoofstick?”

“That’s not the point,” the rabbi responded. “I just want to know how you feel about them.”

“About what?”

“The Bafoofsticks.”

The young man looked at Rav Weinberg as if the learned man had lost his mind, and tried to be as respectful as he could under the circumstances.

“Rabbi,” he exclaimed in frustration, “I’d love to tell you how the Bafoofsticks were. I’d even spend the whole day discussing Bafoofsticks with you. But frankly, I honestly have no idea what in the world a Bafoofstick is! I wouldn’t even know a Bafoofstick if I saw one!”

Rav Weinberg smiled, for he had accomplished his objective. “Tell me,” he said softly, “do you know what spirituality is?”

Merriam-Webster may be dealing their deceit as they collaborate in defining authenticity, but there is only one place that is the source of authentic truth.

That is the words and outlook of Torah.

Merriam-Webster can translate and define. They can even name it “Word of the Year.” But do they know what authenticity really is?

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The Torah mentions that the caravan on which Yosef was “shipped” to Mitzrayim was laden with pleasant-smelling fragrances...

When Do We Not Make a Beracha on a Fragrance? By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: My neighbor has a wonderfully fragrant garden. Do I recite a beracha whenever I visit her and walk through the garden, and, if so, which beracha?

Question #2: On my way to work I pass a spice factory that has a wonderful aroma. Do I recite a beracha every day as I drive by?

Question #3: Someone told me not to recite a beracha on perfume today because the fragrances are synthetic. Is this true?

Question #4: I just adore the smell of turpentine! Do I make a beracha when I smell it?

Answer: In general one should not benefit from a pleasant aroma without first reciting a beracha. Nevertheless, not all fragrances require a beracha before we smell them.

Furthermore, when a beracha is not required, it is forbidden to recite one.

Fragrances upon which one may not recite a beracha fall under three general categories:

I. Forbidden fragrances

II. Fragrances whose purpose is not for pleasurable smelling.

III. Fragrances whose source no longer exists. This would include a case where you put the fragrance into a closed bag, but can still smell the residual aroma in the air outside the bag (Biur Halacha 217:3), or when you enjoy the smell of an empty besamim box.

I. FORBIDDEN FRAGRANCES One does not recite a beracha on a fragrance that it is forbidden to smell, such as a scent used in idol worship, sorcery or the perfume of an ervah (Rambam, Hilchos Berachos 9:7, based on Berachos 53a). Smelling something used for idol worship is prohibited because one may not have any benefit from idols. Since we are not permitted to smell these fragrances, it is understood why Chazal ruled that one should not make a beracha on them.

One does not recite a beracha before smelling these prohibited fragrances even if a small amount is mixed into a potpourri of other fragrances (Biur Halacha 217:8; cf. Gra ad loc. who implies that if most of the fragrance is from a different source, one should recite a beracha before smelling it. However this is very strange, because the Torah forbids smelling the entire fragrance whenever the prohibited source is discernable.)

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I PASS AN IDOL AND SMELL INCENSE? Although this is unusual in America, there are many places in the world where this is a common shaylah. May I walk down this street if I might smell a forbidden fragrance?

According to halacha, I am permitted to walk down the street provided I try not to appreciate the fragrance. The Gemara discusses a category called Hana’ah haba’ah lo

le'adam bal karcho, "benefit that a person receives against his will." Although a person has control over what he eats, he has more limited control over what he smells or hears. If someone is exposed to a pleasurable fragrance that is forbidden according to halacha, there is no violation involved, provided he does not try to enjoy the aroma (Pesachim 25b).

II. FRAGRANCES WHOSE PURPOSE IS NOT TO PROVIDE THE PLEASURE OF

SMELLING "One does not make a beracha on a fragrance unless it was made for the pleasure of smelling" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 217:2). One recites a beracha on a fragrance only when it is avida le'reicha, literally, "made for fragrance." In the words of the Chazon Ish (Orach Chayim 35:1), "Anything that it not specifically meant to smell is not considered a fragrance." Thus, the definition of the word besamim is something made to provide pleasurable scent and does not include aromas not meant for smelling.

There are several headings of aromatic fragrances that are not for the pleasure of smelling. They include:

A. Deodorizing fragrances

B. Fragrances whose current purpose is not for their aroma. C. Fragrances whose purpose is to provide aroma to something else.

D. Items that most people do not consider fragrances. IIA. DEODORIZING

FRAGRANCES One does not recite a beracha before smelling a fragrance whose purpose is to neutralize a bad odor, such as a room deodorizer, deodorant, or oil rubbed on the skin to dispel malodor (Berachos 53a). Even though these items may be highly aromatic, since their purpose is not for enjoyment but to neutralize an unpleasant odor, we do not recite a beracha.

One does not recite a beracha before smelling a room deodorizer, even if he enjoys the aroma and even if he sprayed it in a room without a bad odor or brings it to his nose for a pleasant whiff. Since the deodorizer was made expressly to dispel malodor and not for enjoyment, it is not considered besamim even if the individual enjoys smelling it (Shaar Hatziyun 217:16, based on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 297:2).

USING OILS AS A DEODORIZER Some people use pleasant-smelling essential oils to combat malodors. Does one make a beracha before smelling these fragrances?

It depends on why one smells them. If they are functioning as deodorants, then one does not recite a beracha, whereas someone who uses the oil with the intent of enjoying its aroma does recite the appropriate beracha before smelling it (Berachos 53a with Rashi). (See my other articles on this subject on the website RabbiKaganoff.com to know which beracha one recites.)

WHAT DETERMINES WHETHER A FRAGRANCE IS BESAMIM OR A

DEODORIZER? Some items are obviously deodorants or deodorizers and are not besamim. However, the essential oils we mentioned and other fragrances may sometimes be used to deodorize and sometimes for pleasure. What determines whether this particular fragrance is besamim over which we recite a beracha?

The Chazon Ish (Orach Chayim 35:2) explains that the determining factor is why you brought the fragrance to this location. If you brought it for pleasure, it is besamim and you recite a beracha. If you brought the fragrance to neutralize an odor, you do not recite a beracha, even if you are smelling it because you enjoy it.

However, if you removed some of the fragrance permanently to enjoy its aroma, this part becomes besamim and warrants a beracha. The Chazon Ish uses the example of someone who applies fragrant oil to his or her skin. Even if the person originally used the oil to deodorize, if he subsequently sprinkled some onto a handkerchief to enjoy the aroma, he recites a beracha on the sprinkled oil.

IIB. INCIDENTAL TO PURPOSE We learned above that one does not recite a beracha before smelling a fragrance whose current purpose is not for its aroma. What does this mean?

Imagine yourself outside the production facility of the world's largest manufacturer of flavors and fragrances. The aroma outside this plant is indescribable -- I can tell you because I have been there. Yet the halacha is that one does not recite a beracha on this fragrance. Why not?

The halacha is that someone who enters a spice merchant's store recites a beracha because the owner wants potential customers to smell his wares so that they will make a purchase (Berachos 53a). If these items are in his warehouse where he is not soliciting customers, one does not recite a beracha (Magen Avraham 217:1).

Why do you recite a beracha on the spices in his store but not those in his warehouse? Because the fragrances in the store are there to be smelled and enjoyed; the ones in the warehouse are not. Thus, the fragrances in the warehouse are not avida le'reicha and are not besamim. Thus, smelling the most fantastic aroma in the world, from the production facility of the world's largest manufacturer of pleasant flavors and fragrances, does not warrant a beracha. These fragrances do not qualify as besamim since they are not there for people to enjoy their aroma.

THE SPICE MERCHANT HIMSELF Does the spice seller himself recite a beracha upon entering his own shop? He does not enter intending to smell fragrant spices in

order to decide what to buy. He enters because it is his livelihood. Can a fragrance be avida le'reicha for one person but not for another?

Poskim dispute this question, many ruling that the merchant should recite a beracha since the fragrance has the status of avida le'reicha. Others contend that, for the merchant, the fragrances are merchandise and not avida le'reicha, and therefore he should not recite a beracha (Mishnah Berurah 217:4; Shaar Hatziyun 217:7).

Other poskim present a different reason why the merchant should not recite a beracha on the fragrance. The Taz (217:1) contends that someone recites a beracha over a fragrance only when they demonstrate a desire to smell it, such as by picking up the fragrance and raising it to their nose. The customer who enters the shop recites a beracha because he walked into the shop intending to smell and purchase fragrances -- thus, his entry is itself demonstration that he wants to smell the spices; therefore, he recites a beracha. However, the owner's entry does not demonstrate intent to smell the product. According to this opinion, someone who makes a delivery to a perfumery does not recite a beracha.

On the other hand, most poskim contend that a fragrance that qualifies as avida le'reicha requires a beracha even when not trying to smell it (Pri Megadim MZ 217:1; Shaar Hatziyun 217:4). Later in the article, I will suggest an approach whereby a safek beracha can be avoided.

The same dispute also applies to the neighbors of the perfumery, its workers, and those making deliveries to the shop. According to the Taz's opinion, only the customers recite a beracha on the magnificent fragrance of the shop, since they come to smell and purchase. Also, if you entered the store specifically to enjoy the fragrance, you recite a beracha according to all opinions.

PUTTING INTO YOUR HAND Let's assume you are back in the spice merchant's warehouse or in the flavor factory and you know that you do not make a beracha on the incredible fragrance that is wafting through the air. What happens if you approach some of the spices to take a pleasant whiff or you lift some of the fragrance in order to smell it? Do you recite a beracha?

The poskim dispute what to do in this case. The Mishnah Berurah (217:1) contends that whenever you do something to smell the fragrance, such as you move towards the fragrance, you lift it up or you place some into your hand, you should recite a beracha. Any act makes the fragrance avida le'reicha. However the Chazon Ish disagrees, maintaining that, if you will return the fragrance, it is not avida le'reicha and you do not make a beracha (Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim 35:1). The Chazon Ish agrees that if the manufacturer has samples available because he wants people to smell and buy, one does recite a beracha on these samples.

SPICES IN THE KITCHEN There is a common practical difference in halacha between the approaches of these two gedolim regarding spices in the kitchen. Suppose you want to enjoy the smell of the cinnamon or the oregano on your kitchen shelf.

According to the Mishnah Berurah, if you remove a container to smell it, you recite a beracha on the spice, even though you intend to return the spice to the shelf after smelling it. However according to the Chazon Ish, you do not recite a beracha on this fragrance unless you do not intend to cook with it later. (See Shemiras Shabbos K'Hilchasah, Vol. 2, Pg. 262). Someone who wants to avoid the dispute would sprinkle a little bit of spice into his hand and make a beracha on that. Since you are not going to use this spice for cooking, it is besamim according to all opinions and one recites a beracha before smelling it.

Some poskim explain that this opinion of the Chazon Ish is the reason for the widespread minhag to set aside special besamim for havdalah on Motza'ei Shabbos (Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah, Vol. 2 pg. 262). This is because, according to the Chazon Ish, one does not recite a beracha on a kitchen spice if one intends to cook with it. Only if one removed some of the spice from kitchen use and set it aside for besamim does that spice warrant a beracha.

THE GARDEN At the beginning of the article I asked, "My neighbor has a wonderfully fragrant garden. Do I recite a beracha whenever I visit her, and, if so, which beracha?" We are now prepared to answer this question.

The fragrant garden itself is avida le'reicha since the owner or gardener presumably planted it in order to benefit from the beautiful aroma. Do we therefore recite a beracha upon entering the garden? According to most poskim, since it is avida le'reicha, one would recite the beracha upon entering the garden, even if he is not entering to enjoy the aroma at all. The beracha will depend on what is growing in the garden, but assuming that there are items growing with different brachos, one should recite Borei Minei Besamim.

However according to the Taz, one recites a beracha only if he wants to smell the fragrance. In order to avoid this shaylah, he should have in mind before entering the garden that he is entering the garden to enjoy the fragrance and recite a beracha immediately before entering the garden, just as one recites a beracha immediately before eating a delicious fruit.

Similarly, someone whose house is permeated with aromatic flowers should recite a beracha before entering the house, since the flowers were acquired with the intention

of making the house pleasantly fragrant. However, if the flowers are there only for beauty and their owner was not concerned with their fragrance, then one does not recite a beracha before entering the house. According to the Mishnah Berurah we quoted above, one should recite the appropriate beracha (either Borei Atzei Besamim or Borei Isvei Besamim) before smelling an individual flower. According to the Chazon Ish, it would seem that one should not recite a beracha unless he removed a leaf or trimming from the flowers that he wants to smell.

THE FRUIT MARKET AND THE CONFECTIONER Does one recite a beracha when entering a fragrant fruit market, since smelling the delicious fruit may entice one to make a purchase? The same question applies to a confectionary store: Does one recite a beracha before entering this store since the delicious smell of all the sweets may entice the customer to purchase?

If indeed the owner feels that the fragrance of his wares encourages people to buy them, then one should recite a beracha before entering. This case is similar to an interesting dispute that we find in earlier poskim.

THE PHARMACY In earlier days, a pharmacy was a store in which the apothecary sold raw herbs for their medicinal value. The poskim ask whether one recites a beracha before entering the apothecary shop, just as the Gemara says that one recites a beracha before entering the besamim seller's store. Some poskim rule that one should recite a beracha before entering a pharmacy because the permeating fragrance encourages people to purchase herbs. Other poskim disagree for an interesting reason -- people do not purchase medicinal herbs because of fragrance, but for medical need (see Biur Halacha 217:1). Thus, since healthy people do not make purchases even if the herbs smell pleasant, and sick people will buy even if the herbs are not fragrant, no one is deciding to buy because of the fragrance. Therefore, these herbs are not avida le'reicha.

The Biur Halacha (217:1) compromises between the two positions quoted above. In his opinion, if people use the fragrance to find the location of the store, that is reason enough to make a beracha. However, he points out two other reasons why one should be careful before reciting a beracha.

1. According to the Taz (mentioned above) one does not recite a beracha unless one intends to smell the fragrance.
2. One should recite a beracha only if the fragrances are open. However, if the herbs are all in closed bags, but the air is fragrant from when the bags had been open previously, this is considered a rei'ach she'ein lo ikar, upon which one does not recite a beracha.

Thus upon entering a fragrant fruit store, one should recite Hanosein Rei'ach Tov Bapeiros and then intend to enjoy the fragrance, since the fruits are always out in the open to encourage people to buy them.

It is uncertain whether the same halacha applies to a florist's shop. Flowers today are not cultivated for fragrance, and most people purchase flowers because of beauty, not fragrance. However, if there is a florist who feels that customers purchase because of fragrance, one should recite Borei Minei Besamim and enjoy the fragrance.

IIC. Fragrances whose purpose is to provide aroma to something else.

In the time of Chazal, it was common to burn incense in order to give clothing or dishes a pleasant fragrance. The Gemara (Berachos 53a) mentions that one does not recite a beracha when smelling this beautiful aroma because its purpose is not for the fragrance itself.

When showing a house for sale, some people toast cinnamon in the oven or open essential oils and other fragrances around the house to make the house more appealing. Since the purpose of these fragrances is to give the house a pleasant aroma and not to entice people either to smell or to purchase the fragrance, one does not recite a beracha.

IID. Items that most people do not consider fragrances. There are items that some people enjoy smelling, but most people do not consider fragrant. One should not recite a beracha before smelling such an item.

Examples: The poskim dispute whether one recites a beracha on freshly baked bread. Those who contend that a beracha is ont recited opine that this is not a fragrance significant enough to warrant a beracha (Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 216; Rema). Thus, some people enjoy smelling certain plants or herbs whereas other people do not. If most people do not consider a particular smell to be a fragrance, you should not recite a beracha even if you enjoy it.

TURPENTINE Question #4 above, was: "I just adore the smell of turpentine! Do I make a beracha when I smell it?"

Dear reader, how would you please answer this shaylah? Perfumeries do not sell turpentine as a fragrance. Hardware stores sell it as a solvent and paint thinner. Many people consider the odor of turpentine pungent and not fragrant. Since most people do not consider turpentine to be a fragrance, one should not recite a beracha before smelling it.

III. Ein lo ikar – A fragrance whose source no longer exists.

In the case mentioned above where one burns incense to impart aroma onto clothing or dishes, one does not recite a beracha on the clothing afterwards, because the fragrance has no ikar (Rambam, Hilchos Brachos 9:8). For this reason, one does not recite a beracha on a bag that has a pleasant smell because it once held fragrance, or when you can still smell the residual aroma that is in the air after a spice has been put into a closed bag (Biur Halacha 217:3).

SYNTHETIC FRAGRANCES Some poskim contend that one does not make a beracha on a synthetic fragrance (Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah, Vol. 2, Pg. 263 note 32). Apparently, they hold that one can recite a beracha only on a fragrance whose source was originally besamim. However most poskim dispute this ruling, contending that a fragrance should not be different from a "synthetic food" -- a food made from a non-food substance, such as alcohol or vinegar whose source is petrochemical -- which is very common today. This situation is very common today, since most inexpensive fragrances and perfumes are synthetic. Because of the above dispute, if I have a reason to smell a synthetic fragrance I try to recite a beracha on a different fragrance whose beracha is Borei Minei Besamim, such as cloves or cinnamon, and thereby be motzi the synthetic fragrance. (Neither of these options will work for Sefardim, since they usually recite Hanosein Rei'ach Tov Bapeiros on cloves and Borei Atzei Besamim on cinnamon.) As a quick review, we do not recite a beracha on the following categories of fragrances:

Those that we are not permitted to smell. Deodorizers. If the fragrance is incidental to the item's main purpose or if it provides aroma to something else. Items that most people do not consider fragrances. Where one does not smell the source of the fragrance. Some poskim hold that we should not recite a beracha on a synthetic fragrance.

EXPRESSIVE FRAGRANCE In a monumental essay, Rav Hirsch (Breishis 8:21) explains that the expression rei'ach nicho'ach, usually translated as "a pleasant fragrance," should more accurately be rendered "an expression of compliance." He demonstrates that the word nicho'ach means "giving satisfaction," and the concept of rei'ach is used because fragrance implies receiving a very slight impression of something that is distant. Thus, when a korban is offered as a rei'ach nicho'ach, it means that it shows a small expression of our fulfilling Hashem's will. Similarly, our attempt to observe correctly the halachos of brachos on fragrances demonstrates a small expression on our part to praise Hashem for even His small kindnesses to us.

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, MiKet, 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 VAYETZE

Is it acceptable for one to doubt a divine promise?
Certainly, if God makes a promise, we'd expect Him to keep it!
Why then does Yaakov Avinu vow to worship God only **IF** (and when) God fulfills His promise to return him to the Promised Land?
[See 28:20-22.]

Furthermore, why should Yaakov make a "neder" (vow) at all?
After all, neither Avraham nor Yitzchak ever made any sort of conditional vow after receiving their divine promises!

Why is Yaakov's behavior different?
In this week's shiur, as we study God's "hitgalut" (revelation) to Yaakov at Bet-El, we attempt to explain why.

INTRODUCTION

Our shiurim thus far in Sefer Breishit have discussed the 'bechira' process, i.e. how (and why) God chooses the Avot to become the forefathers of His special nation. We have shown how an additional element of this process unfolds with each time that God appeared (and spoke) to Avraham & Yitzchak.

Now, at the beginning of Parshat Vayetze, God's appears for the **first** time to Yaakov Avinu (see 28:10-17), promising him what sounds like the very same thing that He promised Avraham and Yitzchak. Nonetheless, Yaakov's reaction to this 'hitgalut' [revelation] differs drastically from that of his predecessors.

To understand why, we must first consider Yaakov's predicament **before** God appears to him at Bet-El.

SOMETHING TO LOSE SLEEP OVER

Recall from last week's shiur that the Avot themselves were not quite sure exactly **WHEN** or **HOW** this 'bechira' process would finally end. In Parshat Toldot it did become clear that the process would continue for at least one more generation: i.e. either Yaakov OR Esav would be chosen, but not both. Therefore, after the incident of the 'stolen blessing', Yitzchak blesses Yaakov that God should grant him with "birkat Avraham", i.e. he (to the exclusion of Esav) should become the chosen son (see 28:3-4).

Despite his father's blessing, Yaakov may have had ample reason to doubt this.

First of all, only the day before, his father had planned to give the primary blessing to his older brother Esav. Secondly, Yaakov's parents had just sent him **AWAY** from Eretz Canaan - to flee from Esav and look for a wife (see 27:43-28:2). Now if Yaakov is truly the chosen son, then it should be forbidden for him to leave Eretz Canaan, just as his father Yitzchak was prohibited to leave.

[Recall that during the famine, God did not allow Yitzchak to go down to Egypt (see 26:1-3). Likewise, when Yitzchak was getting married, Eliezer traveled to Padan Aram to bring Rivka back - Yitzchak himself was not allowed to go.]

Furthermore, when Yishmael and the children of Ketura were rejected from the 'bechira' process, they were sent away to the **EAST** (see 25:6). Now, Yaakov himself is being sent away to the **EAST** (see 29:1), while Esav, his rival brother, remains in Eretz Canaan!

Finally, even though his father had blessed him 'that God should chose him', nevertheless, Yaakov realizes that it is up to God alone to make that final decision, and not his father.

For all or any of these reasons, it is easy to understand why Yaakov may have needed some 'divine reassurance' before embarking on his journey to Padan Aram!

With these points in mind, we can begin our study of God's 'hitgalut' [revelation] to Yaakov at Bet-El to better appreciate the reason for his special reaction.

YAAKOV HAS A DREAM

As you review 28:10-15, note how Yaakov's dream begins with a vision [of God's angels ascending and descending a ladder /28:12] - followed by a direct message from God (28:13-15). Hence, we should expect for that divine message to relate to both that vision and Yaakov's current situation.

With this in consideration, let's discuss God's message to Yaakov - one pasuk at a time:

"I am the Lord, the God of Avraham and Yitzchak, the land upon which you are lying; I am giving to you and your offspring" (28:13)

As this is the first time that Hashem speaks to Yaakov, it may have made more sense for God to introduce Himself as the Creator of the Heavens & Earth? But there's a simple reason why he doesn't.

DIVINE IDENTIFICATION & 'BECHIRA' CONFIRMATION

Even though God had never spoken to Yaakov directly, it would only be logical to assume that he was very aware of God's existence as well as the various promises He had made to his father and grandfather. [Note especially 17:7-12 and 18:19!] Therefore, when God now appears to him at Bet El, the very first thing God must do is 'identify' Himself in a manner that is meaningful to Yaakov - i.e. as the God of his fathers.

Then, God immediately informs Yaakov that he is indeed the 'chosen' son, using the almost identical wording that He had told Avraham:

"... the land [**'aretz'**] upon which you are lying I have given to you and your offspring [**'zera'**]. And your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out [in all four directions]. and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (see 28:13-14).

Note the use of the key words - 'zera' (offspring) and 'aretz' (the Land). These are certainly typical of God's earlier blessings of 'bechira' to Avraham and Yitzchak (see 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8 & 26:3), and thus confirm Yaakov's 'bechira'. Note as well the key phrase emphasizing the purpose of God's nation - 'to be a blessing for other nations!'

[The significance of the phrase 'afar ha-aretz' [dust of the earth] will be discussed in Part II of this week's shiur.]

DIVINE RE-ASSURANCE

While the first two psukim of this 'hitgalut' sound very familiar, the third and final pasuk introduces an entirely new element:

"And behold, I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go and bring you back to this Land..." (28:15).

This 'extra' promise clearly relates to our earlier discussion of Yaakov's questionable situation. God must allay his fears by assuring him that **EVEN THOUGH** he must now leave Eretz Canaan, He will remain with him, take care of his needs, and ultimately bring him back - **BECAUSE** he indeed is the 'chosen' son.

YAAKOV'S REACTION [and REALIZATION]

Upon awakening from this dream, Yaakov not only recognizes the uniqueness of this site, but also makes an interesting statement: "And Yaakov awoke and stated: 'Indeed God is in this place, but I did not know'. Then in awe he stated: 'This [site] is none other than a **BET ELOKIM** [a house of God], and this is the gate of heaven" (28:16-17).

Yaakov's conclusion re: the uniqueness of this site is obviously based on the fact that He just appeared to him. Furthermore, his conclusion that "v'zeh sha'ar ha-shamayim" - this is the gateway to heaven - is clearly based on his vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder. However, this doesn't appear to be any obvious reason for Yaakov to conclude that this place is a 'bet Elokim' - a house of (or for) God! After all, there was nothing in his vision to suggest that he saw a 'house' of any sort.

The simplest answer would be to connect the two halves of Yaakov's statement. Namely, the very fact that this site is a 'gateway to heaven' renders it an appropriate place for a 'House of God'. However, Yaakov refers to the site first as 'Bet Elokim' and only afterward "sha'ar ha-shamayim". Furthermore, a careful reading of the pasuk shows that these two qualities stand on their own: "This is none other than Bet Elokim, AND this is sha'ar ha-shamayim." The fact that Yaakov divides his comment into two distinct sections suggests that he has reached two unrelated conclusions.

Did Yaakov see some sort of 'bet Elokim' in his dream, or is he 'predicting' that one day a 'bet Elokim' will be built here? At this point in the narrative, it remains difficult to reach any definite conclusion. However, a careful study of what Yaakov does next will clarify the deeper meaning of his statement.

"And Yaakov rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, and set it up for a pillar [**matzeyva**], and poured oil upon the top of it. Then he called the name of that place Bet-el [even though the original name of this city was Luz]." (28:18-19)

Why does Yaakov erect a "matzeyva", pour oil on it, and name this site Bet-el? In these actions, Yaakov is acting in a manner very different than his forefathers. Recall that after God had spoken to Avraham and Yitzchak, they both reacted by building a "mizbeyach" (an altar / see 12:7 & 26:24-25) - but neither Avraham nor Yitzchak ever put up a 'pillar'! Nor did Avraham or Yitzchak ever name cities in Israel!

As before, at this point in the narrative, it remains difficult to reach any definite conclusion concerning why Yaakov is doing so many different things. However, a careful study of what Yaakov does next will clarify the purpose of all of his actions.

YAAKOV'S NEDER

After taking these actions (in 28:18-19), Yaakov makes a vow. Note the wording of his promise and how he concludes his vow:

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

IF God remains with me and protects me... And I return safely to my father's house...

=> Then **this stone**, which I have set up as a **matzeyva**, will be a **bet Elokim - a House for God** - and from all that You give me I will set aside one-tenth" (see 28:20-22).

By following the 'if' & 'then' clauses of his vow, it becomes rather clear why Yaakov had set up this pillar (in 28:18) - it was simply in preparation for his vow that he plans to make (see 28:22), as that pillar will serve as the cornerstone of a House for God that Yaakov now promises to establish upon his return. To symbolically designate this site, his preparation (in 28:18-19) included anointing the pillar with oil; and as a statement of his intention - Yaakov names the site Bet-El - which basically means that this site will be a 'House for God'.

In other words, **all** of Yaakov's actions in 28:18-19 are in preparation for his vow.

Now we must return to our original question, i.e. what was it in Yaakov's dream that prompted him to make this 'neder' [vow]?

To answer this question, we must return to re-examine Yaakov's immediate reaction to his dream.

A PREDICTION - or A RESOLUTION!

Recall the difficulty that we encountered when trying to understand Yaakov's statement (after awakening from his dream) that 'this site is none other than the House of God' (in 28:17) - for there was nothing in his vision suggesting that he saw God's house, nor any obvious reason from him to predict its future existence at that site.

But now that we have seen Yaakov's ensuing 'neder' - his earlier statement of "ein ze ki im bet Elokim" (28:17) becomes most significant - for now we see that Yaakov was not making a prediction - rather **he was stating his resolve!**

In other words, Yaakov's reaction to his dream was not merely a statement of what he saw and felt, but rather a declaration of his

future intention - to build a House for God - and specifically at this site.

This now explains everything that Yaakov does after awakening from his vision.

- 1) He states his resolve to build a 'bet Elokim' at this site (based on what he saw /see 28:16-17), then:
- 2) He sets a 'marker' to remember this precise location (upon his return /see 28:18); then
- 3) He anoints that pillar with oil (see 28:18), symbolically designating its future purpose (compare Bamidbar 7:1 - noting how the Mishkan was also anointed with oil!); then:
- 4) He names the site 'Bet El', once again, reflecting his intention to return one day and build a House for God (28:19); and finally
- 5) Makes his vow to build this 'Bet Elokim' upon his successful return from Charan (see 28:20-22)

Even though we can now explain **what** Yaakov does, we still need an explanation for **why** he makes this resolution. In other words, we must try to figure out what was it that Yaakov saw (or heard) in that vision that prompted his sudden resolve to build a House for God. Secondly, we must also explain why Yaakov makes his resolution so 'conditional'.

To answer these questions, we must return once again to consider Yaakov's current predicament, in contrast to the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak.

WHY YAAKOV IS DIFFERENT

In the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak, being 'chosen' was much more than a 'one-way' relationship. After being told by God he was chosen, Avraham responded by building a "mizbeyach" and 'calling out in God's name' (see 12:6-8, 13:4).

Similarly, after God spoke to Yitzchak at Beer Sheva - re-iterating the blessing, he too built a "mizbeyach" and called out in God's Name.

This 'calling out in God's Name' - as Ramban explains - was how the Avot tried to 'make a name for God' by preaching his existence and by setting an example of the highest moral behavior (see Ramban on 12:8 and 26:5, see also Seforno on 26:5). This also foreshadowed the ultimate mission of God's special nation - acting as a model nation to make God's Name known to all mankind.

Certainly, we would expect Yaakov to act in a similar manner.

In fact, in this opening 'hitgalut' to Yaakov, in addition to the promise of 'zera v'aretz', God emphasizes the same key phrase: "...v'nivrichu b'cha - kol mishpachot ha-adama" - that through you (and your offspring) there will be a blessing to all nations - the same phrase that He had emphasized when He **first** spoke to both Avraham and Yitzchak! [To confirm this, see 12:2-3 and 26:3-4, and compare with 28:13-14!]

Furthermore, when God explains His purpose for choosing Avraham and his offspring (see 18:18-19), we find precisely this phrase emphasized:

"For Avraham will surely become a great nation ['goy gadol' - compare 12:2) - **and through him all nations will be blessed**. For I have known him **in order** [for the purpose] that he will command his children... and they will keep the way of God - to do 'tzedeq u'mishpat' [justice and righteousness] - in order to [fulfill the purpose] of what God had spoken about Avraham [that he would become a great nation]" (see 18:18-19)

[See this phrase also in 22:18, after the Akeyda!]

God reiterates this point to each of the Avot, for the goal of "ve-nivrichu becha kol mishpachot ha-adama" reflects the ultimate purpose of this bechira process.

In this sense, God's opening 'hitgalut' to Yaakov emphasizes not only his being the 'chosen son' [= 'bechira'], but also its **purpose**.

Therefore, when Yaakov receives this blessing from God, he is immediately inspired to act in same manner as Yitzchak and Avraham. However, his present predicament does not allow him - for he is now running away (penniless) from his brother who wants to kill him! He **cannot** build a "mizbeyach" (he doesn't have anything to offer on it!); nor can he call out in God's Name (no one is around to listen!).

Nevertheless, because he understands the deeper meaning of his 'bechira' - he immediately states his absolute resolve that when he returns to Eretz Canaan, and achieves a status where he too can 'make a Name for God' - he too will attempt to accomplish this goal. In fact, he is so inspired that he plans to elevate 'calling out in God's Name' a step further - by establishing a 'House for God'!

[To see how a 'House for God' will make God's Name great, see Melachim Aleph 8:14-20, 8:40-42 & 10:1.]

WHY CONDITIONAL?

Now that we have explained both what Yaakov does, and why he does it, we are left with one last question - If Yaakov is so inspired to build this House for God, why does he make this promise 'conditional'? Let's first explain this question.

Recall that prefaces his promise to establish his 'matzeyva' as a 'Bet Elokim' with the condition: "If God will be with me, and take care of me, etc.". Why can't Yaakov simply state that he's going to do it - no matter what!

To answer this question, let's examine the 'conditions' of Yaakov's 'neder' - to determine their underlying reason.

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

- 1) IF God remains with me,
- 2) and He protects me on this journey, on which I embark,
- 3) and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear.
- 4) And I return safely to my father's house,
- 5) and [or then?] Hashem will be my God.
- 6) And this stone, which I have set up as a monument, will be a Bet Elokim... (see 28:20-22).

IF OR WHEN

Even though it is unclear where precisely the IF clause ends and the THEN clause begins (see Related Topics section), the first four clauses are clearly all conditions, for they are almost identical to God's re-assurance to Yaakov that He will take care of his needs (during his stay in Charan :

"And behold, I will be with you (1), and I will protect you wherever you go (2) and bring you back to this Land (4)..."

[See 28:15, see also Rashi on 28:20, where he 'matches' them up more precisely:]

As indeed these 'conditions' are simply a repeat of God's reassurances, then it could be that Yaakov may not be doubting God at all, nor setting any conditions! Rather, he is simply explaining why he has to wait - before he can build this 'Bet Elokim'.

Recall, that the word "im" in Hebrew can also mean '**when**' (and not exclusively 'if' / see Rashi on Shmot 22:24).

In other words, Yaakov may simply be stating that: **WHEN** God fulfills His promises (in 28:15), then I will be in the position to build this Bet Elokim (and thus help 'make a Name for God').

Yaakov is not a 'doubter' - rather he's inspired to accomplish, but explains why he must wait until the 'time is right' before he can fulfill his stated goals.

You're probably asking - if so, why doesn't Yaakov actually build a Bet Elokim when he finally returns to Eretz Canaan? Well, that's not only a question for Parshat Vayishlach, that's what a good part of Parshat Va'yishlach is all about! And iy"n, that will be the topic of next week's shiur! Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

Below - you'll find below some short discussions on additional topics relating to the above shiur

RELATED TOPICS

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A. TWO PARTS OF YAAKOV'S NEDER A CONDITION OR A PROMISE?

Review 28:20-22 and take note of how the 'neder' divides into two parts:

- 1) a CONDITION - IF... ; followed by:

2) a PROMISE (i.e. the vow) - THEN...

It is unclear, however, where the IF clause ends and the THEN clause begins. Let's take a look:

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

- 1) IF God remains with me,
- 2) and He protects me on this journey, on which I embark,
- 3) and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear.
- 4) And I return safely to my father's house,
- 5) and [or then?] Hashem will be my God.
- 6) And [or then?] this stone, which I have set up as a monument, will be a BET ELOKIM
- 7) and from all that You give me I will set aside one-tenth" (28:20-22).

The first four clauses are clearly part of the CONDITION, as they reflect precisely what God had just promised Yaakov in his dream several psukim earlier. [Compare with 28:15; see also Rashi.]

Similarly, the last two clauses clearly describe what Yaakov vows to do once the conditions are met. They describe Yaakov's promise to establish a Bet Elokim at this site upon his return from Charan and offer a tithe of his possessions.

However, the middle clause (5) - "and Hashem will be my God" - can go either way. Although it can refer to either a condition or promise, each option poses considerable difficulty. On the one hand, it doesn't appear to be a condition for two basic reasons:

- a) It does not reflect God's promise in 28:15 as do the other clauses.
- b) If this is indeed a condition, then it does not add anything to what Yaakov had already stated in his first clause - "If God will be with me".

On the other hand, it does not appear to be a vow, either. How could Yaakov possibly accept Hashem as his God only IF God fulfills His promises! Is Yaakov Avinu so 'spoiled' that he would accept God only if He is good to him?

The classical commentators tackle this question in their commentaries.

Rashi and Rashbam explain that it is indeed a CONDITION. Rashi brilliantly solves the first problem raised above [(a)] by explaining this phrase as a reference to God's earlier promise to Avraham at brit mila - "lihiyot lecha le-Elokim" (see 17:7-8).

Rashbam solves the second problem [(b)] by explaining this clause simply as a summary (or generalization) of the first three clauses.

On the other hand, Ramban, Radak, and Seforno all explain this clause as the VOW. They all solve the problem raised above (that Yaakov appears to accept God only on condition) by explaining that Yaakov vows to INTENSIFY his relationship with God should (or actually WHEN) God fulfills His promise. Surely, Hashem will always remain Yaakov's God no matter what may happen. But Yaakov promises that if (or when) he returns 'home' he will dedicate his entire life to God's service.

[I recommend that you see these "parshanim" inside.

Btw, Ramban adds an additional peirush, which he categorizes as 'sod', that explains the clause as neither a condition nor a vow; it is a STATEMENT OF FACT. Yaakov simply states that only when he returns home to Eretz Canaan will it (de facto) become possible 'for Hashem to become his God', since one cannot develop the fullest relationship with God outside of the Land of Israel. (I've toned down Ramban's statement in translation - see it inside (28:21) for a bit of a shocker.))

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B. BET-EL / A SPIRITUAL INTERSECTION

In this week's Parsha we find the first biblical reference to the concept of 'Bet Elokim', a House of God. Though mentioned only once throughout Sefer Breishit, this concept constitutes one of the most fundamental religious principles in Chumash, as it

presupposes the possibility of man's visiting the house as a means to improve his relationship with God.

Yaakov's description of this site as both 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' and 'Bet Elokim' can help us understand the nature and purpose of the Bet ha-Mikdash and how it represents the potential heights of our relationship with God.

The 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' aspect of the Mikdash, symbolized by the angels ascending and descending from Heaven, suggests the possibility of a 'vertical' relationship, a conceptual connecting point between Heaven and Earth. Despite God's transcendence, a connection, and thus a relationship, can be attained.

In contrast, the 'Bet Elokim' aspect, a HOUSE on earth where Man can encounter God, implies the potential for a 'lateral' relationship. In this sense, the Mikdash serves as both a center for congregation as well as the means of dissemination. From this site, God's word and the recognition of His authority can be spread to all mankind.

[See Yeshayahu 2:1-5! This centrality may be reflected by the unique phrase at Bet El - "yama ve-keydma, tzafona, ve-negba," which might symbolize this dissemination of God's word to all four corners of the earth.]

From God's perspective, so-to-speak, the 'shechina' descends to earth by way of 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' and radiates via 'Bet Elokim' (in the form of His Torah) to all of mankind. From man's perspective, we gather at the 'Bet Elokim' to serve God, and through the 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' we can climb the 'ladder' of holiness.

C. BET-EL & BET ELOKIM

In God's first 'hitgalut' to Yaakov, we find some additional phrases that can help us appreciate why Yaakov decides that this site should become a Bet Elokim. Let's take another look at the second pasuk of this hitgalut:

"And your offspring shall be like the AFAR HA-ARETZ, you shall spread out to the WEST, EAST, NORTH, and SOUTH (yama ve-kedma, tzafona, ve-negba), and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (28:14).

The first two phrases - "afar ha-aretz" and "east west north & south" - had been mentioned only ONCE before, i.e. when God affirmed Avraham's BECHIRA at BET-EL (after Lot's relocation in Sedom). Note the similarities:

"And God said to Avram, after Lot had parted from him, Raise your eyes and look out... to the NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, & WEST, for I give you all the LAND which you see... I will make your offspring like the AFAR HA-ARETZ..." (13:14-16).

Based on our earlier comparison between this 'hitgalut' to Yaakov (28:14) and God's earlier 'hitgalut' to Avraham at BET EL (13:14-16), we may offer a deeper interpretation of these terms.

As explained above, the two common phrases, 'afar ha-aretz' and 'yama ve-kedma...', suggest to Yaakov that he currently stands on the same site where Avraham Avinu built a MIZBEYACH and 'called out in God's Name'. This as well adds additional reason for Yaakov's resolve to make this site a BET ELOKIM.

[See also Devarim 12:5-12, and note the expression used numerous times in Sefer Devarim to describe the Mikdash - "ha-MAKOM asher yivchar HASHEM leshakein SHMO sham". Compare to the use of the word "ha'makom" in 28:10-22!]

However, God's hitgalut to Avraham in chapter 13, also took place in Bet-el (see 13:4, noting its context).

Notice, how the Torah describes this site as Bet-el, even though Yaakov only named that city over a hundred years later. The reason why is simple, because the Torah realizes that Yaakov's dream took place near the same spot where Avraham built his mizbayach! And in any case, the thematic connection, based on the above shiur, is rather obvious.

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the emphasis and repetition of the word 'ha-Makom' in this Parsha - 28:11,16,17,19. Note the use of the term also in Parshat Lech Lecha, 13:14, at the Akeida - 22:4, and in Sefer Dvarim 12:5,11,14,18.

1. Try to explain the significance of this word specifically in the context of these parshiot.
2. Use this to explain Chazal's identification of this spot as the site of the Akeida on Har Ha-Moriah, and eventually the site of the Bet HaMikdash in Yerushalayim.
3. Read Ramban on 28:17 (including Rashi whom he quotes). Relate this Ramban and his machloket with Rashi to the above shiur.

B. Read Rashi on Breishit 2:7, and note the two explanations he cites from the Midrash on that pasuk - "vayitzer Hashem Elokim et ha-adam afar min ha-adama":

- a) 'afar' from Har Ha-Moriah
- b) 'afar' from the four corners of the earth.

How do these two opinions relate to our analysis in this week's shiur?

C. See if you can connect the last section of this shiur to two other well-known Midrashim:

1. Opposite "Yerushalayim shel mata" exists a "Yerushalayim shel ma'ala" (Ta'anit 5a). [Relate this to the concept of "sha'ar ha-shamayim."]
2. Yerushalayim is known in the Midrash Tanchuma as "taburo (navel) shel olam" - the umbilicus of the world. [Relate this to the concept of Bet Elokim and the 'four directions'.]

D. Several related questions to think about which relate to next week's Parsha, as well:

1. Does Yaakov actually fulfill his 'neder' when he returns?
2. Is this "neder" fulfilled by Am Yisrael? If so, when?
3. Relate Yaakov's "galut" and his "neder" to the principle of "maase avot siman l'banim" and Jewish history

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’resheet 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’resheet 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’resheet 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'resheet 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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