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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 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. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!

"Here is the legacy of Yaakov. Yosef. . ." (Bereishis 37:2). I am continuing my focus this year on toldot (legacy), and the Torah is emphatic. While Yaakov had twelve sons and at least one daughter, his legacy initially was to come primarily through Yosef.

The story of Toldot Yaakov continues with the focus of the final four parshot in Bereishis on Yosef, and most discussion of the other brothers (other than Yehuda) is with respect to their interactions with Yosef. While Yosef was clearly the most significant of Yaakov's children in his generation, the legacy of later generations changed significantly. For example, while Yosef ended up as Yaakov's bechor (with the double portion of both his sons becoming tribes in Yisrael), other tribes became more significant in later generations. For example, Levi, who caused trouble for Yaakov (and for Shechem) with his brother Shimon, within a few generations produced Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe – and became the religious leaders of B'Nai Yisrael (Kohen and Levi). Yehuda, who distanced himself from the family and married a Canaanite wife (Shua), had three sons. The oldest son married another non-Jewish woman, Tamar. Yehuda's two older sons died, and he kept the third son from performing the mitzvah of Yibum. (Chapter 38 presents the entire story.) Tamar gives birth to Yehuda's son Perez, who is a direct ancestor of King David. The link from Yehuda to King David means that the legacy of kingship for B'Nai Yisrael will remain with Yehuda.

Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov had a very strong prohibition on marrying any Canaanite – to avoid any influence from idolatry or any other Canaanite practices. Yehuda, estranged from the other brothers after his role in Yosef's being sold as a slave, married a woman whom the Torah describes as a Canaanite. The Talmud, however, interprets her father as a merchant (ancestry unidentified), because the rabbis of the time could not imagine that Yehuda would have married a Canaanite woman. Yehuda later gives his oldest son, Er, to marry a woman named Tamar. According to Midrash, Tamar was a descendant of Shem, a righteous gentile, not a Canaanite. (We have no direct evidence on this assumption.) What is clear is that neither Yehuda's wife, sons, nor daughter-in-law would have been Jewish by modern standards. Conversion to Judaism was much easier in Biblical times than it is now. Also, the Torah does not accuse Yehuda or his children of practicing idolatry or any other hated Canaanite practices. Indeed, Tamar's efforts to gain a child through Yehuda's line indicates that she adopted the practices of his family. Tamar clearly lived as a Jew after moving into Yehuda's family.

During the generation of Yaakov's children, the bechor (double portion) went to Yosef, a son of Rachel. Within a few generations, after the sin of Egel Zahav, Hashem switched the religious leadership from the first-born sons of all of the tribes to the tribe of Levi, because none of the members of Levi participated in this sin. A few hundred years later, during the period of Jewish monarchy, Hashem decided that the kingship should remain with the descendants of King David (Yehuda). The result of these changes was that both the religious and political leadership of B'Nai Yisrael ended up with the Leah side of Yaakov's family. Even later, when the Northern kingdom split from the Southern Kingdom, most of the Northern Kingdom was Ephraim (Rachel) while most of the Southern kingdom was Yehuda (Leah). One may presume that most Jews today come from Leah rather than from Rachel.

We always start reading about Yosef and his brothers shortly before the start of Hanukkah. The parsha opens with Yaakov settled in a home in Canaan, most of his sons grown and successfully raising cattle throughout the country, with Rachel's sons still living at home and studying with him. Yaakov looked forward to a happy retirement – but Hashem had other plans. Yosef will soon be sold into slavery in Egypt. Within little more than a dozen years, there will be a severe famine – and then the family will end up in Egypt. While the family will go freely into Egypt, they will face a very dark period – a good subject to read during the darkest weeks of the year.

This time of year always makes me feel especially close to my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l. His birthday would have been a year ago, and his Bar Mitzvah was on Shabbat Hanukkah. We shared the same Haftorah, just as we shared so much of our lives together. Virtually all Jews have memories of wonderful times during Hanukkah in years past. May the memories of these happy times overcome the darkness of deepest winter, and may we create more wonderful memories to warm our hearts in coming years.

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 the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samiach,

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Vayishlach: Oh Baby!

By Rabbi Mordechai Kemenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Baby. In the sixties it was a term of poetic affection meted to any living organism that a particular party was interested in. In the school yard, its chant — and a directive to stick its head in a sauce usually reserved for a roast — is a verbal taunt usually invoked by one of two immature sparring partners.

But when the Torah refers to someone as a child or a na'ar it is taken very seriously. Often it raises a flag. It is reason to analyze and deduce. The word na'ar is often translated a child. It is hardly used for an infant and rarely for a mature adolescent. But when applied in those circumstances, the commentaries note its usage, and they comment.

In fact, when infant Moshe is found in a reed basket floating on the Nile, the Torah tells us that the daughter of Pharaoh heard a na'ar crying. (Exodus 2:6). Rashi comments on the apparent anomaly. After all the word na'ar is not used for an infant. He explains by quoting Midrashic sources that Moshe had a voice like a mature lad.

This week, the term na'ar is also used, and on the surface it is not complimentary. "Yoseph was 17-years-old and was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a na'ar with the children of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives." Again the expression na'ar raises a flag. The Medrash obviously feels that that term should be reserved for children

younger than teens. And so the Medrash asks, is it fitting to label a 17-year-old a Na'ar? It teaches us that at that age Yoseph acted immaturely; dressing his hair and adorning his eyes to look handsome.

(Ramban feels that the term na'ar would apply, as he was youngest of all the brothers except for Benjamin, a mere child at the time.)

The Sfas Emes asks a powerful question. If the term na'ar is out of place for anyone even approaching his late teens then an earlier verse surely needs clarification.

In Parshas Vayeirah Avraham travels for three days together with his sons Yitzchak and Yishmael, and his servant Eliezer, pursuing Hashem's command to bring his son as an offering on Mount Moriah. As he finally sees the mountain, he knows it is time to conclude the journey alone with only Yitzchak. So Avraham tells Yishmael and Eliezer, "remain here with the donkey, and I and the na'ar will go yonder." (Genesis 22:5).

Yitzchak was 37-years old at the time, yet not one commentator is troubled that his father calls him a baby! Why?

A man once approached my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, quite distraught.

"I know this may not sound like a major problem," he began, "but my 17-year-old daughter is very upset with me. It has come to a point that she hardly talks to me. It began a few nights ago. My wife and I were with a number of old friends at a wedding when my daughter walked by. I introduced her to them by saying, 'This is my baby.'

"I could see that at the moment she became very upset. Moments later she pulled me to aside and was crying. 'You still think I'm a baby!' she sobbed. 'I am almost eighteen already, and all you do is call me your baby! Won't I ever be a grown-up in your eyes?' Ever since then she doesn't want to talk to me."

The man shrugged as he pleaded with the sage. "I really don't want to make this into a major issue, but I'm not sure how to resolve this. Perhaps the Rosh Yeshiva can guide me."

Reb Yaakov put his hand on the man's shoulder. "You live in Flatbush, don't you?"

At the time Reb Yaakov was staying at his youngest son, Reb Avraham's home, and he invited the man to visit him there together with his daughter. He assured him that he would not discuss the incident but was confident that by the time the visit was over the matter would be resolved."

The next day the man and his daughter visited Reb Yaakov at Reb Avraham's home. Reb Yaakov invited the man and his daughter into the dining room where they discussed a variety of issues from school work to life in pre-war Europe everything but the incident at the wedding.

About 10 minutes into the conversation, my uncle, Reb Avraham, came down the stairs. Reb Yaakov looked over to him and invited him to join the conversation. But first he introduced Reb Avraham to his guests.

"This is my baby!" exclaimed the revered sage as he gave a warm hug to his 55-year-old son.

Needless to say, the impact on the 17-year-old girl changed her perspective on her father's comments. Fifteen minutes later they left the house with a renewed and invigorated relationship!

The Sfas Emes answers his question very simply. When the Torah in a narrative describes someone as a na'ar it is a flag for concern. It needs explanation, whether complimentary or otherwise. But when a father calls a child his na'ar there is no need to explain. It is simple and more than acceptable. And Hashem Himself refers to his children that way. "When Israel was a na'ar and I loved him, and since Egypt I have called him my child" (Hosea 10).

https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5760-vayeishev/

Deception That's a Truth, and Deception That's a Lie

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

How do the women in the Torah navigate a patriarchal society?

One very rare model is Sarah. At times, Sarah silently follows Avraham's directions, even when he misrepresents her – twice! – as his sister. At other times, however, she is surprisingly very direct, particularly when it comes to Hagar and Yishmael: "Take my maidservant!" "My offense is on you… May God judge between me and you!" and "Send out this maidservant and her son!" Avraham listens to her orders and direction because God backs her up. Yet even without knowing that would be the case, Sarah was prepared to take on her husband directly.

This model is noteworthy because it is such an exception to the general rule. In the society reflected in the Torah — in a man's society — women could not be direct and speak their minds. If they wanted to push for a certain outcome, they had to do so in indirect ways, exerting their influence while allowing men to be in control. At times, this required resorting to deception because of the power dynamics at play.

In this regard, It is worth contrasting Rivkah with Tamar. Both of them engage in a degree of deception and manipulation, but the outcomes of their actions differ greatly. Rivkah's ruse – having Yaakov present himself as Esav – led to many years of suffering and hardship. Tamar's stratagem, in contrast, brought about two children, one of who proved to be the progenitor of the Davidic line.

Why such radically different outcomes? Ultimately, it's a matter of what the ultimate goal of such deception was. One deception was intended to make someone do the opposite of what they desired, the other to bring a person to live up to his responsibility, to do what he knew he needed to do all along. One was meant to dupe; the other was meant to ennoble.

This contrast is accentuated by the near parallels in the two cases. Both Rivkah and Tamar use clothing to misrepresent someone's identity. Yaakov presents as Esav, and Tamar as a prostitute – hiding who she is, but at the same time not pretending to be someone else. Both use a kid goat. Rivkah does so to further her ruse – she uses its meat to appear as game and its hairy skin to serve as Esav's hair.

Tamar, in contrast, demands a goat payment, and uses its absence to take possession of Yehudah's staff and signet ring — essentially his driver's license and passport — so that he may come to acknowledge his true identity. While Rivkah takes advantage of Yitzchak's blindness — his tikhena einav, the growing dim of his eyes — to hide from him the truth of who stands before him, Tamar, even in her disguise, sits b'ifetach eynayim, at the crossroads — literally, at "the opening of eyes" — to help Yehudah see the truth: that he had shirked his obligation to her.

Although Rivkah was acting to fulfill the divine prophecy — "The older one shall serve the young" — she did so not just through deception, but in contravention of Yaakov's will. Even in a patriarchy, where societal norms may not have made it possible for her to impose her will on Yaakov, she owed him the respect and honesty to share this prophecy with him. Perhaps he would have changed his mind, perhaps not. But ultimately, it would have been a clear statement of where his obligation lay. An obligation that she would have been able to help him see if he were not able to do so himself.

Tamar did exactly that. The result of her deceptions was that Yehudah took responsibility for his actions. He publicly acknowledged that he had slept with her, that the child was his, and — most significantly — that he had shirked his obligations to her by not marrying her off to his son, Sheila.

Tamar wisely understood that if Yehudah were to accept responsibility for his actions, it could only happen if she allowed him to do so himself. Any attempt on her part to call him to task would have led to defensiveness and denial. It is for this reason that she presented to him his staff and signet ring and then stood back, giving him the space to step forward. The critical act of his acknowledgement of his role is captured in one work: "va-yaker," he recognized, he took his responsibility. This stands in stark contrast to the critical moment of Yitzchak's deception, where we read "ve-lo hikiro," and he — Yitzchak — did not recognize Yaakov for who he truly was. Once deception ends in recognition, the other ends where it started — in deception.

It is always best to not engage in deception, to be clear and straightforward about one's positions and intentions. But it will often happen that a person will find him- or herself in situations that do not allow for such directness. At times this may have to do with gender dynamics, but, in fact, imbalanced power dynamics play out for many different groups and at all levels of society. In such cases, indirectness may be necessary. Perhaps even a degree of deception, or at least, a lack of full transparency. At such times we must ask ourselves: What are we seeking? What is our end goal? Is it deception or honesty? Do we want to dupe someone or help them see the truth?

One approach is sure to bring conflict and suffering, the other can lead to great salvation — for oneself, and for society as a whole.

Shabbat Shalom.
https://library.yctorah.org/2021/11/deception-thats-a-truth-and-deception-thats-a-lie/

If only I had known …

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2017

Yosef, it appeared, was in deep trouble. Even as he approached his brothers, they were planning to eliminate him. Suddenly, the voice of Reuven, the eldest brother, was heard. "We dare not harm him directly," he said. "Instead let us throw him in a pit."

The Torah attests that Reuven's motive was a good one. He intended to come back later to retrieve Yosef and return him to their father.

Says the Medrash: Had Reuven realized that his good intentions would forever be recorded in the Torah, he would have done much more. If he had realized the importance of his deed, maintains the Medrash, he surely would have "carried Yosef on his shoulders, to bring him back to their father Yakov."

Every generation has its special mitzvah opportunities. In our time, acts of kindness and charity, as well as acts that promote Jewish Education and Torah study, are mitzvos that address the challenges of the generation. Especially in the current challenging financial climate, it is important that our support of goodness not waiver. It is precisely in such times, it seems, that people and organizations will rise or fall based on the goodwill of individuals. In such times, a critical donation in a timely fashion can literally provide life-saving sustenance to a struggling family.

The lesson of Reuven's act is that he did well, but had he realized the importance of his act, he would have done so much more. The same is true for all of us. We do much good. But, if we would realize the drama associated with good deeds we would surely do much more.

Performing goodness at critical times is a concept that is not foreign to us. In fact, it is the story of Chanukah. The Jews who survived the battles had virtually nothing. But, they did have one jug of oil. They could have made excuses for not lighting the menorah. Instead, with a sense of urgency, they lit the menorah in the best way they could, not knowing what the morrow would bring. Perhaps they had the sense that the eyes and "cameras" of history were trained upon them to see what they would do. They knew that what they did would make all the difference for generations.

And so, despite the times, the Jews of the time of Chanukah lifted their spirits. With a sense of vision, they performed a great act of goodness and faith. Through it, they acquired eternity, and so can we.

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

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org. **Teach613 is starting a new Shulchan Aruch Zoom class this week. For information, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

http://www.teach613.org/vayeishev-if-only-i-had-known/

CHANUKA!!!

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine

The story of Chanuka is well known. The Syrian Greeks legislated against Jewish observance. When the Jews didn't obey, the Syrian Greeks brought in troops to enforce their decrees. They defiled the Beis Hamikdash and caused great pain to the people. At first the Jews attempted to observe as best they could in a clandestine way. They studied Torah with Dreidels in their hands. If soldiers would come to inspect, they would quickly switch from their studies to their games, so they would not be "caught."

Eventually it became clear that the Jews couldn't just wait it out until the danger would pass. The presence and barbarism of the Syrian Greek soldiers was taking its toll on the people. The Maccabees arose in heroic defiance and led the people in guerrilla warfare against the Syrian Greek army. Outclassed and outnumbered in so many ways, the Jews were nevertheless granted miraculous victory, and they routed the Syrian Greeks from the country.

Among the first things the Maccabees wished to attend to was to rededicate the Beis Hamikdash. From the holy sanctuary would emanate light and inspiration to rejuvenate the people. But as they searched for oil to light the Menorah, they found that the Syrian Greeks had defiled the entire cache of oil stored in the Beis Hamikdash. It seemed that their plans of dedication would have to be delayed as they waited to obtain or produce untainted oil. And then, another miracle occurred. A cruse of oil with the seal of the Kohein Gadol was found still sealed and undefiled. The lighting of the Menorah with oil of sanctity was able to occur. Miraculously, it burned for eight days until new oil could be processed.

A remarkable question is raised regarding the cruse of oil which was found "with the seal of the Kohein Gadol." The Kohein Gadol (high priest) was among the highest-ranking people in the Jewish people. He was in the same league as the king, the Av Beis Din (head of the court), and the leading prophet. It seems odd that his personal seal was used on the oil meant for the Menorah. Did he really have time to be the personal Mashgiach for the kashrus of the oil?

I have heard an answer suggested that the oil that was found was not oil originally intended for the Menorah. It was oil owned personally by the Kohein Gadol meant to be used for the Kohein Gadol's own personal daily offering (Chavitei Kohein Gadol). Although the Kohein Gadol's daily offering didn't need to be brought from the same high-quality oil that was used to light the Menorah, the Kohein Gadol voluntarily produced such high-quality oil for use with his own Korban. It was this oil that had the Kohein Gadol's own personal seal, indicating that it was his personal supply. The oil was produced at great personal expense; through it the Kohein Gadol showed his love and dedication to his daily offering.

Remarkably, when the Jews returned to the Beis Hamikdash after the battles, the only cruse of oil that remained miraculously untainted was of this personal supply of the Kohein Gadol. The Jews took this to mean that it was the merit of the Kohein Gadol's love and dedication for his personal Mitzva to voluntarily use Menorah worthy oil that granted them the miracle that one cruse should survive. When they legislated the Mitzva of Menorah for generations, they did so with an opportunity for all of us to affirm our love for the Mitzva. One can fulfill the Mitzva with just one light for the household. But one can show additional endearment for the Mitzva by having each person light their own light. Additionally, we can show further endearment for the Mitzva by observing the Mitzva as we do — by adding a light each night of Chanuka.

The miracle of the oil occurred because of the Kohein Gadol's dedication to his Mitzva, and so for generations, we observe the Mitzva in a structure that shows unique levels of dedication.

If we consider the three levels of the Mitzva, we will notice that they correspond to three levels of making Mitzvos personal to us.

The first level of one light for the family, corresponds to people who have the view that the Kohein Gadol (the symbolic equivalent of the head of household) should light the "Menorah" and be strongly dedicated. The rest of us, perhaps, can just fulfill our obligation through his observance.

The next level of each person lighting their own light corresponds to the awareness that Judaism is about each of us seeing life as a mission, on a personal level. Each morning we wash our hands "as the Kohein did in the Beis Hamikdash" as we begin our own personal daily journey in the service of Hashem.

The third level of each personal lighting an additional light each night, as we observe the Mitzvah, is the goal of the Jewish people: To create motivated, self-starter students in whom the fire and inspiration of Torah and Mitzvos burns ever brighter.

Rabbi Mendel Kaplan was once teaching Gemorah to a high school class of boys who weren't paying much attention. The boys had the greatest respect for the Rebbe, but the subject was complex, and he could see that the boy's minds were beginning to wander off topic. Rabbi Kaplan exclaimed, "Boys: you think that the point of the shiur (lecture) is that the Rebbe should know the material, and that if Rebbe knows the Tosfos (advanced commentaries) then all is okay. But that is not the point of the Shiur! The point is that you should know it. So, let's try again..."

That is the message of Chanuka. There were great people like the Maccabees and the Kohein Gadol whose dedication to the battles and to personal Mitzva observance carried the day. But the legislation to light the Menorah comes with a personal message to each of us. The first upgrade is to realize that each of us should light. The second upgrade is that each of us should become increasingly brighter. May Hashem bless us all to indeed become increasingly brighter and enjoy a joyous and uplifting Chanuka.

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 whom 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.

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

*** The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at www.jewishideas.org

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Light and Shadows: Thoughts for Hanukkah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) records a famous debate between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel as to how to light the Hanukkah lights. Bet Shammai rules that we should light 8 lights the first night, and then subtract one light each ensuing night. After all, the original miracle of the oil in the Temple would have entailed the oil diminishing a bit each day.

Bet Hillel rules that we should light one light the first night, and then increase the number of lights night after night. (This is the accepted practice.) A reason is suggested: in matters of holiness, we increase rather than decrease. The miracle of Hanukkah is more beautifully observed with the increasing of lights; it would be anti-climactic to diminish the lights with each passing night.

Increasing lights is an appealing concept, both aesthetically and spiritually. But the increase of light might also be extended to refer to the increase in knowledge. The more we study, the more we are enlightened. When we cast light on a problem, we clarify the issues. We avoid falling into error. The more light we enjoy, the less we succumb to shadows and illusions.

Aesop wisely noted: Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow. It is all too easy to make mistaken judgments by chasing shadows rather than realities.

Professor Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli Nobel Prize winner in Economics, has coined the phrase “illusion of validity.” He points out that we tend to think that our own opinions and intuitions are correct. We tend to overlook hard data that contradict our worldview and to dismiss arguments that don’t coincide with our own conception of things. We operate under the illusion that our ideas, insights, intuitions are valid; we don’t let facts or opposing views get in our way.

The illusion of validity leads to innumerable errors, to wrong judgments, to unnecessary confrontations. If we could be more open and honest, self-reflective, willing to entertain new ideas and to correct erroneous assumptions — we would find ourselves in a better, happier and more humane world.

In her powerful book, “The March of Folly,” Barbara Tuchman studied the destructive behavior of leaders from antiquity to the Vietnam War. She notes: “A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by government of policies contrary to their own interests.” She points out: “Government remains the paramount area of folly because it is there that men seek power over others — only to lose it over themselves.”

But why should people with political power succumb to policies that are wrong-headed and dangerous? Tuchman suggests that the lust for power is one ingredient in this folly. Another ingredient is an unwillingness to admit that one has made a misjudgment. Leaders keep pursuing bad policies and bad wars because they do not want to admit to the public that they’ve been wrong. So more people are hurt, and more generations are lost — all because the leaders won’t brook dissent, won’t consider other and better options, won’t yield any of their power, won’t admit that they might be wrong. These leaders are able to march into folly because the public at large allows them to get away with it. Until a vocal and fearless opposition arises, the “leaders” trample on the heads of the public. They are more concerned with their own power politics, than for the needs and wellbeing of their constituents.

The march of folly is not restricted to political power. It is evident in all types of organizational life. The leader or leaders make a decision; the decision is flawed; it causes dissension; it is based on the wrong factors. Yet, when confronted with their mistake, they will not back down. They have invested their own egos in their decision and will not admit that they were wrong. Damage — sometimes irreparable damage — ensues, causing the organization or institution to diminish or to become unfaithful to its original mission. The leader/s march deeper and deeper into folly; they refuse to see the light.

Bet Hillel taught the importance of increasing light. Shedding more light leads to clearer thinking. It enables people to see errors, to cast off shadows and cling to truth.

It takes great wisdom and courage to avoid having the illusion of validity. It takes great wisdom and courage to evaluate and re-evaluate decisions, to shed honest light on the situation, to be flexible enough to change direction when the light of reason so demands.

The lights of Hanukkah remind us of the importance of increasing the light of holiness and knowledge. As we learn to increase light, we learn to seek reality and truth — and to avoid grasping at shadows and illusions.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/light-and-shadows-thoughts-hanukkah

Parshas Vayeishev – The Focus Of Chanukah

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2020**

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

** I received this Dvar Torah too late to include it last year. Because I must post early this week, I am including it this year.

Thanksgiving Questions

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

It's time for Thanksgiving. That means it's time for a delicious meal with our friends and family to celebrate how thankful we are for America and for all the bountiful blessings in our life. And it's also a great time for a rabbi to receive some very interesting questions.

1) Rabbi, may I wish people a "Happy Thanksgivvukah" this year? I know that Channukah does not fall out exactly on Thursday but it does fall out on Sunday night on what's traditionally known as Thanksgiving weekend. Would that be enough?

According to the resolution passed by Congress and signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt on December 26th, 1941, Thanksgiving is officially celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. So halachically it would seem not. However, because of the strong custom of calling this time of year "Thanksgiving weekend", one may rely on this and call it Thanksgivvukah. As we know from the Talmud, in certain limited cases, custom can modify the law.

But there is one condition. If you do call it Thanksgivvukah, you must listen to this song.
Thanksgivvukah Song

2) Rabbi, isn't every day Thanksgiving for a Jew? Why is today special if every day we're required to give thanks?

Every day is also Mother's Day for a Jew. It's in the 10 Commandments that we must honor our parents. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't get her a gift on Mother's Day. So too on Thanksgiving. It's a beautiful thing to join our fellow Americans on a holiday where the main point is to give thanks for the lives and freedoms we have here.

Rav Joseph Ber Soloveitchik exhorted his students to observe Thanksgiving so as to thank the country that took us in and allows us to worship freely. He himself celebrated Thanksgiving and would teach his daily class earlier so his students could celebrate with their families.

3) Rabbi, may I fulfill my obligation to eat turkey with turkey meat grown from cells in a laboratory? How about with turkey made from tofu? So many of my relatives have gone vegan...

As we learned in our Shavuot class in KI this year, we have a solid halachic foundation to claim that meat grown in a laboratory is not actually meat according to the Torah. Such an assertation would be good for eating lab meat with cheese but Thanksgiving would present an issue.

Lucky for us though, Rabbi Hodu Turkberg, a famous halachic decisor from Washington D.C. most known for his studies on Hilchot Thanksgiving, has issued a ruling that you can replace turkey with tofu (and presumably lab meat) if you declare yourself a vegan before a Beit Din (Jewish court) of 3 adult Jews. Though you may have to wait till the next Kol Nidrei to annul that vow if you want to eat meat after. So just make sure to stipulate that this "vegan vow" only lasts until the end of Thanksgiving.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving. May you have an incredible time wherever you will be and may we always find a thousand reasons to be thankful!

Shabbat Shalom.

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Rav Kook Torah
Vayeishev: Tamar's Sacrifice

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar took place after Judah was informed that the young widow had behaved loosely and was pregnant. Judah meted out a harsh punishment for her promiscuity: “Take her out and have her burned” (Gen. 38:24).

Confronted with such a severe sentence, Tamar could have easily pointed an accusing finger at Judah. After all, it was Judah who had made her pregnant, not knowing the true identity of the “prostitute” he had met on the road to Timna. Incredibly, Tamar chose to be silent. Only as she was led out to be executed did Tamar remark enigmatically, “I am pregnant by the man who is the owner of these articles” (Gen. 38:25). When Judah heard that cryptic message, he immediately realized that her pregnancy was not the result of promiscuity, but a form of yibum (levirate marriage), which Tamar had only been able to consummate through deception.

Why didn’t Tamar save her life by openly identifying her father-in-law — and judge — as the person responsible?

The Talmud derives an amazing lesson from Tamar’s selfless act:

> *“It is better to throw oneself into a fiery furnace than to shame another person in public.”* (Berachot 43b)

This remarkable statement raises two questions. First of all, is honor really such an important thing? Did the Sages not teach (Avot 4:21) that the pursuit of honor and fame is an undesirable trait that can “drive one from the world”?

Secondly, there are only three crimes — murder, idolatry, and illicit relations — so grievous that it is preferable to die rather than transgress them. Why was Tamar willing to die rather than embarrass her father-in-law?

Superficial Honor versus Inner Worth

To answer the first question, we must distinguish between two types of honor. The first is an illusory honor based on external acquisitions — wealth, position, fame, and so on. Pursuing this type of honor is certainly a negative trait, a mindset which can cause one to lose his way and squander his time on inconsequential matters.

There is, however, a nobler form of honor. This honor is based on our awareness of our true inner worth as human beings created in God’s image. Recognition of our innate dignity, and an aversion to ignominy, has the opposite effect to the pursuit of superficial honor. This awareness is the very foundation of morality. It enables one to value the nobility of a life rooted in ethical and spiritual ideals.

In an essay describing our generation’s need to deepen its appreciation of the spiritual side of the universe, through the study of the Torah’s esoteric teachings, Rav Kook noted a decline in humanity’s awareness of inner values:

> *“As the world advances in its superficial culture, it simultaneously declines in its inner worth. This deterioration is due to the phenomenon that, with the advance of society’s external values, the eye is increasingly captivated by superficialities and learns to belittle inner awareness. Due to this process, humanity’s true worth continually dwindles. The world’s redemption is dependent upon the revival of our inner perceptions.”* (Orot HaKodesh vol. I, p. 96)

Human life has value only when it is accompanied by recognition of one’s inner worth and dignity. It is preferable to forfeit life in this world rather than publicly shame another person, permanently disgracing him and ruining his honor. Such a public defaming will bring about the loss of all value in living, a slow and degrading demise.

In practice, however, it seems that one should not take such a drastic step. With time, a life lived fully can heal and restore lost honor. Nonetheless, those with a noble and sensitive soul should feel that their own will to live is weakened if their own survival must come at the expense of another’s public disgrace and humiliation.

For this reason, the Sages did not write, “One is required to throw oneself into a fiery furnace,” but rather, “It is better.” This is how one should feel, even if in practice it does not come to that.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 191)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYESHEV_65.htm

Improbable Endings and the Defeat of Despair (Vayeshev 5778)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

We live life looking forward but we understand it only looking back.

As we live from day to day, our life can seem like a meaningless sequence of random events, a series of accidents and happenstances that have no shape or inner logic. A traffic jam makes us late for an important meeting. A stray remark we make offends someone in a way we never intended. By a hair's-breadth we fail to get the job we so sought. Life as we experience it can sometimes feel like Joseph Heller's definition of history: "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open in a wind."

Yet looking back, it begins to make sense. The opportunity we missed here led to an even better one there. The shame we felt at our unintentionally offensive remark makes us more careful about what we say in the future. Our failures, seen in retrospect many years later, turn out to have been our deepest learning experiences. Our hindsight is always more perceptive than our foresight. We live life facing the future, but we understand life only when it has become our past.

Nowhere is this set out more clearly than in the story of Joseph in this week's parsha. It begins on a high note: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age, and he made a richly embroidered robe." But with dramatic speed, that love and that gift turn out to be Joseph's undoing. His brothers began hating him. When he told them his dream, they hated him even more. His second dream offended even his father. Later, when he went to see his brothers tending their flocks, they first plotted to kill him, and eventually sold him as a slave.

At first, in Potiphar's house, he seemed to be favoured by fortune. But then his master's wife tried to seduce him and when he refused her advances she accused him of attempted rape and he was sent to prison with no way of proving his innocence. He seemed to have reached his nadir. There was nowhere lower for him to fall.

Then came an unexpected ray of hope. Interpreting the dream of a fellow prisoner, who had once been Pharaoh's cup-bearer, he predicted his release and return to his former elevated role. And so it happened. Joseph asked only one thing in return: "Remember me when it goes well with you, and please show me kindness: mention me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this place. For I was forcibly taken from the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing to deserve being put in this pit."

The last line of the parsha is one of the cruelest blows of fate in the Torah: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." Seemingly his one chance of escape to freedom is now lost. Joseph, the beloved son in his magnificent robe has become Joseph, the prisoner bereft of hope. This is as near the Torah gets to Greek tragedy. It is a tale of Joseph's hubris leading, step after step, to his nemesis. Every good thing that happens to him turns out to be only the prelude to some new and unforeseen misfortune.

Yet a mere two years later, at the beginning of next week's parsha, we discover that all this has been leading to Joseph's supreme elevation. Pharaoh makes him Viceroy over Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world. He gives him his own signet ring, has him dressed in royal robes and a gold chain, and has him paraded in a chariot to the acclaim of the crowds. A mere thirty years old, he has become the second most powerful man in the world. From the lowest pit he has risen to dizzying heights. He has gone from zero to hero overnight.

What is stunning about the way this story is told in the Torah is that it is constructed to lead us, as readers, in precisely the wrong direction. Parshat Vayeshev has the form of a Greek tragedy. Mikketz then comes and shows us that the Torah embodies another worldview altogether. Judaism is not Athens. The Torah is not Sophocles. The human condition is not inherently tragic. Heroes are not fated to fall.

The reason is fundamental. Ancient Israel and the Greece of antiquity – the two great influences on Western civilisation – had profoundly different understandings of time and circumstance. The Greeks believed in moira or ananke, blind fate. They thought that the gods were hostile or at best indifferent to humankind, so there was no way of avoiding tragedy if that is what fate had decreed. Jews believed, and still believe, that God is with us as we travel through time. Sometimes we feel as if we are lost, but then we discover, as Joseph did, that He has been guiding our steps all along.

Initially Joseph had flaws in his character. He was vain about his appearance;[1] he brought his father evil reports about his brothers;[2] his narcissism led directly to the advances of Potiphar's wife.[3] But the story of which he was a part was not a Greek tragedy. By its end – the death of Joseph in the final chapter of Genesis – he had become a different human being entirely, one who forgave his brothers the crime they committed against him, the man who saved an entire region from famine and starvation, the one Jewish tradition calls "the tzaddik."[4]

Don't think you understand the story of your life at half-time. That is the lesson of Joseph. At the age of twenty-nine he would have been justified in thinking his life an abject failure: hated by his brothers, criticised by his father, sold as a slave, imprisoned on a false charge and with his one chance of freedom gone.

The second half of the story shows us that Joseph's life was not like that at all. His became a tale of unprecedented success, not only politically and materially, but also morally and spiritually. **He became the first person in recorded history to forgive. By saving the region from famine, he became the first in whom the promise made by God to Abraham came true: "Through you, all the families of the land will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). There was no way of predicting how the story would end on the basis of the events narrated in parshat Vayeshev. The turning-point in his life was a highly improbable event that could not have been predicted but which changed all else, not just for him but for large numbers of people and for the eventual course of Jewish history. God's hand was at work, even when Joseph felt abandoned by every human being he had encountered.** [emphasis added]

We live life forward but we see the role of Providence in our lives only looking back. That is the meaning of God's words to Moses: "You will see My back" (Ex. 33:23), meaning, "You will see Me only when you look back." [emphasis added]

Joseph's story is a precise reversal of the narrative structure of Sophocles' Oedipus. Everything Laius and his son Oedipus do to avert the tragic fate announced by the oracle in fact brings it closer to fulfilment, whereas in the story of Joseph, every episode that seems to be leading to tragedy turns out in retrospect to be a necessary step to saving lives and the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams.

Judaism is the opposite of tragedy. It tells us that every bad fate can be averted (hence our prayer on the High Holy Days that "penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil decree") – while every positive promise made by God will never be undone.[5]

Hence the life-changing idea: Despair is never justified. Even if your life has been scarred by misfortune, lacerated by pain, and your chances of happiness seem gone forever, there is still hope. The next chapter of your life can be full of blessings. You can be, in Wordsworth's lovely phrase, "surprised by joy." [emphasis added]

Every bad thing that has happened to you thus far may be the necessary prelude to the good things that are about to happen because you have been strengthened by suffering and given courage by your ability to survive. That is what we learn from the heroes of endurance from Joseph to the Holocaust survivors of today, who kept going, had faith, refused to despair, and were privileged to write a new and different chapter in the book of their lives.

Seen through the eye of faith, today's curse may be the beginning of tomorrow's blessing. That is a thought that can change a life.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 84:7; see Rashi to Gen. 37:2.

[2] Gen. 37:2, and see Bereshit Rabbah 84:7.

[3] Tanhuma, Vayeshev, 8.

[4] Yoma 35b.

[5] Shabbat 55a.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

https://rabbisacks.org/improbable-endings-defeat-despair-vayeshev-5778/

Yosef and Divine Providence

By Chaya Mushka and Nechama Dina Krimmer *

In this week's parsha, we delve into the rivalry between Yosef and his brothers, which was exacerbated by several factors. First, prior to the birth of Binyomin, Yosef was the only child of Yaakov's beloved wife, Rochel, born after many years of childlessness.

Yosef was physically beautiful like his mother and had a shining holy spark that Yaakov could see. Yaakov held a special place in his heart for Yosef, and he taught Yosef the wisdom he had learned from his father and grandfather. The attention Yaakov showered on Yosef, along with his being the son of Yaakov's favored wife, fueled the jealousy and anger of his brothers.

Yosef had dreams that intimated that his brothers would one day bow down to him. Regardless whether his brothers saw Yosef's dreams as prophetic, they still were angered that Yosef spoke of these dreams and especially to their father. They would never bow to Yosef! Why couldn't he just keep his far-fetched dreams to himself?

Yosef also represented a different avoda, a means of service to Hashem, than those practiced by his brothers. While his brothers were satisfied being shepherds, closing themselves off from the world to engage solely in the world of Torah and mitzvos, Yosef believed that he must interact with the outside world, bringing Torah and mitzvos to others to share and inspire them.

There is a famous story from the Chassidic Master, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, which demonstrates the greatness of Yosef's avoda. Reb Mendel coined the term "ah tzaddik in peltz" translated as a righteous man in a fur coat. When the weather is cold, there are two solutions. Put on a fur coat and warm oneself or build a fire that warms all who draw close to it. Yosef was not "ah tzaddik in peltz." He was one who would go out in the world and fan the flames of Torah in the hearts of others.

When the anger of Yosef's brothers came to a crescendo, his brothers conjured up the unthinkable; they planned to gather together and kill Yosef. Ultimately, they decided to throw him in a pit where he would either die or be "rescued" by travelers and sold into slavery. Secretly, the eldest of the brothers, Reuvan, planned to rescue Yosef later in the day, but when he got to the well, Yosef was already gone.

The Torah writes that the pit the brothers threw Yosef in held no water. "And they took him and cast him into the pit; now the pit was empty. There was no water in it." Breishis 37:24. Rashi explains that the pit was devoid of water but was teeming with snakes and scorpions. The Torah, itself, is frequently compared to water, that essential nourishing and life-sustaining nectar. Water flows downward from the highest mountaintops to the lowest canyons, yet contains its highest purity and vitality at all elevations.

Being a part of G-d’s essence, the Torah too flows from supernal heights down to this lowly earthly plane. It is filtered through, and dressed in layer after layer in a way almost impossible to comprehend, yet the Torah retains its purity and holds the same strength of life-sustaining power and vitality in the physical worlds as it does in the supernal heights. Because Yosef found himself in a place devoid of water, it comes as no surprise that the pit was full of snakes and scorpions. If our minds, for example, are not filled with positivity, with goals to achieve, and with hopes and dreams to work for, a space can easily open for negative thoughts to seep in.

A vital concept in Torah is that of Hashgocha Protis, or Divine Providence, which relates to our story of Yosef and his brothers. Hashgocha Protis is the belief that G-d has a plan for us, and for the world at large, that is much bigger than we could ever practically perceive with our human intellect. We see the back of the tapestry with strings hanging in all directions, and bizarre asymmetrical patterns with a rugged and perhaps unsettling visage. Only G-d sees the beautiful tapestry emerging, and G-d willingly, it will be revealed to all us in the Messianic Era.

When Yosef was thrown into the pit, the needles of the tapestry of Hashogocha Protis began to stitch together. Yosef was sold and ended up in Egypt as a slave to Potiphar, one of the King's ministers. G-d blessed Yosef in all he did, and soon Potiphar selected Yosef to take care of his personal affairs. Yosef experienced many ups and downs in Egypt, but his connection to the King's minister began a chain of events that ultimately led to the redemption of Yosef's family, which we will read about in future Torah portions.

What can we learn from this to apply to our own lives? Our Sages say that a leaf doesn't turn in the wind unless G-d wills it to. If this is true for a leaf, for more leaves than we could possibly count, how much more so the events in our own lives. We all suffer and we toil. We experience great joy and great sadness. We face minor annoyances like slow drivers and small triumphs like getting the perfect macchiato. We all experience tragedies and heart break, which no words can possibly console, the parts of the tapestry we may never see put together in our lifetimes. But we can start to see Hashgocha Protis in small, perhaps less emotionally charged, ways. We think of a friend who then suddenly calls. We randomly go through a box in the attic during spring cleaning and find an item we've been desperately searching for. We annoyingly can't find our car keys and find out there was an accident where we might have been had the lost keys delayed us.

All it takes is just to look around and see G-d's hands directing our lives.

* Dayton, OH; via Chabad of Greater Dayton, OH

When You Want to Just Give It a Break: An Essay on Vayeishev

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) *

Tzaddikim have no rest

Rashi introduces this week's parshah with the words of the Midrash:

> *Jacob wished to live in tranquility, but then the trouble of Joseph sprang upon him. When the tzaddikim wish to live in peace, The Holy One, Blessed Be He, says, "Is it not enough for the tzaddikim that so much is prepared for them in the next world, that they seek to live in peace in this world?"1*

Jacob consistently tries to settle down quietly, to live at ease, and each time, some new trouble springs upon him. In all the stories about Jacob, and in stories of many other tzaddikim as well, we are often struck with the question of to what extent tzaddikim can attain peace of mind. The question is not about physical wellbeing. In the course of his life, Jacob is hardly harmed at all physically. Jacob's trials are in the sphere of sorrow and grief, and the story of Jacob is a struggle for peace of mind.

When Rabbi Yannai says that "in our hands we have neither the tranquility of the wicked nor the suffering of the righteous,"2 he notes the seemingly counterintuitive reality that the wicked experience tranquility while the righteous experience suffering. The suffering of the righteous is part of their world, part of the pattern of their existence. The assurance to the righteous is that they will "have no rest, neither in this world nor in the next."3 This is no coincidence; it is a basic philosophical tenet – God bestows many favors and gifts upon the righteous, both in this world and in the next, but tranquility is not one of them.

Correspondingly, the Talmud states, "For the wicked, sleep is good for them and good for the world, but for the righteous, it is bad for them and bad for the world."4 There is no rest for the righteous. When a tzaddik wants to rest, God does not let him, as if to say that the lack of tranquility is an essential part of being a tzaddik.

Peace of mind

In our world, peace of mind is one of the most sought-after commodities on the market. We are not speaking only of the fields of psychology and psychotherapy. Every person, according to his emotional makeup, is troubled by all kinds of doubts and insecurities. This is even truer today than in the past, in a world that is much more dynamic, driven, and harried than ever before. Because of this, every person searches for tranquility, in one way or another. Whether a person's solution involves therapy, drugs, or personal introspection, the search for peace of mind is often motivated by the desire to escape from a world full of anguish to a world of calm. Everyone wants to live in peace, and many are even willing to pay for this.

For many people, choosing a path of faith is perceived as choosing a path of tranquility and ease – a way of securing peace of mind for oneself. The search for tranquility is often what leads people to connect with Judaism, since a religious life is often perceived as calm and effortless, in contrast to other lifestyles where one is always on the run.

Actually, there is some truth in this perception. This can be observed in the case of smokers. Many people cannot go fifteen minutes without a cigarette during the week, but on Shabbat, completely abstaining from smoking does not trouble them at all. How is this possible? There are many things in this world that are only troubling when they are in the realm of the possible and the doable. But on Shabbat, when these things are in the realm of the forbidden – completely out of bounds – peace of mind can be achieved.

This is true of many things in the framework of Torah and mitzvot, by virtue of the Torah's nature as a highly structured world of prohibition and permissibility. People are often afflicted with lusts and desires because the object of their desire is within reach. But as soon as they know that it is unthinkable, that it is entirely impossible, there is no longer a reason to lust for it.

An interesting example of this is cited by Ibn Ezra, in his commentary on the verse, "Do not covet."5 He writes that just as it does not even occur to a simple peasant to covet the royal princess, that is how it should be regarding a married woman. The peasant is not beset with dreams about the beautiful princess; he does not even think about her. Perhaps there are princes who are interested in her, but the simple peasant is not. When something is entirely beyond a person's reach, he simply does not think about it, does not seriously consider it. Because of this, there is neither an element of temptation nor a need for a struggle. Similarly, "your neighbor's house," "your neighbor's wife," and similar objects of desire should be seen as outside the realm of the permitted, in the realm of the completely forbidden.

To be sure, the very transition to a life of Torah and mitzvot requires a momentous, fateful decision, but ultimately such a life provides, in certain respects, a great deal of calm. To put it more profoundly: A world where God exists is a world of peace of mind and security. A world where God does not exist is a world that is fraught with anxiety and insecurity; it is like an endless maze.

A world of questions

When we speak of the tranquility of a world of Torah and mitzvot, we must ask if this tranquility, while certainly making for a clearer and more orderly world, truly makes for a better world. It does appear to be a more complete world than the world that is devoid of Torah, but is it truly more complete, or does it just appear to be so?

The answer to this question is that, as already noted, "tzaddikim have no rest." Although it is possible to view this lack of rest as secondary, we see that, according to our sages, there is no rest in the World to Come either. Apparently, lack of rest is an integral and fundamental part of being a tzaddik, perhaps even an ideal form of existence.

Anyone who is a part of the world of faith knows that it is not an easy world in which to live. Anguish and inner struggle are par for the course for the faithful. It has been said that the verse, "Seven times a tzaddik falls and gets up",6 is not a description of the tzaddik's failures but of his natural progression. A sharper formulation would be that crisis is part of the process of the tzaddik's revitalization and rejuvenation, and falling is part of the process of his growth.

Somewhat similarly, the Talmud states that "one does not fully understand the words of the Torah unless he has been tripped up over them."7 The simple meaning of this is that, by its very nature, Torah study requires rising and falling; failure is part of the process.

People are often curious about the “ideal method” of studying Torah. The answer may be found on every page of Talmud, in the Rishonim and in the Acharonim. Our corpus of Torah literature is full of questions and objections, difficulties and contradictions. Clearly, the Talmud thrives on questions more than on answers. The ideal methodology for Torah study is clear: Keep asking questions.

In the language of our sages, there exists many different words for questions. This poses problems for translators, since this vast “question” terminology, with all the various shades of meaning, cannot always be rendered properly in other languages. No other language seems to have quite so many different words for “question” as we do.

It has been claimed that Eskimos have a remarkably large number of words for snow – and it is no wonder. They live in snow throughout their lives, causing them to develop fine distinctions between different kinds of snow – heavy, light, thin, etc. Each type of snow has its own term. In countries where snow falls not nearly as frequently, many fewer terms for snow exist. By the same token, Jewish people live in a world that is rife with questions; it is therefore understandable that so many terms have developed, each of which expresses a different aspect of questioning or a different type of question.

In this regard, Maimonides is exceptional in his attempt to arrange all of Torah such that the framework of questions and answers would be rendered unnecessary. At the end of his introduction to the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides writes that he wants to spare the Jewish people the trouble of asking questions. He claims that anyone who reads the Written Law and his book can skip everything in between. He does not advocate forgoing the Written Law or claim that the Mishneh Torah should take the place of the Tanach, but he is willing to recommend skipping the Oral Law. Why should a person spend his life on questions, answers, and comparisons? Why go into all that if everything can be laid out clearly and cleanly in one solitary book?

The fact is that this attempt was not successful. Maimonides himself writes that he decided not to cite his sources because he wanted to avoid confusion, but later, when he realized what happened, he regretted this decision.8 What the Jews did to Maimonides and his great work would probably have exasperated him. Instead of the Mishneh Torah becoming a haven of calm and tranquility, where the weary could find rest, it became one the best sources for new questions. This work, which was meant to lead us to tranquility, in practice became a source for, and the focus of, many more questions.
Why is it that we thrive on questions? Before we answer, it is important to stress that there is no shame in asking questions. Though it may seem that one who asks questions admits that he lacks knowledge or understanding, the truth is quite the opposite. In a sense, it is the scholar – the one with the most knowledge of all – who asks the most questions. A non-scholar has no questions to ask, not because he knows the most but because he knows the least. In giving us the Torah, God is not selling us tranquility. Tranquility is not part of the reward. Rather, one who reaches a state in which he has no more questions, difficulties, doubts, or problems, is not the ideal man but, on the contrary, is one who has left the world entirely.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa is said to have suggested that a man should always imagine that his head is on the execution block, the evil inclination standing over him with a large axe, ready to decapitate him. One of his disciples asked, “What happens if a man does not imagine this?” Rabbi Simcha Bunim answered that this would be a sure sign that the evil inclination has already cut off his head. If a person no longer feels any anguish and lives in tranquility and peace, then he must have already been decapitated, and that is why he has a good life, full of peace and tranquility.

This conclusion is not comforting and certainly is not calming. A life of tranquility is surely more pleasant than a life of anxiety and stressfulness, but it is not a better life. Choosing the right path does not mean choosing a life of ease, nor does it mean choosing a life that is devoid of problems. Rather, it means choosing a life that inevitably contains a certain degree of anguish.

From strength to strength

“Jacob wished to live in tranquility.” Jacob is an old man, over a hundred years old, and he finally decides that he is done. He studied Torah for several years, he worked for several years, and he married four women. Now, reasons Jacob, he certainly deserves the right to settle down and lead a quiet life. The truth is that when the incident with Esau concludes, it appears that Jacob thinks that the world has more or less reached a state of tranquility.

Just when Jacob is preparing to enjoy his hard-earned rest, God interrupts, saying, “Is it not enough for the tzaddikim that so much is prepared for them in the next world, that they seek to live in peace in this world?” The righteous do not live at

ease, not as a punishment for sins, but because for them, to sleep in tranquility would be “bad for them and bad for the world.” The complication, the anguish, the pain that exists in the world – if the tzaddik does not have all of these, then apparently something is wrong in his essential character.

While it is undoubtedly true that, in certain respects, one who lives within the world of Judaism gains the ability to solve his inner dilemmas and torments, the end goal is never to enable one to settle down in tranquility. If, at any point, a Jew believes that he has freed himself of the Esaus and the Labans of his life, and that he will now be able to enter a good and spacious land where he will live at ease and rest in peace, he is simply mistaken. Going deeper and deeper into Judaism does not mean that one solves all of one’s problems and attains tranquility. That kind of empty tranquility only brings a person closer and closer to death, to the point where his existence is entirely superfluous. Once our questions have been answered, they do not go away; they simply change, becoming new questions altogether.

The draw of Judaism is not the prospect of attaining tranquility, as it is in some other religions. When a person draws closer to God and to the world of Judaism, he is rewarded not with rest but only with questions and more questions. If a person is especially successful in his spiritual journey, every day three of his small questions will die, and three large questions will be born in their place.

Even in the World to Come, there is no rest for the righteous. “They go from strength to strength,”9 which is another way of conveying this notion. When a tzaddik “graduates” from one world, finishing his learning process in this world, he is promoted to another world. What does he gain in this whole process if he is constantly working? What he gains through his labor are new questions, ones that he has never previously considered. Although these are more difficult questions, they are also questions that relate to a loftier world. He can engage in more exalted matters, but he never stops asking questions: What is more important? What is more fitting? What is the proper path to take?

That is what is truly required – not to live in pursuit of tranquility, but to live in a world of questions, each one lifting a person higher and higher in his spiritual journey.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis Rabbah 84:3.
2. Avot 4:16.

3. Berachot 64a.

4. Sanhedrin 72a.

5. Ex. 20:14.

6. Prov. 24:16.

7. Gittin 43a.

8. Igrot HaRambam II, 444–445.

9. Ps. 84:8.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4953677/jewish/When-You-Want-to-Just-Give-It-a-Break.htm

Vayeishev: The Power of the Deed
An Insight from the Rebbe
by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

[Joseph] asked Pharaoh's servants, "Why are your faces so downcast today?" Genesis 40:7

Joseph had suffered horrible humiliations. It would have been logical for him to become absorbed in his own pain, angry at the world. But Joseph did not become bitter. He remained sensitive to others and to his Divine mission in life. Not only did he perceive the anguish of Pharaoh's servants, he reached out to help them. To Joseph, the fact that G d had arranged for him to notice someone in need indicated that it was his duty to help.

As the result of this one, seemingly minor good deed, Joseph became the viceroy of Egypt, and was able to save the civilized world from famine. We see here, once again, the unimaginably far-reaching results that can come from one small good deed.1

* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

1. Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 3:4; Sichot Kodesh 5734, vol. 1, pp. 208–213.

https://www.chabad.org/dailystudy/dailywisdom_cdo/aid/2942279/jewish/Shabbat-The-Power-of-the-Deed.htm

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Explaining Thanksgiving to the French
by Art Buchwald, The Washington Post *

This confidential column was leaked to me by a high government official in the Plymouth colony on the condition that I not reveal his name.
One of our most important holidays is Thanksgiving Day, known in France as le Jour de Merci Donnant.

Le Jour de Merci Donnant was first started by a group of Pilgrims (Pèlerins) who fled from l'Angleterre before the McCarran Act to found a colony in the New World (le Nouveau Monde) where they could shoot Indians (les Peaux-Rouges) and eat turkey (dinde) to their hearts' content.

They landed at a place called Plymouth (now a famous voiture Américaine) in a wooden sailing ship called the Mayflower (or Fleur de Mai) in 1620. But while the Pèlerins were killing the dindes, the Peaux-Rouges were killing the Pèlerins, and there were several hard winters ahead for both of them. The only way the Peaux-Rouges helped the Pèlerins was when they taught them to grow corn (mais). The reason they did this was because they liked corn with their Pèlerins.

In 1623, after another harsh year, the Pèlerins' crops were so good that they decided to have a celebration and give thanks because more mais was raised by the Pèlerins than Pèlerins were killed by Peaux-Rouges.

Every year on the Jour de Merci Donnant, parents tell their children an amusing story about the first celebration.

It concerns a brave capitaine named Miles Standish (known in France as Kilomètres Deboutish) and a young, shy lieutenant named Jean Alden. Both of them were in love with a flower of Plymouth called Priscilla Mullens (no translation). The vieux capitaine said to the jeune lieutenant :

"Go to the damsel Priscilla (allez très vite chez Priscilla), the loveliest maiden of Plymouth (la plus jolie demoiselle de Plymouth). Say that a blunt old captain, a man not of words but of action (un vieux Fanfan la Tulipe), offers his hand and his heart, the hand and heart of a soldier. Not in these words, you know, but this, in short, is my meaning.

"I am a maker of war (je suis un fabricant de la guerre) and not a maker of phrases. You, bred as a scholar (vous, qui êtes pain comme un étudiant), can say it in elegant language, such as you read in your books of the pleadings and wooings of lovers, such as you think best adapted to win the heart of the maiden."

Although Jean was fit to be tied (convenable à être emballé), friendship prevailed over love and he went to his duty. But instead of using elegant language, he blurted out his mission. Priscilla was muted with amazement and sorrow (rendue muette par l'étonnement et la tristesse).

At length she exclaimed, interrupting the ominous silence: "If the great captain of Plymouth is so very eager to wed me, why does he not come himself and take the trouble to woo me?" (Où est-il, le vieux Kilomètres? Pourquoi ne vient-il pas auprès de moi pour tenter sa chance ?)

Jean said that Kilomètres Deboutish was very busy and didn't have time for those things. He staggered on, telling what a wonderful husband Kilomètres would make. Finally Priscilla arched her eyebrows and said in a tremulous voice, "Why don't you speak for yourself, Jean?" (Chacun à son goût.)

And so, on the fourth Thursday in November, American families sit down at a large table brimming with tasty dishes and, for the only time during the year, eat better than the French do.

No one can deny that le Jour de Merci Donnant is a grande fête and no matter how well fed American families are, they never forget to give thanks to Kilomètres Deboutish, who made this great day possible.

* I believe that Art Buchwald first wrote this column in the 1950s, when he was on the staff of the European edition of a New York newspaper. At some time, he started running the same column, but with a new introduction (first paragraph) each year. I believe that he ran this column for more than fifty years. It is a classic account of the origin of this American holiday. Some high school level French helps one maximize the impact of his research.

https://www.democraticunderground.com/10181009038

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Volume 28, Issue 9 **Shabbat Parashat Vayeshev** **5782 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Heroism of Tamar

This is a true story that took place in the 1970s. Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch, then Principal of Jews' College, the rabbinic training seminary in London where I was a student and teacher, was approached by an organisation that had been given an unusual opportunity to engage in interfaith dialogue. A group of African Bishops wanted to understand more about Judaism. Would the Principal be willing to send his senior students to engage in such a dialogue, in a chateau in Switzerland?

To my surprise, he agreed. He told me that he was sceptical about Jewish-Christian dialogue in general because he believed that over the centuries the Church had been infected by an antisemitism that was very difficult to overcome. At that time, though, he felt that African Christians were different. They loved Tanach and its stories. They were, at least in principle, open to understanding Judaism on its own terms. He did not add – though I knew it was in his mind since he was one of the world's greatest experts on Maimonides – that the great twelfth-century Sage held an unusual attitude to dialogue. Maimonides believed that Islam was a genuinely monotheistic faith while Christianity – in those days – was not. Nonetheless, he held it was permitted to study Tanach with Christians but not Muslims, since Christians believed that Tanach (what they called the Old Testament), was the word of God whereas Muslims believed that Jews had falsified the text.[1]

So we went to Switzerland. It was an unusual group: the semichah class of Jews' College, together with the top class of the yeshiva in Montreux where the late Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg, author of Seridei Esh and one of the world's foremost halachists, had taught. For three days the Jewish group davenned and bentsched with special intensity. We learned Talmud each day. For the rest of the time we had an unusual, even transformative, encounter with the African Bishops, ending with a chassidic-style tisch during which we shared with the Bishops our songs and stories and they taught us theirs. At three in the morning we finished by dancing together. We knew we were different, we knew that there were deep divides between our respective faiths, but we had become friends. Perhaps that is all we should seek. Friends don't have to agree in order to stay friends. And friendships can sometimes help heal the world.

On the morning after our arrival, an event had occurred that left a deep impression on me. The sponsoring body was a global, secular Jewish organisation, and to keep within their frame of reference the group had to include at least one non-orthodox Jew, a woman studying for the rabbinate. We, the semichah and yeshiva students, were davening the Shacharit service in one of the lounges in the chateau when the Reform woman entered, wearing tallit and tefillin, and sat herself down in the middle of the group.

This is something the students had not encountered before. What were they to do? There was no mechitzah. There was no way of separating themselves. How should they react to a woman wearing tallit and tefillin and praying in the midst of a group of davening men? They ran up to the Rav in a state of great agitation and asked what they should do. Without a moment's hesitation he quoted to them the saying of the Sages: A person should be willing to jump into a furnace of fire rather than shame another person in public. (See Brachot 43b, Ketubot 67b) With that he ordered them back to their seats, and the prayers continued.

The moral of that moment never left me. The Rav, for the past 32 years head of the yeshiva in Maaleh Adumim, was and is one of the great halachists of our time.[2] He knew immediately how serious were the issues at stake: men and women praying together without a barrier between them, and the complex question about whether women may or may not wear a tallit and tefillin. The issue was anything but simple. But he knew also that halachah is a systematic way of turning the great ethical and spiritual truths into a tapestry of deeds, and that one must never lose the larger vision in an exclusive focus on the details. Had the students insisted that the woman pray elsewhere they would have caused her great embarrassment. Never, ever shame someone in public. That was the transcending imperative of the hour. That is the mark of a great-souled man. One of the great privileges of my life was to have been his student for over a decade.

The reason I tell this story here is that it is one of the powerful and unexpected lessons of our parsha. Judah, the brother who proposed selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:26), had "gone down" to Canaan where he married a local Canaanite woman. (Gen. 38:1) The phrase "gone down" was rightly taken by the Sages as full of meaning.[3] Just as Joseph had been brought down to Egypt (Gen. 39:1) so Judah had been morally and spiritually brought down. Here was one of Jacob's sons doing what the patriarchs insisted on not doing: marrying into the local population. It is a tale of sad decline.

He marries his firstborn son, Er, to a local woman, Tamar.[4] An obscure verse tells us that he sinned, and died. Judah then married his second son, Onan, to her, under a pre-Mosaic form of levirate marriage whereby a brother is bound to marry his sister-in-law if she has been widowed without children. Onan, reluctant to father a child that would be regarded as not his but his deceased brother's, practised a form of coitus interruptus that to this day carries his name. For this, he too died. Having lost two of his sons, Judah was unwilling to give his third son, Shelah, to Tamar in marriage. The result was that she was left as a "living widow," bound to marry her brother-in-law whom Judah was withholding, but unable to marry anyone else.

After many years, seeing that her father-in-law (by this time a widower himself) was reluctant to marry her to Shelah, she decided on an audacious course of action. She removed her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil, and positioned herself at a point where Judah was likely to see her on his way to the sheep-shearing. Judah saw her, took her to be a prostitute, and engaged her services. As surety for the payment he had promised her, she insisted that he leave her his seal, cord and staff. Judah duly returned the next day with the payment, but the woman was nowhere to be seen. He asked the locals the whereabouts of the temple prostitute (the text at this point uses the word kedeshah, "cult prostitute," rather than zonah, thus deepening Judah's offence), but no one had seen such a person in the locality. Puzzled, Judah returned home.

Three months later he heard that Tamar was pregnant. He leapt to the only conclusion he could draw, namely that she had had a physical relationship with another man while bound in law to his son Shelah. She had committed adultery, for which the punishment was death. Tamar was brought out to face her sentence, and Judah instantly noticed that she was holding his staff and seal. She said, "I am pregnant by the person to whom these objects belong." Judah realised what had happened and proclaimed, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26).

This moment is a turning-point in history. Judah is the first person in the Torah explicitly to admit he was wrong.[5] We do not realise it yet, but this seems to be the moment at which he acquired the depth of character necessary for him to become the first real baal teshuvah. We see this years later, when he – the brother who proposed selling Joseph as a slave – becomes the man willing to spend the rest of his life in slavery so that his brother Benjamin can go free. (Gen. 44:33) I have argued elsewhere that it is from here that we learn the principle that a penitent stands higher than even a perfectly righteous individual.[6] Judah the penitent becomes the ancestor of Israel's Kings while Joseph the Righteous is only a viceroy, mishneh le-melech, second to the Pharaoh.

Thus far Judah. But the real hero of the story was Tamar. She had taken an immense risk by becoming pregnant. Indeed she was almost killed for it. She had done so for a noble reason: to ensure that the name of her late husband was perpetuated. But she took no less care to avoid Judah being put to shame. Only he and she knew what had happened. Judah could acknowledge his error without loss of face. It was from this episode that the Sages derived the rule articulated by Rabbi Rabinovitch that morning in Switzerland: it is better to risk being thrown into a fiery furnace than to shame someone else in public.

It is thus no coincidence that Tamar, a heroic non-Jewish woman, became the ancestor of David, Israel's greatest King. There are striking similarities between Tamar and the other heroic woman in David's ancestry, the Moabite woman we know as Ruth.

There is an ancient Jewish custom on Shabbat and festivals to cover the challot or matzah reciting Kiddush. The reason is so as not to put the bread to shame while it is being, as it were, passed over in favour of the wine. There are some very religious Jews who, unfortunately, will go to great lengths to avoid shaming an inanimate loaf of bread but have no compunction in putting their fellow Jews to shame if they regard them as less religious than they are. That is what happens when we remember the halachah but forget the underlying moral principle behind it.

Never put anyone to shame. That is what Tamar taught Judah and what a great Rabbi of our time taught those who were privileged to be his students.

[1] Maimonides, Teshuvot HaRambam, Blau Edition (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1960), no. 149.

[2] This essay was originally written by Rabbi Sacks in 2015. Rabbi Dr. Nachum Rabinovitch was Rabbi Sacks' Rav, his Rabbi, teacher, and mentor. He sadly passed away in 2020, a few months before Rabbi Sacks. To read more from Rabbi Sacks about Rabbi Rabinovitch, please see the Covenant & Conversation essay entitled "My Teacher: In Memoriam", written for Matot-Masei.

[3] According to midrashic tradition (Midrash Aggadah, Pesikta Zutreta, Sechel Tov et al.), Judah was "sent down" or excommunicated by his brothers for convincing them to sell Joseph, after the grief they saw their father suffer. See also Rashi ad loc.

[4] Targum Yonatan identifies her as the daughter of Noah's son Shem. Others identify her as a daughter of Abraham's contemporary Malkizedek. The truth is, though, that she appears in the narrative without lineage, a device often used by the Torah to emphasise that moral greatness can often be found among ordinary people. It has nothing to do with ancestry. See Alshich ad loc.

[5] The text here is full of verbal allusions. As we noted, Judah has "gone down" just as Joseph has been "brought down." Joseph is about to rise to political greatness. Judah will eventually rise to moral greatness. Tamar's deception of Judah is similar to Judah's deception of Jacob – both involve clothes: Joseph's blood-stained coat, Tamar's veil. Both reach their climax with the words haker na, "Please examine." Judah forces Jacob to believe a lie. Tamar forces Judah to recognise the truth.

[6] Brachot 34b. Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings, pp. 303-314.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Judah said to his brothers: 'What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh." (Genesis 37:26-27)

Why are Jews (Yehudim) referred to as such? Historically speaking, the vast majority of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who remained committed to their traditions and faith after the first exile (586 B.C.E.) come from the tribe of Judah (Yehuda), since the ten tribes (not including Levi) were exiled by Sanherib. In addition to the factually-accurate nomenclature, however, I would like to offer a textually-based explanation that provides a complementary but very different answer to our question.

The mere fact that a person can still call himself a Jew (Yehudi) 3,300 years after Sinai and despite nearly 2,000 years of national homelessness is truly a miracle. He is a most unlikely survivor; sustained, nurtured and kept alive by Divine providence in the face of exile, wars, pogroms, and assimilation. To understand what enables a Jew to survive despite all the forces against him, we must turn to his eponym, Judah.

What special traits did Judah possess that set him apart from his eleven brothers, and in particular from his eldest brother, Reuben? For example, when an angry and jealous mob of brothers have the chance to carry out their long-harbored wish to kill Joseph, two siblings — Reuben and Judah—each take a leadership role, and it seems that Reuben's words are the more courageous and moral!

First, Reuben, assuming his status as first-born, attempts to foil his brothers' evil design: "Let us not kill him…let us not shed blood… cast him into this pit…but lay no hand upon him…" (ibid., 37:22). As the verse itself then explains, Reuben's plan to delay a drastic decision was driven by his goal that "he might deliver [Joseph] out of their hand, to restore him to his father." Although they do indeed place Joseph into the pit, Reuben never gets to fully implement the plan.

This is because Judah sights a caravan of Ishmaelite traders in the distance, and suggests to his brothers that there is no point in murdering Joseph when they could just as easily earn money from his sale to slavery. "What profit [mah betza] is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh…" (ibid., v. 26-27).

Reuben returns, finds an empty pit, and rends his garments. His despair is deep and painful: "The child is not here, and I, where shall I go?" (ibid., v. 29-30).

If we compare the responses of Reuben and Judah, the former seems to own the moral high ground, risking his brothers' wrath in preventing them from murdering Joseph on the spot.

Judah, on the other hand, appears crass, turning the crisis into a question of profit. Speaking like an opportunistic businessman, he sees a good deal and convinces the brothers to get rid of their nemesis and enjoy a material advantage at the same time.

In this light, his concluding words, "for [Joseph] is our brother and our flesh" sound grotesque. If Judah harbored fraternal feelings for Joseph, how could he subject his younger brother to abject slave conditions? This makes Jacob's subsequent decision to name Judah as the recipient of the birthright even more puzzling.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, I would like to suggest that Judah's decision is actually what makes him the most fitting leader from among his brothers. The real test of leadership is not who provides the most absolute, morally upright solution – if that will not be accepted by the "crowd" – but rather he or she who ultimately saves the life of the victim!

It is precisely because Judah is a realist who understands when and how to make the best deal possible under exceedingly difficult circumstances that he is deemed best suited for the yoke of leadership.

Faced with dreadful options, he pursues the least horrific one possible. Acceding to Reuben's proposal to leave Joseph inside the pit— which, according to our Sages, was filled with snakes and scorpions— was tantamount to leaving Joseph to die a cruel death (unless we relied on a last-minute miracle!). On the other hand, allowing his brothers to act on

their zealous hatred of Joseph would have been unthinkable!

So when Judah sees the Ishmaelites in the distance, he seizes the opportunity to save Joseph from certain death, giving his brother a chance to perhaps survive. However, in order to be heard by his angry and jealous brothers, he understands that he must conceal his motivations under the guise of a profit-making venture for them!

Reuben may have had the best intentions for Joseph, but intentions alone are not enough. “Let us not kill him,” Reuben declares, but his words fall on deaf ears. While Reuben nobly appeals to his brothers’ “better angels”, he fails the leadership test in not utilizing more pragmatic tactics in order to attain his goal of saving Joseph. In contrast, Judah wisely couches his plea in accordance with the politician’s “art of the possible.”

Thus it is Judah, in his first test of leadership, who becomes worthy of receiving the birthright from his father, Jacob, a man also intimately familiar with navigating in a treacherous world. In an imperfect world in which ideal situations rarely exist, it is Judah, eponymous ancestor of all “Jews,” who demonstrates what it is that enables a Jew to survive and thrive: to take responsibility for the welfare and continued life of his brother, even if he must use guile in order to achieve that end-goal!

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

His Father’s Fears

There are many ways to interpret biblical texts. Some commentaries take a literal approach, others probe for deeper meanings. The great Chassidic masters, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov in the mid-eighteenth century, offer us many examples of the latter path.
At times, the effort to discover depths of meaning results in what seems to be a distortion of the plain meaning of the text. Such seeming distortions are often referred to colloquially as "Chassidishe Torah." I have personally found that these efforts are very worthwhile and that the seeming distortions reveal essential hidden truths.

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

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

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

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

Along comes Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, however, who suggests an entirely different meaning of the word megurei. Elsewhere in the Bible, in admittedly very different contexts, that word means "fear," "anxiety," perhaps even "terror." Consider but three examples from the book of Psalms. There, in chapter 31 verse 14, we have the phrase magor mesaviv, which translates as "terror on every side." Continuing on to chapter 33 verse 8, we have the phrase "mimenu yaguru," which translates as "they will dread him." Finally, in chapter 34 verse 5, we have the phrase "umikol megurosai hitzilani," which translates as "He saved me from all my terrors."

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

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak also assumes that his reader need not be reminded of the significance of the phrase "his father's fears." After all, it was as recently as two weeks ago that we read in Genesis 31:53 of the oath that "Jacob swore by Pachad Yitzchak, the Fear of his father Isaac." Whereas Jacob's grandfather Abraham symbolizes lovingkindness, his father Isaac has come to represent fear and awe in the Jewish consciousness. In this week's Torah portion, then, Jacob is returning to settle in the land where he cannot escape the attitude of fearfulness that characterized his father. But what is the nature of his father's fear? Was he anxious about the circumstances that confront us all? Was he fearful of his enemies, of natural disasters, of famine? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak responds to these questions with a resounding, "No."

Isaac's fears were of a distinctly spiritual nature. He feared that he might fall short of the Almighty’s expectations of him. He was anxious lest he sin and, thereby, distance himself from his desired and well-earned closeness to the Almighty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We see this in life. Sometimes it is amazing to hear, but people go through terrible tzores and yet they still feel a connection to the Ribono shel Olam. They feel that the Ribono shel Olam is punishing them for whatever reason, but He still is in charge and He still cares for them.

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

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

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

The answer is that for whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam wanted Rabbi Akiva to grow in Torah out of a state of poverty. He was the key link in the chain of Torah transmission

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

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

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

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

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

Reuven, Chazal say, got cold feet about this whole incident. He said, "My father is going to blame me for this." This fear put a brake on his jealousy. Once he put a brake on his jealous emotion, he was able to see the facts as they were. He recognized that Yosef was not a Rasha. Yosef was not trying to kill them. Reuven saw how the negiyus of his brothers – their jealousy and their agenda – warped their entire perspective, and they were not seeing things as they should be seen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is Murphy's Law and how should we respond to it?
Where can you find Murphy's Law in the Torah? The answer is most definitely in Parshat Vayeishev. Murphy's Law states that if something can go wrong it will – and usually at the worst time. That's the story of Yosef in our Parasha.

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

How Much God? How Much Us?
The Age-Old Problem: Freedom Vs. God's Prior Knowledge - It is an age-old dilemma: how the Jew should view the world, and the author was hesitant to discuss such a sensitive and life-changing topic. If freedom in our lives is indeed totally unconstrained, and God went to great lengths to ensure this ability to choose the proper path in life, then how could a Jew believe in this and also believe in Omniscience, that God knows all and may control all? If God knows what I will choose, my choice is no longer totally free. But one minor incident in our Parsha sheds light on how the Almighty (sometimes) operates in this world.

Many systems of understanding God will resolve this difficulty and dilemma by stating that one of the premises is not true: either God does not really know all in advance or man is not totally free. Judaism maintains both positions are valid at the same time. This is clearly stated in Pirke Avot (Avot 3:15), when it says, "All is known (by God) yet choice (by man) is given". The entire concept of Mitzvot, referred to above, demonstrates this. Mitzvot are commands which a Jew "must" do. Yet, at the same time, each time a person goes to perform a Mitzvah, it is his choice, even though God knows what that choice will be. Maimonides (Hilchot Teshuvah 5:5) also discusses this apparent difficulty and resolves it in a similar manner, emphasizing that we cannot really understand how God's knowledge works. It seems clear, though, that if the person making the choice is not aware of what God knows, from his perspective, it is a completely free choice. Rabbi Berel Wein has said that for believing Jews, some live their lives 98% Bitachon (all is in God's hands) and 2% Hishtadlut (it is up to me) and some the reverse, with most Jews somewhere in the middle.

Most Of Us Act With God In A Partnership - For most of us, who are not so truly righteous or spiritual, God does indeed impact our lives each day, but we also impact our own lives as well, in combination with God. How does this work? One example seems to be demonstrated in a small and often-overlooked narrative in our Parsha (Genesis 37:15-17). When Jacob asks Joseph to find his brothers shepherding, Joseph goes to Shechem and meets a man. Joseph asks he man where his brothers are, and this unnamed man answers that they moved on to Dotan. Joseph then finds the brothers in Dotan. Why are these three verses in the Torah at all, ask the commentaries. The Torah could simply have stated "Joseph found his bothers in Dotan"?

Nachmanides explains (Genesis 37:14-17 and Nachmanides commentary) that the Torah used this incident to explain how God works in the world. This unnamed man was sent by God to be in the right place at the right time, in order to tell Joseph, who was looking for his brothers in Shechem, that his brothers had left Shechem and were in Dotan. Had this man not been there, Joseph would not have found his brothers, Joseph would never have been sold as a slave to Egypt, and the course of Jewish history would have been radically different as a result. But what is specifically interesting is that Nachmanides declares that this man, an actual person, had no idea that he was designated by God for this mission. He was in the right place at the right time, sent by God to impact Jewish history by informing Joseph where his brothers were, but he had no idea that he was a key component. Similarly, God may send any of us to do many tasks at certain times and places our lives, which will affect others and events in the world, but, like that man in our Parsha, we, too may be unaware that we are instruments of God. We retain free will, just as Joseph freely chose to ask the man and the man freely chose to answer Joseph. But God sets up the specific situations for us to make our free will choices. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, summed up this concept when he said: God (constantly) deals us our hand of cards in life, and It is up to each of us to decide how we play them. Thus, we act in partnership with God, whether we ae aware of it or not.

Another example of this partnership with God in in the area of sickness. The more a person sins, it seems, the more sickness he or she suffers. First the Torah says (Exodus 15:26) that if Jews keep all the Mitzvot-commandments, then all the sickness suffered in Egypt will not come to those Jews. This promise is repeated later in the Torah (Deuteronomy 7:12, 15). Jews who pray believe this as a fact of Jewish life -- i.e., that God controls sickness and -- therefore one of the 19 daily blessings that traditional Jews recite before God (three times daily) is to ask God to heal us of all our maladies, as he is the true Doctor/Healer. Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid leaves no room for doubt, as he states (Sefer Chasidim 751) that anyone who thinks that sickness comes from nature and not as a punishment from God for iniquity, is himself a sinner. Thus, it seems that sickness is totally in God's hands. And, yet the Torah allows for doctors to heal sick people (Exodus 21:19). The Code of Jewish Law adds to this philosophical dilemma when he writes (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 336:1) that anyone who has the skill to heal the sick and does not do so is committing a sin, and this is forbidden -- so much so, that he is as guilty as if he is spilling blood. But how can both concepts be part of normative Judaism? If sickness is in the hands of God exclusively, how can a doctor be permitted to interfere with God's will and heal someone who is suffering because of sin? The explanation is that once God allowed for doctors, they work in tandem with God to heal sickness in the world. For example, if a person contracts a sickness that would normally heal in 14 days without medical treatment but heals in seven days if treated by a doctor, God actually wants the doctor to heal that person, so that the person's suffering was only supposed last for seven days, not fourteen. The doctor who refuses to do God's will by healing and/or reducing the suffering, i.e., bring the suffering from 14 to 7 days, is a sinner. This is an example of how God and man work in tandem in this world to make events happen. And then there is even some sickness, like fever and a cold, which God specifically says is not in His realm at all but is left exclusively to nature and the doctors (Ketuvot 30).

Life, in general, works in this manner. Although most events, causes and effects come indeed from God, each of us is part of the equation, and has input in one aspect of our lives that is not controlled by God – any moral decision. Thus, it says that everything is in God's hand except fear of God -- i.e., all moral choices are made by man, not God (Berachot 33b) Therefore, says the Talmud (Nidah 16b), all the physical characteristics of a person and what happens to a person are set up by God, but how man reacts to every situation that is set up for him, is up to that individual. Man does not get to choose what happens to him or her; it is only what a person does about it that is in everyone's hands.

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the**

full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Never Giving Up Hope
Rabbanit Sally Mayer

Yaakov was inconsolable. He sent his favorite son Yosef to check on his brothers in Shechem, but Yosef never returned. Yosef's brothers have sold him to slave traders on their way to Egypt, and they send their father Yosef's special coat, dipped in goat blood, to deceive Yaakov into thinking that Yosef had been eaten by a wild animal. Using a goat to deceive their father as Yaakov had done to his father Yitzchak years before, their ruse succeeds, and Yaakov concludes that Yosef has died. The Torah relates that "All of his sons and all of his daughters got up to console him, but he refused to be comforted, saying, 'I will go to the grave mourning my son'; and his father cried over him" (Breishit 37:35).

Why would Yaakov not accept comfort over the death of his son? Rashi cites the midrash that one cannot be comforted over the loss of someone who has not actually passed away, only over someone who is truly gone. This may be understood in a mystical sense, but perhaps also reflects a psychological truth – when there is closure, it is possible to grieve and then to continue on with the memory and legacy of those we have lost. Without the closure of actually finding and burying Yosef, Yaakov could not go through the stages of grief; a part of him still hoped that Yosef was alive, which indeed he was.

The phrase "וימאן להתנחם" – "He refused to be comforted" – appears in this combination only one other time in the entire Tanach, and that is in the famous verses in Yirmiyahu (31:14), "A voice is heard upon high, lamentation and bitter crying, Rachel is crying for her children, מאנה להנחם – she refuses to be comforted over her children, for they are gone." Why are these exact words used again here, to describe Rachel's weeping over her exiled children, so many generations later?

In Yirmiyahu, Rachel cries over her sons who have been exiled from Israel and suffer in captivity, just as her husband Yaakov cried over Yosef who is also in captivity in a strange land. Hashem responds to Rachel's crying by telling her to "Refrain your voice from crying and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded, says Hashem, and they will return from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, says Hashem, and your children will return to their own border." God is telling Rachel that you are right to refuse to be comforted – just as Yaakov could not accept consolation over Yosef because he was actually still alive, so too you refuse to be comforted because your children will indeed return to Israel and resettle the land.

Yosef ends his life with the message of hope to his brothers, passed down for generations until the Jews left Egypt – God will redeem you from Egypt and bring you back to Israel. We are the children of Yaakov and Rachel, for 2000 years refusing to be comforted over our exile, praying for and dreaming of returning home. Baruch Hashem, we are witnessing this long-awaited return to Israel that grows by the year, affirming Yaakov and Rachel's refusal to be comforted over the children who are not really gone, still keeping the dream of the Jewish People in the Jewish homeland very much alive.

Freeding Ourselves From Our Prisons
by Rabbi Mark Fishman

תניא רבי אליעזר אומר בתשרי נברא העולם בתשרי נולדו אבות בתשרי מתו אבות בפסח נולד יצחק בראש השנה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנה בראש השנה יצא יוסף מבית האסורין

It is taught in a baraita: Rabbi Eliezer says: In Tishrei the world was created; in Tishrei the Patriarchs were born; in Tishrei the Patriarchs died; on Passover Isaac was born; on Rosh HaShana Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were remembered by God and conceived; on Rosh HaShana Yosef came out from prison.
Talmud: Rosh Hashanah 10b

Fascinatingly, our sages saw monumental events taking place on Rosh Hashanah. If you look at this list from the above passage of the Talmud you might be struck by the last item on this list: Yosef being freed from his prison.

Of course, on one level it doesn't really matter when Yosef was freed. He got out and from there began his monumental climb to the top. Yet if our sages are pointing out that his freedom from bondage took place on Rosh Hashanah then there must be a deeper level, a more fundamental point that we are being taught.

I believe that our sages are hinting at the fact that in some ways we can at times feel trapped. That the lives we have built and the realities we create can sometime be lackluster, perhaps we even feel stuck. Along comes Rosh Hashanah and reminds us that indeed, this day is a day for our freedom. The chance to be whoever we wish to be, the opportunity to go wherever we may wish to go, and become the people we truly long to be.

But how do we get there? How do we break out from the prison that may hold us back? I think following Yosef's life and legacy can point us in the right direction.

The first thing to do is dream. I know people who spend months planning a vacation but very little time planning a life. Imagine setting out on a journey without deciding first where exactly it is that you are going? We can travel at such fast speeds, we strive to put men on Mars (or at least Space X does), yet no matter how fast we journey through life, we will never reach our destination if we never decided where we wanted to be.

Dreams are the great theme of the book of Bereishit. So many people dream in the opening book of the Torah. Great leaders are dreamers. Moshe dreams of a land flowing with milk and honey, Yeshayahu dreams of a world at peace. Perhaps the greatest speech of the twentieth century was Martin Luther King's "I have a dream." Step one is to follow Yosef's lead and dream a dream.

Step two has to be to enjoy and focus on what you are good at. Each of us has a passion – we need to follow it. Nothing else really matters – not money, fame or success – if we end up spending a lifetime doing things we don't enjoy. No one on their deathbed, as the popular saying goes, ever said they wished they had spent more time in the office. Yet I recognise a number of people who, through being a workaholic push themselves to leave no opportunity unturned, only to have sacrificed their families and certainly their relationships with their children on the alter of 'I had to work'. For those who can find their vocation in the things they are passionate about, they tend to be the type of people who spread joy. They become the type of people we like being around. They are the type of people who inspire us to be more like them.

The third step of moving out from our locked-in lives comes from the famed psychotherapist who survived Auschwitz, Viktor Frankl. His book, Man's Search for Meaning, is one of the most widely read books of our time. Frankl writes: Don't ask what you want from life. Ask what life wants from you. There is a well-known story about three men who spent their lives quarrying rocks. When asked what they were doing, one replied, "Breaking rocks." The second said, "Earning a living." The third said, "Building a cathedral." We don't need to ask which of the three had the most job satisfaction. Where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God wants us to be.

The fourth step is to remember the things that matter and to make time for them. If you have spent enough time figuring out what really matters, you will know this means family and friends. This also means carving out time for prayer, learning, community and volunteering. The love and generosity, the fun and the joy we can all experience is based on us permitting ourselves to carve out the time for such moments. At the heart of this idea is Shabbat and how stopping one day in seven can be our lifeline to the 'real-world' of what matters. Connecting with love, humour, joy, community – nothing can give us greater moments of bliss.

Finally, taking advantage of the moments life gives us. I fear that had Yosef been released from prison today he might have missed his chance due to updating his Instagram account. Instead of liking things in the virtual world,

actually tell someone what you like about them. Instead of staring aimlessly into a screen, go out into the world and seize the moment. It was created especially for you. At this very moment, at this very time, you could be freed from your own prison.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

And Elokim said, "Let there be light" and there was light. (Breishis 1:3) The history of the world begins with a flood of Divine light. We cannot properly understand what this sublime light was because it preceded the creation of the great luminaries. It's obviously a wavelength or a dimension of light different than what we experience on a daily basis.

That first overt pronouncement of HASHEM was then covered up by ever thickening veils and layers until HASHEM said to His world, as it is states in Tractate Chagigah, "DI" – "Enough". The world at that point was sufficiently thick and viscous that someone walking on this planet for 70 or 120 years can spend their time working, sleeping, eating, and channel surfing and never ask seriously, "Where does this all come from?" Yet the world is tinged with enough wonder that someone like Avraham Avinu and we his children, can ask with sufficient tenacity to discover with certitude that HASHEM is the sole author of reality.

The ten statements that were invested into the creation of the world were designed as a cover up so that the drama of free will can unfold. The word for "world" – "OLAM" really means hidden, not because we are hiding from HASHEM but rather because HASHEM is hidden from us.

Jewish history also begins with an explosion of light. The Sefas explains that the 10 Plagues that Egypt was stricken with, was an undressing and a reversal of the covering ups of creation. It's no mistake that the 9th of the plagues was the plague of darkness which mystical books explain as an increase of light. Many were actually blinded by the light. Those whose eyes were adjusting to the reality of HASHEM with the other plagues benefitted from that light. Others living in denial were quickly overwhelmed by the sudden truth of that light, a spiritual cognitive dissonance.

That plague corresponds to the 2nd statement of creation, "Let there be light…" The Talmud in Chagigah again explains that BREISHIS NAMI MAIMER… Breishis "In the beginning of…"-was the first general statement. Therefore the Death of the First Born aligns with that "statement" in ways I admittedly cannot explain.

Then at the giving of the giving of the Torah the world was again flooded with Divine light. The Torah testifies, "The nation saw the sounds". They were able to see what is normally heard, as HASHEM spoke out the Ten Statements! What was hidden, laced into creation in the 10 original expressions was later revealed in the 10 statements, known as the 10 Commandments.

Our sages tell us in many ways that the history will conclude with an even more spectacular display of light by the Geula Shlaima – the final redemption. For that reason when we break the middle Matzah at the Pesach Seder we put the larger piece aside for the end, because the best is yet to come.

I remember one of my Rebbeim describing how we are traveling through history down a long tunnel. At the early part of our journey we are benefitting from and inspired by the light that comes from the very beginning. As we approach the end of our journey we begin to experience the light from the end of the tunnel. It's really the same light, if you think about it. We have been confined to a myopic tunnel of time and space.

There is a point along the way, though, when there is neither light from the beginning nor from the end. That place can be very dark and discouraging. That's where Chanukah plays its important role. Chanukah is a bridge of light during the darkest times of life. Sometimes we have to make it till we make it, and Chanukah provides the light necessary to make it, gaining inspiration until we can reach the light at the end of the tunnel.

Weekly Parsha VAYESHEV 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The story of Joseph and his brothers reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of mortal beings and a family structure. Parents, in a perfect world, do not have favorite children. All their children are their favorites, in their minds and hearts. However, in the imperfect world that we live in, favoritism within a family is a norm and not an exception. For whatever reason – and it is usually an emotional and even irrational one – favoritism within a family is a fact of life and common in the human experience.

The issue is not the favoritism itself, but, rather, how the parents and the other members of the family deal with this situation. A great deal depends upon the attitude of the child that is being favored.

In this week's Torah reading, Joseph flaunts his status as being the favored child of Jacob. It is not so much that the brothers resent the specialness displayed by Jacob as he relates to Joseph, for they realize that Joseph is a person of physical strength and attraction, filled with great spiritual and creative values. They even do not begrudge him his status as being the favorite of their father. What they do object to, and most vehemently react to, is the way Joseph chooses to publicly display his favored status in their faces and to their detriment.

One need not demean others to establish one's own greatness and talents. Every person is entitled to great dreams but may not to use them publicly as a weapon against others. And it is this vicious pattern of behavior exhibited by Joseph that the brothers object to, and eventually feel mortally threatened by.

At the end of this wondrous story related to us in the Torah, the brothers and Joseph will come to terms with his uniqueness and favorite position in the family. Joseph will wisely refrain from relating to them his dreams of success, nor attribute his position of power over them to that of entitlement, but rather, as being God's servant in bringing about salvation for all concerned. The brothers, for their part, will realize that their actions were unjustified and extreme regarding their treatment of their brother.

All parties concerned will be forced to take a step back and readjust their thinking as to their reaction regarding the favored status of Joseph. It will take decades and a great deal of pain and suffering on the part of all of Jacob's sons to face up to the reality of their past behavior towards one another. But the greatness of our forefathers, who created the tribes of Israel and the Jewish nation, lies in their honest assessment of their past behavior, and their attempt to begin again with a new and different attitude towards each other.

There will be lingering doubts and fears, of course, for the past never disappears, but in the Torah readings during this coming month, the crucial moral lesson about being honest regarding our past, and being better people regarding our future, will be driven home to us.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Heroism of Tamar (Vayeshev)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

This is a true story that took place in the 1970s. Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch, then Principal of Jews' College, the rabbinic training seminary in London where I was a student and teacher, was approached by an organisation that had been given an unusual opportunity to engage in interfaith dialogue. A group of African Bishops wanted to understand more about Judaism. Would the Principal be willing to send his senior students to engage in such a dialogue, in a chateau in Switzerland?

To my surprise, he agreed. He told me that he was sceptical about Jewish-Christian dialogue in general because he believed that over the centuries the Church had been infected by an antisemitism that was very difficult to overcome. At that time, though, he felt that African Christians were different. They loved Tanach and its stories. They were, at least in principle, open to understanding Judaism on its own terms. He did not add – though I knew it was in his mind since he was one of the world's greatest experts on Maimonides – that the great twelfth-century Sage held an unusual attitude to dialogue. Maimonides believed that Islam was a genuinely monotheistic faith while Christianity – in those days – was not. Nonetheless, he held it was permitted to study Tanach with Christians but not Muslims, since Christians believed that Tanach (what they called the Old Testament), was the word of God whereas Muslims believed that Jews had falsified the text.[1]

So we went to Switzerland. It was an unusual group: the semichah class of Jews' College, together with the top class of the yeshiva in Montreux where the late Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg, author of Seridei Esh and one of the world's foremost halachists, had taught. For three days the Jewish group davenned and bentsched with special intensity. We learned Talmud each day. For the rest of the time we had an unusual, even transformative, encounter with the African Bishops, ending with a chassidic-style tisch during which we shared with the Bishops our songs and stories and they taught us theirs. At three in the morning we finished by dancing together. We knew we were different, we knew that there were deep divides between our respective faiths, but we had become friends. Perhaps that is all we should seek. Friends don't have to agree in order to stay friends. And friendships can sometimes help heal the world.

On the morning after our arrival, an event had occurred that left a deep impression on me. The sponsoring body was a global, secular Jewish organisation, and to keep within their frame of reference the group had to include at least one non-orthodox Jew, a woman studying for the rabbinate. We, the semichah and yeshiva students, were davening the Shacharit service in one of the lounges in the chateau when the Reform woman entered, wearing tallit and tefillin, and sat herself down in the middle of the group.

This is something the students had not encountered before. What were they to do? There was no mechitzah. There was no way of separating themselves. How should they react to a woman wearing tallit and tefillin and praying in the midst of a group of davening men? They ran up to the Rav in a state of great agitation and asked what they should do. Without a moment's hesitation he quoted to them the saying of the Sages: A person should be willing to jump into a furnace of fire rather than shame another person in public. (See Brachot 43b, Ketubot 67b) With that he ordered them back to their seats, and the prayers continued.

The moral of that moment never left me. The Rav, for the past 32 years head of the yeshiva in Maaleh Adumim, was and is one of the great halachists of our time.[2] He knew immediately how serious were the issues at stake: men and women praying together without a barrier between them, and the complex question about whether women may or may not wear a tallit and tefillin. The issue was anything but simple. But he knew also that halachah is a systematic way of turning the great ethical and spiritual truths into a tapestry of deeds, and that one must never lose the larger vision in an exclusive focus on the details. Had the students insisted that the woman pray elsewhere they would have caused her great embarrassment. Never, ever shame someone in public. That was the transcending imperative of the hour. That is the mark of a great-souled man. One of the great privileges of my life was to have been his student for over a decade.

The reason I tell this story here is that it is one of the powerful and unexpected lessons of our parsha. Judah, the brother who proposed selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:26), had "gone down" to Canaan where he married a local Canaanite woman. (Gen. 38:1) The phrase "gone down" was rightly taken by the Sages as full of meaning.[3] Just as Joseph had been brought down to Egypt (Gen. 39:1) so Judah had been morally and spiritually brought down. Here was one of Jacob's sons doing what the patriarchs insisted on not doing: marrying into the local population. It is a tale of sad decline.

He marries his firstborn son, Er, to a local woman, Tamar.[4] An obscure verse tells us that he sinned, and died. Judah then married his second son, Onan, to her, under a pre-Mosaic form of levirate marriage whereby a brother is bound to marry his sister-in-law if she has been widowed without children. Onan, reluctant to father a child that would be regarded as not his but his deceased brother's, practised a form of coitus interruptus that to this day carries his name. For this, he too died. Having lost two of his sons, Judah was unwilling to give his third son, Shelah, to Tamar in marriage. The result was that she was left as a "living widow," bound to marry her brother-in-law whom Judah was withholding, but unable to marry anyone else.

After many years, seeing that her father-in-law (by this time a widower himself) was reluctant to marry her to Shelah, she decided on an audacious course of action. She removed her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil, and positioned herself at a point where Judah was likely to see her on his way to the sheep-shearing. Judah saw her, took her to be a prostitute, and engaged her services. As surety for the payment he had promised her, she insisted that he leave her his seal, cord and staff. Judah duly returned the next day with the payment, but the woman was nowhere to be seen. He asked the locals the

whereabouts of the temple prostitute (the text at this point uses the word kedeshah, "cult prostitute," rather than zonah, thus deepening Judah's offence), but no one had seen such a person in the locality. Puzzled, Judah returned home.

Three months later he heard that Tamar was pregnant. He leapt to the only conclusion he could draw, namely that she had had a physical relationship with another man while bound in law to his son Shelah. She had committed adultery, for which the punishment was death. Tamar was brought out to face her sentence, and Judah instantly noticed that she was holding his staff and seal. She said, "I am pregnant by the person to whom these objects belong." Judah realised what had happened and proclaimed, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26).

This moment is a turning-point in history. Judah is the first person in the Torah explicitly to admit he was wrong.[5] We do not realise it yet, but this seems to be the moment at which he acquired the depth of character necessary for him to become the first real baal teshuvah. We see this years later, when he – the brother who proposed selling Joseph as a slave – becomes the man willing to spend the rest of his life in slavery so that his brother Benjamin can go free. (Gen. 44:33) I have argued elsewhere that it is from here that we learn the principle that a penitent stands higher than even a perfectly righteous individual. (Brachot 34b) [6] Judah the penitent becomes the ancestor of Israel's Kings while Joseph the Righteous is only a viceroy, mishneh le-melech, second to the Pharaoh.

Thus far Judah. But the real hero of the story was Tamar. She had taken an immense risk by becoming pregnant. Indeed she was almost killed for it. She had done so for a noble reason: to ensure that the name of her late husband was perpetuated. But she took no less care to avoid Judah being put to shame. Only he and she knew what had happened. Judah could acknowledge his error without loss of face. It was from this episode that the Sages derived the rule articulated by Rabbi Rabinovitch that morning in Switzerland: it is better to risk being thrown into a fiery furnace than to shame someone else in public.

It is thus no coincidence that Tamar, a heroic non-Jewish woman, became the ancestor of David, Israel's greatest King. There are striking similarities between Tamar and the other heroic woman in David's ancestry, the Moabite woman we know as Ruth.

There is an ancient Jewish custom on Shabbat and festivals to cover the challot or matzah reciting Kiddush. The reason is so as not to put the bread to shame while it is being, as it were, passed over in favour of the wine. There are some very religious Jews who, unfortunately, will go to great lengths to avoid shaming an inanimate loaf of bread but have no compunction in putting their fellow Jews to shame if they regard them as less religious than they are. That is what happens when we remember the halachah but forget the underlying moral principle behind it.

Never put anyone to shame. That is what Tamar taught Judah and what a great Rabbi of our time taught those who were privileged to be his students.

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

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And Judah said to his brothers: 'What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh." (Genesis 37:26-27)

Why are Jews (Yehudim) referred to as such? Historically speaking, the vast majority of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who remained committed to their traditions and faith after the first exile (586 B.C.E.) come from the tribe of Judah (Yehuda), since the ten tribes (not including Levi) were exiled by Sanherib. In addition to the factually-accurate nomenclature, however, I would like to offer a textually-based explanation that provides a complementary but very different answer to our question.

The mere fact that a person can still call himself a Jew (Yehudi) 3,300 years after Sinai and despite nearly 2,000 years of national homelessness is truly a miracle. He is a most unlikely survivor; sustained, nurtured and kept alive by Divine providence in the face of exile, wars, pogroms, and assimilation. To understand what enables a Jew to survive despite all the forces against him, we must turn to his eponym, Judah.

What special traits did Judah possess that set him apart from his eleven brothers, and in particular from his eldest brother, Reuben? For example, when an angry and jealous mob of brothers have the chance to carry out their long-harbored wish to kill Joseph, two siblings— Reuben and Judah—each take a leadership role, and it seems that Reuben's words are the more courageous and moral!

First, Reuben, assuming his status as first-born, attempts to foil his brothers' evil design: "Let us not kill him…let us not shed blood…cast him into this pit…but lay no hand upon him…" (ibid., 37:22). As the verse itself then explains, Reuben's plan to delay a drastic decision was driven by his goal that "he might deliver [Joseph] out of their hand, to restore him to his father." Although they do indeed place Joseph into the pit, Reuben never gets to fully implement the plan.

This is because Judah sights a caravan of Ishmaelite traders in the distance, and suggests to his brothers that there is no point in murdering Joseph when they could just as easily earn money from his sale to slavery. "What profit [mah betza] is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh…" (ibid., v. 26-27).

Reuben returns, finds an empty pit, and rends his garments. His despair is deep and painful: "The child is not here, and I, where shall I go?" (ibid., v. 29-30).

If we compare the responses of Reuben and Judah, the former seems to own the moral high ground, risking his brothers' wrath in preventing them from murdering Joseph on the spot.

Judah, on the other hand, appears crass, turning the crisis into a question of profit. Speaking like an opportunistic businessman, he sees a good deal and convinces the brothers to get rid of their nemesis and enjoy a material advantage at the same time.

In this light, his concluding words, "for [Joseph] is our brother and our flesh" sound grotesque. If Judah harbored fraternal feelings for Joseph, how could he subject his younger brother to abject slave conditions? This makes Jacob's subsequent decision to name Judah as the recipient of the birthright even more puzzling.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, I would like to suggest that Judah's decision is actually what makes him the most fitting leader from among his brothers. The real test of leadership is not who provides the most absolute, morally upright solution – if that will not be accepted by the "crowd" – but rather he or she who ultimately saves the life of the victim!

It is precisely because Judah is a realist who understands when and how to make the best deal possible under exceedingly difficult circumstances that he is deemed best suited for the yoke of leadership.

Faced with dreadful options, he pursues the least horrific one possible. Acceding to Reuben's proposal to leave Joseph inside the pit— which, according to our Sages, was filled with snakes and scorpions— was tantamount to leaving Joseph to die a cruel death (unless we relied on a last-minute miracle!). On the other hand, allowing his brothers to act on their zealous hatred of Joseph would have been unthinkable!

So when Judah sees the Ishmaelites in the distance, he seizes the opportunity to save Joseph from certain death, giving his brother a chance to perhaps survive. However, in order to be heard by his angry and jealous brothers, he understands that he must conceal his motivations under the guise of a profit-making venture for them!

Reuben may have had the best intentions for Joseph, but intentions alone are not enough. "Let us not kill him," Reuben declares, but his words fall on deaf ears. While Reuben nobly appeals to his brothers' "better angels", he fails the leadership test in not utilizing more pragmatic tactics in order to attain his goal of saving Joseph. In contrast, Judah wisely couches his plea in accordance with the politician's "art of the possible."

Thus it is Judah, in his first test of leadership, who becomes worthy of receiving the birthright from his father, Jacob, a man also intimately familiar with navigating in a treacherous world. In an imperfect world in which ideal situations rarely exist, it is Judah, eponymous ancestor of all "Jews," who demonstrates what it is that enables a Jew to survive and thrive: to take responsibility for the welfare and continued life of his brother, even if he must use guile in order to achieve that end-goal!

Shabbat Shalom!

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 27 November 2021 / 23 Kislev 5782
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Vayeshev
A True Shepherd

"Yosef at the age of seventeen was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock…" (37:2)

"Because Hashem loves only those who love the Jewish People. And the greater the love a person has for the Jewish People, the greater is Hashem's love for that person. These are the true shepherds of Israel. Hashem desires them greatly because they sacrifice

themselves for their flocks and seek out their good. They exert themselves on behalf of the Jewish People, seeking their welfare in every way possible. They stand in the breach to defend them (the Jewish People) by praying for the nullification of harsh decrees against them and open the gates of blessing for them. It's like a father who loves no one more than someone whom he sees truly loves his son. This is something that experience testifies to." (Mesillat Yesharim – The Path of the Just, by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto)

For forty years and more, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was the address for the most complex and difficult halachic questions. He lived on the Lower East Side of New York City.

One day the sound of a car crash pierced the tranquility of his study. A Torah student flew through the door of his apartment with terrible news. Right outside Rabbi Feinstein's apartment, a car had run down and killed a young Jewish boy.

"That's not possible," said Reb Moshe.

"But I saw him lying there." said the student.

"It's not possible that the boy is Jewish," said Reb Moshe. "Go back and check, please."

The student returned to the scene of the accident. Ambulances and police were now crowding the street. Clearly beside the motionless boy there was a yarmulke. The yeshiva student returned to Reb Moshe. "It's true." "He's Jewish." "It's not possible," said, Reb Moshe. "Go and check again."

The student returned once again to the street. A crowd of people had now gathered around. Out of the crowd, a young Jewish boy emerged and asked one of the police officers for his yarmulke. "This belongs to you?" quizzed the policeman. "Yes. This boy was shouting anti-Semitic slogans at me and he chased me across the street. My kippa flew off my head as I was running. The yellow cab that ran him down just missed me."

The yeshiva student was stunned. He returned to Reb Moshe and told him the story. "But Rebbe, how were you so sure that the dead boy wasn't Jewish? The age of prophecy ended more that two thousand years ago."

Reb Moshe looked at him. "For more than forty years I have sat at this desk. My entire life has been involved with the welfare of the Jewish People. It is not possible that a Jewish boy would die in such a way right under my window."

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Vayeishev: Our greatest inspiration can be found within ourselves!

Sometimes, our greatest inspiration comes from within ourselves.

In Parshat Vayeishev, the Torah describes how Yaakov favoured his son Yosef and a reason is given for this in Bereishit 37:3:

"…ki ben zekunim hu lo," – "…because he was a child of his old age."

Mishnah

The Ba'al HaTurim, who is a master of Hebrew words and letters, says that we can learn from here that Yaakov taught Yosef all the lessons of the Mishnah.

What an extraordinary teaching! Where does the Ba'al HaTurim get this from? The Ba'al HaTurim explains that it comes from the words 'ben zekunim.' Zekunim has five letters. The zayin stands for Zeraim, which is the first of the orders of the Mishnah, teaching us the laws of agriculture. The kuf stands for Kodshim, the sacrificial rites, the nun for Nashim teaching us all the laws relating to women and marriage, and so on. The yud stands for the word Yeshua, saving, relating to the way in which we need to save ourselves from the threat of being damaged as is described in Seder Nezikin, and then finally the mem stands for Moed which deals with all our festivals.

Now there's a huge question we have to ask on this Ba'al HaTurim. Even a little child, from the seder experience, knows about 'Shisha Sidrei Mishnah' – there are SIX orders of the Mishnah! The Ba'al HaTurim only refers to five of them here!

The Admor, Rev Itsche Meir of Gur, explains beautifully. He says that only five of the orders are mentioned because they relate to the passing down of information, to instruction. When a parent instructs a child about something, it's a cerebral activity, which is how Yosef was able to learn from Yaakov about agricultural law, about the festivals, and so on.

Purity

When, however, it comes to the sixth Order of the Mishnah which is called Taharot, how to live a life of purity, no person can receive that automatically from previous generations. We need to look into ourselves to derive inspiration from ourselves to lead a pure life. That's something that Yaakov could not give to Yosef, and that's why that seder is missing.

Over many years I have come across many people who've been from the finest, most outstanding homes

and yet that is not reflected in their way of life, and on the other hand I've seen so many extraordinary people who come from backgrounds which they would probably wish to forget about and yet from within themselves they have reached exceptional levels of human conduct and are an extraordinary inspiration for many others.

So when looking for guidance and inspiration in life, often we should just start from within ourselves.

Shabbat shalom.

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

Drasha Parshas Vayeishev - Prisoner of Unconscious

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Near the end of this week's parsha, the Torah tells how Yoseph is falsely accused of adultery and is sent to prison. During Yoseph's detention "Hashem was with Yoseph, He was endowed with charm and had much favor in the eyes of the warden. In fact, the warden placed all the other prisoners in Yoseph's custody and Yoseph was in charge of all their duties. The warden trusted everything that Yoseph did and, everything that Yoseph discharged was successful" (Genesis 39:21-23).

In addition to the Divine Providence that cloaked Yoseph, another striking incident occurred. Back at Pharaoh's palace, the king's was served wine with an insect floating in it, and a foreign substance was baked into Pharaoh's bread. The baker and butler were both jailed for those breaches, and were placed in Yoseph's charge. After a year in prison, theu both dreamt a strange dream. Yoseph, Divinely ordained, interpreted each dream in amazingly accurate fashion. He predicted that the baker would be executed for his infraction while the wine steward would be returned to his former position and stature. Yoseph, convinced at the power of his predictions, did not stop with mere interpretations. He implored the wine steward to discuss his own plight with Pharaoh. "If only you would think of me when Pharaoh benefits you, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you will get me out of here," pleaded Yoseph (Genesis 40:14). Yoseph erred. The wine-steward completely ignored Yoseph's requests and left him to languish in prison for another two years. In fact, upon mentioning Yoseph to Pharaoh, the butler even referred to him in a very disparaging manner.

The midrash explains that this response, or lack thereof, was a heavenly punishment. Yoseph should not have urged a mortal man to be the vehicle of his release. He should have rather placed more faith in Hashem. Many commentaries are bothered by this midrash. They ask, "is it not one's duty to employ the help of others? Why should Yoseph have relied solely on Hashem? What is wrong with asking for help from below instead of relying solely on the One Above?

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, had a keen sense of direction, not only in spiritual life, but on the mundane streets of the city as well. He was once in a car together with a colleague, a Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of a prestigious Yeshiva. That particular Rosh Yeshiva was a nervous individual and panicked when the driver, a student of his, lost his way in an area of the city that was not accustomed to welcoming rabbis with open arms. The young man wanted desperately to get back on the highway. "Please," pleaded the Rosh Yeshiva of his student, "freg a politzmahn (ask a policeman)!"

Reb Yaakov interrupted. "You needn't ask. I know the way." Reb Yaakov turned his attention to the driver. "Continue for two blocks, make a left. After the first light, you make another left. Make an immediate right and you will see the entrance to the highway that we need."

Reb Yaakov's colleague was not convinced. "Please," he insisted of the driver, "ask a policeman!" The student felt obliged to listen to his Rosh Yeshiva, and spotted a police car on the other side of the street, two blocks away. Quickly he made a U-turn, drove the two blocks, and stopped the officer. "Excuse me, officer, asked the nervous driver, "how do you get back on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway?"

The officer saw the two sages in the back seat of the car and realized the severity of the situation. He began to explain the directions. "First of all, turn back around and go four blocks. Then make a left. After the first light, you make another left. Make an immediate right and you will see the entrance to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway."

My grandfather turned to his colleague and smiled. "Nu, my friend," whispered Reb Yaakov, "now that a stranger said it, do you feel better?"

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (who incidentally was not the other Rosh Yeshiva) explains that there are two types of individuals. There are those who have no heavenly signs, and the thought of Hashem is quite distant from them. Then there are those whose every action is

blessed with the guidance of a spiritual force. It is almost as if Hashem is walking hand in hand with them or even as if Hashem is sitting next to them. Yoseph should have realized that the events that transpired in the prison cell were supernaturally divine. Within one year of entering prison, he is charged with the welfare of every prisoner. Then, two Egyptian stewards were sent to be with him, and each had a dream that Yoseph, divinely inspired, interpreted in prophetic fashion. At that point, Yoseph should have understood that his freedom was imminent. Hashem, through His own mysterious yet miraculous ways would surely get him out of jail. The wine-steward was extremely impressed when Yoseph's interpretation pro ved correct. Yoseph did not have to implore the steward twice with requests for mercy.

When G-d is driving, there is no need to ask for directions.

Dedicated in memory of Joseph Jungreis — Reb Yoel Zvi ben Reb Tuvia HaLevi By Joel & Marylin Mandel

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeishev

The Father Who Weeps Unceasingly for His Lost Son

The brothers threw Yosef into a pit on Reuvain's advice (rather than kill him outright). Reuvain intended to come back to the pit and rescue Yosef. However, in Reuvain's absence, the brothers decided to sell Yosef to traveling merchants. They first stripped him of the special robe his father had made for him and dipped it into the blood of a goat they slaughtered to make it look like Yosef was killed by a wild animal.

They sent the bloodied garment to their father and asked him to identify it. He recognized the garment and, as the brothers anticipated, concluded that his beloved son was torn up by a wild animal. The pasuk states that Yaakov ripped his garments, put on sackcloth, and went into an extended period of inconsolable mourning for Yosef.

The pasuk further relates: "All of his sons and daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be consoled. He said, 'I will descend to the grave mourning my son'. And his father mourned for him." [Bereshis 37:35]

At a recent Agudah Convention, Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum from Queens told a story about a Rav from Eretz Yisrael. The story is related to this pasuk, and the commentary of the Ohr HaChaim haKadosh thereon.

The Ohr HaChaim haKadosh asks a question: When Yaakov's children saw that Yaakov refused to stop mourning for Yosef, they were perplexed. They commented to themselves: Such behavior may be appropriate for a person who has just one son and that son dies, or perhaps even someone who just has a few children – then perhaps a father might go into a deep and inconsolable mourning after witnessing the (almost) total devastation of his family.

The Ohr HaChaim wonders what it was that Yaakov's children said to him to try to comfort him and concludes that they did not say anything. Rather, they did something which they thought should provide a source of comfort to Yaakov by itself: "All of his sons and daughters arose to comfort him…" They assumed that the very gathering together of the large family including the many surviving children and grandchildren who were still part of Yaakov's legacy would itself bring their father a source of consolation and comfort. They came as eleven remaining sons, and an equal number of daughters (for with each Tribe, according to the Medrash, a twin daughter was born). Imagine the scene. Yaakov is there, inconsolable. He can't find nechama. The family suggest to one another: Do you know what we will do? We will gather everyone together. All the sons, all the daughters, all the grandchildren. Yaakov will look up at this throng of people, and that will be his nechama. A person with such a large family should not be so distressed over the disappearance of just one of his sons.

The plan did not work. Yaakov refused to be comforted even by this scene. Yosef was clearly Yaakov's favorite son. Yaakov saw in him something that he did not see in any of the other children, and even the large remaining family could not compensate for the loss of the irreplaceable eldest son of his beloved wife Rochel.

This was part of a story told by Rabbi Oelbaum at an Agudah Convention: There was a Rav in Eretz Yisrael who spoke between Mincha and Ma'ariv during the week of Parshas VaYeshev. The Rav repeated this interpretation of the Ohr HaChaim haKadosh, and

then he concluded: "And this is the way the Ribono shel Olam feels. There are thousands and thousands of people who are religiously observant Jews, and who are learning Torah. Especially in Eretz Yisrael, there are large and growing communities full of Shomrei Torah and Lomdei Torah – tens of thousands of people! But the Ribono shel Olam looks and sees how many sons are lost and how many daughters are lost. Therefore, the fact that there are tens of thousands of people learning and being Shomrei Torah u'Mitzvos does not console Him. The Ribono shel Olam weeps for every Jew that is not Shomer Torah u'Mitzvos.

That was the Rav's drasha in Eretz YIsrael for Parshas VaYeshev. Just like Yaakov wept and kept on weeping for his son Yosef because he was lost, so too the Almighty weeps for every Jew who is lost.

There was a Jew in shul that evening, apparently a neighbor of the Rav, who was not a Shomer Mitzvos. Despite the Rav's many attempts to be mekarev this person and to have influence on him, nothing helped. That night, this Jew came to shul because he had Yahrtzeit, and he heard the Rav's drasha that the Ribono shel Olam weeps over every Jew that is "lost" like Yaakov wept over Yosef. He came over to the Rav after Ma'ariv and asked "Do you mean that the Ribono shel Olam cries for me, that he weeps over me because I am not a Shomer Mitzvah?"

The Rav said, "Yes, precisely. The Ribono shel Olam cries profusely over every lost Jew, and you are such a lost Jew. Hashem considers every Jew to be one of his children,, and just like Yaakov would not be consoled over one of his children who was lost, that is the way it is with Hashem's mourning over his lost children. He keeps on weeping."

That apparently touched this Yahrtzeit observer in the right place, and he became a Chozer B'Teshuva. Little by little, he found the way back home. He started becoming a Shomer Shabbos, and today he is already a full Shomer Torah U'MItzvos.

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Rav Kook Torah

Vayeshev: The Reality of Dreams

Chanan Morrison

Joseph, the ambitious protagonist of the final four readings of Genesis, was the "master of dreams." In addition to his own two dreams of future greatness, Joseph was called upon to interpret four more dreams: the dreams of the royal baker and steward, and Pharaoh's double dream about the seven-year famine.

All six dreams bore prophetic messages. "A dream," the Sages taught, "is a sixtieth of prophecy" (Berachot 57b). And yet, Joseph's dreams contained inaccuracies. Joseph dreamt that the sun and moon would bow down to him — i.e., even his father and mother would acknowledge his greatness. But, as his father quickly pointed out, Joseph's mother had passed away long before!

Nevertheless, "Jacob waited to see the results" (Gen. 37:11). He knew that this impossibility did not invalidate the rest of the dream. As the Sages noted in Berachot 55a: "Even if most of a dream comes true, not all of it will come to pass."

Why do dreams include extraneous elements and inaccurate details?

Rav Kook explained that this is due to the very nature of dreams. All dreams originate from our imaginative and emotional faculties. As a result, they are subject to exaggeration and nonsensical elements. Even prophetic dreams may contain details that do not correspond to reality.

This is because the truth contained in a prophetic dream relates to the general reality of what should happen. It may be that due to circumstances, certain details in fact occurred differently. This does not mean that the dream is false. Rather, the dream's message relates to what potentially could or should have occurred.

Joseph dreamt of his parents bowing down before him. In reality, Joseph's mother had died many years before. Yet the fundamental message of the dream was true, for had Rachel still been alive, she too would have bowed down before her son, viceroy of Egypt.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeishev

פרשת וישב תשפ"ב

וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו... ויראו אחיו כי אתו אהב אביהם מכל אחיו וישנאו אתו... ויקנאו בו אחיו ויתנכלו אתו להמיתו

And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons… His brothers saw that it was he whom their father

loved most of all his brothers, so they hated him… So his brothers were jealous of him… They conspired against him to kill him. (37:1,3,4,11,18)

Writing about the lives of our *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs, is extremely difficult and must be done with great trepidation. To present them on a mortal level equal to us not only denigrates them, but it is ludicrous. In the *pesichah*, preface, to *Leket Sichos Mussar* (the *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, of *Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher*, *zl*, *Rosh Yeshivas Slabodka*, and son-in-law of the *Alter*, *zl*, of Slabodka), the *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that our approach toward studying Torah narrative dates back to when we were young children in *cheder*, elementary school. The terminology and nuances that served us then do not apply as our intellect matures. He quotes the *Chovas HaLevavos (Shaar Cheshbon Hanefesh*), "Therefore, do not be content with what has been formed in your mind in the beginning of your learning of the difficult matters and the deep reasons; rather, it is proper for you to start at the age of mature intellect and understanding to examine the Book of G-d and the Book of the *Neviim*, like someone who never learned one letter of them." *Girsa d'yankessa,* the Torah we learned in our youth, remains rooted within us. While this is a great spiritual benefit, it can impede our depth of understanding the Torah's narrative if we do not "graduate" to intellectual learning worthy of our matured intellects.

Thus, when we approach the narrative of the *parshiyos* that conclude *Sefer Bereishis*, we must take a step back and realize that the story of Yosef and his brothers and the ensuing events that occur are much deeper than our "kindergarten" intellects have penetrated. Hashem guided and orchestrated everything that took place. Hatred and envy, the words which the Torah uses to describe the tenuous relationship that marked the strife in Yaakov *Avinu's* home, are not the same envy and hatred to which we, mere mortals, are accustomed. They go much deeper. Hashem placed in Yaakov's heart a profound love for Yosef, which was greater than that which he manifested toward the other brothers. Hashem also had the brothers take note of this change and react to it. This is what Hashem wanted, because this was the way in which He catalyzed Yaakov's eventual descent to Egypt, which would be the precursor of the Egyptian bondage and eventual redemption some two hundred years later. In turn, the redemption from Egypt led to *Klal Yisrael's* acceptance of the Torah and the subsequent induction as the people of Hashem.

This was the Master Plan. As such, we study these *parshiyos* as lessons in pure, unvarnished Heavenly Providence, acknowledging that we are mere spectators in a scenario guided by Hashem for a purpose that is beyond our grasp, but will conclude with the Giving of the Torah. All the questions are answered – nay – there should be no questions, because we do not question Hashem. After all, we are mortals, His creatures; we should learn and seek guidance, but, as the *Chovos HaLevavos* exhorts: We should do so as intelligent mortals – not like *cheder* children.

A well-known *chassidic* tale (cited in *Nitzitzos*, by *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita*) encapsulates this idea. The *Yehudi HaKadosh, zl*, of Peshischa traveled to his saintly *Rebbe*, the *Chozeh, zl, m'Lublin*. It was during a bitter Polish winter, and the frigid stormy weather had delayed him, to the point that he found himself on *Purim* night in a small town. He immediately sought out the local *shtiebl*, so that he could *daven* with a *minyan* and hear the reading of the *megillah*. The *megillah* reader was the local *chazzan*, a fine, simple Jew who was versed in the cantillation notes of the *megillah* reading. He was no scholar; he was certainly not the *Chozeh*.

As he read the story of Haman and Achashveirosh, Mordechai and Esther, the *Yehudi HaKadosh* made remarks concerning the foolish Achashveirosh, the evil Haman, the holy Mordechai and deeply devoted Esther. The worshippers were taken aback. "Is this the first time you hear about the Purim story and the individuals involved?" (This is the impression he gave with his play-by-play comments.)

The *Yehudi* explained, "When my holy *Rebbe* read the *megillah*, I heard Heavenly sounds and thunder, as the deep secrets and Heavenly Providence emerged from each and every word. This time, I heard a story concerning a foolish king, whose evil minister convinced him to have the Jews murdered. A righteous man in Shushan, together with his niece who was the foolish king's wife, was able to prevent this decree from achieving fruition. Truthfully, I never heard the 'narrative' in the manner it was being chanted today." It all depends on how we approach the narrative: Is it a Bible story or *divrei Elokim Chaim*, words of the Living G-d?

Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Rabba (25:) teaches, "One is obligated to ask, 'When will my actions reach those of my forebears?'" One would think that it is unfathomable for the Jew of the twenty-first century to think that he can achieve a spiritual level akin to that of the Patriarchs. We have just explained that the Torah narrative concerning our ancestors is beyond our grasp. If we cannot even understand their spiritual level, how can we possibly dream of achieving it? Simply put, we might not be able to parallel their *kum v'asei*, active *mitzvos* and accomplishments; we can, however, try to guard ourselves *b'shev v'al'taaseh*, in those areas in which they desisted from acting negatively. Our inclination drives us to act out our negative desires. By refraining and controlling ourselves, we are emulating our forebears.

Alternatively, it means that we model and seek to emulate the way of life and positive acts of our forebears who demonstrated their extraordinary character development. Clearly, we are not as refined, but why not use their positive activities as the lodestar by which we navigate our own lives? *Horav Shmuel Salant, zl*, was consulted by a man who asked the following: "My son emigrated to America, where, within a short interval, he reneged on the Torah and *mitzvos* with which we raised him in Yerushalayim. He sends me money on a regular basis, because he is acutely aware of the material hardship we confront regularly in Yerushalayim. I do not feel comfortable using this money, since I am certain it was earned by working on *Shabbos*. I wish to return the money to him."

Rav Shmuel Salant responded with a *dvar Torah*, "When Yaakov *Avinu* escaped from Eisav, his evil brother dispatched his son, Elifaz, to kill him. When Elifaz caught up with Yaakov, the Patriarch pleaded for his life. 'What can I do concerning my father's instructions?' Elifaz asked. Yaakov replied, 'Take all of my possessions, thereby leaving me bereft of my material wealth. As such, I will be a poor person who is considered as good as dead. You can then report to your father that you accomplished your mission.'" *Rav* Shmuel asked, "Why did Yaakov not attempt to impress upon Elifaz that *retzichah*, murder, is prohibited? He was Elifaz's *Rebbe*, and Elifaz would have listened. The reason is that Yaakov observed how much Elifaz wanted to carry out the *mitzvah* of honoring his father. Yaakov did not want to deprive his student, who was otherwise bent on killing him, from fulfilling this *mitzvah*.

"It is unfortunate that your son fell prey to the material blandishments which abound in America. He still, however, has the one *mitzvah* of caring for his father. Is it fair to deprive him of this *mitzvah*?"

ויראו אחיו כי אותו אהב אביהם מכל אחיו וישנאו אותו ולא יכלו דברו לשלם

His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers, so they hated him; and they could not speak to him peaceably. (37:4)

When two people do not get along, their inability to maintain an honest discourse which has nothing to do with their disagreement is an indication of their antipathy towards one another. The brothers, regrettably, could not carry on a friendly conversation even about matters unrelated to their discord. On the other hand, as *Rashi* observes, their incapacity to have a conversation showed their virtue: Their integrity did not allow them to evince a show of friendliness. If they did not feel it – they did not show it. Unfortunately, their refrain from speaking also caused them to avoid rebuking Yosef for what they felt was his unbecoming behavior. This resulted in their aversion to him becoming more compelling and decisive.

Accepting rebuke – owning up to the error of one's ways, bowing to disappointment – is the mark of an honorable person. *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, relates the story of a young Torah scholar who lived in an apartment building in central *Eretz Yisrael*. Someone opened up a children's store on the first floor of the building which sold all kinds of products geared to the infant through teenage market. They also carried children's furniture, cribs, carriages, etc. In order to attract attention to their wares, the store's owner placed some of his products outside of his store for passersby to notice. Everything seemed perfectly innocent – except to the young scholar, who took umbrage with a business using the sidewalk in front of his apartment building for advertisement purposes. When the owner of the store ignored his complaints, he presented his grievance to a *bais din*.

The *bais din* listened to his complaints and even dispatched one of their own to look at the furniture on the street, but found no reason to ban this form of advertisement. Case closed. The Torah scholar, who was a decent, upstanding *ben Torah*, accepted the *halachic* ruling. The *Av Bais Din*, head of the court was impressed with the young man, went over to him and whispered in his ear, "You did well and acted appropriately. Who knows? One day you

might benefit from the services of the storekeeper or his products."

Ten days passed, and the young man and his wife were in the kitchen of their fourth floor apartment, when their two-year-old crawled out onto the balcony and somehow squeezed between the bars of the window and fell down. The parents heard their child's shriek, and they came running. Overwhelmed with shock, they imagined the worst. They looked down from their fourth floor perch expecting to witness a tragedy. Hashem had protected their child, who landed on the mattress of the crib outside of the children's store! It was as the *Av Bais Din* had portended: The young man was the beneficiary of his own honorable willingness to accept the *halachic* ruling of the *Bais Din*.

The young scholar was *mevater*, manifested self-control, and acted royally by accepting the ruling. *Horav Elozar M. Shach, zl*, declared that in his entire life, he had never seen someone who was *mevater* and lose out as a result of his concession. The young Torah scholar and his child present a living testament to this verity.

וישב ראובן אל הבור

Reuven returned to the pit. (37:29)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* 24:19) ask: "Where was Reuven that he had to return?" One opinion in the *Midrash* contends that he was occupied with his sackcloth and his fasting as part of his penance in repenting for the deed concerning Bilhah (when he rearranged his father's bed). *Chazal* record Hashem's response to Reuven's *teshuvah*, repentance: Hashem said, "No man has heretofore sinned before Me and repented. You are the first to take the initiative with regard to repentance. By your life, your descendant (*Hoshea HaNavi*) will one day rise and take the initiative with regard to repentance. (As it says: *Shuvah Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha*, "Return *Yisrael* unto Hashem your G-d" (*Hoshea* 14:2).

The question is obvious: Reuven was not the first one to inaugurate *teshuvah*. Adam *HaRishon* repented for one hundred and thirty years for his role in the *cheit Eitz HaDaas*, sin of eating from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Kayin also repented. Reuven was certainly not the first to repent. *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, explains that, in fact, Reuven's "sin" was actually not viewed as such. Indeed, his position as one of the twelve tribes who comprise *Klal Yisrael* was not diminished in any manner. Nonetheless, Reuven did not accept the notion that he had not sinned. He disregarded the intensity (or lack thereof) of the sin and chose to repent regardless. He conjectured that any sin, regardless of its gravity, still represents a rebellion against Hashem. (*Rabbeinu* Yonah writes: "One should not look at the size of the sin, but rather, at its enormity, because of before Whom he has sinned" *Shaarei Teshuvah*.) Sin is viewed as a breach of trust, an insurgence against the Almighty. Does it really matter how large or how small the insurrection is? Reuven was *mechadesh*, originated, this *nekudah*, point. A sin is a *meridah*, rebellion, against Hashem. Size, intensity, and aforethought do not matter. Rebellion against Hashem requires repentance. This is what his descendant Hoshea taught *Klal Yisrael*: "Return, Yisrael, to Hashem, your G-d." We must acknowledge that Hashem is our G-d and He supervises everything that we do. As such, every infraction is an act of sedition, which must be expunged via repentance.

Teshuvah is "time sensitive," because we do not know how much time Heaven has allotted us. In the following *pasuk*, when Reuven returns and notices, to his chagrin, that Yosef is gone, he becomes greatly perturbed: *Ha'yeled einnenu v'anah ani ba*; "The boy is gone! And I, where can I go?" (Ibid. 37:30) This *pasuk* has been used as a metaphor concerning our own youth, when we were young and strong, living unrestrained as if we did not have a care in the world. When we age and ultimately confront our mortality, with what will we stand before the Heavenly Tribunal? If our "youth" is missing, because we had not been spiritually productive, we will appear before Hashem with very little to show for our early years. While errors in judgment may occur during our developing years, being unrepentant concerning those errors transforms them from youthful errors into sinful infractions. This is where a good friend comes to the rescue, rebuking with love, subtly pointing out errors which are actually miscreant behavior, but can still be repaired if the person owns up to his actions and makes amends.

A friend listens, but does not necessarily agree if he notes deficient behavior. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, quotes *Horav Michel Forschlager, zl*, who defines friendship as a confidant to whom one can relate all of his secrets, even if they concern activities that were less than complimentary. A friend is one with whom he can share his errors, sins, misgivings, secure that his friend will neither embarrass him, nor divulge and

betray his secrets. On the contrary, the friend will listen, rebuke, assist and support his return to good graces.

Rav Schwab related (*Rav Schwab on Chumash*) how his father, *Rav Yehudah Leib Schwab* of Frankfurt-am-Mein, had a friend who fell prey to desire and committed a shameful act. This was not an error in judgment; it was downright sin in its most despicable form. The sinner was ashamed, and, as a result, he remanded himself to his home. *Rav* Schwab's father and two of his closest friends felt that they had a moral obligation to rescue their friend from self-pity and depression by encouraging him to repent and repair his grievous sin. They split the cost of a one-way ticket on an ocean liner which was leaving for the United States. They went to his house and presented themselves at his door. When he saw them, he was shocked that they stood with their backs to him. "Due to the shameful act which you committed, we have chosen not to look at your face. However, we are still friends, and, as such, we cannot ignore our feelings of intense friendship and responsibility to you. We have, therefore, decided to purchase a one-way ticket to America for you. It is our fervent hope that you will come to your senses, repent your ways and return to Hashem's good graces. Start your life over again, so that you can once again live without shame."

Those friends provided the impetus to save their good friend and his future family. This led to the man leading a respectable, good, observant life. His friends were not willing to ignore his misdeed, and they knew that, without *teshuvah*, he would leave this world emotionally and spiritually flawed. They were friends who cared. This is how caring friends act.

ויהי בעת ההיא וירד יהודה מאת אחיו

It was at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers. (38:1)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* 85:1) make a fascinating observation, one over which we, as Jews living *b'ikvessa d'Moshicha*, during the epoch of *Moshiach*, should carefully ruminate again and again. The Torah relates that Yehudah went down from his brothers and turned away toward an Adulmite man whose name was Chirah – a seemingly benign statement. *Chazal* explain that Hashem was quite "occupied" during this seemingly innocuous period. The *Midrash* opens with a *pasuk* from Yirmiyahu (29:11) which implies (as per *Chazal's* interpretation) that Hashem knows what is going on in everyone's mind. He knows that while others are each individually engaged in thinking about other (personal) things, He is thinking about how to bestow the ultimate good upon the Jewish people. In other words, we are clueless about what Hashem is doing – but He is doing everything for us.

Having said this, *Chazal* make the following observation: The tribes were preoccupied with selling Yosef. Yosef was preoccupied with his sackcloth and fasting (over being separated from his father's house). Reuven was preoccupied with his sackcloth and fasting over missing out on the opportunity to save Yosef from being sold to the Yishmaelim. Yaakov *Avinu* was mourning what appeared to be Yosef's death at the hand of an animal. Yehudah was preoccupied with looking for a wife. During this very time, when each of the brothers and Yaakov were involved in personal grief, Hashem was busy creating the light of *Moshiach*. (This means that, while *Moshiach* had not yet been created, the seeds from which he would eventually emerge were being set into place.)

Yehudah's role in the sale of Yosef caused him to lose his leadership position in the family. Thus, the term "going down," which led to his seeking a wife with whom he eventually fathered three sons, two of whom died untimely deaths. This set the stage for Yehudah's meeting his daughter-in-law, Tamar, and marrying her, which provided the union that resulted in the birth of Peretz, the progenitor of David *HaMelech* and *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*. All these harmless – seemingly unrelated – events were orchestrated by Hashem in order to prepare the scenario for the birth of *Moshiach*. (Obviously, this is merely a superficial treatment of the subject.)

We derive from *Chazal* that even amid the bitter darkness that enveloped Yosef, the darkness that preempted *galus Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian exile; even during the time when all of the Jewish leadership – Yaakov, Reuven, Yehudah, Yosef – was beset and submerged in grief and mourning, Hashem was planting the seeds, laying the framework for the future redemption. Light emerges from the darkness. Despite being plunged into the blackest nights, the deepest darkness, the Jew knows not to despair. Hashem will bring about an emergence of bright light from within the bleak, heavy darkness.

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, notes that following the cataclysmic conflagration that destroyed the major Torah centers of Europe and with it the lives

of six million of our brothers and sisters, the *Ponovezher Rav, zl*, escaped to *Eretz Yisrael*, physically broken and emotionally traumatized beyond human endurance. He did not allow his personal grief to overwhelm him, as he immediately occupied himself with rebuilding Torah from the ashes, a task he would prioritize for the rest of his life. One has no "down time" when it affects the building of Torah.

Rav Shternbuch relates that he heard from *Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl* (author of *Seridei Eish*), that in the Warsaw Ghetto weddings were being held daily. This was despite the bitter, tragic fact that every day thousands of Jews were being loaded into the infamous cattle cars and sent to Treblinka to be murdered. The Jews never gave up. The weddings kept on coming. It happened more than once that the Nazi murderers would crash the wedding party and haul everyone away to their deaths. Yet, the weddings continued. Parents married off their children. They always held on to defiant hope. At least, their child will have been united with another Jewish *neshamah*, soul. They would arrive together before Hashem's Heavenly Throne, united as husband and wife. This is how a Jew thinks. This is how a Jew lives. This is how a Jew dies.

Rav Shternbuch enjoins us constantly to review, especially during periods of distress, the powerful words of *Rabbeinu Yonah* (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 2:5), "And one who trusts in Hashem should hold on during the vision of his distress; for the darkness will be the cause of the light; as it is written (*Michah* 7:8), 'Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; since I have fallen, I rise again, since I sit in darkness, Hashem is my light.' As our sages taught, (*Midrash Tehillim* 22), 'If I had not fallen, I would not have risen; 'If I had not sat in darkness, Hashem would not have been my light.'"

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Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Vayeishev

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The following is a discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Parshas Vayeishev - Chanukah Questions And Anwers

QUESTION: May a Jewish employee participate in company parties that are held in celebration of non-Jewish holidays?

DISCUSSION: It depends on the type of party the company is having. Many times, a company's holiday party has nothing to do with the celebration of the holiday; rather it is an employee appreciation party that happens to take place during the holiday season. There is no halachic objection to attending such a party. But if the intention of the party is to celebrate the actual non-Jewish holiday, it would be forbidden for a Jew to attend.

However, even if the party is not intended to celebrate a non-Jewish holiday, non-Jewish office parties are hardly the place for an observant Jew to be. The mode of dress, the type of language and the loose behavior at such affairs is completely alien and contrary to everything that Yiddishkeit stands for. It is clear, therefore, that if for business reasons one must attend such a party, he or she must do so only when there is no other choice, and even then, he or she must come and go as quickly as possible. Lingering in such an environment can lead to serious transgression of many Torah laws.

QUESTION: Is there a source for the custom of women refraining from doing housework while the Chanukah candles are burning?

DISCUSSION: This custom is cited in Shulchan Aruch and dates back at least to the days of the Rishonim. Women have always felt a special affinity for the Yom Tov of Chanukah since a woman – Yehudis, the daughter of Yochanan Kohen Gadol – played a prominent role in the defeat of the Greeks. In addition, Jewish women suffered from the Greeks more than the Jewish men did.(1) There are two basic reasons why women chose to refrain from work as an expression of their special observance of Chanukah:(2)

* To serve as a reminder that it is forbidden to "benefit" from the Chanukah candles. Refraining from work when the candles are burning reinforces the idea that the Chanukah candles are not to be used for any other purpose but as a reminder of the great miracle that took place.(3)

* In order to highlight the fact that Chanukah is indeed a Yom Tov. Therefore, women refrained from doing "work" – as they refrain on Yom Tov – so long as the candles are burning.(4)

QUESTION: What type of housework is included in this custom?

DISCUSSION: There are various opinions as to what "work" means vis- a-vis this custom. Most communities prohibit "work" that would be forbidden on Chol ha-Moed, such as doing laundry or sewing, while cooking, baking and light housework would be permitted.(5) But in some communities, "work" includes all work, including cooking and baking.(6)

The poskim also debate the amount of time that women customarily refrain from doing housework. Most poskim hold that the custom applies only to the minimum length of time that the candles must burn,(7) which is approximately one half hour after the stars appear. Others, however, maintain that the custom to refrain from work lasts as long as candles are burning anywhere in the community, which may be as late as midnight.(8) Most communities follow the first view.(9)

QUESTION: Is it permitted to recite the blessings over Chanukah candles that are kindled outside one's home, e.g., at a Chanukah party in school, in a public hall or at a public display?

DISCUSSION: Several contemporary poskim address this issue and the consensus is that it is not permitted. They explain that the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles was instituted specifically to be performed in one's home or in a place where one is residing temporarily. Reciting the blessings over candles lit outside of one's home may be a berachah levatalah.(10)

The only exception to this rule is when candles are lit in shul between Minchah and Ma'ariv on Chanukah. Thus it may be argued that any public lighting is similar to the lighting in shul. But for several reasons the poskim strongly reject this argument and recommend that one avoid reciting the blessings in any setting other than in one's home (or temporary dwelling) or in shul.(11)

QUESTION: When is the appropriate time to light Chanukah candles and how long should they burn?

DISCUSSION: Concerning the proper times for lighting, there are several views in the poskim which are reflected in various customs. Those who have a family tradition should uphold it, but those who do not have a specific custom should light at the time that recognized Gedolei Yisrael lit, which is about twenty minutes after sunset.(12) Although in Eretz Yisrael many people light immediately after sunset, outside Eretz Yisrael it is yet daylight for a while and too early to kindle the lights.

There should be enough oil, however, for the candles to burn until one half hour after tzeis ha-kochavim.(13) There are various ways and a number of opinions of calculating tzeis ha-kochavim, ranging from twenty minutes (in Eretz Yisrael) to seventy-two minutes past sunset. In order to fulfill the mitzvah according to all views, there should be enough oil to burn for about eighty to eighty-five minutes.

On erev Shabbos, Chanukah candles are lit right before lighting Shabbos candles, which is about twenty minutes before sunset. In order to fulfill the mitzvah according to all views, there should be enough oil to burn for at least two hours.(14)

QUESTION: How important is it to daven Minchah before lighting Chanukah candles on erev Shabbos Chanukah?

DISCUSSION: If possible, one should daven Minchah on Friday before lighting Chanukah candles.(15) There are two reasons for this: 1) The afternoon Tamid sacrifice, which corresponds to our Minchah service, was always brought before the lighting of the Menorah in the Beis ha-Mikdash; (16) 2) Davening Minchah after lighting Chanukah candles appears contradictory, since Minchah "belongs" to Friday, while the Chanukah candles "belong" to Shabbos.(17)

However, if no early minyan is available, then it is better to light first and daven with a minyan afterwards.(18) Working people who are unable to daven Minchah before lighting the menorah because that would cut their short Friday even shorter, should light candles first and then daven Minchah in shul with a minyan.

QUESTION: Is it permitted to give a gift to a non-Jewish employee, colleague, etc., during the non-Jewish holiday season?

DISCUSSION: As explained earlier, giving a gift to an employee or to a person who renders a service is merely an expression of gratitude, a form of payment for past or future service which it is not considered a celebration of avodah zarah and is permitted. It is proper, however, that no specific mention be made that the gift is in honor of the non-Jewish holiday,(19) and that the gift be given a day or two before or after the holiday rather than on the holiday itself.(20)

FOOTNOTES:

1 Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 139:3.

2 Some men also have the custom to refrain from doing work during this time; Mishnah Berurah 670:3.

3 Beiur ha-Gra, O.C. 670:1.

4 Levush, O.C. 670, quoted by Kaf ha-Chayim 670:6.

5 Harav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 8; Halachos of Chanukah, pg. 4); Harav Y. Kamenetsky (Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 670, note 584); Shraga ha- Meir 6:87.
6 This is the custom in Yerushalayim; Harav Y.Y. Fisher, quoted in Rivevos Efrayim 1:436.
7 Mishnah Berurah 670:4.
8 Magen Avraham 670:2, quoted by Be'er Heitev 2 and Siddur Ya'avetz.
9 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 670:7; Kaf ha-Chayim 670:8. See Aruch ha-Shulchan 670:8, who writes that in his community, women refrained from work only at the time that the candles were being lit.
10 Minchas Yitzchak 6:65; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Az Nidberu 6:75); Shevet ha-Levi 4:65; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:398.
11 There are several distinctions between lighting in shul and any other public lighting. Two of the more significant are: 1) The purpose of lighting in shul was to remind us of the lighting of the Menorah in the Beis ha-Mikdash, and only lighting in shul, a mikdash me'at, is similar; 2) Lighting in shul was instituted for the sake of guests who had nowhere to sleep, whereas lighting Chanukah candles in any other public venue would not address this concern.
12 Harav Y. Kamenetsky (Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 672, note 586). See also Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:334 and Az Nidberu 7:70. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:101- 6, who writes that the appropriate time is ten minutes after sunset, but Harav Feinstein himself used to light thirteen to eighteen minutes after sunset (Halachos of Chanukah, pg. 20). Harav A. Kotler lit twenty-five to thirty minutes after sunset (ibid.)
13 See Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:101-6.
14 See Beiur Halachah 672:1. The breakdown is as follows: Twenty minutes before sunset, seventy-two minutes until the stars appear, and an additional half hour for the candles to burn after tzeis ha-kochavim.
15 Mishnah Berurah 679:2.
16 Sha'arei Teshuvah 679:1, quoting Birkei Yosef.
17 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 679:7, quoting Pri Megadim.
18 Birkei Yosef 679:2; Yechaveh Da'as 1:74.
19 Y.D. 147:2.
20 Rama, Y.D. 148:12.

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Baby-Sitting: How To Avoid Yichud

"No Man Of The Household Staff Was There In The House" (39:11)

Yichud, the prohibition against a man being alone in a secluded place with a woman, is Biblically forbidden(1). It is for this reason that Yosef ha-Tzaddik, who as a son of Yaakov Avinu kept the mitzvos of the Torah, refused to be alone with his master's wife in their home(2). Indeed, on that fateful day, when he unexpectedly found himself alone with her in the house, he was almost tempted to sin. What follows are some guidelines concerning yichud in everyday situations.

Are Relatives Included In The Prohibition Of Yichud?

Yichud is permitted with linear descendants, such as parents with their children(3) or grandchildren(4). Yichud is also permitted between a brother and a sister(5) and a nephew with his father's or mother's sister(6), but only on a temporary basis(7). They may not live together in the same house for a period of time which exceeds the normal stay of a house guest(8).

Yichud with all other relatives, such as uncles, aunts [through marriage], cousins, brothers-in-law, parents-in-law, etc., is strictly prohibited(9).

At What Age Does The Prohibition Of Yichud Begin?

A boy under the age of bar mitzvah is permitted to be alone with a girl under the age of bas mitzvah(10). Since there is no mitzvah of chinuch in the prohibition of yichud(11) and both parties are minors(12), yichud is permitted. When one of the parties, however, is bar/bas mitzvah, then he or she may not be alone with a member of the opposite gender. We must clarify, therefore, the minimum age requirements of the other party – the one who is under bar/bas mitzvah.

According to the Rambam, Shulchan Aruch and all the earlier poskim [including the Mishnah Berurah(13)], once a girl turns three years old she is considered an ervah in regard to yichud and all halachos of the Torah – she must dress properly, physical contact and yichud with her are prohibited, etc. Indeed, in many communities these halachos are strictly observed from the age of three.

The Chazon Ish(14), however, when discussing the halachos of reciting Kerias Shema in the presence of an ervah, disputes this cut-off age. In his opinion, a little girl is not considered an ervah because people do not view her as such until she matures. There is no exact age that determines ervah since the maturation rate of each individual girl differs. It is generally assumed, though, that any girl up to the age of six or seven is not considered an ervah(15).

In the view of some contemporary poskim(16), the Chazon Ish's leniency applies only to hilchos Kerias Shema; it does not apply to hilchos yichud. Concerning hilchos yichud, age three remains the age from when yichud is prohibited. Other poskim(17), however, hold that the Chazon Ish's leniency applies to hilchos yichud(18) as well. In their opinion, yichud is permitted with a girl until the age of five or six.

Harav M. Feinstein(19) deals with this issue from a different angle. In his opinion, yichud may be permitted with a girl over three since a girl that age will surely report any illicit behavior to her parents or teachers. The fear of being found out is enough of a deterrent to permit yichud with a girl that young. In his final evaluation, however, Harav Feinstein hesitates to expressly permit yichud with a girl over three, although he does not object to those who are lenient. In an oral ruling(20), Harav Feinstein allows yichud – when necessary – with a girl till age seven.

The age of yichud for a boy begins at age nine(21).

Question: Are there any permissible ways in which a girl over twelve may baby-sit for a boy over nine?

Discussion: There are several permissible ways. The halachic definition of yichud is: Seclusion with little or no chance of intrusion from the outside. The halachah states, therefore, that if there is a pesach pasuach (open door) to a reshus ha-rabim (public domain), then yichud does not apply, since there is a constant possibility of public access. Thus, for yichud to be permitted, both of the above factors – pesach pasuach and reshus ha-rabim – must be present.

What constitutes pesach pasuach is a subject of debate among the poskim. Similarly, there is no exact, undisputed definition of reshus ha-rabim. In the following situations, however, there is general agreement among the poskim that yichud is permitted(22):

If the front door is left completely or partially open(23). After 10 p.m.(24) the house must also be well lit(25);

If the front door is closed, but unlocked, and people regularly walk into the house without knocking(26). After 10 p.m. one should not rely on this solution(27);

If the door is locked, but the parents or other members of the household are in possession of a key and could come into the house at any time(28);

If the door is locked, but there is an unimpeded view from the street or from a facing window directly into the room where the yichud is taking place(29). The home must be well lit. After 10 p.m. it is better not to rely on this solution(30);

If another child, male(31) or female(32), is in the house. There are various opinions concerning the required age of the other child – ranging from a minimum age of five to a maximum of thirteen for a male and twelve for a female(33). This leniency is only applicable during normal waking hours(34). To extend this leniency to normal nighttime sleeping hours, there have to be two children present besides the one who is being cared for(35).

Often, none of the above solutions are practical. A baby-sitter may not want to leave the door open or unlocked. Sometimes the parents may be out of town or unavailable to check on their children. Thus, the preferred method when hiring a baby-sitter is to give a set of keys to a married couple that lives nearby(36), with instructions that the husband and wife should come into the house several times throughout the day and night. The baby-sitter must be told of these instructions. The neighbor must actually go into the house several times for this leniency to be valid(37).

1 View of the vast majority of the Rishonim. In certain situations, such as when one man is alone with two women, yichud is Biblically permitted but prohibited by the Rabbis.

2 See Ibn Ezra, Rashbam and Seforno on Bereishis 39:10.

3E.H. 22:1. See Igros Moshe E.H. 2:15; E.H. 4:65-8 who rules that it is permitted for a man to be alone with another woman other than his wife in the presence of his daughter, mother or sister.

4 Pischei Teshuvah E.H. 22:2 quoting the Bach.

5 Beis Shmuel and Chelkas Mechokek E.H. 22:1.

6 Igros Moshe E.H. 4:63; 64-1, since a nephew and his aunts have the same relationship as a brother and a sister, based on Shulchan Aruch E.H. 21:7. See Hebrew Notes, pg. 236, for an elaboration.

7 Beis Shemuel and Chelkas Mechokek E.H. 22:1.

8 Igros Moshe E.H. 4:64-3;65-11, who adds that a sister who is visiting from a distant city may stay longer than a sister visiting from a nearby area, just as a guest from afar stays longer than a guest from nearby.

9E.H. 22:1; Igros Moshe E.H. 4:63; 64-1. See Hebrew Notes, pg. 237, for elaboration.

10 Bach and Yam Shel Shelomo in the name of the Semag, quoted in Devar Halachah 2:8.

11 Shevet ha-Levi 5:204 wonders why the process of chinuch does not pertain to this prohibition. See Divrei Sofrim, pg. 137 for a possible answer.

12 Or one minor and one non-Jew – oral ruling from Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Kuntres Toras ha-Yichud).

13 Beiur Halachah 75:1 – concerning the definition of an ervah for hilchos Kerias Shema.

14 O.C. 16:8. See also Maharam Brisk 2:70 who concurs with this ruling. Harav M. Feinstein is also quoted (Children in Halachah pg. 30) as concurring with this ruling.

15 Halichos Bas Yisrael 4:3; Ohr l'Tziyon 6:12. Harav Y. Kamenetsky (oral ruling quoted in Ko Somar l'Beis Yaakov pg. 139) ruled that until age five is clearly permitted, while from age five and above depends on the individual girl.

16 Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (quoted in Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 135).

17 Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.Y. Neuwirth (quoted in Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 135). For an explanation of this dispute, see Hebrew Notes, pg. 237

18 Hugging and kissing, however, is prohibited from age three and on – ibid.

19 Igros Moshe E.H. 4:65-12.

20 Quoted in Children in Halachah pg. 40.

21 This is the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch E.H. 22:11 and all the poskim. See, however Kuntres Toras ha-Yichud who quotes an oral ruling from Harav S.Y. Elyashiv that nowadays we can be lenient and allow yichud with a boy till age eleven. No other poskim, however, mention this leniency.

22 There is a disagreement among the poskim if the leniency of pesach pasuch may be relied upon when the baby-sitter and the child share a close, personal relationship which could be described as libo gas bah. One should be stringent – Igros Moshe E.H. 4:60; 65-9.

23 E.H. 22:9.

24 The 10 p.m. deadline was given by the Chazon Ish (Devar Halachah 3:14) as the time that is considered as "late night hours" in the city of Bnei Brak during the 1950s. Each location, depending on its population and lifestyle, must determine its own "late" hours.

25 The poskim rule that during the late night hours, when people are not on the streets, the leniency of an open door does not apply – see Be'er Heitev and Pischei Teshuvah E.H. 22:9, and Igros Moshe E.H. 4:65-5. When the house is lit, however, there are poskim who are lenient – see Devar Halachah 3:15.

26 Ruling of Harav S.Y. Elyashiv and Harav C.P. Scheinberg (Kuntres Yichud pg. 25) as a compromise between those who require the door to be completely open and those who allow yichud as long as the door is not locked.

See Igros Moshe E.H. 4:65-4, who is lenient even when the door is locked, as long as there is a possibility that someone would come knocking on the door and would need to be let in. Most other poskim do not agree with this leniency.
27 Since even a completely open door should not be relied upon late at night. Even lighting the house would possibly not be sufficient in this case – see Devar Halachah 3:15.
28 Devar Halachah 3:3 quoting the Chazon Ish and Dovev Meisharim.
29 Noda B'yehudah E.H. 1:77; Igros Moshe E.H. 4:65-2; Devar Halachah 3:10.
30 See note 27.
31 Beis Shemuel E.H. 22:9; Chochmas Adam 126:5-9.
32 E.H. 22:10.
33 See Devar Halachah 4:2-3 for all the various views. A sister of any age over five serves as a guardian – see note 3.
34 Rama E.H. 22:5; Chasam Sofer E.H. 2:96. Even if the child is presently up, once it is past his normal bedtime we are concerned that he may fall asleep at any time and will no longer serve as a guardian. The same halachah applies during the day if the guardian is actually sleeping.
35 Chazon Ish Kiddushin 45; Devar Halachah 4:9.
36 A married couple is preferable since they can come together to check on the house, thus avoiding a possible yichud problem between the baby-sitter and the neighbor. Even in a situation where a yichud problem does not exist, two neighbors should be asked to check the house, since we are fearful that one can forget or fall asleep.
37 Devar Halachah pg. 188-189. See further clarification in Avnei Yashfei 2:185.
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Using Hashem's Name
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff
The posuk in parshas Vayeishev (Bereishis 39:3) says that Yosef's master, Potifar, recognized that Hashem was with Yosef. Rashi, quoting the Bereishis Rabbah, explains that this means that Yosef frequently referred to Hashem, thus introducing our topic for this week.
Question #1: Nasty Neighbor
Mrs. Goodhearted asks: "I have a disturbed neighbor who often spews out abusive invective. I am concerned that her cursing may bring evil things upon me. What should I do?"
Question #2: A Friend in Vain
Mr. Closefriend inquires: "A close friend of mine often makes comments like 'for G-d's sake,' which I know are things that we should avoid saying. I wanted my friend to be one of the witnesses at my wedding, but an acquaintance mentioned that my friend may not be a kosher witness because he uses G-d's name in vain. Is this really true?"
Introduction
Although both words "swear" and "curse" are often used to mean "speaking vulgar language," for this entire article, I will not be using these words in this sense, but "swear" in the sense of "taking an oath," and "curse" to mean "expressing desire that misfortune befall someone."
Ten prohibitions
The Rambam counts a total of thirteen different mitzvos, ten mitzvos Lo Sa'aseh and three mitzvos Aseh, which are included within the context of our discussion. The ten Lo Sa'aseh prohibitions are:
1. Not to break an oath or commitment that one has made. The Torah's commandment concerning this law is located at the beginning of parshas Matos. It is counted and discussed in the Rambam's Sefer Hamitzvos as Lo Sa'aseh #157 and in the Sefer Hachinuch as Mitzvah #407.
2. Not to swear falsely (Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #61; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #227). This is derived from the words, lo sishav'u bishmi lashaker, "you shall not swear falsely in My Name," which appear in parshas Kedoshim.
3. Not to deny, with an oath, that one owes money. This mitzvah is also located in parshas Kedoshim and is derived from the words lo seshakru ish ba'amiso, "do not lie to your fellowman," which Chazal interpret as a prohibition against swearing a false oath denying that one owes money (Bava Kama 105b; Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #249; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #226).
4. Not to swear an oath that has no purpose (Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #62; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #30). This mitzvah is derived from the words of the Aseres Hadibros: You shall not take the Name of Hashem, your G-d, in vain.
5. Not to cause someone to swear in the name of an idol (Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #14; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #86). This mitzvah is derived from the words, vesheim elohim acheirim… lo yishama al picha, "You should not cause the names of other gods to be used in an oath" in parshas Mishpatim (23:13; see Sanhedrin 63b).
6. Not to curse Hashem (Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #60; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #70).
7. Not to curse one's parents (Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #318).
8. Not to curse the king of the Jewish people or the head of the Sanhedrin, who is called the Nasi (Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:1; Sefer Hamitzvos 316; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #71). This mitzvah is derived from the words, venasi be'amecha lo sa'or in parshas Mishpatim.
9. Not to curse a dayan, a judge presiding over a beis din proceeding (Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh #315; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #69; Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:1). This mitzvah is derived from the words, Elohim lo sekaleil in parshas Mishpatim.
10. Not to curse any Jew (Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:1; Sefer Hamitzvos 317; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #231). This mitzvah is also derived from a verse in parshas Kedoshim, since it is included under the Torah prohibition

do not curse someone deaf. As the Sefer Hachinuch explains the mitzvah, "do not curse any Jewish man or woman, even one who cannot hear the curse."

Four in one

We should note that the above-mentioned mitzvos are not mutually exclusive, and one could violate several of them at the same time. For example, the son of the Nasi of the Sanhedrin who curses his father violates four different Lo Sa'aseh prohibitions: for cursing (1) a Jew, (2) his father, (3) a dayan, (4) the head of the Sanhedrin (Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah #231).

As we will see shortly, violating most of these prohibitions is punishable by 39 malkus, lashes (Temurah 3b). This is highly surprising, since usually violating a Torah mitzvah through speech does not lead to this sentence (Temurah 3a). However, these laws are exceptions to the usual rule, which demonstrates the severity of these prohibitions.

Three positive mitzvos

In addition to the ten Lo Sa'aseh mitzvos that this topic covers, there are also three positive mitzvos involved:

1. A mitzvah to fulfill something that one has accepted to do, located at the beginning of parshas Matos (Sefer Hamitzvos, Mitzvas Aseh #94; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah # 406).
2. Fearing Hashem, which includes treating His Name with respect (see Temurah 4a).
3. The Rambam counts a positive mitzvah of taking an oath (Sefer Hamitzvos #7).

What does a curse accomplish?

At this point, I would like to explain a very important and often misunderstood concept. When someone curses an innocent person, the curse causes no harm. To quote Rav Moshe Feinstein, "when someone curses his fellowman, the prohibition is not because it causes harm to the other person. First of all, Heaven will ignore a curse that was performed in violation of the Torah. Second of all, a curse without basis does not bring harm." Rav Moshe refers to the verse in Mishlei (26:2): an unjustified curse affects only the one who uttered it. a curse of this nature causes no harm."

Furthermore, even the curses and evil intended by sorcerers (kishuf) do not affect Jews, since we are directly connected to Hashem, and therefore not affected by kishuf (Ramban, Bamidbar 24:23).

Rav Moshe concludes that although a curse of this nature does no harm to its intended target, the one who cursed a fellow Jew is punished because he embarrassed someone, and because he acted with disdain for Hashem's Holy Name.

Based on this, Rav Moshe explains that there is a difference in halacha between cursing someone else and cursing oneself. When the Gemara (Shavuos 35a) states that cursing oneself is prohibited min HaTorah, Rav Moshe explains that, in this instance, the sinful act of cursing will bring upon himself punishment and harm (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 3:78).

Based on Rav Moshe's analysis of the mitzvah, we can now understand several other halachos of cursing. Cursing a child old enough to understand what was said is liable to the same level of punishment as cursing an adult. This is because it is prohibited to hurt a child's feelings, just as it is forbidden to insult an adult. However, cursing a dead person is exempt from the punishment of malkus (Toras Kohanim on Parshas Kedoshim; Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:1-2). This is because the dead feel no pain when someone curses them.

In one situation, cursing a dead person is indeed punished -- cursing one's parents after their demise is a fully culpable crime (Sanhedrin 85b, quoted by Kesef Mishneh, Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:2).

Cursing without using Hashem's Name

Cursing a person without using G-d's Name does not incur the punishment of malkus. However, the beis din has the halachic right and responsibility to punish the offender in a way that they feel is appropriate (Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:5).

Having seen Rav Moshe's explanation of the mitzvah, we can now explain why someone who curses without using Hashem's name is not liable. The most severe violation, which incurs the punishment of malkus, is violated only if one committed both aspects of the sin – he demonstrated total disregard both for G-d and for man, by desecrating G-d's Name and by offending someone. However, one who cursed without desecrating Hashem's Name is spared from receiving corporeal chastisement, because his infringement was not of the highest level. This is similar to cursing a dead person, as explained above. Although Hashem's Name has been desecrated, no living person is offended; hence, there is no malkus.

At this point, we can address our first question above. Mrs. Goodhearted asks: "I have a disturbed neighbor who often spews out abusive invective. I am concerned that her cursing may bring evil things upon me. What should I do?"

I would advise her to avoid her neighbor when she can, but for a different reason. Mrs. Goodhearted is concerned that she will be damaged by the neighbor's curses – but according to Rav Moshe, there is no cause for concern. However, if her neighbor is sane enough to be responsible for her actions, the neighbor will be punished for cursing and for hurting people's feelings. Mrs. Goodhearted should try to avoid giving her neighbor an opportunity to sin.

Cursing in English

Does cursing using G-d's Name in a language other than Hebrew violate this prohibition? The Rambam rules that cursing someone using a vernacular Name of G-d is also prohibited min haTorah and is chayov malkus (Hilchos Sanhedrin 26:3; see also Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 27:1).

What type of oath?

Having discussed the prohibitions against cursing one's fellow Jew, let us now discuss the prohibitions against swearing in vain. What type of oath did the Torah prohibit taking?

In general, the Torah prohibits taking any type of oath, even when the oath is true, because it is an oath that has no purpose (Temurah 3b). For example, someone who swears truthfully that he did not eat anything today violates the Lo Sa'aseh, You shall not take Hashem's Name in vain, since this oath accomplishes nothing.

Someone who swears an oath that is false, such as one who falsely swears that he did not eat breakfast that day, violates both the proscription for swearing a false oath and also for swearing a vain oath, since it serves no purpose.

Two exceptions

There are two instances when the Torah permits someone to swear a truthful oath (Temurah 3b). This is derived from the fact that the Torah says in two different places (Devarim 6:13; 10:20), uvishmo tishavei'a. We will see shortly that the halachic authorities dispute whether the words uvishmo tishavei'a should be translated as "in His Name you shall swear" or as "in His Name you may swear."

Encouraging mitzvah observance

What are the two exceptional instances in which the Torah permits swearing?

(1) The first is when someone swears an oath as an incentive to support his efforts at growth and self-improvement. One may take an oath to encourage himself to perform a mitzvah that he might otherwise not perform (Temurah 3b). For example, one may swear to donate to tzedakah or to say a chapter of Tehillim every day.

Bear in mind that in general, although permitted, it is not a good idea to create oaths or vows upon oneself (see Nedarim 22a). Someone who takes an oath or a vow is now bound to observe it, and failure to do so is a grievous sin. Therefore, although reciting such an oath (that has a purpose) does not violate the Torah's prohibition against taking Hashem's Name in vain, it is usually recommended not to do so.

A better approach is to accept the new practice bli neder, which means that one is hoping and planning on it, but without the obligation and inherent problem of making it an obligation on the level of a shavua or a neder, a vow.

When required in litigation

(2) The second situation in which the Torah permits swearing an oath is within the framework of halachic litigation. There are instances in which the psak halacha, the final ruling of a beis din, requires a litigant to take an oath in order to avoid paying or to receive payment. When the beis din rules that one is required to take an oath, the Gemara (Temurah 3b) concludes that the person swearing does not violate the Torah's prohibition against swearing unnecessarily.

Permitted or a mitzvah?

It is important to note that in this last situation, the authorities dispute whether the halacha is that one may take an oath, but there is no mitzvah to do so, and we would discourage the oath, or whether, in this situation, it is a mitzvah to swear an oath. The Rambam (Hilchos Shavuos 11:1 and Sefer Hamitzvos, Positive Mitzvah #7) contends that someone who swears because of a din Torah fulfills a positive mitzvah of the Torah, uvishmo tishavei'a, "in His Name you shall swear." Others contend that this verse means simply "in His Name you may swear," but that there is never a mitzvah of taking an oath (Ramban, Sefer Hamitzvos, Positive Mitzvah #7). Still others contend that even though the verse says, "in His Name you may swear," this does not mean it is permitted to swear, but that one who swears is not punished for taking an oath (Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Choshen Mishpat #90). However, this last authority contends that one should avoid taking an oath even under these circumstances, and thereby explains why the custom is to pay large fees or fines rather than swear an oath that is fully truthful.

Testimony without oaths

It is worthwhile to note that testimony in halacha does not require one to swear an oath. This can be juxtaposed to the secular legal system, in which one must take an oath or pledge; otherwise, one's testimony cannot be considered perjury. This is not true in halacha. A Jew's word is sacrosanct, and any time he testifies or makes a claim in court, whether as a litigant, a witness or an attorney, he is halachically bound to tell only the truth. It is therefore a serious infraction of the Torah for someone to file a legal brief that includes false statements. In addition, filing these statements may involve many other violations, including loshon hora, rechilus, motzi shem ra, machlokes and arka'os.

Oath without G-d

Does swearing an oath without mentioning Hashem's Name qualify as an oath? This question is discussed extensively by the rishonim, who conclude that someone who commits himself to doing (or refraining from doing) something, using terminology that implies an oath, is now bound to observe the pledge, whether or not he mentioned Hashem's Name (Rambam, Hilchos Shavuos 2:4; Rashba, Shavuos 36a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 137:1). Nevertheless, according to most authorities, swearing an oath that mentions Hashem's Name is a more serious Torah violation (Rambam, Hilchos Shavuos 2:4).

Taking Hashem's Name in vain

It is also prohibited min haTorah to use Hashem's Name unnecessarily, even when one is not taking an oath. This is prohibited as a mitzvas Aseh, since it violates the words of the Torah, es Hashem Elokecha tira, "You shall fear Hashem your G-d" (Devarim 6:13). Thus, it is prohibited min haTorah for someone to say as an expletive, "For G-d's sake," "Oh, my G-d in Heaven" or similar exclamations.

In this context, the following halachic question is raised:

"Is there anything wrong with saying: 'Just as G-d is True, so this is true!' Does halacha consider this to be an oath?"

This question is discussed almost five hundred years ago by the Radbaz (Shu"t #17), who writes that these types of declarations are serious infractions of the Torah and are considered blasphemous. Anyone who makes such statements should be severely reprimanded and punished, so that he realizes how sinful this is and will take it upon himself to do teshuvah on his crime. The Radbaz states that it is very wrong to compare the existence and truth of anything else to Hashem's existence and truth. Furthermore, someone who makes such a declaration about a falsehood denies the Creator and forfeits his share in the World to Come.

A friend in vain

At this point, we have enough information to examine Mr. Closefriend's question posed above:

"A close friend of mine often makes comments like 'for G-d's sake,' which I know are things we should avoid saying. I wanted my friend to be one of the witnesses at my wedding, but an acquaintance mentioned that my friend may not be a kosher witness, because he uses G-d's name in vain. Is this really true?"

Although Mr. Closefriend should convince his close friend that this irreverent referring to Hashem and His holy Name is prohibited, this use does not qualify as making an oath in vain, but as a violation of the mitzvas Aseh of fearing Hashem (Temurah 4a). As such, there is a difference in halacha:

Two categories of people are disqualified as witnesses because they are sinners.

One is someone who has demonstrated that he will compromise halacha for monetary benefit (Rambam, Hilchos Edus 10:4).

The other category is someone who violattoo cues a sin so severe that, during the time of the Sanhedrin, he could be punished with malkus (Rambam, Hilchos Edus 10:1-3; Sefer Hamitzvos, Lo Sa'aseh 286; Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 75). Therefore, someone who curses people using G-d's Name or one who swears is not a valid witness at a wedding ceremony. However, although it is highly sinful to violate mitzvos Aseh, one who violates them is not invalidated as a witness.

Conclusion

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons why one should be careful how and when one uses Hashem's Name, the Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 231) mentions other reasons not to curse people. Cursing creates conflict, something we certainly want to avoid. Furthermore, we want to learn to develop our self-control.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל

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'uvein. As we learn through VaYeshev, MiKetz, 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'uvein: 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'uvein?

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? Suprisingly, 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'uvein, the biological first-born and natural choice to lead the family, and Yehuda, who begins to takes 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 Cana'an -- 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

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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PARSHAT VA'YESHEV - Who Sold Yosef?

Could it be that the brothers DID NOT sell Yosef!

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

So what difference does it make?

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

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

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

PLAN A - THE BROTHERS / FIRST DEGREE MURDER

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

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

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

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

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

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

PLAN B - REUVEN'S PLAN / SECOND DEGREE MURDER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHERE ARE THEY EATING?

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

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

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

(1) Where are the brothers eating?

Recall that the brothers are grazing their sheep in the Dotan area [see 37:17/ today the area of Jenin, between Shechem and Afula], which is on the northern slopes of central mountain range of Israel. The midbar" [wilderness], that Reuven is talking about, is found some 5-10 kilometer to the east of Dotan (that "midbar" is found along the eastern slopes of the entire central mountain range).

Considering that the brothers throw Yosef into a pit 'out in the MIDBAR', it would definitely make sense for them to return afterward to their campsite in the Dotan area to eat (see 37:16-17). Besides, it would not be very appetizing to eat lunch while listening to your little brother screaming for his life from a pit nearby - see 42:21 for proof that he was indeed screaming.]

And even should one conclude that it would have been just as logical for them to have sat down to eat near the pit, when we consider the whereabouts of Reuven, it becomes quite clear that they must have sat down to eat farther away.

[Later in the shiur, we will bring textual proof for this assumption as well.

2) Where is Reuven?

Considering that Reuven's real plan is to later save Yosef from the pit, it would only be logical from him to either stay near the pit, or at least remain with his brothers (wherever they may be). Certainly it would not make sense, according to his real plan, for him to go far away, and to leave his brothers by the pit!

However, from the continuation of the story we know for sure that Reuven did not stay near the pit, because he RETURNS to the pit only AFTER Yosef is sold! Therefore, if Reuven left the pit area, then certainly the brothers also must have left that area. Hence, it would only be logical to conclude that the brothers are indeed eating away from the pit, and Reuven must be eating with them!

After all, not joining them for lunch could raise their suspicion. Furthermore, the Torah never tells us that he left his brothers.

In summary, by taking the logic of Reuven's plan into consideration, we conclude that Reuven remains with his brothers, as they all sit down to eat AWAY from the pit.

[Obviously, this interpretation does not follow Rashi's explanation that Reuven had left his brothers, as it was his turn to take of his father. See further iyun section for a discussion of how and why our shiur disagrees with that approach, and prefers the approach of Rashbam and Chizkuni.]

PLAN C - YEHUDA'S PLAN / A 'QUICK BUCK'

Now that we have established that Reuven and the brothers are sitting down to eat at a distance far away from the pit, we can continue our study of the narrative, to see if this conclusion fits with its continuation:

"And the brothers sat down to eat, and they **lifted up their eyes** and saw a caravan of Yishmaelim coming **from the Gilad** carrying [spices]... to Egypt.

Then Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What do we gain by killing our brother ... let us SELL him [instead] to the Yishmaelim; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh, and his brothers agreed" (37:25-27).

[From Yehuda's suggestion, it becomes clear that the brothers truly planned to allow Yosef to die in the pit. and were unaware of Reuven's intention to save him.]

If indeed Reuven is still sitting with his brothers, then this new plan (to **sell** Yosef) puts him in quite a predicament, for if the brothers would sell Yosef, his own plan to rescue him would be ruined. Reuven has only one alternative - he must 'volunteer' to fetch Yosef from the pit, in order to free him - before his brothers may sell him.

What happens when Reuven returns to the pit? We'll soon see. But before we continue, we must provide a little background on Israel's geography, which is essential towards understanding the psukim that follow.

THE ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE

Recall that Yosef met his brothers while they were grazing their sheep in the hilly area of Dotan (see 37:17), north of Shechem. Recall as well that during their meal, the brothers 'lifted up their eyes' and noticed a caravan of YISHMAELIM traveling down from the GILAD (today, the northern mountain range in Jordan), on its way to Egypt (see 37:25).

Now, when we read this story in Chumash, most everyone assumes that this convoy will soon pass nearby the spot where the brothers are eating. However, when we consider the geography involved, it is more probable to arrive at a very different conclusion!

This CARAVAN of Yishmaelim (camels et al.) most likely should be traveling along the ancient trade route (better known as the Via Maris), which crosses through Emek Yizrael (the Jezreel Valley) on its way toward the Mediterranean coast. Therefore, this convoy, now sighted by the brothers as it descends from the Gilad Mountains in Transjordan, must first pass through the Bet She'an valley, continuing on towards Afula and Megiddo in Emek Yizrael, on its way towards the coast. Certainly, it would NOT pass the hilly area of Dotan, for it would make no sense for the caravan to climb the Gilboa mountain range to cross through the Dotan area to reach the coast. Let's explain why.

Dotan, today the area of Jenin (about 20 kilometers north of Shechem) lies about 10 kilometers SOUTH of this main highway (the Via Maris) as it crosses Emek Yizrael. In altitude, Dotan sits about 300-400 meters above Emek Yizrael. Hence, from the hills of the Dotan/Gilboa area (where the brothers are eating lunch), one has a nice view of both the Gilad and parts of the Jezreel valley. However, the trade route itself follows through valley that cuts between the mountains.

This explains why the brothers are able to see a Ishmaelite caravan (convoy) as it was descending from the Gilad towards Bet She'an on its way to Emek Yizrael. Even though it was in sight, it was still far enough away to allow the brothers at least several hours to meet it, when it would pass some ten kilometers to the north. Therefore, in order to sell Yosef to that caravan, the brothers would have to first fetch Yosef from the pit, and carry him on a short trip till they meet the caravan in Emek Yizrael. They have ample time to first 'finish their meal', go fetch Yosef from the pit in the 'midbar' (on their way to the Emek), and then meet the convoy to sell Yosef.

SOMEBODY GOT THERE FIRST

With this background, we now return to the story of 'mechirat Yosef' in Chumash. Let's take a careful look at the next pasuk, noting its grammar:

"And a group of Midyanite **TRADERS** passed by, and THEY pulled, and they lifted Yosef out of the pit, and THEY sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim for twenty pieces of silver, and brought Yosef to Egypt." (37:28)

[Carefully read this pasuk again, noting the difference between the Midyanim and Yishmaelim and the startling fact that the brothers are never mentioned!]

Based on the wording of this pasuk, it's quite clear that the Midyanim and the Yishmaelim are two DIFFERENT groups of people! To support this, note how the Torah describes the Midyanim as local '**traders**' ("socharim"), while the Yishmaelim are described as international '**movers**' ("orchat Yishmaelim - a transport caravan). Hence, a simple reading of this pasuk implies that a group of Midyanite traders happened to pass by the pit (they most probably heard Yosef screaming), and pulled him out. As these Midyanim are 'traders', they were probably on their way to sell their wares (now including Yosef) to the Ishmaelite caravan.

If this explanation is correct, then the MIDYANIM themselves pulled Yosef out of the pit and sold him. [After all, the brothers are never mentioned in this pasuk.]

[This interpretation also explains why the Torah needs to tell us about both MIDYANIM and YISHMAELIM, for understanding that these are two DIFFERENT groups is a critical factor in the story.]

So where were the brothers during all of this? Most probably, still eating! Recall our explanation above: the brothers had thrown Yosef into a pit out in the 'midbar' and returned to their grazing area to eat. They are far enough away that they do not see or hear what transpired between Yosef and the Midyanim!

And WHERE was Reuven? Again, as we explained above, he must have been eating WITH his brothers. However, as soon as he heard Yehuda's new plan (and the brothers' agreement) to sell Yosef, he would have to get back to the pit (before his brothers) to save Yosef - and that's exactly what he does! [But it's too late.] Note how this explanation fits perfectly into the next pasuk:

"And Reuven RETURNED ("**va-yashov**") to the pit, and behold, Yosef was no longer in the pit!;

Then, he tore his clothes." (37:29)

Reuven is not the LAST brother to find out that Yosef was sold (as commonly assumed). Rather, he is the FIRST brother to recognize that Yosef is missing!

What can Reuven do? Shocked, he immediately returns to his brothers [probably by now eating dessert] with the terrible news:

"And he RETURNED ['**va-yashov']** to his brothers and said, 'The boy is gone! And for myself, what am I going to do?" (37:30).

Note the word 'va-yashov' [and Reuven RETURNED] in both 37:29 and 37:30. This verb proves that the brothers could not have been eating near the pit, for if so, Reuven would not need to 'RETURN' to them. However, based on our explanation above, 'va-yashov' in both psukim makes perfect sense. Since Reuven and his brothers are eating away from the pit, Reuven must first RETURN to the pit, then he must RETURN back to his brothers to tell them the news - hence TWICE the verb 'va-yashov'!

WHAT DO THE BROTHERS THINK?

At this point in the story the brothers must be totally baffled, for they have no idea what happened to Yosef. Assuming themselves that most probably was eaten by an animal, they don't want their father to think that he may be missing, nor would they want their father to accuse them of killing him - so they plot once again. They will trick their father into thinking that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal on his way to visit them. They dip Yosef's coat in blood and have it sent to their father (see 37:31-32). This plan works, as when Yaakov sees the coat:

"And he recognized it and said, 'My son's "ktonet", "CHAYA RA'A ACHALATU; tarof, taraf Yosef" - he was surely devoured by a wild beast (37:33).

Ironically, the end result of this final plan echoes the brothers' original plan (see "ve-amarnu - chaya ra'a achalatu" 37:20 -compare 37:33). Yaakov reaches the same conclusion that the brothers themselves may have reached, but for a very different reason!

Even more ironic is how the brothers final plan 'to sell Yosef' came true, even though they never sold him; and how (they thought that) their original - for Yosef to die - came true, even though they never killed him.

In retrospect, one could even suggest that the brothers may have never been able to 'gather the courage' to either kill or sell Yosef. Despite their various plans and intense hatred of Yosef, just as they had quickly retracted from their first two plans to kill Yosef (see 37:22 & 26), they most probably would have retracted from their plan to sell him as well.

Nevertheless: they talked; they planned; they plotted - and in God's eyes - are considered guilty, even though they never actually killed or sold Yosef.

WHAT DOES YOSEF THINK?

So far, our explanation has followed Rashbam and Chizkuni. [I recommend that you read their commentaries and note how they reach the same conclusion regarding who sold Yosef, even though they don't explain the events in the manner that we did.]

Even though this interpretation seems to explain the psukim quite well, there is a pasuk in Parshat Vayigash that seems to 'ruin' this entire approach. When Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, he states explicitly:

"I am Yosef your brother, whom you SOLD to Egypt"(45:4)

Based on this statement, it's quite clear that Yosef himself thinks that his brothers SOLD him! But if our above interpretation is correct, Yosef should have thought that the Midyanim had sold him, and not his brothers! In fact, this pasuk is most probably the primary basis for the more popular interpretation (advanced by Rashi and Radak - see Further Iyun section) that the brothers indeed did sell Yosef.

The Chizkuni, bothered by this pasuk, explains that Yosef knows that the Midyanites sold him, but since the brothers threw him in the pit, it was the brothers "who CAUSED me to be sold to Egypt".

Alternately, one could explain, based on the above shiur that Yosef truly did think that his brothers had sold him, even though the brothers themselves had no idea concerning what really happened.

To explain why, let's consider these events from Yosef's perspective.

Yosef was not aware of any of the brothers' conversations. All that he knew was that, as soon as he arrived, his brothers took off his coat and threw him into the pit. A short time later, some Midyanim passed by, took him out of the pit, and sold him to the Yishmaelim who, later, sold him to the Egyptians. Yosef, trying to piece together what had happened, probably assumed that his brothers had set it all up beforehand. In other words, he thought that the brothers told the Midyanim that they had thrown Yosef in a certain pit, and that they should take him from there to sell to the Yishmaelim.

If so, then Yosef was totally unaware that it was only 'by chance' that the Midyanim were passing by, nor did he think that the brothers originally wanted him to die in the pit. Rather, he thought all along that his brothers had sold him, even though they had no idea what had happened.

In next week's shiur, we will see how this understanding helps explain Yosef's behavior during his many years in Egypt. It will also explain why the brothers assume that Yosef is either missing (see 42:13) or dead (see 42:22 -"hineh gam damo nidrash"), even though Yosef thinks that his brothers sold him (see 45:4).

[Furthermore, this can also explain why Yosef why Yosef tells his cellmates (in prison) that he was '**stolen**' from the Land of Ivrim (see 40:15)

HASHEM'S PLAN

Even though the brothers had three different plans for 'getting rid' of Yosef, God had a different plan.

The Hand of Providence led the brothers to believe that THEIR 'dream' [to rid themselves of Yosef] had come true. In reality, it was their plotting that eventually led to the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams to come true.

Finally, as will be seen in the story that follows, this was all part of God's long-term plan for the people of Israel to become a nation in the Land of Egypt, as the forecasts of "brit bein ha'btarim" now begin to unfold.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN
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A. **RASHI'S SHITTA**

To explain Rashi's 'shitta' (opinion) that the brothers sold Yosef, we must return to the two questions raised earlier in the shiur: i.e. where are the brothers eating, and where Reuven is - and change our conclusions.

According to this opinion, the brothers sat down to eat nearby the pit, and for some reason (see below) Reuven left them.

Then, there are two ways to explain what happened next. Either when the Midyanim came by, the brothers employed their services as 'middlemen' to sell Yosef to the Yishmaelim (see Rashbam's second explanation), OR possibly, the term Yishmaelim is synonymous with the term Midyanim (see Radak).

To explain why Reuven had left his brothers, Rashi offers two reasons- either he went 'home' to take care of his father, or he had taken a short walk to do some 'soul-searching' (see Rashi & Radak).

Re: Rashi's quote of the Midrash that it was Reuven's turn to go home to take care of his father, it would be difficult to consider this pshat, for it's over 100 kilometers from Hebron to Dotan, and hence it would be totally against Reuven's own plan to save Yosef, from him to leave his brothers at a time like this!

One could suggest that this Midrash is not coming to explain pshat about what 'happened', but rather gives us insight regarding how 'frum' the brothers were, and the fact that they cared about the mitzvah of 'kibud av', but their hatred of Yosef was much greater than their love for their father.

If so, what point is this Midrash making regarding the nature of 'sin'at achim'.

Rashi's second opinion, that Reuven was 'fasting', may relate to Reuven's own plan - as discussed below:

WHAT'S IN IT FOR REUVEN!

B. For some reason, Reuven is interested in saving Yosef. Why does Reuven suddenly become so dedicated to his father?

One could suggest that Yaakov was quite angry with Reuven since the incident with Bilha (see 35:22), after which he was most likely cursed by his father (see 49:4), and hence lost his 'bechora'. Reuven may have hoped that by saving Yosef from the brothers, he would 'prove himself' once again worthy to his father. This would explain his reaction when he tells his brothers that Yosef is missing - "va-ani ana ani ba". This was his big chance to redeem himself. Now, it only looks worse for him. After all, should Yaakov find out what happened, bottom line, it was Reuven's idea to throw him in the pit! For Reuven, this could have been 'strike three'! [Just a thought.]

WHY THE BROTHERS HATED YOSEF

One could suggest that the brothers' hatred of Yosef may have been more than just 'petty sibling jealousy'. Considering that they all realized that they were a chosen family, with great goals for their future, and also realizing that in previous generations, certain children were chosen, and others 'rejected' - they may have felt that it was their spiritual 'responsibility' to 'expel' Yosef from this 'chosen family', considering his behavior.

Examine Yosef's dreams. Compare them to Yitzchak's original bracha to Eisav /Yaakov, and the standard blessing of bechira.

How would this confirm the brothers' fear? Do the brothers have reason to believe that Yaakov is making a mistake by favoring Yosef? Do they have a precedent for 'intervening'?

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A True Shepherd

"Yosef at the age of seventeen was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock..." (37:2)

"Because Hashem loves only those who love the Jewish People. And the greater the love a person has for the Jewish People, the greater is Hashem's love for that person. These are the true shepherds of Israel. Hashem desires them greatly because they sacrifice themselves for their flocks and seek out their good. They exert themselves on behalf of the Jewish People, seeking their welfare in every way possible. They stand in the breach to defend them (the Jewish People) by praying for the nullification of harsh decrees against them and open the gates of blessing for them. It's like a father who loves no one more than someone whom he sees truly loves his son. This is something that experience testifies to." (*Mesillat Yesharim – The Path of the Just, by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto*)

For forty years and more, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was the address for the most complex and difficult halachic questions. He lived on the Lower East Side of New York City.

One day the sound of a car crash pierced the tranquility of his study. A Torah student flew through the door of his apartment with terrible news. Right outside Rabbi Feinstein's apartment, a car had run down and killed a young Jewish boy.

"That's not possible," said Reb Moshe.

"But I saw him lying there." said the student.

"It's not possible that the boy is Jewish," said Reb Moshe. "Go back and check, please."

The student returned to the scene of the accident. Ambulances and police were now crowding the street. Clearly beside the motionless boy there was a yarmulke. The yeshiva student returned to Reb Moshe. "It's true." "He's Jewish." "It's not possible," said, Reb Moshe. "Go and check again."

The student returned once again to the street. A crowd of people had now gathered around. Out of the crowd, a young Jewish boy emerged and asked one of the police officers for his yarmulke. "This belongs to you?" quizzed the policeman. "Yes. This boy was shouting anti-Semitic slogans at me and he chased me across the street. My kippa flew off my head as I was running. The yellow cab that ran him down just missed me."

The yeshiva student was stunned. He returned to Reb Moshe and told him the story. "But Rebbe, how were you so sure that the dead boy wasn't Jewish? The age of prophecy ended more that two thousand years ago."

Reb Moshe looked at him. "For more than forty years I have sat at this desk. My entire life has been involved with the welfare of the Jewish People. It is not possible that a Jewish boy would die in such a way right under my window."

Q & A - Vayeshev

Questions

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand " mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 – Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

Q & A - Chanukah

Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanukah take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanukah.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "*shamash*"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanukah?
12. What three *mitzvot* did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanukah?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanukah except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanukah indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanukah?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanukah?

Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol.* (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1, and the "*Al Hanissim*" prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer "*Al Hanissim*" (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
10. No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
11. When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah. (Ibid. 684:3)
12. Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
13. They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
14. They were stronger and more numerous. ("*Al Hanissim*" Prayer)
15. It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
16. Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanukah. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
17. If we break up the word into two parts — *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25th day of the month.
18. Hallel (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
19. They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. ("Chanukah"means inauguration.)
20. Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

SPECIAL CHANUKAH FEATURE

Chanukah: Celebrating the Oral Torah

by Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh HaYeshiva

The Greeks, the Midrash relates, darkened the eyes of the Jews with their decrees, saying to the Jews, "Write upon the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel." What did the Greeks mean by this quite cryptic decree? How does this decree epitomize their dark designs against the Jewish People?

Approximately 150 years before the Maccabees, a Hellenistic king in Alexandria ordered the translation of the Written Torah into Greek. In a sense, his need to become appraised of the Jewish world view and endow his massive Alexandrian library with Torah wisdom was a compliment to the Jewish People.

Miraculous events attended the translation. Each of the scholars summoned to Alexandria emerged from his private cubicle with an identical Greek translation.

Nevertheless, the translation of the seventy, the Septuagint, was a tragic moment for the Jewish People, a tragedy our Sages describe as "three days of darkness" that descended upon the world. What was the nature of this tragedy?

The Jewish People either exist as a separate entity or cease to exist. Anything mitigating or threatening our monopoly on Torah depreciates our ability to protect our uniqueness as a people. As soon as we share that monopoly with others, the Torah becomes merely another source of wisdom, another culture, another subject in the university catalogue. Ultimately, we are to impact the world community, but only through maintaining the integrity of uniqueness will that impact come about.

One thing diminished the tragedy: Only the Written Torah was shared. The Oral Torah remained the exclusive property of the Jewish People. Its transmission still necessitated the teacher-student relationship.

When I was in yeshiva in Baltimore, many of the boys took courses at Johns Hopkins University. The Semitic Studies Department was then headed by William F. Albright. Clutching a photocopied page of the Talmud, the frustrated Albright once approached one of the yeshiva students and said, "I've translated the text and correctly identified the etymology of every single word on this page, but I can't for the *life* of me understand what it is saying!"

Albright's problem was not accidental. It was anticipated and orchestrated by our Sages. They knew that if an Albright could understand the Oral Torah, then Torah as a product of *transmission* from scholar to disciple, with the particular approach and perspective of the Jewish People, would end. We would not need a Chaim Berlin, a Torah Vodaas, or a Ponevezh. If we are no longer the sole guardians of the Torah, our uniqueness and purpose as a people are eclipsed. To mitigate the quality and specialness of our purpose is counter-productive for the nations of the world.

When, 150 years after the Septuagint, the Greeks said "Write upon the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel," they were in effect saying "Give us the Oral Torah! Just as you translated the Bible, now write down Torah *she'beal peh* and grant us access to it as well. As long as that part of the Torah remains oral, no one else can approach it!"

The roots of conflict between the Greek world view and the Torah world view can be seen in the Book of Genesis. Emerging after the great flood from the ark, Noah became drunk and compromised himself. Shem and Yefes, seeing their father's shame, took a garment, walked backwards to avoid gazing on Noah, and covered him. The Sages explain that it was Shem who initiated this action, but, walking backwards with a blanket draped over his shoulder was a tricky business, and when Yefes saw that Shem could not take action alone, he helped. At select times in

history, Shem and Yefes cooperate. For most of history, the relationship is defined by conflict. The ideal situation is expressed in the blessing awarded to Yefes: "*Yishkon B'ohaley Shem*" — "He shall dwell in the tents of Shem." The *aesthetic* should be in the service of the *true*.

Yefes is the progenitor of the Greeks. Yefes perceived his father's indignation on the aesthetic level, as something distasteful and aesthetically base. The action he took to correct the situation was merely cosmetic. He did not see the violation as essentially evil, his action was optional. If necessary, he was available to participate, but he was not the one to initiate the action, because it just was not that important to him.

Shem, on the other hand, is the progenitor of Abraham. Shem experienced his father's indignity as evil, and a suffering to be assuaged through an elementally good act, an act which — in and of itself — positively affects his own soul. Shem wanted the mitzvah, the very execution of which has a nourishing consequence. Hence, he initiated the action.

From ancient Greece through the age of chivalry, and even in the cowboy/hero movies of our generation, you find the following scene: Two protagonists meet in the middle of the street or town square at high noon to duel. As long as one gives the other a fair chance to draw, he may shoot him down. Whether the opponent is evil is irrelevant — a fair chance is all that counts.

The Jew, however, rejects the "fair chance" concept. Rather, if you face an evil opponent, a Stalin or a Hitler, you shoot him in the back. However, when facing a man who is not essentially evil, you have no right to kill him just because you give him a fair chance.

If man is created in the image of G-d, then life has essential value. If man was not created in the image of G-d, however, man must reduce the gnawing emptiness, the absence of right and wrong by instead turning life into a "game," a showdown where "fair chance" resembles truth. Some people play checkers, others chess. Some people play poker, others bridge. The more involved the game, the deeper man can engage his intellect — but only to focus less upon life's meaninglessness, because life in the godless Greek mind is essentially a game. We simulate a kind of dignity by honoring the *rules* of the game.

The entire world is reduced to aesthetics and a game in this Greek world view. But the Jew says "No." When G-d encountered man through the medium of prophecy, man was charged with the mission to fulfill a universal role, the performance of which is judged at the individual, communal, and national levels.

Historically, at Chanukah, the Jews warred with the Greeks, yet there is no *megillah*, no written work chronicling that battle. Why not? Because it is a story that must be transmitted orally, for at the center of this battle was the Greeks' attempt to destroy the Oral Torah. Instead of being conquered, we persevered and created a new holiday that could only have been orchestrated through the mechanism of the Oral Torah.

The blessing we say when lighting the Chanukah lights is "...Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to light the flame of Chanukah." Where are we commanded? Which verse in the Torah mandates such? The oblique origin of this mitzvah is its very strength: Because the Torah endows our Sages with the initiative in each generation to legislate for the Jewish People, a mitzvah such as Chanukah symbolizes the power of the Oral Torah. Exactly that which the Greeks sought to extinguish is symbolized in the light that illuminates the darkness of exile.

Each holiday that Jews approach is like a way-station along the turnpike of history. The largest distance on the highway had been between Succot and Pesach, between which there was no holiday to stop off and refuel. In the darkness of exile, G-d in His wisdom provided us with two more fueling stations, Chanukah and Purim. When we celebrate Chanukah, we celebrate a holiday that reminds us that it is the wisdom and genius of the Jew, expressed and refined through the Oral Torah, that makes us Jewish.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Seeking Salvation

During the eight days of Chanukah we recite the *Al HaNissim* prayer, which thanks G-d for His miraculous role in bringing salvation to our forefathers in the times of old. In that prayer we refer to the "salvation" as both a *purkan* and a *teshua*. Another common term that refers to "being saved" is *hatzalah*. In this week's essay we seek out the etymologies of these three terms for "salvation" in an attempt to better understand in what ways they differ from one another.

The word *purkan* is the standard Targumic Aramaic form of the Hebrew word *pidyon*. The word *pidyon,* in turn, refers to the aspect of the salvation that is best translated as "redemption," by which G-d "bought us back" from the Greeks after having "sold us" to them by allowing them to rule over us. When He saved the Jews in the story of Chanukah, it was as if He redeemed them after they had been sold to another. Although the Rabbis tend to conform to Biblical Hebrew in the phraseology of the prayers that they formulate, here they used the word *purkan* because the root PEH-REISH-KUF already appears in the Bible in the context of "salvation" (see Lam. 5:8 and Ps. 136:24). In Biblical Hebrew that root also means to "slip something off" (*porek*) — which is an apt description of how the Jews in the story of Chanukah shook off the yoke of Syrian-Greek domination and asserted their own political independence.

Given the association of *purkan* with financial transactions, Rabbi Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau of Dubno (1801-1876) explains that in the context of *Al HaNissim* it refers to G-d's deliverance of the Jews from the hands of financial ruin.

In contrast to this, the term *teshuot*, or *yeshuot*, refers to a different aspect of the "salvation." These words are related to the idea of "crying out," so they refer specifically to the aspect of the redemption that was a Divine reaction to our prayers and efforts. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 14:13) suggests that the verb *shaavah* ("crying out") refers to the act of yearning for a *teshua*. Meaning, unlike other words for crying out (see "For Crying Out Loud," February 2016) that might simply denote verbalizations of one's suffering, *shaavah* is an unmistakable cry for "salvation" — a sort of prayer, as opposed to a complaint.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) sees SHIN-AYIN as the root of both *yeshua/teshua* and *shaavah*, explaining that at its core this root denotes "enjoyment" or "pleasure." Other words derived from this root include *sha'ashua* ("playful" or "delightful"), *mishan* ("leaning/relying," in reference to the state of enjoyment and satisfaction that one achieves when one is "supported" by another), *sha'ah* ("hour," i.e. a unit of time that a person dedicates to a specific task he wants to do). Alternatively, we may posit that the core meaning of SHIN-AYIN is "smoothness" (see "Smooth Sliding & Glad Gliding," November 2019), and in this context recalls the uninterrupted, smooth transition from prayer to salvation.

The Talmud (*Bava Kama* 80a) mentions a ceremony called *Yeshua HaBen*, but offers no clarification as to what this term refers. *Sefer HaAruch* and Rashi explain that this expression refers to the festive meal of a *Pidyon HaBen* ("redeeming of the [firstborn] son"), adducing this understanding from the fact that cognates of the Biblical Hebrew word *yeshua* and cognates of the Biblical Hebrew *pidyon* are both translated into Aramaic by the various Targumim as words related to *purkan* (see also *Tosafot* to *Bava Kama* 80a).

Rabbi Hirsch actually proposes an etymological difference between the words *yeshua* and *teshua*. He explains that *yeshua* derives from the root YOD-SHIN-AYIN, which he sees as related to YOD-SHIN-HEY (through the interchangeability of AYIN and HEY) and ultimately to the biliteral root

YOD-SHIN, which means "has," "is" or "exists." Accordingly, he explains that *yeshua* refers to the first-order existence that G-d grants a person. When someone is faced with an existential danger that threatens the very possibility of his continued existence and G-d saves him from this situation, that sort of salvation is referred to as a *yeshua*.

On the other hand, the term *teshua* derives from the root SHIN-VAV-AYIN ("crying out"), which Rabbi Hirsch sees as related to the roots SHIN-BET-AYIN ("seven") and SHIN-PEH-AYIN ("influence," "influx"), via the interchangeability of VAV, BET, and PEH. Rabbi Hirsch explains that this set of etymological roots do not refer directly to one's core existence, but to matters considered to be somewhat periphery to that, like one's material property. Based on this, he explains that *teshua* does not refer to being saved from something that threatened one's very existence, but to something that threatened one's economic freedom. Consequently, Rabbi Hirsch argues that the term *teshua* often refers to "salvation" that comes about through military victory, meaning a win that defeats those outside conquers who threaten one's freedoms.

The *Peirush HaRokeach* explains that *yeshua/teshua* implies total and utter salvation from a state of oppression and subjugation, while the term *hatzalah* refers to only a partial or temporary respite from the oppressive situation, but not a total release. The Malbim (to Jer. 15:20) adds that the term *hatzalah* focuses on the element of salvation that releases a person from mortal danger. Perhaps it is because of this implication that the term Hatzolah is used for the paramedic volunteer organizations that have sprung up in places with sizeable Jewish populations.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Heilpern (1660-1742) and Rabbi Chanoch Zundel of Bialystok (d. 1867) explain that while *hatzalah* can refer to being "saved" from any sort of threat, the terms *yeshua/teshua* refer to salvation from a particularly grave threat, such as murder or crimes of a sexual nature (see Deut. 22:27). This is why the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:32) assumes that when the Bible reports that Moses "saved" (*vayoshian*) Yitro's daughters from the local shepherds (Ex. 2:17), the latter must have had some machinations to commit sexual crimes against those damsels. The Malbim further argues that *yeshua* refers to mere "salvation" from a dire situation, while *hatzalah* implies being "saved" from the situation, plus being "protected" from future troubles.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *hatzalah* to the biliteral root TZADI-LAMMED, which he defines as "separation for a constructive purpose." In the sense of "saving" somebody, *hatzalah* refers to extricating, or separating, a person from a perilous situation. Other words derived from this biliteral root include *tzel* ("shadow," which appears as though it separates from one's person), *tzli* ("roasting," which uses heat to extricating the moisture from within an uncooked food), *atzal* ("bestowal," e.g., when one blesses another).

Similarly, Rabbi Hirsch (to Ex. 3:22, Deut. 32:2) understands the root of *hatzalah* to be NUN-TZADI-LAMMED, which he connects to the roots NUN-SHIN-LAMMED ("remove") and NUN-ZAYIN-LAMMED ("flow away") by explaining that *hatzalah* refers to saving somebody by "removing" him or her from a hazardous situation and "separating" them from what which endangers them. Interestingly, while Radak connects the "saving" and "removing" meanings of NUN-TZADI-LAMMED, Ibn Janach fails to see a thematic connection between these two concepts and considers them two different meanings denoted by the same root.

In short: *Purkan* focuses on the redeeming aspect of "salvation," as though G-d bought us back after having proverbially sold us; *teshua* focuses on the idea that "salvation" is a response to our prayers for help; and *hatzalah* refers to "salvation" as the means of separating us from a dangerous position.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 9)

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart."
(Helen Keller)

The third blessing begins: "G-d is true and certain, established and enduring, fair and faithful, beloved and cherished, delightful and pleasant, awesome and powerful, correct and accepted, good and beautiful is this affirmation to us forever and ever"

Our blessing opens with sixteen different descriptions to define "this affirmation". Yet, strangely enough, the verse does not seem to tell us what "this affirmation" actually refers to. The commentaries explain that it is a reference to the verses that we have just recited in the *Shema*. There are sixteen verses from the beginning of the *Shema* until the end of the second paragraph. Thus, the final blessing of the *Shema* begins with sixteen different declarations, each one verifying the validity of its corresponding verse.

I once heard a deceptively simple idea, but an idea that is also exceptionally thought-provoking, from Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Shlomo, one of the leader of the Ohel Yaakov Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He pointed out that with so many different descriptions, there seems to be one category that is missing from the sixteen. The word "easy" — "*kal*" in Hebrew — is notably absent. Rabbi Ben Shlomo explained that the reason is obvious. There is nothing "easy" about our relationship with G-d. In fact, there *should* be nothing easy about it. Things that come easily have a habit of disappearing just as easily. Our connection to G-d requires continual effort and input. Even when we feel a true closeness to G-d, there is always room for fine-tuning that connection, to enhance it and to make it even more significant.

In the gym there is a phrase that is regarded as being *the* international motif of the exercise world: "No Pain, No Gain." As with many slogans that conquer the world — or, at the very least, the international marketplace — it actually has its roots in the timeless lessons of our Sages. In Ethics of the Fathers (in the last Mishna of chapter five), Ben Hei Hei teaches, "*L'phum tzara agra*," which is Aramaic for "The reward is in proportion to the exertion." Or, in our modern lexicon — no pain, no gain! Rashi explains that the amount of spiritual reward we receive for our actions is in direct proportion to the amount of effort and difficulty that went into performing our actions. Rabbi Shmuel ben Isaac de Uceda, in his classic commentary, Midrash Shmuel, adds the most beautiful clarification to Rashi's original explanation. G-d's reward for learning His Torah is not measured simply by how much a person remembers and understands. Nor is it determined solely according to how many innovative concepts a person originates. Rather, G-d bestows reward according to how much toil and determination went into learning it. And, he adds, one who truly strives to learn Torah will receive an abundance of reward even if they, seemingly, did not manage to accomplish very much.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the revered head of the illustrious Mir Yeshivah in Jerusalem, would point out that Jewish Law instructs us to stand up for Torah scholars as a sign of respect for the vast amount of Torah knowledge they have acquired. But there is no similar directive to stand up for a pregnant woman, despite our Sages' teaching that a fetus is taught the entirety of the Torah while in the womb (Niddah 30). The reason is that the fetus *does not toil* to understand the Torah; it simply

absorbs the Torah with no effort whatsoever. When we stand up in respect for a Torah scholar, we are doing so not just because of their prodigious knowledge, but also because of the toil and effort that went into their acquiring it.

There is a delightful story told about Rabbi Yehosua Eizik Shapiro, one of the most brilliant Rabbis of the nineteenth century, who is universally known as Rabbi Eizel Charif (*charif* means sharp) because of his acutely sharp intellect and his razor-sharp answers for all facets of Torah. In his quest to find an appropriate husband for his beloved daughter, he travelled to one of the most prestigious yeshivahs at the time and posed an extremely detailed and complex question. He announced that whoever could come up with the correct answer would be a worthy candidate to marry his daughter. The yeshiva students all toiled to find the answer. But, as each one offered a possible solution, Rabbi Eizel Charif explained why that answer was inadequate. After a few days, Rabbi Eizel Charif realized that no one would succeed in arriving at the answer. So, he boarded his carriage to leave the town to go looking elsewhere for a potential son-in-law. As his carriage began to move off, one student raced after it while shouting that the wagon driver should stop. When he finally caught up, he said to Rabbi Eizel Charif, "Rebbe, please tell me the answer. Unfortunately, I did not merit being your son-in-law, but at least tell me the answer to the question, because not knowing it is driving me to distraction!" Rabbi Eizel Charif looked at the young man and with a broad smile he told him, "Primarily, I was seeking someone *who desires to know the answer*. And you passed that test! The desire to know Torah is more important to me than your level of Torah knowledge itself. I want you to be my daughter's husband!"

This brings us to another "modern" idiom that has been universally embraced and is undoubtedly true. When William Ritter, a contemporary American author, wrote, "failure is not the *opposite* of success — it is *part* of success," he was unwittingly paraphrasing Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch's writings from more than one hundred and fifty years earlier. In his uniquely articulate fashion, Rabbi Hirsch writes, "It is not the quantitative measure of the moral and spiritual goals that a person has actually achieved that constitute the true worth of a life's course. It is the measure of earnest striving, of devoted endeavor, of sacrifices made and privation endured — all for the realization of good purposes — that determine the true worth of both a person and their life. Actual success can come only from the Hands of G-d Himself."

So, no, "easy" is not one of the sixteen definitions that the blessing after the *Shema* starts with. Because if it were easy, then it would not be an accurate reflection of the inner, spiritual yearning that each person has — to bring joy to the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe.

To be continued...

Ohr Somayach wishes all of our friends, alumni and readers of Ohrnet Torah Magazine a festive and luminous Chanukah that will light up our lives with good health, much happiness and success.

Chanukah Somayach!

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ta'anit 2-8

Our Immortal

While sitting together at a table for a meal, Rav Nachman asked Rabbi Yitzchak to honor them with words of Torah. Rabbi Yitzchak said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Yaakov Avinu did not die."

What is the context for this statement and is it meant to be understood in a literal sense, a figurative sense — or perhaps in these two apparently contradictory manners?

When Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak were having a meal together, and Rav Nachman requested a *dvar Torah,* Rabbi Yitzchak replied with a teaching he had learned from Rabbi Yochnan, that Yaakov Avinu did not die. But rather than Rav Nachman questioning the "amazing" possibility of Yaakov Avinu not having passed from this world, his question came from a different angle — the words of the Torah's narrative. "Was it for naught that the eulogizer eulogized him, the embalmers embalming him!?" (See Ber. 50:26)

Rabbi Yitzchak then replied, seemingly sidestepping this question, saying, "What I am asserting can be derived from a verse in the Torah: 'And fear not, My servant Yaakov, says Hashem, and do not be dismayed, O Yisrael, for behold I save you from afar and your seed from the land of their captivity, and Yaakov will again be at peace and at ease, with no one to frighten them.' (Yirmyahu 30:10) This verse equates Yaakov and his descendants, teaching that just as his descendants are alive, Yaakov too is alive."

Rashi explains this teaching in a semi-literal manner: Yaakov Avinu lives forever, and the various acts performed after his non-death were done since he appeared as if he had died. Rashi also explains the phrase "Just as his descendants are alive, Yaakov too is alive" to mean the following: "In the future when Hashem gathers in the exiles from the lands in which they are captive, He will gather in those who are alive at the time and not those who have already passed from this world. Likewise, at that time Hashem will bring Yaakov Avinu to witness this ingathering of the exiles — his descendants — so that they will be saved in his very presence, just as the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt at the time of the Exodus took place in the presence of all of surviving members of Klal Yisrael."

Another explanation of the message in our *sugya* is suggested by a number of commentaries, and is a more "allegorical" approach, in a sense. Our Sages in Tractate Berachot teach that righteous people are called "alive" even after death, and wicked people are called "dead" even while they are alive. When Rabbi Yitzchak stated that Yaakov Avinu did not die, he was alluding to this concept since Yaakov Avinu was undoubtedly righteous. Therefore, even after his natural, physical death, he is considered alive. Rabbi Yitzchak mentioned Yaakov Avinu, although the same life-principle should certainly also apply to Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu (and many others) because not only was Yaakov Avinu righteous, but all of his children were righteous as well. In Jewish thought, children are considered and viewed as a continuation of their parents, and as long as the children are alive, their parents are also alive. (The corollary to this concept is that if one's child is wicked, the parents are also considered not alive, in a sense, because "the wicked are called 'dead' even when they are alive.") Rashi in Chumash (Ber. 18:19) similarly teaches that a parent who dies, leaving behind a righteous child, is considered alive.

According to these more allegorical commentaries, Rabbi Yitzchak derives an extremely important message from the verse compareing Yaakov Avinu to his children. Yaakov Avinu is considered alive because he lives on through his children, who are righteous. Likewise, all parents who — as a result of serious efforts to raise children who are sincere in following the ways of Hashem — merit children who are righteous, are always alive. (See Kli Yakar, Maharsha and Abarbanel)

- *Ta'anit 5b*

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

The Power of Minority

We Jews represent a mere .02% of the world population. A minute minority indeed. Not for naught has this been the case since the inception of our history. The fact of our minority was revealed as an essential feature of our mission. *Not because you are more numerous than any other peoples did G-d take delight in you and choose you; for you are the smallest among all the peoples (Devarim 7:7).*

What better time than Chanukah, when we celebrate the victory of the few over the many, to reflect on this unique aspect of our nationhood?

Our minority status begins way back with our forefather Avraham the *Ivri*. He was called *Ivri* – the one from over there — our Sages note, because the entire world stood at one side, championing polytheism, and Avraham stood alone, on the other side, resolute in His monotheistic truth and piety. Within our people too, it was the minority that preserved G-d's Will against rebellion of the masses. After the debacle of the golden calf, Moshe called out, "Whoever is for G-d, join forces with me!" Only a single tribe, the Levites, responded to the call. Out of the twelve spies sent to assess the Land, only Yehoshua and Calev remained loyal to G-d, standing firm against a panicked people prepared to return to Egypt. The events recorded in the books of the Prophets repeat this phenomenon over and over again. One man, with firm conviction and passionate commitment, stood up for the Law of G-d and saved the people: Gidon, Ovadiah, Eliyahu, Elisha — each resisted the misguided masses, and set the nation straight.

In the Chanukah story, this hallmark of our history is most apparent. The nation was rapidly assimilating to the Hellenistic culture surrounding it. One man, Matisyahu, raised five sons so mighty in spirit, so staunch in their commitment, that they took on G-d's cause *alone*. It is the victory of these few great and pure souls, the victory won for the loyalty to G-d's Law that we celebrate on Chanukah.

Our history of three-and-a-half millennia attests time and again to the triumphant perseverance of a tiny, powerless minority. Every page of our history reminds us: the fate of truth and right can never be hopeless, even if their cause is supported only by a minority.

But what *advantage* does a minority confer? Is there no merit and power in numbers?

A minority is likely the most fertile ground for cultivating spiritual truth. A victorious majority will all too often become unfaithful to its own cause. Once its struggle is a matter of the past, the members of the majority lend their minds and spirits to new aspirations. The core values which were once the fuel of its life, now immune from challenge, are left to wither — no further development or nurturance are pursued. A majority often imagines that its cause owes its victory to its numbers, when in fact its numbers were once won on account of its cause. Because the focus is on numbers, a majority is often content to preserve its numbers, or perhaps increase them. But the underlying cause remains just that — underlying. It lies buried under new ambitions, often of a different character. This may explain why some of the largest religions are underdeveloped theologically.

Not so for the minority. By virtue of its continuing struggle, it perpetually breathes new life into its cause. Survival of the minority depends on its ability to keep awake within it a vibrant spiritual reserve. Because the

numbers and power of the majority always beckon, the minority is impelled to immerse itself, over and over again, in the content of its cause. A minority must educate its ranks not only to the truth of its cause, but to the character required to defend its cause. This, in turn, requires that each individual have access to knowledge and research — to make these truths personal ones. There can be no mindless masses if a minority is to survive. Hence, in our Jewish minority, the teaching and dissemination of our cause — Torah, G-d's truth — occupies the most splendid and prominent place in life. The mind and spirit of the Jew are so immersed in this fountain of truth that there is not one house of study without new insight. The result is a rich and ever-growing reservoir of spiritual thought and strength. And, precisely because membership in the minority often requires sacrifice — material wealth and prosperity usually reside in the majority — the minority will likely be composed of more purely motivated supporters.

The fact of our minority is hardly a cause of despair. Its unique features have enabled us to live a noble existence for millennia. We are assured:

"There is always still within it a tenth consecrated to G-d. Even though there will be destruction again and again, like the oak and the beech tree, whose trunk remains though they shed their leaves, still the trunk will remain holy seed." *(See Yeshayahu 6:13)*

- *Sources: Source: Collected Writings II, Kislev IV, pp. 233-248*

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF WATER

Water says: "At the sound of His placing bountiful waters in the heavens, then the clouds are raised from the ends of the earth." (Yirmiyah 51:16)

Water sings of the ingenuity of Hashem's perpetual system of precipitation.

Water is absolutely essential for all living organisms. Drinkable water comes mostly from rainfall. If not for the kindness of the complex water cycle, water and the life it supports would soon disappear. Therefore, each water drop sings of Hashem's repetitive formation of rainclouds to provide for His creations.

Water speaks of "the sound of Hashem's placing bountiful waters in the heavens." This "sound" is the proclamation of Hashem's praise expressed by the formation of the clouds. On a deeper level of understanding, the Midrash relates that on the second day of Creation, when Hashem separated the waters, forcing half to remain on earth, the lower half cried out over its demotion. We may suggest that the lower waters find solace when they are elevated and formed into clouds.

The water cycle has a lesson for mankind: Hashem brings up water from the ends of the earth to the high heavens in order to provide for the needy. We should be willing to make the much smaller effort necessary to help out others.

- *Sources: Ber. Rabbah 5:2; Malbim to Yirmiyah 51:16 and Ber. 1:6*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Torah portion's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

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