BS"D
December 16, 2022

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

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

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## Mazel-Tov to the Honorees at the annual dinner at Beth Sholom Congregation in Potomac, MD: Ilene & Syd Schneider and Arnie Hiller (Pillars of the Community) and Thalia Baumgarten (Leadership Award)

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

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

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

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

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

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

The connections between Yosef and Hanukkah remind me of my days in graduate school, fresh from college philosophy class, where we learned that there is no way to prove or disprove the existence of God. I remember asking my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, nearly 50 years ago how one learned to believe in God. He taught me to look at the world, at the way everything hangs together in a way that could only arise through a master plan. How could such a world have come to be without an incredible mind putting it together? (Rabbi Fohrman's investigation of the precise conditions required for each stage of a Big Bang theory to lead to creation, rather than chaos or things falling apart, shows how science has reinforced this lesson in recent decades.) We must learn to see God in the physical and mathematical beauty and perfection of a sunset, mathematics, music, and so many other treasures in our world. What I am presenting is a pale version of a beautiful lesson that Rabbi Cahan gave to me and the precise mathematical conditions for creation that Rabbi Fohrman explains. Rabbi Cahan's lesson enabled me to rise from a very secular upbringing to learn to see God's hand in our world.

Shabbat Shalom and Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah and Alan

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

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

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## Dvar Torah: Vayeishev: The Truth of Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2018

> *And Yosef dreamed a dream and told his brothers, and they continued to hate him. And he said to them, "Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed. Behold, we were binding sheaves in the midst of the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright, and behold, your sheaves encircled [it] and prostrated themselves to my sheaf."* (Breishis 37:5-7)

Something about Yosef's dream stoked the fire of hatred within his brothers. What did it tell them?

The Malbim explains that the brother considered Yosef a false prophet. He is relating his dream as a prophetic truth. A prophecy must be 100% true. There can be no admixture of falsehood. In a previous verse Rashi comments on the words, "…**and he was a lad"**: *'He behaved childishly fixing up his hair and touching up his eyes so that he would appear more handsome.'and he was a lad: He behaved childishly, fixing his hair and touching up his eyes so that he would appear handsome.* [From Gen. Rabbah 84:7]

The brothers understood that what we think about during the day we dream about at night. Since he was exhibiting signs of self-absorption during the day, by being overly involved in fixing up his appearance, then by night he was dreaming self-centered dreams, placing himself in the position of leadership and authority over his older siblings. If he then goes on to believe that these dreams are necessary to be related as prophetic revelations then he is a dangerous person that is blinded by ambition and guided by delusions of grandeur.
Their premise was right. The Talmud tells us that dreams are 1/60 prophecy. If a drop of milk fell into a pot of meat with sixty times the measurement of that drop, then the milk is considered undetectable and nullified. 1/60 is on very cusp of being neglible. It is a proportion of 59 parts to 1. The reason most dreams are made up of 59 parts of foolishness out of 60 is because most of our 60,000 waking thoughts are admixtures of futile worries, false judgments, and mindless distractions. Therefore most of our dreams are a giant salad of fears and fantasies mixed with a touch of prophecy.

The Orchas Tzadikim says that if a person is focused on truth all day long then their dreams at night are potentially rich with prophetic treasures. Their assumption about Yosef may have been completely misguided.

His youthful habit of grooming himself may well have been motivated by a desire to represent Torah in the most dignified way. The Hallacha states that a Talmud scholar is not allowed to have a stain on his garment, because he represents Torah. His father gave him a fine coat, just as we put a beautiful cover on a Torah scroll. In any case their perception of his actions may have been mistaken.

It once happened that I dreamt on Shevuos morning after giving shiurim all night that a friend of mine from out of town was holding a brand new baby boy. In the dream I was talking to him and I asked him what the baby's name was and he told me in the dream.

After Shevuos I called him up and he told me right away that his wife had a baby boy. I told him I was calling to tell him about my dream and that he told me the name in the dream. He asked me not to tell him the name, so I stopped there.

The next week I got up at 3 AM and drove four hours to the Bris. My son came along with me and he was the only person I shared the name from the dream with. They honored me with the reading of the name and when my friend whispered the name in my ear, "Yosef," my hand started to tremble. That was the name in the dream.

Later my friend told me that he had a different name in mind all week but they checked with a Mekubal and he objected to the name they had in mind and in the last day they came up with Yosef.

I have a theory. It took me a while to realize this important factor. I may have merited a truthful dream in the morning because I was busy at night teaching **the truth of Torah**.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-vayeishev/

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## The Angels in Our Lives

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2020

Who have been the angels in our lives?

At a critical moment in the story of Joseph and his brothers, there is a turning point that goes by so fast, that if you blink you'll miss it. Joseph travels to Shechem to visit his brothers, yet he searches for them in vain. At that moment, a man sees that Joseph *"he was wandering in the fields"* (Genesis 37:15), lost and not knowing where to go next. Upon hearing that Joseph is looking for his brothers the man responds casually *"Oh, I heard them saying that they were going to Dotan."* Seizing on this piece of information, Joseph goes to Dotan, upon which his brothers see him coming and throw him in the pit which precipitates the entire story of Joseph being taken down to Egypt, becoming a viceroy, testing and deceiving his brothers, and bringing down his father's family and settling them in Egypt.

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

foot of Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. The entire story of the Jewish People is thanks to that one offhand comment by this anonymous man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So I ask us to take a moment to reflect on who the angels have been in our lives. Just think for a few minutes and you will know who they are. Maybe give them a call before Shabbat and say "Thank you for that suggestion you made ten years ago. I can't begin to express my gratitude. It has made all the difference in my life's trajectory." Chances are that they won't even remember what you are talking about, or consider it to not have been a big deal. For them it was just a passing comment, but for us it was everything.

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

Shabbat Shalom!

https://library.yctorah.org/2020/12/the-angels-in-our-lives/

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## Beware Your Dreams: They May Just Come True

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *****

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> ***16*** *And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, "Thy father did command before he died,*
> *saying,* ***17*** *'So shall ye say unto Joseph, "Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren*

*and their sin, for they did unto thee evil.”’ And now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him.* ***18*** *And his brethren also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are thy servants.”* (50:16-18)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Light and Rejoicing: Thoughts for Parashat Vayeshev

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

*“Light is sown for the righteous, and rejoicing for the upright of heart. Rejoice in the Lord, righteous ones, and celebrate His holiness in praise.”* (Psalm 97)

In this passage, the Psalmist identifies two categories of people: the righteous and the upright of heart. What distinguishes each group?

The righteous one (tzadik) is devoted to the light of truth. The tzadik pursues truth with singular commitment and resists diversionary temptations. While this pursuit can be a source of satisfaction, it also can lead to loneliness and alienation from others. The tzadik operates on a deeply intellectual and spiritual level that not everyone can appreciate.

The upright of heart (yishrei lev) are distinguished by warm-hearted relations with others. Whereas the Psalmist refers to tzadik in the singular, he refers to the upright of heart in the plural. Whereas the tzadik is rewarded with light, the yishrei

lev are filled with rejoicing. If the tzadik is “a lonely man of faith,” the yishrei lev are sociable and well-liked. The tzadik finds satisfaction in the pursuit of truth; the yishrei lev find satisfaction in warm friendships and social interactions.

The Psalmist consoles the lonely tzadik. You are not alone! There are others who share your commitment. These tzadikim also find happiness…but their chief joy is rejoicing in the Lord. If most human beings do not appreciate or understand the tzadikim, God does! And that’s the ultimate source of rejoicing and personal fulfillment.

In rabbinic tradition, only one character in the Torah is given the title tzadik: Joseph—Yosef haTzadik. Some say that he was described as tzadik because he resisted the advances of his master’s wife. Yet, to be labeled as a tzadik would seem to reflect on Joseph’s overall character, not just his virtuous behavior in this once circumstance.

Looking at the range of stories in the Torah about Joseph, we see that he regularly calls on the name of the Lord. Instead of taking personal credit for interpreting dreams, he ascribes the power to God. He is only a humble servant. When he later reconciles with his brothers, he tells them not to feel guilty for their role in getting him sent to Egypt; it was part of God’s plan so that he could become a source of sustenance to his family.

Unlike Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Joseph was never addressed directly by God. Nevertheless, he felt God’s presence and strove to live a Godly life. Joseph was a tzadik in that he put his life in the context of relationship with God.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik described biblical Joseph as a basically lonely and misunderstood individual. In spite of external signs of success, he did not seem to enjoy warm relationships with family and associates. It was the spirit of God that gave light to his life.

Although being a tzadik is surely a great achievement, it often entails being spiritually and socially isolated. The joy of the yishrei lev — the warm-hearted and sociable people — is missing.

Whereas the Psalmist refers to tzadikim and to yishrei lev, the ideal is to incorporate both qualities in our lives. Our steadfast commitment to truth and Godliness can be — and should be — accompanied by the joy of warm-hearted relationships with others. One who combines the virtues of the tzadik with those of the yishrei lev is one whose joy is full.

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

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/light-and-rejoicing-thoughts-parashat-vayeshev

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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.

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

## Hanukkah: A Vote Against Religious Zealotry

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

One of the difficulties in learning about the meaning of Hanukkah is that there is no biblical text. There are only three pages in the Talmud dedicated to Hanukkah, and they focus primarily on the technical laws of lighting the hanukkiyah (Shabbat 21a–23b).

Why are there so few sacred texts for Hanukkah? This question becomes more pressing when we consider that the Maccabees and their supporters composed four Books of the Maccabees. These books describe the heroism of the Maccabees and God's role in the victory.

Amazingly, the Talmud never mentions the Books of the Maccabees. Why would the Sages ignore them? Why did they exclude the Books of the Maccabees from the Bible?

Some argue that the Sages turned against the Maccabees once their descendants embraced Hellenism and persecuted the rabbis. Additionally, the Maccabees abused their religious authority and became corrupt (see Rabbi Marc D. Angel, *Angel for Shabbat,* vol. 1, 2010, p. 36).
Another possible dimension emerges from a closer reading of the Books of the Maccabees. One of the greatest heroes of the Maccabees was their putative ancestor Phinehas (I Maccabees 2:26), the grandson of Aaron the High Priest. In Numbers chapter 25, we learn of Phinehas' religious zealotry as he killed the leading participants in the idolatry of Baal Peor. God approved of his actions, stopping a plague and granting Phinehas a covenant of peace (Numbers 25:12).

The Maccabees viewed Phinehas as a religious role model and sought to apply his teachings to a Hellenized society. According to the Books of the Maccabees, the Maccabean revolt began when a Hellenized Jew was about to sacrifice to the Greek gods. Mattathias (Judah Maccabee's father) killed him and proclaimed, "Whoever is on God's side, come with me!" (I Maccabees 2:27). This expression derives from Moses' battle cry against those who served the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:26). Although the Torah prohibits idolatry, Jewish Law does not allow Jews to take the law into their own hands and harm or kill violators of the Torah. However, the Maccabees believed that they had acted correctly like their ancestor Phinehas and like Moses. They claimed that the victory and miracles enumerated in the Books of the Maccabees were
proof that God had sanctioned their actions.

On his deathbed, Mattathias instructed his children to continue to act in the manner of their ancestor Phinehas:

When the time drew near for Mattathias to die, he said to his sons,

> *"…my children, be zealous for the Torah, and be ready to give your lives for the covenant of our fathers…Phinehas, our ancestor, through his act of zeal received a pact of priesthood for all time."* (I Maccabees 2:49–50, 54)

Although the Maccabees idealized the religious zealotry of Phinehas, the Sages drastically curtailed the application of his behavior. A passage in the Jerusalem Talmud poignantly captures the paradox facing the Sages. On the one hand, they were uncomfortable with Phinehas' taking the law into his own hands. On the other hand, God explicitly approved of his actions:

> *Phinehas did not act in accordance with the Sages. Rabbi Judah b. Pazi said: the Sages wanted to excommunicate him, were it not for the divine spirit that jumped in and said that he and his descendants shall have an eternal covenant of priesthood.* (J.T. Sanhedrin 9:7, 27b)

The Sages conclude that Phinehas himself acted appropriately, and God attested to the absolute purity of his motives. However, the Sages deeply circumscribed the applicability of Phinehas' actions to others.

Two generations after the Maccabean victory, Hillel preached that we should be students of Aaron — loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them closer to Torah (Avot 1:12). Hillel represents proper Jewish teaching. We should emulate Aaron, not Phinehas.

Perhaps Hillel also learned this lesson from his mentors, Shemayah and Abtalion (see Avot 1:10–11). They were the rabbinic leaders of the previous generation and were either converts of descended from converts (see also Gittin 57b). The Talmud relates a story where the High Priest was jealous over their popularity and denigrated them for being converts whereas he was nobly descended from Aaron the High Priest. Shemayah and Abtalion retorted that they truly reflected the
peaceful values of Aaron whereas the High Priest — the biological descendant of Aaron — did not:

> *It happened with a high priest that as he came forth from the Sanctuary, all the people followed him, but when they saw Shemayah and Abtalion, they forsook him and went after Shemayah and Abtalion….The high priest said to them: May the descendants of the heathen come in peace! They answered him: May the descendants of the heathen, who do the work of Aaron, arrive in peace, but the descendant of Aaron, who does not do the work of Aaron, he shall not come in peace!* (Yoma 71b)

The Sages rejected the Books of the Maccabees from the biblical canon and ignored them in their literature. The Sages also recast the holiday as a spiritual festival, downplaying the military victory and focusing instead on lighting candles and the beautification of the mitzvot (hiddur mitzvah). The Talmud describes one miracle associated with the Hanukkah story, namely, the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days (Shabbat 21b). Although the Books of Maccabees report several miracles, the miracle of the oil is conspicuously absent. **By ignoring the miracles in the Books of the Maccabees, and by focusing on a miracle that the Maccabees did not consider important, the Sages effectively deprived the Maccabees of the divine sanction they had claimed for themselves.**
The Sages also selected a Haftarah for Shabbat Hanukkah that preaches a message in opposition to that of the Maccabees (Megillah 31a). The prophet Zechariah envisioned a Menorah, and told Zerubbabel, *"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit — said the Lord of Hosts"* (Zechariah 4:6). It appears that the Sages chose this passage to take a stand not only against the Hellenists, but also against the overzealous approach of the Maccabees.

In medieval times, Jews often were persecuted and powerless. Consequently, the military heroism of the Maccabees against the Greek enemy (and not against assimilated Jews) was brought to the fore and celebrated. The Al HaNissim prayer that we recite in the Amidah and the Grace after Meals appears to have been introduced during these times and represent a response to persecution.

During this period, a book entitled *Megillat Antiochus* that related the military victories of the Maccabees was composed and widely circulated. The Maoz Tzur hymn also was composed, celebrating God's victories over the enemies of the Jews. This medieval model of Jewish pride in the Maccabees' strength sustained our people through difficult times and became an additional layer of meaning for Hanukkah.

Although that medieval recasting of Hanukkah is important, the core of the talmudic observance of Hanukkah celebrates the triumph of the spirit of the Sages against both assimilation and religious zealotry. We celebrate peaceful dialogue, and transmission of the Torah to students and children. We should again be reminded of Hillel's teaching: *Love peace, pursue peace, love people, and bring them closer to the Torah.*

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/hanukkah-vote-against-religious-zealotry [emphasis added]

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## The Mitzva of Tochacha -- Providing Clarity

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

One of the Mitzvos in the Torah is that if we see someone doing (or about to do) something wrong, we are to intervene and provide clarity to them. This Mitzva is commonly translated as "Rebuke." But the reality of Tochacha is that it is simply a clarification. The observer helps the person in crisis by providing clarity. Sometimes that clarity is provided with information; what indeed is the Halacha. Sometimes that clarity is provided by inspiring, by conveying the message, "You can do better." When we share the message, "You can overcome this situation and succeed," the person experiencing a critical life test is emboldened to be stronger and act wiser.

When providing Tochacha, there are times that the communication is indeed provided by way of rebuke, with a bit of harshness or firmness. Other times, the clarity is provided with pleasantness, in a way that inspires. The Novi Zecharia (11:7) eloquently described how he took in hand two rods of leadership; one he called “pleasantness,” and the other he called “beating,” and he thereby shepherded the flock of Israel. The art of Tochacha is to know how best to communicate and provide clarity.

In appreciating the structure of the 613 Mitzvos, the Mitzva of Tochacha stands in sharp contrast to the prohibition described in Parshas Re’eh, not to lead someone astray with misguided information. Tochacha complements the Mitzva of “Do not stand idly by as your fellow is hurt,” by requiring that we do not just stand by as a problem develops, but rather, proactively intervene if we see someone acting with improper or destructive behavior.

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In this week’s Parsha we find Yosef in a situation, a test that could have dire consequences. Distanced from his family and his saintly father, Yakov, Yosef found himself in the intensely immoral environment of Mitzrayim. Daily he experienced the overtures of his master’s wife, until one day he was left alone with her, and was truly tempted. Yosef overcame the temptation and fled. The Talmud (Sotah 36b) is very specific as to how he managed to overcome and pass the test.

The Talmud says that at that moment of temptation, the image of Yakov appeared to Yosef and said to him, “Each of the Shevatim (brothers) is destined to be written on the Kohein Gadol’s garments. If you slip now, your name will be missing.” In fact, the Medrash says that Yosef explained his decision to disengage with the words, “I am from those who see.” In saying this Yosef declared that he was able to see more than meets the physical eye. Yosef was able to see his connection to greatness and his potential, well beyond the temptation that was before him.

When Yosef was in a compromising situation there were two things that saved him. Firstly, he reconnected emotionally with his father. Secondly, he was reminded that so much more was expected of him in his destiny as a child of Yisroel.

Rabbi A. J. Twerski often said that the most powerful and meaningful Tochacha which he received from his father was when his father commented on his behavior with the words, “Es Past Nisht — ” It is unbecoming of you to act in that way. The message of love and of high expectations is often better at providing clarity than harsh rebuke. What Yosef needed to feel at that moment was not the evil of what he was considering. Intellectually, he knew the temptation was evil. What Yosef needed to feel at that moment was his father’s love, and affirmations of his personal greatness and potential.

There are times that we may perceive the need to provide clarity to another person. It could be a child, a student, or even a spouse, parent, or neighbor. If we think of Tochacha as harsh rebuke, we may think that what is demanded of us is to speak harshly and lace our comments with sarcasm. Yet, if we can believe in the innate goodness of the people with whom we interact, we could well observe the Mitzva of Tochacha as a Mitzva to provide clarity. We provide clarity to a person in crisis by clarifying right from wrong and affirming that the person is great enough to persevere.

Yosef was in crisis. He needed help; he needed intervention. The love of his father, years earlier, came to his rescue. When he perceived his father’s image, he felt the love of connection. He drew from his reservoirs of confidence and clarity to act in a way that caused him to be known to us as Yosef HaTzaddik.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

## Parshas Vayeishev -- Truth Be Told

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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## Reading Between the Lines

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *****

I have a confession to make. I love Tanakh. Obsessed with Tanakh. I go back to familiar verses and read them over and over again, looking for unturned stones under which I find treasures. At times, I feel that commentary takes away from the beauty and dynamics of the biblical narrative as the reader travels back and forth from text to commentary. I therefore ask for your indulgence in presenting the first chapter of the Parasha, with my commentary in an experimental way. I wove the commentary into the text, which is presented with verse numbers. There are also question for Shabbat Table discussions at the end )it is allowed to have these discussions at any day of the week.( I would love to hear your thoughts and feedback on this format.

**Genesis, Chapter 37**

1: ]After he drove Esau out of Canaan[ Yaakov finally settled in the land where his father, the one he deceived, lived in as a sojourner. 2: The way Yaakov saw it, he had only one child, Yosef, who was seventeen years old and worked with his brothers as a shepherd. Yaakov was unable yet to love Benjamin, since he reminded him of Rahel's death, and he subconsciously blamed him for it. Yosef was helping the sons of Zilpa and Bilha, his father's other wives, and would speak bad of them to his father. 3: Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons, he justified him by saying that he was born at his old age, even though Benjamin was the youngest. Yaakov made for Yosef a striped robe.

4: His brothers realized that their father loved him more than all his brothers, so they hated him and could not fake friendship when talking to him. 5: Yosef had a dream and told his brothers, causing them to hate him even more. 6: He told them, please listen to this dream I had. 7: We were gathering sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood, towering over yours. Your sheaves circled my sheaf and bowed down to it. 8: His brothers told him, you think you will be our king or our ruler? and they hated him now even more, for his dreams, and for speaking bad of them, because as their hatred intensified, they included past actions, which they previously dismissed, in the list of his faults.

9: He then had another dream and he told it to his brothers. He said, I had a dream where the sun, the moon, and eleven starts bow down to me. The brothers were so infuriated with him that they did not even respond. 10: Not reading their cues, as is typical for a teenage boy, he told it again to his father in his brothers' presence. His father rebuked him and said, what is this dream? Do you think that me and your mother and brothers will come to bow down to you? 11: His brothers were now jealous of him, because they knew that their father's rebuke was not genuine. They understood that his father was waiting to see how the dream will be realized.

12: His brothers went to tend to their father's flocks in Shekhem. 13: Israel told Yosef, your brothers, as you know, are with the flocks in Shekhem, the city which they destroyed defending the honor of their sister and the clan, let me send you to them. He told him; I am ready to go. 14: He told him, please go see how your brothers are doing and how are the sheep and report back to me. Yaakov wanted Yosef to form friendship – שלום, with them, and hoped that Yosef's quality time with his brothers, without the divisive father's interference, will help mend the rift between them. He sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he arrived at Shekhem. 15: A man found him in the field, clueless, not knowing that soon his world is going to be destroyed. The man asked him to say what is he looking for. 16: He said, I seek out my brothers, I want to be their friend, please tell me, where are they tending to the flocks? 17: The man said, they traveled away from her, I believe, since I heard them saying "let us go to Dotan!" Yosef went after his brothers and found them in Dotan.

18: They saw him from afar and felt the emotional distance. Before he had a chance to get closer to them physically and emotionally, they detached themselves from him and schemedi to murder him. 19: Some of them told each other, brother to brother, with Yosef excluded from the fraternity, here comes that man of dreams. They would neither call him by name, nor refer to him as a brother, as for them he was defined by his resentful actions – man of dreams. 20: They said, let us kill him and throw him in one of the pits. We will tell everyone that he was devoured by a wild beast and let us see then what he dreams about. 21: Reuven heard them, and he saved him from their hand. He said, we will not kill him. 22: Reuven told them, do not shed blood, throw him in this pit in the desert, but do not raise your hand against him, this way he will surely die but you will not be active killers. Reuven did it to save him and return him to his father, but he should have been more forceful and talk them out of the plan altogether.

23: As Yosef, unsuspecting, approached those he thought were his brothers, they stripped him of the robe, the striped

robe, which was on him, the symbol of their father's preference for him and rejection of them. 24: The dragged their naked, struggling brother, treating him as a trapped animal, and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty of water, allowing them to feel that they did not sentence him to death by drowning. 25: They could not stay at the pit because Yosef was screaming and begging for mercy. They walked to a remote place and sat down to eat bread together, making sure that all are there, and no one breaks rank to go back and save him, thus spoiling Reuven's plans.

During that horrific meal, the banality of cruelty settled in them. Reuven was thinking, fervently, how to save his brother, and was appalled by their ability to dissociate from what they have just done to their brother and father. They then raised their eyes and saw a caravan of men of their great uncle Ishmael's clan coming from Gilead, with camels carrying goods for sale in Egypt. 26: Yehudah, who apparently was also bothered by his involvement in a potential murder, told his brothers, we gain nothing by murdering our brother and covering his blood. Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and clear ourselves of responsibility, for he is our brother, our own flesh, and his brothers agreed.

28: Unfortunately, while the brothers were eating, traveling Midianite merchants passed by the pit and heard the screaming boy. They pulled him out of the pit, but before Yosef, overwhelmed with the shock of his brothers' cruelty and betrayal, had a chance to thank them and tell him who he was, they sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty silver coins, and the Ishmaelites brought him to Egypt. 29: Meanwhile, on the other side of the dune, after Yehudah suggested to sell Yosef, Reuven rushed to the pit, excited that his plan to save Yosef bore fruits. When he came to the pit, its emptiness hit him. The pit, which previously contained no water, now contained no Yosef. Reuven tore his garments in despair and agony, for he knew what will be the consequences for his father and for the whole family.

30: He returned to his brothers and said, the kid is gone! Me, where can I go now?[ii] 31: Instead of setting out to look for Yosef, they decided to cover up their actions. They took the resentful robe, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the robe in its blood. 32: As if Yaakov was trapped in a re-run of his life story, his deception of his father was now coming back to him in the form of garments and a young goat. They sent the robe with a messenger, unable to face him when he hears the news, and the robe was brought to him. They told him, this is what we found, please identify, is this the robe of your son or not? The brothers who said those words were not the ones who cared for Yosef. Their words were harsh and cruel, infused with poisonous resentment. Like sledgehammers, their words hit Yaakov. He read their anger between the lines and suspected them, and their request to identify the robe echoed for him Yitzhak's inability to identify him when he was dressed as Esau.

33: Yaakov identified the robe. The words, formed in his shock-paralyzed brain, refused to leave his mouth. He finally said, in a slow whisper, not believing that he is saying these words:

> *It is the robe of my son, my only son. A wild beast, or perhaps his brothers, have eaten him. Yosef was devoured, he is devoured…*

34: Yaakov tore his garments, like Reuven and Yosef before him. He wore sackcloth and mourned his son incessantly. 35: His sons should have reacted to his grief. They should have told him the truth and set out to search for Yosef or for his body, but it was too late. They became entangled in a web of lies, one careless act leading to another. Instead they got up, with Yaakov's daughters, to try and comfort their father. But Yaakov refused to be comforted. He said, I will join my son in the netherworld as a mourner. His father wept for him.

Yosef was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's minister, the chief executioner. He was sold by the Midianites – מְדָנִים, to the Ishmaelites who then sold him in Egypt, but the truth is that he was sold because of sibling rivalry – מְדָנִים.[iii]

After reading such a sad and painful story, it was a little hard for me to sign off, as usual, with Shabbat Shalom. I then thought of it a one of the messages of the Tanakh and its intricate and intensely human narratives: we are bound to err, but we should be willing to assume responsibility and mend the damage we caused. Reading the story of Yaakov and his children which is also the story of Yosef and his siblings, we should strive to understand each other better, to never dehumanize others or dissociate ourselves from them, and to form bonds of friendship and peace.

So yes, Shabbat Shalom.

**Questions for Discussion:**

4. Why is Yosef referred to as the only son?
5. What was the brothers' initial reaction to Yosef's calumny?
6. What was the point-of-no-return for the brothers?
7. Which correlations can you find between this story, the one of Yitzhak's deception by Yaakov, and the one of Yehudah's deception by Tamar?
8. What do these correlations teach us, in your opinion?

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

**NOTE: Because of issues switching software, unfortunately the endnotes for Rabbi Ovadia's Dvar Torah appear at the end of this attachment rather than at the end of his Dvar Torah.**

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## Struggles & Leadership

By Rabbi Joel Dinin *

The tale of Yoseph in this week's parsha, Vayeishev, includes elements of tragedy, redemption and ultimately triumph. His envious brothers, rather than kill him in anger, are convinced to sell him as a slave, leading him to Egypt. Only through a miracle of God, his gift to interpret dreams, is he saved and made great in the eyes of the whole nation. One understanding of Yoseph's journey is that he was put through the ordeal of being sold into slavery as part of a divine plan that would allow him to be in a position to ultimately save his brothers, something Yoseph himself alludes to when they are reunited. The brothers are upset and guilty for what they have put him through, but he calms them, assuring them that this was all part of God's plan as he says in Breishit 45:5:

*For ]the sake of saving your lives[ God sent me before you:*

Yet, I find this troubling. Would God really put Yoseph through so much suffering and danger just so that he would end up in a position to provide food for his family?

There must be more to Yoseph's journey than simply being dragged along by destiny or fate.
Yoseph's dreams, which all turn out to be true, identify him as a future leader, a great leader. But when we first meet Yoseph he is far from "leadership" material. The first thing we see him do when he is a young boy is to spread lies about his brothers in Breishit 37:2:

*And Joseph brought evil reports )about his brothers( to their father:*

He's a tattletale!

Yoseph was spoiled and guided by his own ego. And so, Rashi explains, he was punished for each one of these lies. His coat was covered in blood from a slaughtered goat, where he had accused his brothers of eating an un-slaughtered goat in an unkosher manner. Yoseph accused his brothers of treating their half-brothers like slaves, so he became a slave himself and, finally, after accusing them of acting immorally, Yoseph was put in a situation where Potiphar's wife tried to lure him into an inappropriate relationship. Though there is little evidence of these accusations in the text, they reflect the kind of person Yoseph is at this point in his journey, one who is more concerned with currying favor by blaming others rather than putting them first.

Measure for measure, Yoseph was punished by God for his bad qualities, but God was also with Yoseph, supporting him every step of the way as described in Breishit 39:23:

*God was with him and whatever he ]Yoseph[ did, God made successful*

God wasn't attempting to punish Yoseph, He was helping him, perhaps forcing him to recognize his own faults and flaws. Yoseph could not lead a people that he could not empathize with. Yoseph saw himself as above everyone, and only when he was forced to live at the lowest levels of society, rotting in jail, could he appreciate what he had and what a real leader needs to be, someone who doesn't blame others for what happens and someone who cares about what happens to even the lowliest among us.

God could have easily saved our people with a miracle, ending the famine in any number of ways. Instead, He needed Yoseph not just to grow into leadership, but to create a model, a *Dugma Ishit,* for future generations, of someone who is able to fail, to pick themselves up from the depths of despair and to learn how to become greater than they ever were. Moshe did this, King David did this, the Jewish people have been forced into this path time and again, but with God by our side we can become stronger, we can rise to the challenge to become, through our own struggles, a great nation worthy of being a Kiddush Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi, Lake Park Synagogue, Milwaukee, Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah )2015(.

https://library.yctorah.org/2022/12/struggles-leadership/

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## Shavuon Vayeishev

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

A community is people. That's it.

I know we attach a lot of other things to the word "community." It is a delightful buzzword filled with fantasy, hope, purpose and meaning. It is a vague enough term that we can direct our love or nonlove towards it with an almost reckless abandon. Most spend their entire life devoted to community whether it be their corporate community, music community, or religious community. The phrase "Build Community" attaches itself to our lips on our fundraising brochures or trying to convince someone to come to an event. With all the times that I have heard the word community uttered, it seems to have taken some kind of life of its own. It's this wild and amazing goal that everyone seems to throw themselves into.

But with all the imagery and romance we attach to community, a community is at its core, people bonded together.

And a certain magic happens when we leave our lofty ideals about community and instead choose to focus on the people around us. Listening to them, helping them, and most important getting to know them as the people they are.

I had that opportunity a few times this week to do just that. The Kosher Deli, a fixture and one of the great uniters of our community, put on a Channukah bash that outshone even the New York Channukah parties I've been to. It provided not only an opportunity for amazing food but to actually be with and talk to people, some of whom I knew and some of whom I'd get to know. I've had the privilege of getting to know Sam, our local kosher chef extraordinaire, and that's been a pleasure – as is getting to eat his food. Let's face it. Being with others and having more open and free conversations become a whole lot easier when we're surrounded by delicacies and music. It's about the party, and yet the party directs us towards being with the community individuals which gives us even greater pleasure and purpose.

Joseph's brothers seem to have forgotten this principle when they sold him. Perhaps they thought they had to act for the "good of the community." Joseph in their mind was a bad egg who needed to be expelled from Israel. And so they ignored Joseph's suffering cries as an individual person and acted in the communal interest -- forgetting in the process that care and love for the individual is what builds community in the first place. They acted like an architect ensuring the integrity of a building by removing its foundation.

So as we head into Channukah and especially the Channukah in the Park celebration, let's enjoy the latkes, fire show, and especially the amazing musicians. And also see if you can introduce yourself and get to know another person there. It definitely will be easier to make that first social step when surrounded by a table of donuts and someone juggling torches. And if you do that, you will have done the best thing you can do to build community.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation.

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## Rav Kook Torah
## Vayeshev: The Reality of Dreams

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.

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 267.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYESHEV60.htm

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## Refusing Comfort, Keeping Hope )Vayeishev 5767, 5773, 5779(

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

The deception has taken place. Joseph has been sold into slavery. His brothers dipped his coat in blood. They bring it back to their father, saying: "Look what we have found. Do you recognise it? Is this your son's robe or not?" Jacob recognises it and replies, "It is my son's robe. A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces." We then read:

> *Jacob rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned his son for a long time. His sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, "I will go down to the grave mourning for my son."* Gen. 37:34–35

There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief – shiva, sheloshim, a year. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. The Talmud says that God admonishes one who weeps beyond the appointed time, "You are not more compassionate than I."]1[ And yet Jacob refuses to be comforted.

A Midrash gives a remarkable explanation. *"One can be comforted for one who is dead, but not for one who is still living,"*

it says. In other words, Jacob refused to be comforted because he had not yet given up hope that Joseph was still alive. That, tragically, is the fate of those who have lost members of their family )the parents of soldiers missing in action, for example(, but have as yet no proof that they are dead. They cannot go through the normal stages of mourning because they cannot abandon the possibility that the missing person is still capable of being rescued. Their continuing anguish is a form of loyalty; to give up, to mourn, to be reconciled to loss is a kind of betrayal. In such cases, grief lacks closure. To refuse to be comforted is to refuse to give up hope.

Yet on what basis did Jacob continue to hope? Surely he had recognised Joseph's blood-stained coat – he said explicitly, *"A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces."* Do these words not mean that he had accepted that Joseph was dead?

The late David Daube made a suggestion that I find convincing.]2[ The words the sons say to Jacob – *haker na,* literally *"identify please"* – have a quasi-legal connotation. Daube relates this passage to another, with which it has close linguistic parallels:

> *If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to his neighbour for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking, the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbour did not lay hands on the other person's property…If it ]the animal[ was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal.* Exodus 22:10–13

The issue at stake is the extent of responsibility borne by a guardian )shomer(. If the animal is lost through negligence, the guardian is at fault and must make good the loss. If there is no negligence, merely force majeure, an unavoidable, unforeseeable accident, the guardian is exempt from blame. One such case is where the loss has been caused by a wild animal. The wording in the law – *tarof yitaref, "torn to pieces*" – exactly parallels Jacob's judgment in the case of Joseph: *tarof toraf Yosef, "Joseph has been torn to pieces."*

We know that some such law existed prior to the giving of the Torah. Jacob himself says to Laban, whose flocks and herds had been placed in his charge, *"I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself "* )Gen. 31:39(. This implies that guardians even then were exempt from responsibility for the damage caused by wild animals. We also know that an elder brother carried a similar responsibility for the fate of a younger brother placed in his charge, as, for example, when the two were alone together. That is the significance of Cain's denial when confronted by God as to the fate of Abel: *"Am I my brother's guardian ]shomer[?"* )Gen. 4:9(

We now understand a series of nuances in the encounter between Jacob and his sons upon their return without Joseph. Normally they would be held responsible for their younger brother's disappearance. To avoid this, as in the case of later biblical law, they "bring the remains as evidence." If those remains show signs of an attack by a wild animal, they must – by virtue of the law then operative – be held innocent. Their request to Jacob, *haker na,* must be construed as a legal request, meaning, *"Examine the evidence."* Jacob has no alternative but to do so, and by virtue of what he has seen, to acquit them. A judge, however, may be forced to acquit someone accused of a crime because the evidence is insufficient to justify a conviction, while still retaining lingering private doubts. So Jacob was forced to find his sons innocent, without necessarily trusting what they said. In fact Jacob did not believe it, and his refusal to be comforted shows that he was unconvinced. He continued to hope that Joseph was still alive. That hope was eventually justified: Joseph was still alive, and father and son were ultimately reunited.

The refusal to be comforted sounded more than once in Jewish history. The prophet Jeremiah heard it in a later age:

> *This is what the Lord says:*
> *"A voice is heard in Ramah,*
> *Mourning and great weeping,*
> *Rachel weeping for her children*
> *Refusing to be comforted,*
> *Because her children are no more."*
> *This is what the Lord says:*
> *"Restrain your voice from weeping,*
> *And your eyes from tears,*
> *For your work will be rewarded," says the Lord.*

*"They will return from the land of the enemy.*
*So there is hope for your future," declares the Lord,*
*"Your children will return to their own land."* Jeremiah 31:15–17

Why was Jeremiah sure that Jews would return? Because they refused to be comforted – meaning, they refused to give up hope.

So it was during the Babylonian exile, as articulated in one of the most paradigmatic expressions of the refusal to be comforted:

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept,*
*As we remembered Zion…*
*How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land?*
*If I forget you, O Jerusalem,*
*May my right hand forget ]its skill[,*
*May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth*
*If I do not remember you,*
*If I do not consider Jerusalem above my highest joy.* Psalms 137:1–6

It is said that Napoleon, passing a synagogue on the fast day of Tisha B'Av, heard the sounds of lamentation. *"What are the Jews crying for?"* he asked one of his officers. *"For Jerusalem,"* the soldier replied. *"How long ago did they lose it?" "More than 1,700 hundred years." "A people who can mourn for Jerusalem so long, will one day have it restored to them,"* the Emperor is reputed to have replied.

Jews are the people who refused to be comforted because they never gave up hope. Jacob did eventually see Joseph again. Rachel's children did return to the land. Jerusalem is once again the Jewish home. All the evidence may suggest otherwise: it may seem to signify irretrievable loss, a decree of history that cannot be overturned, a fate that must be accepted. Jews never believed the evidence because they had something else to set against it – a faith, a trust, an unbreakable hope that proved stronger than historical inevitability. It is not too much to say that Jewish survival was sustained in that hope. And that hope came from a simple – or perhaps not so simple – phrase in the life of Jacob. He refused to be comforted. And so – while we live in a world still scarred by violence, poverty and injustice – must we.

**FOOTNOTES:**

]1[ Mo'ed Katan 27b.
]2[ David Daube, Studies in Biblical Law, Cambridge: University Press, 1947.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayeshev/refusing-comfort-keeping-hope/ 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.

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## Judah, Tamar, and the Indomitable Flame of Chanukah

By Jonah S.C. Muskat-Brown * © Chabad 2022

**Hide and Seek**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Our Loyalty**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The Flame Within**

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

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

**The Courage to Kindle Our Own Light**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now is our time to shine!

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

**FOOTNOTES:**

1. Likkutei Sippurim 3.

2. Genesis 3:10.

3. Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Parashat Tzav.

4. Genesis 38:1–26.

5. Ibid., 38:20–23. Judah attempted to send payment to Tamar but was unable to locate her. He decided to let her keep his items to save him from the embarrassment of others finding out what he had done with her.

6. Genesis 2:7; Tanya 2.

7. Bat Ayin, Parshat Vayeishev, Drushim L'Chanukah.

8. Yehuda Avner, The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership )New Milford: Toby Press, 2010(, pp. 445–446.

9. Sefer Hamaamarim Milukkat, vol. 2 )Kislev-Shevat(, Parshat Mikeitz 5738.

10. Shabbat 21b.

11. Orach Chaim 673:1.

12. Al Hanissim prayer.

13. Shabbat 21b.

* Educator, social worker, and freelance author from Toronto, Canada.

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

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## Torah Tought for Yud-Tes Kislev

From Chabad of Dayton, OH

Dear Friends,

This week Chabad communities around the world celebrated a holiday known simply as "Yud-Tes Kislev" — the 19th of Kislev, the anniversary of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi's release from Tsarist prison.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, also known as the Alter Rebbe, referred to his imprisonment as a spiritual challenge to his work of bringing the teachings of Jewish mysticism to the masses, and for a time he actually considered stopping as a result. But then he discovered that not only was it not a reason to stop, but ultimately it is what propelled him to keep growing the Chabad movement, disseminating his teachings further than before.

This is similar to what occurred to Joseph, son of Jacob, about whom we read about in this week's Torah portion. He was sold into slavery, but instead of disappearing and losing his identity, he thrived and grew until he became defacto ruler of Egypt.

The same message can be found in Chanukah, which starts this Sunday night. The menorah in the Temple was kindled with pure olive oil. The way the oil is extracted from an olive is by crushing it, destroying the olive. But instead of disappearing, the oil now brings light and warmth to the world around it.

So be like an olive — turn your challenges into opportunities for growth and light!

Shabbat shalom and happy Chanukah.

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## Spiritual Business

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

*Jacob lived in the land where his father had lived, in Canaan.* )Gen.37:1(

Rabbi Dovber, the Maggid of Mezeritch )the successor of the Ba'al Shem Tov( interpreted this verse allegorically, as follows: *"Jacob tarried in earthliness in order to gather ]the Divine sparks therein and elevate them[ to his heavenly Father, in a profitable manner."*

Engaging the material world )"tarrying in earthliness," eating, sleeping, earning a livelihood, etc.( is a descent from the spiritual life of studying the Torah, praying, and observing the commandments.

But when we )a( descend in this way in order to reveal the Divine potentials inherent in materiality, and )b( do so for the sake of furthering G-d's goals rather than for the sake of personal spiritual growth, we emerge from this engagement spiritually unscathed, just as Jacob emerged unscathed from his encounters with Laban and Esau.

Moreover, just as Jacob profited from his engagements with Laban and Esau, we too will profit both spiritually and materially by elevating the sparks of Divinity inherent in even the simplest physical acts.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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My son sent me an amusing piece that hopefully will not offend any readers. *Here is what he wrote: Below is one of a series of fake letters written by a comedienne on her Facebook account, imagining what it would be like if the USA had a religious Jewish majority and a small Christian minority. She flips the narrative extremely well, and I thought you would enjoy reading it. She actually has a lot of these for different holidays. Also, I recommend checking the "jingle bells" Youtube link provided below.* The piece in question follows:

Dear Teachers,

As some of you may know, if you have any students in your class who identify as Christian, they may ask to be excused from school to observe the Christian holiday of "Christmas," more popularly referred to as Yom Christmas or Nittel.

The date of Yom Christmas is set according to Pope Gregory's calendar, so the holiday moves around on the normal calendar. This year, Yom Christmas falls on Rosh Chodesh Tevet. Although it will also be Chanukah, Christians do not observe Hanukkah. Christians light candles only if they have a five-candle Advent Menorah with the fifth candle for Yom Christmas. This candle is lit without a bracha.

It is a common misconception to think of Yom Christmas as a "Christian Hanukah," but the holidays are not related, even though Yom Christmas sometimes falls during Chanukkah. Nor is it an observance of Rosh Chodesh.

The holiday lasts only one day, even outside Medinat Vatican.

Students in your classes may express that they feel sorry for the Christian students who have only one day of holiday, and no candles. You may explain to them that Christian students have their own holiday traditions, some even with candles of their own, and that in their way they enjoy their holiday just as much as we enjoy Chanukkah.

Most people assume that Yom Saint Francis Ha'Kadosh is the most important Christian holiday, falling as it does during the holiday season. But Yom Christmas is also widely observed in the Christian world, and it has many fascinating and colorful customs.

Observance of Yom Christmas begins on Erev Christmas. This may seem like an obvious point to make, but since the Christian day typically starts in the middle of the night, the time holidays begin is not always obvious.

Christians typically attend their Christian shuls for a special maariv service at the beginning of the chag. Most Christians do not attend shul on the morning of Yom Christmas, even though it is an important yom tov to them. Many Protestanted Christian shuls do not even host Christian shacharit davening for this day, even if it falls on First Day (as it does this year), which is the Christian Shabbat.

Most students love sharing their culture. Your Christian students would probably love explaining the significance of all of their colorful holiday minhagim to your class. Perhaps you could ask Christian students to explain the major mitzvot of Yom Christmas!

Yom Christmas commemorates the birth of the Christian prophet Yeshu. You may notice depictions of the baby prophet in an animal trough. The story of the prophet's barnyard birth to an unwed mother is considered religiously significant for Christians, and the holiday is widely celebrated by both religious and secular Christians.

Out of politeness for their sincerely held beliefs, please refrain from asking Christian students to explain how the prophet's unwed mother became pregnant.

If you happen to live near a Christian shul, you may notice a sukkah housing some people and animals. This isn't actually a sukkah but a depiction of Yeshu's birth scene. The depiction may feature a rendition of the baby prophet, his mother and her fiancé, some farm animals, and several richly-clad Wise Guys bringing gifts.

The birth scene is sometimes depicted in the form of a drama, with actors and real animals. You should refrain from petting the animals, as it is not a petting zoo.

In modern times, Yom Christmas incorporates many religious rituals that were appropriated from Yule, which is the Celtic pagan celebration of the winter solstice. One Pagan-derived custom is to bring greenery, including entire cut trees, inside the home. Frum Christian families may insist on a real tree for halachic reasons, but many secular Christian families use an artificial tree because natural ones are so expensive and hard to find, given the minimal demand.

Your Christian students may love sharing with the class how their family goes about choosing a kosher tree, and the bracha they say upon sacrificing the conifer.

Christaica shops and specialty Christian grocery markets sell decorations for the trees, but thrifty Christian families know it's easier to buy sukkah lights and ornaments on clearance after Sukkot!

Some students have a minhag of wearing garish sweaters to school in the days leading up to Yom Christmas. Please DO

comment on the ugliness of the sweater. They believe the uglier the sweater is, the better.

Most of these holiday sweaters will probably be yellow & white — the colors of Christianity and every single one of their chagim — but others might have pictures of Saint Nikolas Ha'Kadosh ("Santa") surrounded by deer or polar bears, because they believe he lives in the Arctic Circle.

Recall that Yom Saint Nikolas Ha'Kadosh was last week, as part of the Christian Holiday Season.
https://www.facebook.com/JewWhoHasItAll/posts/188261753782816

Some students might ask to hear JingleBells. This is the anthem of "Christmas." It is acceptable to play the song once during snack time if requested by a student. Here is a link to the song, in case of a request:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GobTfAF8rJw...

There are several other traditional songs for Yom Christmas, but most are religious and therefore not suitable for use in public school.

You may also remind Christian students that we already celebrated their chag of Yom Saint Francis Ha'Kadosh months ago during the holiday season, and it is unreasonable to be expected to recognize every single minority holiday in public schools.

Since Yom Christmas falls on a weekend this year and lasts only one day, Christian students should not need to miss any school. Students who feel they need to miss class for their observance should bring a letter from their Christian rabbi.

Melacha is not prohibited on Yom Christmas nor on other Christian holidays, so if you notice your Christian friend (if you have one) posting pictures to Facesefer over their yom tov, please do not assume they are mechalel yom tov.

The traditional greeting for Yom Christmas is "Merry Christmas." If you forget, a simple chag sameach is never wrong.

Thank you, as always, for all your hard work!

Shavua tov!

Yael Cohen

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Endnotes for Rabbi Ovadia's Dvar Torah:

[i] ויתנכלו – which is easily exchangeable with ויתנכרו – meaning that they pretended to not know him, alienating themselves from him.
[ii] The alliteration in Hebrew is daunting.
[iii] The Midianites appear twice in the story with a slight difference in their name. The first time, when they sell Yosef, they are called מדינים. In the conclusion they are called מדנים – which is also a synonym for quarrels, fights.

# Likutei Divrei Torah

**Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet**



**Volume 29, Issue 9** **Shabbat Parashat Vayeshev** **5783 B"H**

**Covenant and Conversation**
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

**The Angel who did not know he was an Angel**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After the war, the position of America vis-à-vis the State of Israel was deeply ambivalent. The

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

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

Two people, Dorothy de Rothschild and Eddie Jacobson, appeared on the scene of history and connected Chaim Weizmann with individuals he might otherwise not have met, among them Arthur Balfour[2] and Harry Truman. They were like the stranger who connected Joseph and his brothers, but with infinitely more positive consequences. I think of them both as angels who did not know they were angels.

Perhaps this is true not only about the destiny of nations but also about each of us at critical junctures in our lives. I believe that there are times when we feel lost, and then someone says or does something that lifts us or points the way to a new direction and destination. Years later, looking back, we see how important that intervention was, even though it seemed slight at the time. That is when we know that we too encountered an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel. That is what the story of Joseph's stranger is about.

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

[2] Weizmann had met Arthur Balfour already, but without Dorothy he would not have had the influence that he eventually came to have over a whole circle of leading politicians.

**Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

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

Who bears the ultimate responsibility for a criminal act? Is it the person who plans the crime, or the one who pulls the trigger or stabs with the knife? Is it the agency that sets up the act, the terrorist inciters, the mercenary for hire, or even the disinterested parents or apathetic society that nurtured the evil intent leading to the villainous deed?

An ambiguous verse in Vayeshev dealing with the sale of Joseph initiates a difference of opinion amongst biblical commentators that have relevance to this important question.

Let's consider this scene of déjà vu. We know that Isaac was actually blind when he planned to give the blessings to his favored son, Esau, who turned out to be Jacob because of Rebecca's planned deception. Now, we find Jacob is equally blind in his relationships with his own sons, for "Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors' [Gen. 37:3]. This infuriated his brothers. 'And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him' [Gen37:4]. The Talmud declares:

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

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

Joseph doesn't do anything to assuage his brothers' feelings: he recounts his dreams that flaunt his superiority and eventual domination over the other family members (Genesis 37:5–11). Then, in a fateful move, the still unaware (blind) Jacob sends Joseph to Shekhem to see "whether all is well with his brothers, and well with the flock" (Genesis 37:14). Sighting Joseph from a distance and clearly aggrieved by their father's favoritism, Joseph's brothers conspire in their hearts to kill him. They tear off his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit.

Shortly afterwards, the brothers spy an approaching caravan, prompting Judah to suggest that since killing isn't profitable, they should rather sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite caravan and tell their father he was devoured by a wild beast.

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

However, when we examine the verse recording the sale of Joseph, it's hard to figure out who it was that actually sold the hapless brother, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites or the brothers who initiated the plan (Genesis 37:27,28).

Joseph himself initially considers the brothers responsible, as he said when he first reveals his true self to them, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold to Egypt." (Genesis 45:4)

However, the Rashbam maintains that since the brothers were not the ones who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit to sell him, they could not be considered as the only guilty party; but they must still share responsibility for the events that unfolded as a result of the sale. Their initial act of casting their brother into the pit was done with murder in their hearts. Rashbam casts guilt upon everyone who shares in unleashing the forces of evil, even those whose hands remain clean – while others do the actual dirty work.

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

But there is a twist in this portion, and Joseph engages in a little historical revisionism. A much wiser and more mature Joseph was Grand Vizier of Egypt twenty-two year later; he looks upon this incident from the perspective of Jewish history, sub specie aeternitatis, under an Eternal gaze. From his vantage point, when he stands as Master rather than hapless victims, he continues, "But now do not be sad, and let there not be reproach in your eyes because you sold me here; it was in order that you [all] might live that God sent me [to Egypt] before you…to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you [for a momentous deliverance]. And now, it was not you who sent me here but God…" (Genesis 45:5–8).

Hence Joseph may very well be holding the brothers responsible for the sale even though it may have been the Midianites who actually committed the transaction – not only because it was the brothers who began the process which led to the sale, but mostly because he wishes to involve them in redemption. For Joseph, the act that began as a crime concluded – owing to divine guidance and Joseph's own quick-wittedness – as the salvation of the family of Israel. Joseph is anxious to restore family unity – and thus to look upon the sale from a divine perspective, which turned a tragic family transgression into a truly mighty salvation!

**The Person in the Parsha**
**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

**"The 'Wisdom' of the East"**

There are jokes which are very funny on the surface, but which, upon reflection, can be quite painful and disturbing.

One of them, which was told frequently twenty years ago or more, concerns a matronly woman from the Bronx who seeks to visit a famous guru somewhere in the Far East, perhaps in the mountains of northern India or Tibet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first words in this week's Torah portion read: "Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned…" The Bible then narrates the story of Jacob's son Joseph and how he is sold into slavery by his brothers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Torah scholars have rest neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come, as in both worlds they are constantly progressing, as it is stated: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion."

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

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**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.

**Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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.

**Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel**
**Encyclopedia of Jewish Values***

**Friendship in Judaism**

If you we to ask anyone under forty how many friends he or she has, the changes are that the response would be hundreds" or "thousands". But most of these "friends" from Facebook are people who they have not even met in person or had a serious conversation with in the last few months. most people that we call "friends" are, at best, only acquaintances, not true friends. How does one discern who is a true friend and who is a mere acquaintance?

In this week's Torah Portion of Vayeshev, someone is called a friend for the first time in the Torah, in a relationship that is mostly overlooked or not even discussed in the commentaries. Judah secretly has a sexual encounter with Tamar, who he believes is a prostitute. Without payment, Judah gives Tamar a "deposit". The next day he wishes to pay and retrieve his deposit. But rather than go himself, Judah sends his friend "The Adulami" to pay for the encounter and retrieve the deposit (**Genesis 38:20**). The Adulami cannot find this woman

and returns to Judah without the "deposit". We know almost nothing about this person, but what a friend he must have been. Judah confided in him about this sin he committed and, too embarrassed, asked his friend to pay her. If this is true friendship in the Jewish sense, what type of relationship should it look like? Does the Jewish standard of friendship coincide or differ with the norms of western society?

In Judaism, friendship seems to signify much more than companionship. A friend is more than just a buddy one hangs out with. Pure friendship is defined in the Mishna (**Avot 5:16**), which says that if a friendship is based on any one thing (or even two or more specific things), then the friendship will certainly dissolve as soon as its basis disappears. On the other hand, friendship that is not based on any specific thing will survive forever. Thus, friendship based on living in the same neighborhood, a mutual interest or even a mutual activity, is not true friendship. Once one person moves away or loses interest in the activity that has kept the friendship together, the "friendship" will disintegrate. Mutual interest may begin a relationship, but the relationship may grow to the point that the specific activities that began the relationship are no longer important, and the friendship will endure. Jewish friendship, therefore, transcends individual interests.

The Mishna continues and describes the ultimate example of true friends, David, and Jonathan. These individuals had every reason and tendency to hate each other, based on events in their lives. It was David who replaced Jonathan's father as the king of the Jewish people. Jonathan, who might have naturally sought the crown as it was customary at that time (as it is today) for royalty to be passed down within the family, should have hated David for becoming king. Nevertheless, despite all these factors, the friendship of David and Jonathan endured and became even stronger. This is true friendship indeed.

Another Mishna in the same chapter of Ethics of the Fathers uses a strange verb in referring to becoming friends (**Avot 1:6**). In quoting the statement of Yehoshua Ben Prachya about how to properly behave in life, the Mishna says, "acquire for yourself a friend." But the literal translation is "Buy yourself a friend." How does one buy a friend? Is friendship, then, a function of wealth? It is clear that the means of buying referred to in the Mishna is not money. Rather, just as in any money transaction is, in reality, an exchange of money for a good or service, so, too, a friendship is an exchange. The material used for exchange in a friendship is mutual experience and giving to the other person. Thus, a friendship is "bought" through an exchange of give and take, a giving of oneself and receiving from the other person. The word for friend, *Chaver* comes from the Hebrew verb *Lechaber*, to unite to blend together. Thus, two friends unite into one by each giving of himself or herself to acquire that friendship. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (**Hirsch commentary to Genesis 22:2**) claims that the meaning of the word for love or friendship, *Ahav*, is derived from two Aramaic words meaning "I give." Thus, friendship implies giving more than taking.

But friendship in Judaism implies even more than mutual experiences or even giving to the other person. The Mishna (**Avot 4:12**) speaks about the importance of respect between friends. The honor and respect one should give a friend must be equal to the honor and respect one gives a teacher. It also says (**Avot 4:12**) that to acquire a friend, one must eat with him or her, drink, sleep, learn and even reveal one's secrets to him or her. This implies that a true Jewish friendship can exist only on the most intimate level. Nothing less fulfills the true meaning of the word "friend" in the Jewish sense.

**Do Friends Always Have to Agree?**

Do true friends necessarily have similar interests, similar opinions on issues and never disagree? If this were true, what a boring and shallow friendship this would be. Like a good marriage, part of friendship is disagreeing in a respectful manner and coming to some sort of accommodation that both partners can live with. Friends, like spouses, must not be afraid to point out deficiencies (in a dignified discussion) and areas of disagreement. In fact, the Midrash (**Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 54:3**) points out that any friendship without reproving and without differences is not a true friendship. Issues must be dealt with in order for both partners to grow.

It is said that the opposite of love is not hate -- it is indifference. Just as the marriage is often a love-hate relationship, so it is with friendship, according to the Talmud (**Pesachim 113b**), which says that every friendship involves an element of hate. The Talmud (**Yevamot 14b**) describes the classic relationship of two famous schools in the Mishnaic period, Beit Shamai (The House of Shamai) and Beit Hillel (The House of Hillel). Although they argued with each other vociferously on many pages of the Talmud, they did not hesitate to intermarry, i.e., daughters and sons of Beit Shamai married those of Beit Hillel and vice versa. The passage says that this demonstrates the great friendship between the people of the two schools and quotes a verse from Zechariah (**Zechariah 8:16**) that points out the importance of friendship and peace despite argument. From all these sources, it can be seen that Judaism views real friendship as a very intense relationship in which both parties are intimately involved with the lives of each other, but where there is disagreement which leads to personal growth by each person.

**Friendship Implies Learning and Growing**

The modern use for the word *Chaver* means a friend. The same seems to be true of its use in the Mishna. However, in the period of the Talmud, this word signified a learned man. We can now see a relationship between friendship and learning. A good friend is one from whom a person can learn. Even today, the common term used in a Yeshiva to describe a learning partner is *Chavruta*, which also means a friend in Aramaic. Therefore, a friend is also a learning partner, both in the formal and informal sense. The Talmud (**Makkot 10a)**, in fact, states that Rabbina remarked that he learned more from his friends than he did from his teachers who had taught him a lot of Torah. Thus, the growth of a friendship is intimately tied to a growth in learning.

**Friendship in Judaism Shows Real Caring, Empathy and Kinship**

Based on the Mishna learned above, using the key verb "buying" in order to attain a friend and friendship (**Mishna, Avot 1:6**), Maimonides explains that a true friend is someone who is involved in every aspect of that friend's life, similar to the person who cares for a very expensive item that was purchased. Friends should help one another in every aspect of each other's lives. And if a person does not yet have such a relationship with an individual, continues Maimonides, a human being should continue to seek out associations with other people until he or she has found that one individual worth having this very special relationship called friend (**Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishna, Avot 1:6**).

When Proverbs says that the worry of a person weighs an individual down (**Proverbs 12:25**), Rabbi Assi in the Talmud (**Yoma 75a**), in a play on words, explains that this verse signifies that a person should unload his or her problems and worries on others, a friend, implying that this will make the person feel better. On this Talmudic passage, Rashi explains that a good friend might give advice to that worried and burdened individual, and maybe make him or her feel better (**Rashi commentary on Yoma 75a**). Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in giving a eulogy for a friend who passed away, analyzed three aspects of Jewish friendship (**Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Shana Bishana, 1982, page 411**). The first is a friend of help -- assisting the friend that needs any help, in any form, when in any difficulty. The second aspect is a friend of "worry" -- being there as a friend to speak out any concern a person may have, enter into a dialogue about any topic, in order to ease an individual's burden and worry. The third aspect is a friend of wisdom – to help a friend actualize a vision, attain any goal, or accomplish a mission, where both friends are united in purpose and deem the mission important.

**Importance of Friendship in Judaism**

Judaism seems to attach special importance to the friendship relationship than other life relationships. Rabbi Eliezer stated that the most important thing in life to "cleave to" is friendship (**Avot 2:9**). When Choni fell asleep for seventy years and awoke to find out that all his friends had died, he searched and searched to find a friend, but was unsuccessful at finding anyone who recognized him or knew him (since all from his generation had died). Finally, he cried out, "either friendship or death," whereupon God took his soul (**Taanit 23a**).

Apparently, Choni felt that if he could not have a friendship, it was not worth living. Even in Jewish law, friendship is treasured. When a person does not see a good friend for a period of longer than thirty days, upon seeing that friend, he should recite the Shehechiyanu blessing. If it is longer than twelve months, the blessing for the revival for the dead is recited. The Shulchan Aruch adds that this applies only for a true friend who is a favorite, a person he is indeed happy to see (**Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 225:1**). Friendship is such important part of life that a blessing should be made when it returns after an absence.

It is unnatural for a person to live without true friends or without seeking true friendships. The person who truly does not want to have friends and does not seek friends does not live a normal existence. Next to family, it is the most important human relationship a person can have. When God told man, that it is not good that he remains alone (**Genesis 2:18**), God meant that man needs a lifelong friend. Hopefully, a spouse fulfills that role. Sometimes, though, a friend can also act as a helpmate.

Ecclesiastes (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**) describes a friendship when he says that "two are better than one." This signifies that man's natural existence is in two's, in friendships, and not ones, alone. A friend adds meaning to the life of a person. The verses continue to say that if one falls, the other is there to pick him or her up. And if one is attacked, the other will come to the rescue. This refers not only to a physical fall or physical attack. A true friend is there for support of any type. Friends help each other and support each other through difficulties. Judaism considers a true friend much more than a mere acquaintance, but, rather, a person who will always be there for the other, to help the friend in difficult times, to celebrate in good times and to help the person grow through learning and through guidance. Finally, a good friend cares more about giving to a friend than receiving from a friend.

*** 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**

**'And the pit was empty, having no water in it:' The Deeper Message Behind the Hasmonean Revolt**

**Rabbi Dr. Ari Silbermann**

Ask a Brazilian whether you can be neutral about any part of the World Cup. For a football-crazy country, even a game without Brazil playing impacts the Brazilian chances and cannot be overlooked. Every kick and pass brings with it massive consequences. While I don't quite understand that level of dedication, this idea can be particularly useful for understanding Channuka. What do I mean?

In the Talmudic discussion recounting the halachot of Channuka, we find an unconnected midrash. Rav Kahana recites a tradition in the name of Rav Natan Bar Manyumi, who tells in the name of Rav Tanhum that when Yosef was cast into the pit, the verse states that the pit was empty and then adds a seemingly superfluous, 'and there was no water in it.' The midrash, with its profound sensitivity to the nuances of the text, asks, 'By inference from that which is stated: And the pit was empty, don't I know that there was no water in it? Rather, why does the verse say: There was no water in it?' The answer is that 'there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it.'

On a superficial reading, this midrash aggada is recited here because the preceding halachic discussion also had a teaching in the name of Rav Kahana, who repeated a tradition in the name of Rav Natan Bar Manyumi, who recounted it in the name of Rav Tanhum. The method of the Gemara – in a world before footnotes – is to include statements in this way, even if they are unrelated. Superficially, also, this Torah portion, tied to the story of Joseph, is usually read around the time of Channuka.

However, after a closer look, there is more to it. This midrash teaches a lesson inherent to the message of Channuka.

The cultural war between the Hellenists and the Jews was a deep ideological and theological divide. And yet the nature of Hellenism meant that for many Jews, a kind of syncretism was possible, allowing one to combine both cultures relatively easily. Especially in obvious secular contexts, one could claim that there was no need to stake a side. However, the Maccabees said no! In a cultural war, and indeed as a matter of Jewish belief, there is never a truly neutral space. Hashem and his Torah inhibit every realm. Either you are on the side of Hashem or not.

This is also the message of the midrash, and why it is found amongst the laws of Channuka. There is no such thing as an empty pit – if there is a space devoid of the light of Torah, it is necessarily filled with snakes and scorpions. The figure of Yosef himself embodies this more than anyone else. Exiled to the Egyptian court, tested with many ethical trials, he remained tied to his home and maintained the image of his father in the front of his mind at all times – and successfully maintained his identity. Like Yosef, we shouldn't exclude ourselves from society but must ensure that every element of the world around us is filled with Jewish tradition and Torah.

Just as the chanukiah is lit towards the street at the entrance to the home, our role as shlichim is to ensure that the lives of our communities in the shul, in the home, and on the street are infused with a purified, profound, and enlightening Torah.

**Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

**Rabbi Michael Rosensweig**

**The Bayit-Centric Celebration of Chanukah**

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) asserts that "ner Chanukah mitzvah le-hanichah al petach beito mi-bachutz - Chanukah candles should be placed outside the door of one's home". Tosafot (s.v. mitzvah), however, qualify this conclusion by adding that if there is a courtyard that intervenes between one's home and the public thoroughfare, the menorah should be situated at the opening to the courtyard. The Shulchan Aruch (571:5) rules in accordance with the Tosafist view. Certainly, the consideration of pirsumei nisa (publicizing the miracle), a prime factor in this mitzvah (Shabbat 23b, 24a, Rosh Hashana 18b; see, also Shabbat 23a - af hein hayu beoto ha-ness and numerous other manifestations of this dominant theme in Hilchot Chanukah), dictates this conclusion (along with other evidence- see Gera 571:10). Yet, Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 4:6) leaves the Gemara's ruling unqualified, implying that under all circumstances a close proximity to the home is mandated, evidently even to the detriment of publicizing the neis! [Rashi's view on this matter is intriguing. See 21b s.v. mi-bachutz, 22b s.v. mitzvah] Moreover, Rambam integrates the statement of Rabah (Shabbat 22b) demanding that the menorah be situated within a tefach and on the left side of the door post across from the mezuzah in that very same halachah (while Shulchan Aruch codifies these laws discretely in 571:5,7, as they are formulated distinctly in the Gemara), reinforcing the perspective that the home is central to this mitzvah. When the Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 4:8) relates the Talmudic ruling (Shabbat 221b) that in times of danger one may light indoors, he downplays the scope of the change (especially compared with Shulchan Aruch [571:5] and others), subtly emphasizing that the consistent bayit-centric orientation of the mitzvah merely changes from outside to inside (4:7 - "petah beito mi-bahutz...", 4:8 - "betoch beito mi-bifnim").

Rambam's accentuated emphasis of the bayit in the mitzvah of Chanukah is further confirmed by his subtle reformulation of the core mitzvah. While the Gemara (Shabbat 21b) famously depicts the basic requirement as "ner ish u-beito", a candle per household (which may be perceived as a kind of agency), Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 4:1) significantly expands the bayit factor by depicting it as a collective home obligation- "mitzvatah she-yihiyeh kol bayit u-bayit madlik ner echad bein she-hayu anshei ha-bayit merubin bein she-lo hayah bo ela adam echad". [See, also, Iggerot ha-Grid, Hilchot Chanukah 4:1] It is particularly noteworthy that his view of even mehadrin min ha-mehadrin maintains the focus on the collective obligation of the home as reflected by the pivotal role of the baal ha-bayit, who alone lights for the entire bayit! When the Rambam(4:2-3) explicates the different configurations of this mitzvah, he repeatedly (seemingly) gratuitously refers to

the "anshei beito". The effect is to consistently underscore that this mitzvah, in all of its permutations, revolves around the institution of "bayit", man's inner sanctum!

The home-bayit in Jewish thinking represents the appropriate integration of physicality and spirituality; it embodies consistency, security, sanctity, and dignity. It is a venue-institution that is conducive to cultivating the values that foster spiritual growth in a physical environment. It is surely no coincidence that the berachah that we offer to a young couple is that they build a "bayit neeman be-Yisrael". The spiritual institutions that guide our religious life are also battim - beit ha-mikdash, beit ha-knesset, beit ha-midrash etc. When Hashem recognized the remarkable qualities of the "meyaldot ha-ivriyot", He responded: "va-yaas lahem batim". The kohen gadol, who enters lifnai ve-lifnim on Yom Kippur, must be married, as he must be anchored in the bayit motif based on the expression "vekiper baado u-bead beito", as "beito zu ishto" (the word bayit is synonymous with married life).

While the term bayit appears in the early sections of Bereshit sporadically inter alia as a de facto reality ("lech lecha....mi-beit avicha", "zekan beito" etc.), the first recorded "binyan bayit" is ascribed to Yaakov-Yisrael, the bechir ha-avot who bears the moniker of the entire nation, who magnificently integrated (as reflected by his midah, tiferet) the best qualities of his diverse father and grandfather. Immediately upon neutralizing and dispatching Esav (Bereshit 33:16- "vayashav bayom hahu Esav le-darko seirah"), both the individual and the culture he embodied, signifying a pinnacle achievement that cemented his stature befitting one who Hashem depicted as "ki sarita im ha-Elokim ve-im ha-anashim va-tuchal", we are told "ve-Yaakov nasa sukota, va-yiven lo bayit"! The very next pasuk relates that "va-yavo Yaakov shalem ir shechem..." Rashi, citing the midrash explains that Yaakov had attained sheleimut-harmonious perfection in different realms that do not typically integrate- "shaleim be-gufo... shalem bemamono...shaleim be-torato..." Rav Hirsch adds that being shaleim connotes a perfect harmony that radiates from within, that reflects essential truths.

The cultural struggle of Chanukah revolves around many of these core issues. The Greek-Syrian focus on physical form and external esthetics, the emphasis on discrete powers and forces fostering a compartmentalized and fragmented approach to reality completely antithetical to the principle of an integrated, omnipotent Divine Being, and the disregard for religious self-expression and personal dignity, were manifest in attacks on targeted halachot (rosh chodesh, Shabbat, milah etc.), but also constituted a broad attack on Yahadut (Rambam 3:1-"bitlu datam velo hinichu otam laasok be-Torah u-mitzvot"), and on the very concept of "bayit". The breaching of the walls of the "bayit" ("ve-nichnasu le-heichal u-partzu bo peratzot") and the penetration of private and sanctified Temple venues is cited by the Rambam (Chanukah 3:1) as a substantive threat to spiritual survival. [One girsa (see Yalkut Shinuyei Nuschaot in the Frankel edition of Rambam, also strongly endorsed by Maaseh Rokeach 4:1) also records "u-pashtu yadam be-mamonam u-bebateihem (instead of "u-bebenoteihem" in the standard girsaot, probably based upon Megilat Taanit chapter 6), directly linking the embattled "bayit" to the spiritual erosion of Jewish life!]

The miracle of Chanukah celebrates Divine providence manifest by the miracle of the pach ha-shemen. By anchoring this mitzvah in the bayit, the halachah also underscores the stakes and significance of both the military victory and the remarkable resurgence of the Beit Hamikdash and its norms. It promotes an acute pirsumei nisa but in conjunction with a resounding affirmation of the centrality of the "bayit" and all it represents. [We can suggest that even Tosafot and the Shulchan Aruch who disagree with the Rambam regarding placement of the menorah in proximity of the home when there is an intervening courtyard agree with the core principle we have developed. They perhaps perceive the courtyard as an extension of the "bayit", as it is in some other halachic contexts, with the added benefit of a more robust pirsumei nisa.]

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

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**A Good Interpretation**

And Yaakov dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Yaakov: when Yosef was seventeen years old, being a shepherd, he was with his brothers with the flocks, and he was a lad, with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Yosef brought evil tales about them to their father. And Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age; and he made him a fine woolen coat—And Yosef dreamed a dream and told his brothers, and they continued to hate him. And he said to them, "Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the midst of the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright, and behold, your sheaves encircled [it] and prostrated themselves to my sheaf."(Breishis 37:1-7)

and he was a lad: He behaved childishly, fixing his hair and touching up his eyes so that he would appear handsome. –a son of his old age: Onkelos renders: he was a wise son to him. Whatever he had learned from Shem and Eber he gave over to him-Rashi

Yosef shared this dream and another one too in which he was positioned at the epicenter of their lives. It turned out that these dreams were proven to be 100% prophecy but his brothers had reason to assume otherwise, and according to the Malbim they later judged him to be a false prophet, either delusional or power hungry or both.

Why would they have come to that conclusion? A dream, the Talmud tells us, 1/60 prophecy. What is the significance of that ratio? If an ounce of milk falls accidentally into 60 ounces of meat-soup then it is considered butt'l -negligible because the flavor of the milk is lost in the meat. The proportion of 1/60 is 1 part to 59. The taste can be detected ever so slightly.

So too a regular dream is presumed to have a drop of prophecy but it is lost in an admixture, a salad of psychological phenomenon. What one thinks about in the day becomes the stuff of dreams at night and that includes all the worries, fantasies, conversations, confrontations, exposures, and experiences we had in the course of the day. Good luck sorting out the prophecy from folly.

Rashi explains that he behaved as a NAAR – a lad, and that he was fixing up his hair and making himself more attractive. That self-absorbed appearance was only confirmed by his dreams that placed him in the adoring middle of the family. Little did they know his father gave him a special coat as a special honor for his scholarship as one puts a handsome cover on a Sefer Torah. He was really absorbed with truth all day and that would account for his prophetic visions at night- making his dreams 100% TRUE!

I was a Yeshiva Bochur and I had a vivid dream one morning that a Sefer Torah, held up in front of me, was falling forward and I sat up in horror only to realize that I was late for Davening. So, I ran to the Beis Medrash to join the morning Minyan in progress. It was a Monday morning and so they took out the Sefer Torah to read. After calling up Cohen, Levi, and Yisrael, the Gabbai came over and tapped on my shoulder inviting me to do Hagbah.

As I approached the Bima the Gabai cautioned me, "Careful this is a heavy Sefer Torah!" It was a temporary replacement for the one that was found Possul, invalid on Shabbos. Then the Gabbai Sheni chimed in, "The handle is loose!" My frightful dream woke up that moment and I decided to call an emergency time out. I walked over to the Rosh HaYeshiva and told him that I am not picking up this Sefer Torah. He asked why. I told him, "I had a dream this morning that a Sefer Torah was falling!" He told me confidently, "That's a good dream!" I picked up the Torah without an issue.

Later I asked him how seeing a Sefer Torah falling is a good dream?! He said, "I have to do carpool after Davening. Come with me." It was pouring rain. As the kids came into the van and then as they exited to school he exclaimed, "Rain is good! Rain is good!" When we got back to Yeshiva he told me that

the Talmud says about dreams, “Everything goes after the interpretation!” Saying it’s good makes it good!

King David tells us when HASHEM will return us from our captivity in exile “we will have been like dreamers.” Our current perception of reality is like that of a dreamer and so our dreams are begging for a good interpretation!

## Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

### To Whom Was the Birthright Given?

**Rav Meir Shpiegelman**

And the sons of Reuven, the firstborn of Israel – for he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Yosef the son of Israel, yet not so that he was to be reckoned in the genealogy as firstborn. For Yehuda prevailed above his brothers, and he that is the prince came from him; but the birthright was Yosef's – the sons of Reuven, the firstborn of Israel: Chanokh and Palu, Hetzron and Karmi. (*Divrei ha-Yamim I* 5:1-3)

As these verses indicate, Yaakov divided the birthright between three of his sons: Reuven remained the eldest of the brothers ("Reuven, the firstborn of Israel"), Yosef received the actual birthright ("but the birthright was Yosef's"), and Yehuda received the leadership ("for Yehuda prevailed above his brothers, and he that is the prince came from him"). As we shall see below, it is not by chance that the birthright was divided specifically between these three brothers. The three of them, as we shall see, represent three different types of leadership: Reuven, as the oldest brother, assumes responsibility for various situations and tries to deal with them; Yehuda is the leader; and Yosef, as is clear from our *parasha*, is the visionary.

**Yosef the Dreamer –** Our first encounter with Yosef's vision is when he has his own dreams. Later, we find Yosef interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh and his servants, and he even manages – as a result of his wise interpretation – to successfully prepare for the years of famine.

As history has often shown, the ability to predict the future causes problems in the present. A man who sees into the future and awaits an ideal era finds it difficult to live in the present and to experience the hardships of his time. It is perhaps for this reason that Yosef is insensitive to the distress around him. While still a teenager, he brings an evil report of his brothers to their father. Afterwards, he tells them his dreams, though he could have foreseen the negative impact this would have on them.[1] When Yaakov sends him to check on his brothers' welfare, Yosef goes to them without any means of protection, even though he knows they hate him. We also see that Yosef does not know how to solicit help from others. When Yaakov arrives in Charan, he goes to the well and asks the people if they know Lavan’s family. Yosef, in contrast, loses his way in the field but does not approach other people to ask where he might find his brothers. Only when another person approaches and asks him what he is looking for, does Yosef seek assistance and ask him whether he has seen his brothers.[2]

Yosef's difficulty with interpersonal relations is also evident from his attitude toward his father. Why doesn't Yosef send messengers to tell his father that he is alive? Much ink has been spilled on the answer to this question,[3] but beyond the many answers that have been given, it is clear that Yosef's conduct attests to a certain rigidity. Further evidence of this rigidity can be found in the words of *Chazal* (*Tanchuma Vayeshev* 8), who criticize Yosef for curling his hair while his father was mourning over him. Even at the end of his life, when Yaakov's sons return from burying their father and ask Yosef to forgive them, Yosef tells them that in the end their actions had a positive result, but he does not say he forgives them. It does not appear that Yosef, immediately after his father's death, wished to be cruel to his brothers. Yosef lived in historical processes, immersed in his visions about the future, and does not assign much importance to the present. He sees no need to say to his brothers that he forgives them, for he explained to them that the process that they started was a positive one. The brothers, in contrast, do not live in the future. The historical process does not interest them so much, and all they want is to feel that Yosef has forgiven them for the injustice they caused him.

This may be the reason why Yosef became a slave – to teach him to relate to others. After Yosef continued to curl his hair in the house of Potiphar (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 39:6), God caused him to be thrown into jail. And, indeed, when Yosef sees that the king's chief butler and baker are sad, he takes an interest in their situation and asks them what is wrong.

The highpoint of Yosef's actions as ruler of Egypt is the transformation of all of the Egyptians into Pharaoh's slaves, and spreading them out throughout the land of Egypt. The Torah does not offer a reason for this drastic step, but *Chazal* explain that Yosef wished to turn all of the Egyptians into strangers, so they would not relate to the family of Yaakov as exiles. In the end, Yosef's action had the precisely opposite effect. It is reasonable to assume that after the years of famine had passed, the Egyptians forgot that Yosef had saved them from starvation and remembered only that he had exiled them and turned them into Pharaoh's slaves. From here, it was only a short step (with the help of the new king who arose over Egypt) to the subjugation of Israel, in the sense of "measure for measure" for the members of Yosef's family. From a broad historical perspective, turning all of the Egyptians into slaves, and leaving the people of Israel as the only freemen in the country (for Yosef fed his brothers during all the years of the famine), stoked the hatred that was directed at the children of Israel until it erupted into cruel enslavement.[4]

**“The Firstborn of Yaakov – Reuven” –** As stated in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, Reuven was the eldest brother. It was he who would assume responsibility and determine the right thing to do. When Yosef comes to his brothers, and they want to kill him, it is Reuven who says: "Let us not take his life" (*Bereishit* 37:21). Earlier, he had slept with Bilha, his father's concubine, so that Yaakov would return his bed to Lea (ibid. 35:22; see Rashi). Reuven is the first to realize that there is no alternative but to bring Binyamin down to Egypt, and he offers Yaakov: "You shall slay my two sons, if I do not bring him to you" (ibid. 42:37).

All this notwithstanding, Reuven is not the ideal leader. While he takes the initiative, he does not know how to persuade others to join him. When he wants to save Yosef, he cannot convince his brothers to release him, and is forced to take a deceptive path and suggest throwing him into the pit.[5] Even when he proposes that Yaakov send Benyamin with him, he makes him a strange offer: "You shall slay my two sons, if I do not bring him to you," and *Chazal* attribute shock to Yaakov at this proposal: "Fool, are your sons not my sons?" (*Bereishit Rabba* 91,9). In both cases, Reuven is the first to recognize the proper way to act – but in the end, it is not his proposal that is accepted but rather than of Yehuda.

**“For Yehuda Prevailed Above His Brothers and He That is the Prince Came from Him” –** Yehuda is gifted with the ability to lead. His suggestions are always accepted, whether they are right or wrong. This was the case regarding the sale of Yosef ("Come, and let us sell him to the Yishmaelites," *Bereishit* 37:27) and regarding bringing Binyamin to Egypt ("I will be surety for him; of my hand shall you require him," ibid. 43:9). When he speaks before

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[1] Yosef should certainly not have told his brothers about the second dream, after seeing their reaction to his first dream.

[2] It should also be noted that Yosef does not speak clearly to the man. He does not say that he is looking for the sons of Yaakov, but for his brothers, as if the man was supposed to know who Yosef was and who his brothers were. Whether Yosef spoke to the man in a clearer manner, or whether he did not, the Torah chooses to present Yosef's appeal to the man in an unclear manner, as if to allude to Yosef's difficulty with accepting the help of another person.

[3] See the articles of Rav Yoel Bin-Nun and Rav Yaakov Medan in the first issues of *Megadim.*

[4] Why, indeed, did Yosef act in this manner? Two explanations may be suggested: First, as was noted above, Yosef did not always know how to properly assess the way other people would respond to his actions. Second, it is reasonable to assume that Yosef was committed to Pharaoh, who had rescued him from jail. Yosef acted, then, in accordance with his loyalty to Pharaoh, despite the fact that this was liable to bring harm to him and to his family.

[5] As the Torah attests: "And Reuven said to them: Shed no blood; cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him – that he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father" (*Bereishit* 37:22).

Yosef, he manages to break him and bring him to make himself known to his brothers. Even Yehuda's mistakes – such as his proposal to sell Yosef to the Yishmaelites – lead to positive results in the end. Therefore, it is Yehuda who is sent before Yaakov to prepare the land of Goshen for him, and it is he who merits the crown of leadership in the blessings given to him by his father.

**The Difference Between Yehuda and Reuven –** We can learn about the essential difference between Reuven and Yehuda if we examine the story of the sale of Yosef. There is no doubt that the brothers threw Yosef into the pit to die there. It is not for nothing that *Chazal* determined there were snakes and scorpions in the pit, for Yehuda tells the brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and explains: "What profit is it if we slay our brother?" (*Bereishit* 37:26). The only one who tries to save Yosef is Reuven, as the Torah testifies: "That he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father" (ibid. 22). As was already noted, it was Yehuda's proposal that was accepted, and not that of Reuven. What is more, the brothers seem to have forgotten that Reuven sought to save Yosef, and Reuven has to remind them of this fact when they later discuss the sale.

In fact, Reuven's response to his brothers when they repent their sin – "Did I not speak to you, saying: Do not sin against the child, and you would not hear" (ibid. 42:22) – is not the response of a leader. A leader does not say "I told you so" to his people when it turns out that his way is the right way. When the people get into trouble, it is a leader's job to remove them from their straits, not to prove that he was right in the first place.

Yehuda, on the other hand, we find in a severe crisis with his brothers immediately after the sale of Yosef. He leaves them ("And Yehuda went down from his brothers," *Bereishit* 38:1), and in a certain sense he leaves the house of Yaakov. He marries a Canaanite woman – a woman from the nation to whom Avraham and Yitzchak were careful not to marry off their children, this being more than a hint of the disconnect created between Yehuda and Avraham's legacy. Indeed, unsurprisingly, the son born to Yehuda and the daughter of Shua is evil in the eyes of God, and God kills him. The Torah refers here not only to the personal wickedness of Er, but to the deeper problem – Er's origins in an improper marriage.[1]

However, there is another reason for the deaths of Yehuda's children. As the one holding the scepter of leadership, Yehuda should have prevented the sale of Yosef. Yehuda's punishment for initiating the sale is the killing of his children. To allude to this, the Torah sets the story of Yehuda adjacent to the story of the sale of Yosef.

Now we can understand Reuven's words to Yaakov, when he asks him to allow Binyamin to go down to Egypt: "You shall slay my two sons, if I do not bring him to you." There is no doubt that when Reuven spoke these words, all those present noted the comparison to Yehuda, who caused the sale of Yosef and was punished with the deaths of his two sons. Just as Yehuda failed to restore Yosef and his two sons died, so too Reuven says to Yaakov – you shall slay my two sons if I do not bring Binyamin back to you.

What is Yehuda's response to Reuven's accusation? He assumes responsibility, agrees to serve as surety for Binyamin in order to bring him down to Egypt, and in the end is the direct cause of Yosef and Binyamin returning to their family. Just as he came through the incident with Tamar and said: "She is more righteous than I" (*Bereishit* 38:26) despite the personal price he paid for his admission, so he accepts the blame in this case as well, assuming responsibility and correcting his ways. Indeed, when Yaakov blesses Yehuda before he dies, he does not say he was not a partner in the sale of Yosef; rather, "From the prey, my son, you have gone up" (ibid. 49:9) – that is to say, you were a partner to the sale, but through your actions you have successfully cleansed yourself of that heinous act.

**Who Was Given the Birthright? –** When he examines his sons and considers to whom to give the birthright, Yaakov decides to divide it into three parts.

Reuven remains the eldest brother, but because of his recklessness, he is not given leadership rights. For this reason, he does not receive any special blessing, but suffices with being defined as "Reuven, you are my firstborn" (*Bereishit* 49:3).

Yehuda receives in his blessing the blessings that Yitzchak planned to give to Esav, the firstborn of his sons: "Be lord over your brothers" (27:29) corresponds to "The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda" (49:10); and "Let your mother's sons bow down to you" (27:29) corresponds to "Your father's sons shall bow down before you" (49:8). Rule and leadership were given to Yehuda explicitly, and he was even assured that they would not be removed from his descendants.

Yosef – the third contender for the birthright – did not receive leadership and authority. He received the blessing of God ("From the God of your father, Who shall help you," 49:25),[2] and the blessings of the Patriarchs ("The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my progenitors," ibid. 26). Just as Yitzchak chose Yaakov to be his successor, so Yaakov chose Yosef, and he gives him two parts in the inheritance (two tribes) like a firstborn.

What we have here is the continuation of an ancient struggle. Yaakov and Esav, in their day, engaged in a twofold struggle: On the one hand, who would merit being the firstborn, and on the other hand, who would receive Yitzchak's blessings. In the first struggle, Yaakov grabs onto the heel of Esav and tries to stop him from emerging first from their mother's womb, and in the end purchases the birthright for a pot of lentils. In the second struggle, Yaakov masquerades as Esav and receives the blessings from Yitzchak through deception.

In the next generation, two pairs of sons compete for the birthright: Yosef had two sons in Egypt, and Yehuda had twins from Tamar. A "struggle" over the birthright takes place between the two sons of Yosef and the two sons of Yehuda. Yaakov chooses Yosef's younger son, and he receives a greater blessing than the older son. Yehuda's two sons fight for the right to go out first, and after Zerach emerges and a scarlet thread is bound upon his hand, Peretz pushes him aside, comes out first, and earns the birthright. It is possible that this is a repair of the stealing of the blessings: Yehuda's sons also struggle over the leadership, but the son who would have been younger emerges first and merits the birthright.

Indeed, hundreds of years later, the firstborn Yosef merits having Shaul, the first king, rise up from among his descendants. This expresses the birthright of Yosef, who was chosen by Yaakov as his successor. Eternal leadership was not given to him, and therefore in the aftermath of the fall of Shaul, David, a descendant of Yehuda, ascends to the throne, becoming the king of Israel. *(Translated by David Strauss)*

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[1] So too in the case of King David, a descendant of Yehuda, we find that for marrying an inappropriate wife, he was punished with the death of his son.

[2] It is possible that this blessing is one of the blessings of Yitzchak to his firstborn son that was not given to Yehuda.

Vayeishev 5783

**Weekly Parsha VAYEISHEV**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Modern writers and commentators have found the biblical narratives of the book of Bereshith irresistible in their penchant for psychoanalyzing people described in terms of modern understanding and current correctness. In so doing they do a great disservice to Jewish tradition and present a distorted picture of the message that the Bible is attempting to convey.

The narrative regarding Joseph and his brothers has engaged mankind for millennia. In it is represented all of the personality characteristics of nobility, self-justification, blindness and deception throughout history. The narrative stands by itself and needs no "deeper" exposition or analysis. It is what it is and that is how Jewish tradition has always viewed it.

The tendency to "understand" the characters of the people presented in the Torah narrative leads to all sorts of weird ideas that serve to undermine Jewish values and traditions instead of strengthening them. In all of the narratives that appear in this holy book the unseen hand of Heaven, so to speak, is present and active. And that part of the story is not subject to any psychological or personal analysis or perspective.

Rashi points this out in his opening comment to this week's Torah reading. The plan of Yaakov is to enjoy a leisurely retirement in his later stage of life but Heaven interferes as the story of Yosef and his brothers unfolds. No matter how you will analyze the motivations of the characters in this biblical narrative, we still will not know the entire story. It is always the inscrutable hand of Heaven that governs the story and mocks our pretensions.

One of the great differences between the traditional commentators and the more modern versions of this genre is this God factor. Midrash, Talmud, and the great medieval and later commentators that created the framework for understanding the narrative of the Torah, also delved deeply into the personalities and motives of the people represented in the Torah. They were always careful not only to include but also to emphasize that ultimately it was the will of Heaven that was guiding events towards Divine purposes.

The Bible is not a psychodrama or rebuke of history and psychology. It is a book of fire and holiness and one has to be careful in handling it. But modern commentators – even those who are observant and scholarly – many times insert currently faddish values and interpretations into its eternal words. Keeping this in mind in dealing with the great narrative regarding Joseph and his brothers, one of the key narratives in the entire Torah, we should do so with caution and tradition.

To do otherwise, is a great disservice to the text of the story itself and to the value system that Jewish tradition has assigned to it. The dispute between Joseph and his brothers has heavenly and historic consequences and still hovers over Jewish life today. To treat it as a matter of sibling rivalry is a misunderstanding of the entire purpose of the Torah narrative.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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**VAYESHEV - How to Change the World**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

In his Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance), Moses Maimonides makes one of the most empowering statements in religious literature. Having explained that we, and the world, are judged by the majority of our deeds, he continues:

Therefore we should see ourselves throughout the year as if our deeds and those of the world are evenly poised between good and bad, so that our next act may change both the balance of our lives and that of the world.[1]

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

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

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

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

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

Gen. 37:19–20

Only one of the brothers disagreed: Reuben. He knew that what they were proposing was very wrong, and he protested. At this point the Torah does something extraordinary. It makes a statement that cannot be literally true, and we, reading the story, know this. The text says:

"When Reuben heard this, he saved him [Joseph] from them"

Gen. 37:21

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

On this, a Midrash says:

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

What does this mean?

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

To be sure, God had already told Abraham, many years earlier:

"Know with certainty that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and there they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years."

Gen. 15:13

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

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

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

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

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it Civility. The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. "In the Jewish tradition," he notes, such civility is called "chessed – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God."

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

He adds:

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

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

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

[1] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 3:4.
[2] Tosefta, Pe'ah 1:4.
[3] Tanchuma, Vayeshev, p. 13.
[4] Stephen Carter, Civility (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 61–75.
[5] Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5 (original manuscript text).

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**Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1 – 40:23)**
**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – "And there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver, and they brought Joseph down to Egypt" (Genesis 37:28).

Who bears the ultimate responsibility for a criminal act? Is it the person who plans the crime, or the one who pulls the trigger or stabs with the knife? Is it the agency that sets up the act, the terrorist inciters, the mercenary for hire, or even the disinterested parents or apathetic society that nurtured the evil intent leading to the villainous deed?

An ambiguous verse in Vayeshev dealing with the sale of Joseph initiates a difference of opinion amongst biblical commentators that have relevance to this important question.

Let's consider this scene of déjà vu. We know that Isaac was actually blind when he planned to give the blessings to his favored son, Esau, who turned out to be Jacob because of Rebecca's planned deception. Now, we find Jacob is equally blind in his relationships with his own sons, for "Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors' [Gen. 37:3]. This infuriated his brothers. 'And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him' [Gen37:4]. The Talmud declares:

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

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

Joseph doesn't do anything to assuage his brothers' feelings: he recounts his dreams that flaunt his superiority and eventual domination over the other family members (Genesis 37:5–11). Then, in a fateful move, the still unaware (blind) Jacob sends Joseph to Shekhem to see "whether all is well with his brothers, and well with the flock" (Genesis 37:14). Sighting Joseph from a distance and clearly aggrieved by their father's favoritism, Joseph's brothers conspire in their hearts to kill him. They tear off his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit.

Shortly afterwards, the brothers spy an approaching caravan, prompting Judah to suggest that since killing isn't profitable, they should rather sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite caravan and tell their father he was devoured by a wild beast.

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

However, when we examine the verse recording the sale of Joseph, it's hard to figure out who it was that actually sold the hapless brother, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites or the brothers who initiated the plan (Genesis 37:27,28).

Joseph himself initially considers the brothers responsible, as he said when he first reveals his true self to them, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold to Egypt." (Genesis 45:4)

However, the Rashbam maintains that since the brothers were not the ones who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit to sell him, they could not be considered as the only guilty party; but they must still share responsibility for the events that unfolded as a result of the sale. Their initial act of casting their brother into the pit was done with murder in their hearts. Rashbam casts guilt upon everyone who shares in unleashing the forces of evil, even those whose hands remain clean – while others do the actual dirty work.

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

and abetting the perpetrators of the crime, certainly makes one a partner in crime who must assume a share of the guilt.

But there is a twist in this portion, and Joseph engages in a little historical revisionism. A much wiser and more mature Joseph was Grand Vizier of Egypt twenty-two year later; he looks upon this incident from the perspective of Jewish history, sub specie aeternitatis, under an Eternal gaze. From his vantage point, when he stands as Master rather than hapless victims, he continues, “But now do not be sad, and let there not be reproach in your eyes because you sold me here; it was in order that you [all] might live that God sent me [to Egypt] before you…to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you [for a momentous deliverance]. And now, it was not you who sent me here but God…” (Genesis 45:5–8).

Hence Joseph may very well be holding the brothers responsible for the sale even though it may have been the Midianites who actually committed the transaction – not only because it was the brothers who began the process which led to the sale, but mostly because he wishes to involve them in redemption. For Joseph, the act that began as a crime concluded – owing to divine guidance and Joseph’s own quick-wittedness – as the salvation of the family of Israel. Joseph is anxious to restore family unity – and thus to look upon the sale from a divine perspective, which turned a tragic family transgression into a truly mighty salvation!

Shabbat Shalom!

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https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/944/essay-vayeishev-chanukah-have-we-betrayed-our-g-d-has-g-d-betrayed-us?print=1

**Have We Betrayed G-d? A Chanukah Drama**

**Rabbi YY Jacobson**

**December 11, 2012 |27 Kislev 5773**

Dedicated by Kenya Washington for blessed memories of my Mother-Pearl Agnes Washington

Class Summary:

Have We Betrayed Our G-d? Has G-d Betrayed Us? - A Yud-Tes Kislev and Chanukah Drama

The Judah-Tamar Drama

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Take her out and have her burned," said Judah.

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

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

A Spiritual Story

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

What follows, therefore, in this week's essay, is a classical Chassidic interpretation on the episode of Judah and Tamar, treating the story as symbolic of the inner spiritual life of the Jew.

Betrayal and Its Consequences

In the writings of the kabbalah, the name Judah, or Yehudah, containing within it the four letters of the name of Hashem, symbolizes G-d. Tamar, on the other hand, is the Hebrew name for a palm tree, and represents the Jewish people and their bond with G-d (5).

Why? The Talmud explains (6), that "just as the palm tree has but one 'heart,' so too do the Jewish people have only a single heart, devoted completely to their Father in heaven."

(The heart of the date palm is its sap. Unlike the saps of other trees, like the alive or almond tree, the sap of the palm is found only in its trunk, but not in its branches or leaves.

This is the meaning behind the Talmudic statement that the palm tree possesses only a single "heart" (7)).

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

But then, some time passes, and the spiritual inspiration of the High Holy days wears off. Judah is informed that "Tamar, your Kallah (8), has committed harlotry, and moreover, she has become pregnant by harlotry." The news arrives to G-d that His bride has betrayed Him, substituting him with another partner.

Is this not the story of so many of us? At one point during our lives, we are inspired to transcend our selfish identity and connect to the deeper Divine rhythm of life. Yet, the cunning lore of numerous other gods captivates our imaginations and ambitions and dulls our vision. We substituted the G-d of truth and transcendence with the ego-god, the power-god, the money-god, the temptation-god, the addiction-god, the manipulation-god, and the god of self-indulgence

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

"Take her out and have her burned," says Judah. The purpose of the Jew is to serve as the spiritual compass of human civilization, to bear witness to the truth of the One G-d, the moral conscience of the world. When the Jew loses sight of the raison d'être of his existence when he believes that his salvation lies in the fact that he "was invited to the White House," or

that he was praised in an editorial of The New York Times, his existence is useless.

The Truth Emerges

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

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

During that fateful time, when the "prosecuting angels" have almost been successful in demonstrating to G-d that the Jewish people are a failed experiment, at that very moment, the Jew sends word to G-d, saying, "I am pregnant by the man who is the owner of these articles!"

The information you received that I abandoned you, is a blatant lie! If I have gone astray here and there, it is merely a superficial, temporary phase. Gaze into the deeper layers of my identity and you will discover that I belong to You, that my intimacy is shared only with You, G-d. "I am pregnant from Judah and not from anybody else!" the Jew declares.

"Identity, I beg you, these objects. Who is the owner of this seal, cord, and staff?" For during the festival of Chanukah - when the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is finalized -- the Jew kindles each night a wick, or a cord, soaked in oil, commemorating the event of the Jews discovering a sealed single cruse of oil after the Greeks had plundered the holy Temple in Jerusalem (9).

The Jew further points to the staff in his arm (10). In order to preserve his faith, he was forced time and time again - for 2000 years - to take the wandering staff in his arm, abandon his home, wealth and security, and seek out new territory where he could continue to live as a Jew.

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

Who Is the Traitor?

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

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

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

How can I expect that a Jew never commits a sin? How can I expect that a Jew never try to cast his luck with the materialistic world about him that seems so appealing when I held back for so long the light of Moshiach?

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

Cold Soup

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moshiach is ready to come!

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

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

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**Parshas Vayeishev**

**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of Leon Brickman.

Transmitting a Double Legacy

Now Yisroel loved Yosef more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age (ben zekunim); and he made him a kesones passim […] (37:3).

Rashi (ad loc), based on the Targum and Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 84:7), explains that ben zekunim refers to the fact that "Yaakov taught

Yosef all the Torah he learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever" (the word zekunim being a reference to the two zekanim – elders).
That Yaakov emphasized these teachings to Yosef is somewhat difficult to understand. Maimonides (Hilchos Avodah Zara 1:3) says that while Yaakov taught all his children, the one he appointed to head his Yeshiva was Levi. In other words, Levi was entrusted with the transmission of all the Torah and its values that began with Avraham. In Parshas Vayigash (46:28), Rashi points out that Yehuda was charged with building the Yeshiva (read "fundraiser"), but Levi was clearly the Rosh HaYeshiva. What then, was Yosef's role that it necessitated him knowing all the Torah of Shem and Ever? Moreover, what in fact was studied in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever?
The answer is that the children of Yaakov had two curriculums in their Torah studies. These curriculums were patterned after the two roles of Yaakov Avinu – that of Yaakov and that of Yisroel. In the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever he studied the seven Noachide laws and all their subsets and applications. The seven Noachide laws are for the average non-Jew to know their responsibilities to fulfill in this world. This was a very large body of work to study and took many decades to study and master. As an example; one of the seven Noachide laws is the prohibition on idol worship. In the times of Avraham, the tractate of Avodah Zara (idol worship) had four hundred chapters (Gemara Avodah Zara 14b) while today ours only has five. The second curriculum was that of the 613 mitzvos.
Yaakov had two roles that he fulfilled and they are represented by his two names; Yaakov and Yisroel. Originally, Yitzchak Avinu had envisioned a Jewish nation as a partnership between Eisav and Yaakov – Eisav would handle the physical world and physical needs, including interfacing with the other nations of the world, while Yaakov would be the spiritual source of Torah and Jewish values. This all changed when Yaakov received Eisav's bracha from Yitzchak. When Eisav's archangel was defeated and conceded that his birthright entitled him to the brachos, Eisav's angel gives him his second name – Yisroel.
As Yaakov, he was charged with the transmission of the Torah and the values of Avraham Avinu. This is the very essence of Klal Yisroel and that role was passed on to Levi as Rosh HaYeshiva and final authority on Jewish law and custom. As Yisroel, he represented the leadership of Klal Yisroel as it relates to the other nations of the world; the responsibility to help them recognize Hashem and bring morality and international peace to them. This second role he gave to Yosef, that of international ambassador for the Jewish people. To fill that role Yosef had to be fully versed in the teachings of Shem and Ever and that is why Yaakov made it the focus of Yosef's studies.
Becoming Mainstream
These are the generations of Yaakov; Yosef, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives (37:2).
The Torah makes a remarkable statement here. Until this time Bilhah and Zilpah had been either called "maidservants" or "concubines." This is the first place they are referred to as the "wives" of Yaakov. The difference is self-evident; a child of a servant is a servant while the child of a wife is considered a full sibling to all the children in the family. In the possuk, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah are referred to as Yosef's "brothers." Clearly, Yosef had elevated the status of the children of Bilhah and Zilpah to brothers (in part by considering their mothers "wives of his father"). This would explain what our rabbis teach – that Yosef was so vexed that his brothers from Leah were calling them "slaves" that he complained to his father (see Rashi ad loc).
Given that Yosef had gone out of his way to validate their lineage, what happens to him later on is seemingly impossible to believe. The Midrash Tanchuma (ad loc) relates that ALL the brothers were unanimous in the decision to put Yosef to death and according to the Yalkut Shimoni (ad loc), when they changed their mind and sold him instead, ALL the brothers took a share of the proceeds from the sale. How is this possible? How could the children of Bilhah and Zilpah turn on the one brother who validated them and elevated them to the status of brother?
Chazal are teaching us a fascinating sociological application of human nature. Even after the children of Bilhah and Zilpah were validated and recognized as equal brothers, they were still constantly looking for further validation and wouldn't even consider disagreeing with the children of Leah. In other words, an insecure person will always choose to remain part of the mainstream even if it comes at the expense of the person who opened the door for them in the first place. A common refrain from kiruv professionals is that very often the people they have returned to mainstream Orthodox practice refuse to support the very system that enabled them to become religious in the first place because the kiruv organization isn't "religious enough." Another example is when families choose schools for their kids based on what community they want to be identified with as opposed to starting with the question; what school is best for this particular child?
This type of behavior points to a serious deficiency in one's character. Fortunately, the solution is fairly simple. Once a person has grown to a new level, he must not look for validation from the outside. This will only lead a person to make poor decisions because these decisions are made primarily on the criteria of what will give him the greatest validation. Instead, he must begin to appreciate internally who he has become and self-validate himself. Only then will he begin making decisions based on what is the right thing to do.

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***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights***
***For the week ending 17 December 2022 / 23 Kislev 5783***
***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com***
***Parshat Vayeshev***
***Whetting or Jading the Appetite***
*"…Hashem blessed the Egyptian's house on Yosef's account, so that the blessing was in whatever he owned…" (39:5)*
In 2010, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates launched the Giving Pledge. It has approximately 81 billionaire signers so far, each of whom have pledged to give away at least half of their wealth. Last July, Gates himself said he planned to give away 'virtually all' his $113 billion.
What makes a fabulously wealthy guy like Gates want to give away all his money? Hashem created man with two desires: a physical desire and a spiritual desire. And physical desire just goes so far. You can only sleep in one super-duper king-size bed at a time. You can only swim in a one swimming pool filled with pink champagne at a time. Physical pleasure has its limits (and may require more than Alka-Seltzer when those limits are exceeded).
On the other hand, spiritual pleasures, even in this world, have no limits. The more money you have, the more pleasure you have when you give it away. As it says in Kohelet, "And also the soul will not be filled."
Rashi, in defining the Shabbat experience, says in Mesechet Beitza, "He eats a lot is and is not disgusted." Shabbat is a magic machine that converts the physical into the spiritual. Shlomo Hamelech said, "The one who loves money will not be satiated by money." But he also says, "The one who loves Torah will not be satiated by Torah." Physical pleasures leave you feeling empty as soon as they finish, and so you want more and more and more. Even though spiritual pleasures leave you full, but, just like Shabbat, you can consume more and more and more of them. The appetite is whetted, not jaded.


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***Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis***
***Dvar Torah Vayeishev: To be 'shomer mitzvot' does not mean to keep mitzvot!***
That is the surprising view of the Or HaChaim Hakadosh. If that's the case, what does being 'shomer mitzvot' mean? The Or HaChaim explains that it means 'to look forward to the performance of mitzvot.' He derives this from a passuk that we're all familiar with from our kiddush on shabbat:
*"Veshamru Bnei Yisrael et hashabbat la'asot et hashabbat,"*
which we usually translate as,

*"and the people of Israel shall keep the shabbat to perform the mitzvot of shabbat."*

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

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

Where does he derive this from?

It's from Parshat Vayeishev. In Parshat Vayeishev, we read about the dreams of Joseph. The reaction of his brothers in Bereishit 37:11 was,

*"Vayekanu bo echav," – "His brothers were jealous of him,"*

But what was the reaction of his father Yaakov?

*"V'aviv shamar et hadavar." – "and his father was shomer this matter,"*

meaning Yaakov knew that Joseph's dreams were prophesy and therefore he looked forward to the day when he would see the fulfilment of these dreams, when the rest of the family and all of society would pay homage and respect to Joseph who would be a great ruler.

Shamar therefore means to look forward to, and as a result to be 'shomer mitzvot' means to have a passion for mitzvot. To be 'oseh mitzvot' of course means to fulfil the mitzvot, but from here we learn a very relevant and important lesson for us today. Is it not only important to technically and practically carry out mitzvot, through which we can tick a box with their fulfilment. If we want to preserve our tradition and guarantee that future generations will be as passionate as we are about mitzvot, we should celebrate them and perform them with hitlahavut, absolute passion. We are so fortunate and privileged through the Torah, to have a code of law and a guide to a fulfilling meaningful and joyous existence. Let us therefore be truly 'shomrei mitzvot' looking forward to the performance with passion of each and every precept that Hashem has gifted us.

*Shabbat shalom.*

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

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***Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky***

***Behind the Image Of His Father***

"The image of his father appeared to him." With these words Chazal encapsulate where Yosef drew his strength from to overcome the temptation of the wife of Potifar. On a basic level we can understand that Yosef was simply reminded by his father's image of the values his father had taught him in his youth. Perhaps there was more than just Yaakov as an individual that strengthened Yosef and enabled him to make the correct decision in whose merit he would eventually be called Yosef Hatzadik.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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***Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz***

***Parashat Vayeshev – 5783 :: The Cost of an Education Mistake***

Two weeks ago, we read about the deceit perpetrated by Laban when he gave Jacob his older daughter Leah instead of the younger one who Jacob loved, Rachel. At the end, Jacob married both Leah and Rachel, but the Torah attests to the fact that he loved Rachel while Leah was hated. Even the fact that Leah bore him six sons and Rachel was infertile did not change the complicated situation. Rachel was, in Jacob's eyes, the main wife, the one he loved wholeheartedly. As long as she hadn't given birth, Jacob could stay disconnected from his family and living in Haran. But once Joseph was born, the son of his beloved wife, Jacob saw it as the right time to return and reunite with his family in the land of Canaan. It seems that Jacob saw Joseph as his first son despite the sons Leah bore before him. It is no wonder that this attitude led to tremendous tension between Leah's sons and Joseph.

Jacob, his wives, and his sons returned to Canaan where Rachel died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. Later, Jacob favored Joseph and marked him as his successor when he made him a special woolen coat that symbolized Joseph's special status in relation to the other sons. Jacob's treatment of Joseph, along with dreams Joseph dreamed that pointed to his desire to rule the entire family, led his brothers to do a terrible act and they sold Joseph into slavery. Joseph was brought to Egypt and sold into slavery there and later even thrown into an Egyptian

prison because of spite. Ultimately, as we will read during these coming weeks, the entire family went down to Egypt. There, after a change in rulers, Jacob's family – which meanwhile had grown into the Jewish nation – sunk to the status of slaves for many years.

This entire sad story began with Laban's deceit when he married off Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel. But it wasn't only Laban who was guilty. In the Babylonian Talmud, we find sages who point to Jacob's treatment of his sons:

*And Rava bar Meḥasseya said that Rav Ḥama bar Gurya said that Rav said: A person should never distinguish one of his sons from among the other sons by giving him preferential treatment. As, due to the weight of two sela of fine wool [meilat] that Jacob gave to Joseph, beyond what he gave the rest of his sons, in making him the striped coat, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter unfolded and our forefathers descended to Egypt. (Tractate Shabbat 10)*

Those same sages who taught us to admire the patriarchs of the nation, as people who merited a high spiritual and moral level, did not cover up the failures of these patriarchs. They demanded that we learn the Torah honestly, not being forgiving of mistakes made, even if those mistakes were made by superior people. Jacob, say our sages, should not have given Joseph preferential treatment. It was an education mistake that brought tragedy upon Jacob and upon the entire family. Had he treated all his sons equally, he could have prevented the friction and tension in his family that troubled his life and he would have prevented the suffering of the entire Jewish nation.

True, we are human and not angels. We are very far from Jacob's virtues. And yet, we are called upon to learn also from mistakes. An educational mistake can exact a steep price. Jewish sages direct us to learn from Jacob's mistake and act differently, to try to give each child the treatment he deserves, to let each child feel he is always wanted by his parents, no matter what he does or what happens.

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

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***Rav Kook Torah***

***Vayeishev: The Conflict between Joseph and Judah***

***Rabbi Chanan Morrison***

Having overcome the difficult challenges posed by Esau and Laban, Jacob looked forward to more peaceful times. But intense resentment among his sons shattered these wishful hopes, and led to the sale of his favorite son, Joseph, as a slave in Egypt.

How could the brothers sell Joseph, and even consider killing him? Is it possible that they were motivated by petty jealousy over a colorful coat? Also, is there a connection between the story of Joseph and the holiday that falls out this time of the year — Chanukah?

Integration versus Separation

The root of the disagreement among the brothers was in fact ideological. There were two schools of thought in Jacob's family, one championed by Joseph, the other by Judah. Joseph stressed the mission of the Jewish people as "a light unto the nations." In order to fulfill this goal, Joseph felt that we must interact with the nations of the world and expose them to the monotheistic teachings of Judaism.

Judah, on the other hand, was concerned about the negative influences when intermingling with pagan cultures. He emphasized the separate sanctity of the Jewish people, "a nation that dwells alone" (Num. 23:9). Judah feared that Joseph's philosophy of openness and integration would endanger the future of the Jewish people. But how to safely neutralize this threat?

Simon and Levy, who had already fought against assimilation when they decimated the city of Shechem for kidnapping Dina, planned to simply kill Joseph. Judah objected, "What profit is there if we kill our brother?" (Gen. 37:26). The true danger is not Joseph, but his school of thought. Let us put his theories to the test. We will sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, and let him assimilate among the nations. Then all will see where his ideas lead to.

The Tabernacle and the Temple

These conflicting views are reflected by the contrast between the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in Shiloh and the Temple in Jerusalem. In Shiloh, offerings could be eaten outside the walls, as long as the city of Shiloh was in sight. Temple offerings, on the other hand, could only be eaten within the Temple walls. Why this difference?

For Joseph, the primary mission was to publicly demonstrate the sanctity of Israel and educate the nations. Thus, the holiness of the Shiloh Tabernacle — in Joseph's portion — spread beyond its walls. The Temple in Jerusalem, however, was located in the land of Judah and followed his view. It is necessary to build walls and restrict the dissemination of Torah, in order to protect the sanctity of the Jewish people.

The Hellenists versus the Hasmonean Priests

The holiday of Chanukah commemorates a similar struggle, the conflict between those seeking integration with the rest of the world, and those striving to preserve the distinct sanctity of the Jewish people. The Hellenistic Jews demanded adoption of Greek customs, the prevalent culture of the day. They claimed to be following Joseph's path of openness. Their slogan was, "Write on the ox horn that you have no share in the God of Israel" (Vayikra Rabbah 13:5). Why an ox horn? This is an allusion to Joseph, who was compared to a powerful ox (Deut. 33:17).

The Hellenists called for the people to continue in Joseph's path of openness and assimilation.

However, they ignored Joseph's underlying goal, to educate the nations. The Hellenists "broke down the walls of my towers." They breached the walls protecting Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, and allowed the idolatrous nations to defile the holy Temple.

The Hasmonean priests, kohanim from the tribe of Levy, naturally followed the path of Judah and Levy, that of separation. As kohanim, they benefited from the special sanctity of priesthood separating them from the rest of the Jewish people. The ultimate victory for the Hasmoneans was the discovery of a ritually clean jar of oil, with the seal of the High Priest intact. This jar of pure oil was a sign that the inner sanctity of Israel remained undefiled by pagan contact.

In the future, the nations will recognize the necessity for the walls of the House of Jacob that separate the Jewish people from the other nations. The nations will accept upon themselves the mitzvot of the Torah, while the entire Jewish people will be elevated to the level of kohanim. Then the Jewish people will relate to the nations of the world in a fashion analogous to the current connection of kohanim to the rest of the Jewish people.

*Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah 10, 5630 (1929).*



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***Shema Yisrael Torah Network***

***Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeishev***

***פרשת וישב תשפ"ג***

**והנה אנחנו מאלמים אלמים בתוך השדה והנה קמה אלמתי וגם נצבה**

**Behold! We were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when, behold! My sheaf arose and remained standing. (37:7)**

The Torah's narrative teaches us how Hashem's ways (of dealing with the world and with us) must be accepted with love. A superficial, cursory perusal of the stories in the Torah will not do anyone justice; the reader is left clueless, and the profundity of the narrative remains concealed and ambiguous. The *Midrash* and *Zohar*, the *Talmud* and its many commentators, offer us powerful insights into the behind the scenes workings of the narrative, their hidden meaning, and the message for the reader. Concerning Yosef *HaTzaddik*, *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 84:10) teach, *Kamah alumasi*; my sheaf stood up – "My *alumah*, alternatively – silence, stood for me." An *ileim* is a person who is mute or harnesses his speech to the point that he is virtually mute. Regarding Yosef, *Chazal* are intimating (as explained by *Sefas Emes*) that the quiet acceptance manifest by Rachel *Imeinu* (Yosef's mother) when Leah *Imeinu* replaced her as the bride who would marry Yaakov *Avinu*, gave Yosef the power (ability) to accept the Divine Will.

Until seventeen years of age, everything seemed to be going Yosef's way. Doted on by his father, who not only taught him Torah, but also imbued him with a powerful, life-sustaining perspective on how to

live in a morally bankrupt society in a world where the Jew was not recognized, and, in some instances, reviled by many. Such depraved culture and feelings of animus can have a deleterious effect on one's spiritual connection to Hashem. Yaakov precluded this with the life lessons that he imparted.

It all changed when Yosef's brothers, who felt that he was a spiritual threat to them, stripped him of his position and degraded him. During all this, he remained silent, recognizing the hand of Hashem guiding the events surrounding his life. This was followed with the fictitious claim that he had attempted to seduce Potifar's wife. In reality, he had had to muster up every ounce of spiritual strength to ward off her advances. Yet, Yosef remained silent. This was his hallmark – the hallmark of his family – silence, acceptance, because it is the Divine Will.

Yosef remained in spiritual darkness, in a pit filled with the dregs of Egyptian society, the lowest of the low. Yet, he retained his *tzaddik* status, paving the way for the Jewish People to look for and see Hashem's guiding hand during the darkest of times.

Aharon *HaKohen* merited to see his son, Elazar, dressed in the vestments of the *Kohen Gadol*. This was a miracle: since Moshe *Rabbeinu* removed Aharon's vestments one-by-one, Elazar immediately donned them, despite the fact that Moshe placed Aharon's outer garments onto Elazar first. Why did he merit such a miracle? True, Aharon was a holy man who dedicated his life to the preservation of peaceful co-existence among people. This extraordinary display of *nachas*, however, was unprecedented. I think it was the result of Aharon's silence, *Va'yidom Aharon*; "Aharon was silent" (*Vayikra* 10:13), his acceptance of the Divine decree which claimed the lives of two of his sons. His countenance did not alter one iota as he submitted himself to Hashem. Those few moments of acquiescence earned him a few moments of novel *nachas*.

Everything that happens in our lives constitutes a message from Hashem. At times, our essential response should be passive, as indicated above. During other instances, however, Hashem expects an active response – which might be forthcoming if we would only listen. The following sad story underscores this idea. A rabbi attended the funeral of one of his congregants – a fine man who left behind a son who was a source of *nachas* to him. After the internment, the rabbi returned home with the son, who was not only inconsolable at the service, but his deep melancholy continued in the car. A seasoned rabbi, who had attended his share of funerals and dealt with many a family member, he was somewhat concerned about the intensity of grief the son was expressing. The rabbi asked the son, "Did something unusual happen?"

"Yes. I will never forgive myself," the son began. "Shortly before my father passed away, he became quite ill. As such, he was very anxious to be in touch with me at all times. I assured him that he could call me 24/7, any time of day or night. I would be there to talk to him. My father was very considerate and hardly called. He did not want to bother me. When he took a turn for the worse, however, shortly before he left this world, with his last ounce of strength, he picked up the phone to call me to say goodbye – but my line was busy. I never got to talk to my father! I never said goodbye!"

Very sad, but unfortunately more common than we care to admit. With respect to Hashem, who is our Heavenly Father, He, too, sends us messages, which we either tend to ignore, because our ability to listen is stunted, or our life is busy with something else. The difference between the story and our relationship with Hashem is: He "lives" forever; we unfortunately, do not. This should serve as a fitting wake-up call.

**וילכו אחיו לרעות את צאן אביהם בשכם... ויאמר ישראל אל יוסף... לכה ואשלחך אליהם... ויבא שכמה**

**Now, his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem… and Yisrael said to Yosef… "Come, I will send you to them," and he arrived in Shechem. (37:12,13,14)**

Despite the brothers negative association with Shechem, a region where they had killed the male inhabitants of an entire city, they put their trust in Hashem, who caused the pagan residents of the area to fear them. Perhaps they remonstrated to themselves that their actions were not a disgrace. They acted in a manner which they felt was appropriate.

*Rashi* notes that Shechem was a *makom muchan l'puraniyos*, a place prepared for adversity: there, the tribes acted sinfully; there, the people of Shechem violated Dinah; there, the *malchus Bais David*, kingdom of David *Hamelech*, was divided. *Rashi's* order of events seem to be out of sequence. Dinah's violation occurred before the incident with Yosef. Yet, *Rashi* gives Yosef's incident precedence.

The Torah records Yaakov *Avinu* dispatching Yosef to Shechem as if it were important for him to go there. Why? *Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl*, explains that Yaakov was quite aware of his sons' animus toward Yosef. Thus, he felt that Yosef's arrival in Shechem might be fraught with danger. On the other hand, he conjectured, the brothers had special feelings concerning Shechem. After all, it was the place where they had been willing to sacrifice their lives on behalf of Dinah, their sister. Yaakov felt that this was a place in which great familial love was demonstrated, where the love of one sibling for another was manifest in a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice. This is what Yaakov *Avinu* intimated to Yosef, "Your brothers are in Shechem. It is a place where they showed extreme love for a sibling. Surely, their love will overcome whatever negative feelings they have toward you."

Undoubtedly, Yaakov suffered greatly as a result of Dinah's defilement. His only consolation was that his sons were willing to sacrifice their lives for her. Thus, he no longer viewed the Dinah incident as adverse. Whatever negative feelings he had were mitigated by the love his sons had demonstrated. Once they erred in Shechem and sold Yosef, however, he saw that the love had been short-lived. Therefore, the Dinah incident reverted back to one of adversity. While, indeed, it occurred before the brothers' debacle in Shechem, it was their current unconscionable collapse which returned it to the fore.

**וישמע ראובן ויצלהו מידם**

**Reuven heard and he rescued him from their hand. (37:21)**

Reuven suggested the brothers throw Yosef into a pit, rather than personally execute corporeal punishment against him. [The *Shevatim*, tribes/brothers, convened a *bais din*, judicial court, to determine if Yosef was, in fact, guilty of rendering false testimony against them, or a *rodef*, pursuer, who wanted to do them harm. In any event, they did not make their decision lightly.] It is difficult to understand how Reuven's suggestion that the brothers instead fling Yosef into a pit swarming with dangerous creatures was an act of saving Yosef. Was he not selecting one form of death over another? The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains that Reuven's intention to have Yosef placed in a pit with deadly creatures was to save him – if he was worthy. A man has free will, thus enabling him to take someone's life even if the victim had not been Heavenly sentenced to death. Wild animals are Heavenly-controlled. In this regard, they will not harm a human being unless Hashem has sentenced him to death. Thus, *va'yatzileihu mi'yadam*; "He rescued him from their hands," meaning: he saved him from the hand of a human being, who possesses free choice.

*Ohr HaChaim's* position vis-à-vis human free will – and its impact on another human being – is novel. Other commentators appear to disagree, maintaining that no human can harm another unless Heaven has specifically decreed it. Veritably, our core beliefs are founded upon the principle of Divine Providence, which teaches that Hashem guides everything in this world. As such, no one can harm his fellow unless Hashem is in agreement.

*Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, sheds light on the *Ohr HaChaim's* statement. Hashem created the world for the purpose of giving man free-will to choose between good and evil. Thus, when one chooses evil by intending to harm his fellow, to countermand his intention by miraculously saving the victim means going against a principle of Creation. The victim certainly wants to live; the murderer wants to change his status. Who wins out, without negating the assailant's free-

will? Such a miracle requires that the intended victim possess enormous merit, such that it will supersede the aggressor's free-will.

When we have the merit of the victim up against the free-will of the murderer, the victim requires a greater accumulation of merit than he would if he were facing off with deadly creatures, who have no free-will. Reuven conjectured that Yosef was sufficiently righteous to merit being saved from the creatures – but not so when he must contend with the brothers. He was certain that, unless Heaven issued a decree that Yosef should die, he would survive the pit. He was not prepared to assert that Yosef's merits could save him from human hands who possess free-will. Therefore, their decision to kill Yosef was inequitable.

The *Ohr HaChaim's* position that an animal cannot harm a human unless Heaven has so decreed, came into play in his own life. *Horav Chaim Ibn Attar, zl*, the *Ohr HaChaim*, made Torah study his primary vocation. He spent day and night poring over the tomes of *Talmud* and *Shulchan Aruch*. Refusing to be supported by the community, he opted to open a small silver shop and use his extraordinary craftsmanship to fashion beautiful pieces of jewelry and trinkets. His fame spread throughout Morocco. He had one stipulation. He worked until he had sufficient funds with which to support his family. He then shuttered his shop and returned to his Torah study. When the funds ran out, he returned to the shop.

One day, two emissaries from the king of Morocco presented themselves at his shop with a message from the king. He had gold which he wanted him to fashion into a beautiful jewelry piece in honor of his daughter's upcoming wedding. *Rav* Chaim apologized that he could be of no assistance. His shop was closed. He had earned enough money to retire to his beloved Torah study. They looked at him incredulously. How dare he say "no" to the king? He replied that he had priorities, and Torah had supremacy over everything. The two men returned to the king in a state of shock. This had never happened before. No one had ever manifest such audacity. The king was angry to hear of the *Ohr HaChaim's* refusal, but decided to forgo his feelings this one time and give the Jewish silversmith another chance. To his chagrin, the negative response had not changed. "No" remained "no." To defy the king twice was high treason, which warranted the death penalty. Since the silversmith had made a fool of the king, the execution would be especially painful and gruesome. He would be thrown into a cage with three hungry lions. In short time, he would satisfy their hunger. *Rav* Chaim took the decree with total equanimity, and even refused to share it with his family. He bid them goodbye and said he would return later. He made one request of the soldiers: He would like to take his *Tallis, Tefillin* and *Sefer Tehillim* along with him. They scoffed at him, but agreed, knowing that within minutes he would be devoured.

Bedecked in *Tallis* and *tefillin* and reciting *Tehillim* in a loud voice, *Rav* Chaim was led into the cage. A short time passed, and, when the guards heard no screams, they went to see what was occurring. How shocked they were to discover the *Ohr HaChaim* sitting in middle of the cage reciting *Tehillim*. The three lions sat at his feet entranced, listening to his prayers. When the king was informed of the developments, he raged in disbelief. He was going to the lion's den to see with his own two eyes the spectacle that was taking place. At first, he blamed the lion keeper for having fed the lions a large meal. Thus, they were not hungry for human flesh. The lion keeper denied any wrongdoing. To prove his innocence, he hung a piece of meat from a pole which he passed through the bars of the cage. The lions proceeded to devour it fiercely. Clearly, something was special about the holy rabbi. Seeing this entire scene, the king declared, "Now I know that there is a G-d of *Yisrael*!" He had *Rav* Chaim removed from the cage and asked for his forgiveness. As penance, the king showered him with gifts and great honor. When he returned home and his wife asked him about his day, he replied, "*Baruch Hashem*. But I see now that the time has come for us to move to *Eretz Yisrael*. Conditions here do not provide the proper climate for Torah study."

While variations to this story exist, the message remains the same: animals have no power over a human being unless Hashem wills it to be so.

**ויקרע יעקב שמלתיו... ויתאבל על בנו ימים רבים**

**Then Yaakov rent his garments… he mourned for his son many days. (37:34)**

*Rashi* explains the term *yamim rabim*, many days: twenty-two years, which lasted from Yosef's sudden departure until Yaakov *Avinu* went down to Egypt. This specific time was by design (as is everything) to coincide with the twenty-two years that Yaakov *Avinu* did not fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v'eim*, honoring his father and mother. Yaakov *Avinu* experienced twenty-two years of agony and mourning over the painful loss of a son, as *middah k'neged middah,* measure for measure, for his lack of fulfilling the *mitzvah* to honor his parents. At first glance, Yaakov's departure from home by his mother's instruction in order to save his life is a far stretch from Yosef being sold, of which Yaakov was unaware. He thought that he was dead, torn by a wild animal. What is the equity between a passive lack of honor and active grief over the loss of a child?

I think that we may glean from here a powerful lesson which should give us food for thought. We have no idea of the pain experienced by parents when their child acts up and disrespects or ignores them. The pain is tantamount to losing a child! Yaakov's pain at losing Yosef was the penance for the pain his parents sustained when he was gone for twenty-two years. Frightening.

**ותסר בגדי אלמנותה מעליה... ותשב בפתח עינים**

**So, she removed her widow's garb from upon her… and she sat at a crossroads. (38:14)**

The term *pesach einayim* literally translated, means "at an entrance of eyes." Here, it is interpreted as *parashas derachim*, crossroads, because it is point where a traveler must open his eyes and decide which road he will take. The *parashas derachim* is called *pesach einayim*, because one cannot continue on the road unless his eyes are open, so that he can determine the best road to take. *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Ferber, zl* (*Kerem HaTorah*) relates that years earlier (he published his *sefer* in 1914), in such Jewish bastions of Torah and *avodah*, one road existed (which was used by the Jewish residents): It went from one's house to the *shul/bais hamedrash*. A Torah Jew had no other place to visit. He either went to *daven* or to learn.

Times have changed. Society and the new world culture have provided us with competing roads – each vying for us to journey on it. The *bais hamedrash/shul* is no longer our only destination. Thus, it is critical that we travel with our eyes open to see where we are going. This is especially crucial for parents to observe. Just because the father's address is the *shul* is by no means an indication that his son also uses the same address. Heaven help the parent whose perception with regards to his children is myopic, whose eyes are closed to his son's/daughter's destination in life. We are admonished to be *poseach einayim*, open up our eyes, in order to guide our children properly about how to navigate the various roads of life. Otherwise, the journey could take a bad, dangerous turn. By the time we open up our eyes and adjust our glasses, it might be too late.

***Va'ani Tefillah***

**רצון יראיו יעשה – *Retzon yirei'av yaaseh*. He will do the will of those who fear Him.**

During the Gulf War, when anxiety for personal safety was a primary concern, *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, assured people that they need not worry. He promised that no missile would fall on the city of Bnei Brak, the city of Torah and *chassidus*. He cited the *pasuk* in *Melachim* II 6:17, where Elisha prayed that the fearful eyes of his attendant be opened, so that he could see beyond the natural limitations of this world. Hashem granted the *Navi's* request, and suddenly his attendant saw an army of fiery horses and chariots surrounding Elisha, protecting him from harm. *Rav* Chaim declared, "If only people could see the vast wall of fiery words of Torah surrounding Bnei Brak, they would harbor no fear whatsoever. They would be confident that the *z'chus*, merit, of Torah would protect them from harm. Indeed, no missiles fell on Bnei Brak.

*Rav* Chaim added that the words/assurances of a *tzaddik* apply not only during his lifetime, but even after his *neshamah*, soul, has left

his physical body. Thus, as when the *Chazon Ish* had promised years earlier that no explosion (bombs) would occur in Bnei Brak, this assurance continued to hold in our present. There is nothing to fear. We have the Torah as our protection.

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*by his family*

*prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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## *Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha*
## *Lighting the Menorah with Kedushas Sheviis Oil?*
### *For the week ending 17 December 2022 / 23 Kislev 5783*
### *Rabbi Yehuda Spitz*

Although we are currently in the Eighth year (Shnas Hashminis) of the Shemitta cycle, and hence actually post-Shemitta, all the same, now is the time when many Shemitta Sheilos first occur, as much Kedushas Sheviis produce only now starts flooding the marketplace and becoming commercially available. The vigilant consumer must remain on high alert to know how to properly deal with these 'holy fruit'.[1] This includes "Holy Olive Oil" for Chanukah that is currently easily obtainable.

As detailed at length in previous articles,[2] Chazal derived several essential Shemitta halachos from several pesukim in Parshas Behar that pertain to preserving the sanctity of Kedushas Sheviis produce.

Regarding to the Shemitta year the Torah states "V'haysah Shabbos Ha'aretz Lachem L'achlah…V'livhemtachah V'lechayah Asher B'artzechah Tihiyeh Kol Tevuasah Le'echol - And the Resting of the Land should be for you to eat… and for your domesticated animals and the wild animals in your fields, all the produce should be for consumption."[3]

Personal Uses

One important halacha that is inferred from these pesukim is:

Lachem- for you, lechol tzarcheichem, for all of your needs. (Sukkah 40a and Bava Kamma 102a)

According to the Mishnah, and duly codified as halacha,[4] Kedushas Sheviis produce is not only permitted to be eaten, it is even allowed to be utilized in whichever manner the owner deems it necessary: including drinking, anointing, dyeing, and even lighting.

However, there is a very important caveat, namely that the owner's use of it during Shemitta must be that product's main use year round. Otherwise, it would be considered 'ruining' the 'holy' fruit and duly prohibited.[5]

But what happens when the owner needs it for a purpose that is one that he may not halachically benefit from? For example, there is a well known Talmudic dictum that "Mitzvos lav lehenos nitnu, [utilizing something by] fulfilling a Mitzvah is not considered receiving benefit.[6] Although regarded as a 'need,' a Mitzvah is not deemed an actual personal benefit. If so, may one use Shemitta produce to fulfill such a Mitzvah or obligation?

Previous articles discussed several Mitzvos involving actually eating or drinking the Shemitta produce, such as using Kedushas Sheviis wine for Kiddush, Havdalah, and the Arba Kosos at the Pesach Seder, which since involving direct bodily benefit (hana'ah), as long as one sticks to the guidelines of not 'ruining' the 'holy wine,' it would be permissible to use for these Mitzvos.[7] But what about Mitzvos containing indirect benefit? Are they included in the 'personal use leniency'?

Kedushah Kindling ?

The issue in this category most commonly addressed issue by contemporary authorities involves Shemitta oil. We know that it may be used for lighting up a dark room, as that is an actual need and personal use. And according to most Poskim one may even light Shabbos and Yom Tov candles with Shemitta oil,[8] as the purpose of this Mitzvah is Shalom Bayis[9] and is therefore considered a true personal need.

But can Shemitta oil be used for lighting Chanukah candles?

This question is even more complicated than it seems at first glance, as according to most Poskim it is entirely prohibited to derive any benefit from Chanukah oil at all.[10] This is one of the reasons why common practice is to have a 'shamash' candle lit as well, so any potential hana'ah one receives can be assumed to be coming from it, as opposed to the Chanukah lights.

To summarize: If one cannot obtain any actual benefit from the Chanukah candles, how then may one possibly use Kedushas Sheviis oil for this purpose? Additionally, is the prohibition against "ruining"Shemitta produce transgressed by the oil burning as fuel for light, albeit that being its natural use?[11] Moreover, technically, the instant one lights, he has already fulfilled his Chanukah obligation. Wouldn't that mean that the remainder of Shemitta oil burned might be considered 'wasting'?

ChanukahShemitta Lights?

This halachic dilemma is the reason why many contemporary authorities, including the Ridbaz, the Imrei Yosher, Rav Menachem Ziemba HY"D, Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, the Chazon Ish, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, and Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer, rule that one may not use Kedushas Sheviis oil for Chanukah lights.[12] Rav Moshe Sternbuch even writes that if one did so, he would not have fulfilled the Mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles, even b'dieved.[13]

On the other hand, several authorities, including the Maharash Engel, Rav Ezra Alteshuler, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul, argue that one may indeed use Shemitta oil for Chanukah candles.[14] They explain that kindling for a Devar Mitzvah is certainly considered a proper use.[15] What greater hana'ah is there than being able to fulfill a Mitzvah? Additionally, they counter that even if one may not technically benefit from the light due to a different reason, this should not preclude it from being considered a normal use vis-à-vis its Shemitta status. Moreover, one may indirectly benefit from Chanukah lights.[16] Why, they argue, should this matter be considered any different?

In the words of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l, although one may not use Shemitta produce for medicinal purposes,[17] still, if one wants to use Shemitta oil to light a candle to be able to see in order to put on a bandage, to learn Torah, or even to smash all of his dishes, does that mean that that lighting was in fact prohibited, as these are not proper enough uses? He concludes definitely not. He maintains that it is sufficient that one has a need to enable the use of Kedushas Sheviis produce. What the actual need is should be deemed irrelevant.[18]

Rav Chaim's Chiluk

However, Rav Chaim Kanievsky disagrees with Rav Shlomo Zalman's logic, countering that although one may certainly learn Torah by Shemitta oil light, even though we hold "Mitzvos lav lehenos nitnu," that is because 'the use' involved is using the light to see. What one wishes to see or read are indeed irrelevant. On the other hand, regarding Neiros Chanukah, receiving benefit from their light is prohibited. Aside from the performance of the actual Mitzvah itself in a manner that is fitting for Persumei Nissa (publicizing the Chanukah miracle), the Mitzvah is for seeing the candles lit, but not utilizing the actual light of the candles.[19] As such, that is not considered receiving tangible benefit from the lighting, as opposed to the other cases Rav Shlomo Zalman cited, and in Rav Chaim's estimation, any other use would still be deemed prohibited.

Practically speaking, whichever luminary one decides to follow regarding his own personal Chanukah illumination, we see that there are great authorities on both sides of this debate. The bottom line seems to be that although if one has no other oil to light with or in extenuating circumstances, one may indeed rely on using Kedushas Sheviis oil for Chanukah lights. However, due to the strength of arguments of the machmirim, it would certainly be preferable to purchase non-Shemitta oil for the Neiros Chanukah.[20]

Chutz La'aretz Complications

It is important to note that all of the above is referring to those of us zocheh to be in Eretz Yisrael that such a dilemma whether or not to use Shemitta oil for Chanukah licht exists. However, for those of us in Chutz La'aretz, such a question presents a plethora of problems; a downright cornucopia of complications, even regarding Otzar Beis Din Olive Oil. You see, Otzar Beis Din produce also maintains Kedushas Sheviis status.[21] As such, even if such oil was permitted to be obtained, it still may not be taken to Chutz La'aretz or sold in a normal manner. Such produce being sold in Chutz La'aretz violates several key tenets of Hilchos Sheviis.

The Torah teaches us that Shemitta sanctity applies L'achlah- for you to eat, and not for sechora, merchandise or commercial use;[22] and B'artzechah - in your land, and not in Chutz La'aretz, meaning that Kedushas Sheviis produce may not be taken out of Eretz Yisrael.[23]

Although it seems that me'ikar hadin regarding both of these Shemittah violations, one may still eat such produce even after transgression, nevertheless, there are authorities who forbid it.[24]

Moreover, Kedushas Sheviis olive oil in Chutz La'aretz may be even more problematic due to the prohibitions of "Shamor V'Ne'evad." We all know that during the Shemittah year the land must lie fallow and no work may be done.[25] Similarly, all fruit trees and their produce are halachically considered hefker, ownerless, and anyone may partake of the fruit. But what happens if the owner transgresses and ignores the Biblical commandment and instead works the land as usual or cultivated via forbidden labors (Ne'evad)? Or what happens if he does not allow public access to his halachically hefker fruit (Shamor)? Obviously, it is not permitted; yet, more importantly, several authorities maintain that such produce that is Shamor V'Ne'evad becomes forbidden to be eaten![26]

This would similarly make utilizing Shemitta oil for Chanukah lighting in Chutz La'aretz quite questionable, as aside for any prohibitions involved with their growth and or shipping, they might be forbidden, period.[27]

Keeping Abreast oftheBiur Necessities

Another important issue relevant to using Shemitta olive oil is that it is subject to the laws of Biur. This refers to taking Kedushas Sheviis produce out of the house to a public place and giving up all rights to the fruit, announcing it as 'hefker' in front of three people.[28] Every type of fruit has its own specific Zman Biur, time of year when this must be performed, as it depends on when each species of fruit is no longer commonly available in the fields.

The Gemara informs us of the Biur dates of four types of fruit: dried figs on Chanuka, dates on Purim, grapes on Pesach, and olives on Shavuos - all in the eighth year.[29] Although the Mishnah divides Eretz Yisrael into nine different 'zones' for Biur,[30] nowadays since the exact locations are unclear and all types of fruit are readily available throughout Eretz Yisrael, the consumer must keep abreast of the actual Biur dates publicized in newspapers by the experts in the Agriculture industry.

That means that one who uses his Shemitta olive oil for Chanukah lighting may not just save the leftover oil in the bottle for the years ahead, but must do a proper Biur prior to this Shavuos. Afterwards, it may be re-acquired.[31] If one neglects to properly perform Biur in its appropriate time, the oil will actually become prohibited. Just another matter of concern when dealing with Kedushas Sheviis produce and all the more of a reason why it is worthwhile for all of us to be proficient in Hilchos Sheviis.

It is apropos that for the most of us, the illuminating holiday of Chanukah falls out during the doldrums of winter. Whether or not we use Kedushas Sheviis oil in our Menorahs, when contemplating the lights of Chanukah, it behooves us all to internalize their message that Hashem's hashgachah in this world, showing us the triumph of light over darkness, is eternal and everlasting.

*Note: This article is not intended to serve as an exhaustive guide, but rather to showcase certain aspects of the intricate and myriad halachos of produce imbued with Kedushas Sheviis.*

*[1]Kedushas Sheviis status for olives, grapes, and the five grains, is determined by when they are one-third grown, no matter when actually picked, plucked, or procured. See Gemara Rosh Hashanah (12b - 13b), Rashi and Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. v'hazeisim), Tosefta (Sheviis Ch. 2: 10), Yerushalmi (Sheviis Ch. 2, Halacha 5), Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 4: 9), and Chazon Ish (Sheviis 7: 15 s.v. tevuah). Hence, although technically post-Shemittah, now is the time when such "Holy Olive Oil" abounds.*
*[2]Shemitta Basics: 'Kedushas ShevііsProduce' and 'Fruit Use and Fruit Juice'.*
*[3]Parashas Behar (Vayikra Ch. 25: 6-7).*
*[4]See Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 8: Mishna 2), Tosefta (Sheviis, Ch. 6: 1-3), Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 1-5), Rash (on Mishnayos Sheviis ibid.), Aruch Hashulchan Ha'asid (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel 24: 3; however he classifies this as a separate issur and not that of 'ruining), Chazon Ish (Sheviis 10: 4), and Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 8: 102).*
*[5]See Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 8: Mishnah 2), Yerushalmi Sheviis (Ch. 7: Halacha 1), Tosefta Sheviis (Ch. 6: 1-3), Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 1-5), Ra"sh (on Mishnayos Sheviis ibid.), Aruch Hashulchan HaAsid (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel 24: 3; however he classifies this as a separate issur and not that of 'ruining), Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 7: 4), Chazon Ish (Sheviis 10: 4), and Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 8: 102). This topic was delineated at length in a previous article titled 'Kedushas ShevііsProduce'.*
*[6]Eruvin (31a).*
*[7]See Sefer HaShemittah (Ch. 7: 3 and footnote 4), Shabbos Ha'aretz (Kuntress Acharon to Ch. 5: 3), Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5, Tziyun Hahalacha 19), Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Pesach Ch. 9: 35), Chut Shani (Shemittah, pg. 218), Shu"t Mishnas Yosef (vol. 2: 40), Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 2: 137), Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 6: 36), the Steipler Gaon's Haggada shel Pesach Kehillas Yaakov (pg. 559), Shemittah Kehilchasah (Ch. 3: 11), Ohr*

*L'Tzion (Sheviis, Ch. 2: 6, pg. 42), Yalkut Yosef on Sheviis (Ch. 15: 55), Mishpetei Aretz (Ch. 21: 5),Mishmeres HaSheviis (Ch. 16: 30), and Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 16, s.v. Shimushei Mitzva 4 and Ch. 32, Pesach 15 - 17). Aside for the issue of potential waste, there are those who maintain that one is not supposed to drink the wine spilled for the 'Esser Makkos' - see for example, Chok Yaakov (Orach Chaim 473: 37) and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 165), citing the Pesach Me'uvin (261) - perhaps this is applicable here as well. See also Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 81), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 163), and Moadei HaGra''ch (vol. 1, pg. 57-58). This topic was discussed at length in an article titled 'The Complicated Case of Shemitta Wine on Pesach.'*

*[8]Shu''t Mishnas Yosef (vol. 1: 26), Shu''t Even Yisrael (vol. 9: 114), Toras Ha'aretz (vol. 1, Ch. 8: 7), Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 49), Chut Shani (Shemittah Ch. 5: 8), Mishpetei Aretz (Sheviis, Ch. 24: 8), Yalkut Yosef (Sheviis, Ch. 15: 62), Sefer Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 16, Shimushei Mitzvah 7 and Ch. 32, Shabbos 1), and Mishmeres HaSheviis (Ch. 16: 44). However, Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shemittah Kehilchasa Ch. 3: footnote 12) advises not to rely on using Shemittah oil for Neiros Shabbos. He maintains that with the advent of electricity we do not really depend on the Shabbos Licht as an actual source of light. Therefore, he maintains that it possibly may be no longer considered a true 'use' to allow using Kedushas Sheviis oil.*

*[9]Gemara Shabbos (23b and 25a), Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos Ch. 5: 1), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 263: 3).*

*[10]See Tur, Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 673: 1) and relevant commentaries. This is essentially a machlokes Rishonim. The Rosh (Shabbos Ch. 1: 3 and 6) and Ran (Shabbos 9a s.v. halachos; in the Rif's pages) maintain that since the Chanukah lets occurred with a Menorah, we are not allowed to benefit at all from our Menorahs. However, the Baal HaTur (vol. 2 pg. 115a; cited by the Tur) and Shibolei Leket (185) maintain that nevertheless, a Tashmish shel Kedushah with the Chanukah lights would indeed be permitted. [See Biur Halacha as loc. s.v. v'yesh for a machlokes Acharonim as to whether the Baal HaTur meant to permit exclusively a tashmish ara'ei or even a tashmish keva.] Either way, we conclusively see that all non-Mitzvah uses of Chanukah lights are certainly forbidden.*

*[11]Especially as the Gemara in Bechoros (12b) teaches regarding a Shemitta animal (ostensibly one that was redeemed with Shemitta produce, thus transferring the Kedushas Sheviis to the animal as well; this was addressed in a previous article titled 'ShemittahShailos: The Case of the Contraband Carrots,' that it is exempt from being brought as a Korban. The Gemara derives this rule from the pasuk:"L'achla velo Lesreifah, to eat and not to be burned". This implies that one may not perform a Mitzvah that involves burning, with an item imbued with Kedushas Sheviis. This would seemingly prohibit using Shemitta oil for Chanukah lights as well.*

*[12]Ridbaz (Beis Ridbaz glosses to Pe'as HaShulchan, Sheviis Ch. 5: 9), Shu''t Imrei Yosher (vol. 1: 100; also cited lemaaseh in Shu''t Levushei Mordechai, Telita'ei Orach Chaim 53, and later by the Shaarim Metzuyanim Behalacha, 139, 3 s.v. uv'inyan), Chiddushei HaGaonRav Menachem Ziemba [HaGRM''Z] (16; he holds that since we hold 'Hadlakah Oseh Mitzvah' - the second one lights he has technically already fulfilled his Mitzvah of Chanukah lighting and therefore all the remainder of Shemitta oil that is burned would be considered hefsed), Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 7, 4: 2), the Chazon Ish (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 2, pg. 334, 52; citing proof from a Tosefta in Menachos, end Ch. 8, regarding that one may not bring Menachos or Nesachim from Shemittah produce; the same should apply to Chanukah candles as well), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (in his ma'amar in Kovetz Halichos Sadeh vol. 122, pg. 11 s.v. kal [and not as quoted in Kovetz Halichos Sadeh vol. 50, pg. 80 footnote 34]; he does however give dispensation to allow it according to the Baal HaTur's opinion, but concludes that if one lights Chanukah Licht outside, it would be prohibited since that is not way people are generally meshtamesh from light), Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Derech Emunah vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 49), and Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer (Shu''t Even Yisrael vol. 9: 114 and Halichos Even Yisrael, Moadim vol. 2, pg. 359: 7 and footnote 9; maintaining that since there is a non-Shemitta oil shammash candle used, one is not receiving any hana'ah from his Chanukah lights, and to use Shemitta oil for them would thereby be considered 'mafsid,' wasting, and thus prohibited). Other poskim who ruled this way include the Shaarei Deah (Shu''t vol. 2: 9; cited lemaaseh by the Piskei Teshuva, vol. 1: 94), Pischei She'arim (on Gemara Shabbos 21a; although he concludes that according to the Baal Hamaor (Rosh Hashana 7a in the Rif's pages s.v. amar Rava) who holds that 'Mitzvos Derabbanan lehenos nitnu', lechoirah he would allow lighting Chanukah candles with Kedushas Sheviis oil; [this is similar the opinion of the Mareh Panim on Yerushalmi Terumos (Ch. 11, end Halacha 5); on the other hand, see Shaar Hamelech (Hilchos Lulav Ch. 8) who understands this Machlokes Rishonim differently], the Mishnas Yosef (Shu''t vol. 1: 26, and in Kovetz Tenuvas Sadeh vol. 15; however, he later allowed some leniency, see footnote 15), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shemittah Kehilchasa Ch. 3: 12; see also next footnote), Toras Ha'aretz (vol. 1, Ch. 8: 40), Mishpetei Aretz (Sheviis, Ch. 24: 8), and Mishmeres HaSheviis (Ch. 16: 44). Several of these authorities maintain that lighting Yartzeit candles or candles for Shul share the same status - that one may not useKedushas Sheviis oil for these purposes. They explain that since these types of lights are not kindled for one's personal hana'ah, but rather l'iluy nishama and lichvod Beis Knesses, Shemitta oil would likewise not be permitted for such uses.*

*[13]Moadim U'Zmanim (vol. 2: 145 s.v. amnam).*

*[14]Shu''t Maharash Engel (vol. 2, Yoreh Deah 4), Rav Ezra Altesh uler (author of 'Takkanas Ezra'; cited in Kerem Tzion, Sheviis pg. 52, Gidulei Tzion 6; 5698, and Halichos Shlomo, Moadim vol. 1, Chanukah Ch. 15: 7, footnote 20), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Shu''t Minchas Shlomo, Kamma vol. 1: 42 and Halichos Shlomo ibid.), and Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Ohr L'Tzion on Sheviis, Ch. 2: 7, pg. 42). Rav Abba Shaul cites precedence from a diyuk in the Rambam (Hilchos Terumos Ch. 11: 18), as well as the Mishneh L'Melech (Hilchos Terumos Ch. 2: 14), and Pnei Moshe (on the Yerushalmi, Terumos Ch. 11, Halacha 7) regarding Hilchos Terumah, that lighting Chanukah lights is considered a hana'ah. Hence, he asserts, the same should apply regarding Hilchos Shemitta. [He concludes ''v'chein shmaati shehorah Echad M'Gaonei Zmaneinu,'' ostensibly referring to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.] Other poskim who ruled leniently were the Strasbourger Rav (Shu''t Kinyan Torah Behalacha vol. 3, 17: 2) and Rav Shlomo Amar (Shu''t Sheima Shlomo vol. 3, Inyanei Zeraim 23 and 24 at length, and in Kovetz Tenuvas Sadeh vol. 3). Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Shu''t Shevet HaLevi, vol. 1, 184: 1) writes several reasons why it should theoretically be permitted as well. See also footnote 20.*

*[15]There is precedent to allow this as well, regarding lighting candles on Yom Tov, even though any melachah on Yom Tom is only permitted 'Lachem.' See Gemara Beitzah (19-20b), Rambam (Hilchos Shevitas Yom Tov Ch. 1), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 495: 1). However, it is important to note that said fire cannot actually be lit, just transferred from a pre-existing flame [see Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 502: 1)]. For more on the topic of whether fulfilling a Mitzvah with Shemitta produce is considered 'Lachem', see Shu''t Har Tzvi (Orach Chaim vol. 2: 68).*

*[16]See Mishnah Berurah (673: 11) and Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 11), quoting the Shaarei Teshuvah (ad loc. 3), who cites the Pri Chodosh (ad loc.), Maharikash (Erech Lechem ad loc.), and Shu''t Pnei Aryeh (47), that one is allowed to sit in his house when Chanukah lights are lit, as just basic seeing (without iyun) is not considered an actual tangible prohibited benefit.*

*[17]See Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 8, Mishnah 1), Gemara Sukka (40a) and Bava Kamma (102a), Yerushalmi (Sheviis Ch. 8, Halacha 2), Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 10 and 11), Pe'as Hashulchan (24: 14 and 17), Minchas Chinuch (Parashas Behar, Mitzvah 329, 6), Shaarei Tzedek (17: 20), Aruch Hashulchan HaAsid (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel 24: 22), Sefer HaShemittah (Ch. 7, 4: 9), andChazon Ish (13: 6 and 7).However, it must be noted that if the Kedushas Sheviis produce is only suitable for fodder it may be then used for medicinal purposes for humans, as this is not considered hefsed. See the Pnei Moshe's commentary on the Yerushalmi (Sheviis Ch. 7, Halacha 1), Pe'as Hashulchan (Ch. 24: 17), Chazon Ish (ibid. and 27: 3), and Sefer Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 16: Kilkil V'hefsed 24). This is also implied by the Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 11). Similarly, as taught by the Yerushalmi (Sheviis Ch. 7, Halacha 1; and not as implied in Ch. 8, Halacha 1) and cited by many Acharonim including the Chazon Ish (Sheviis 14: 5), Har Tzvi (Shu''t,Zeraim vol. 2: 55), Minchas Yitzchak (Shu''t vol. 8: 101), and Minchas Asher (Sheviis, Tinyana 29: 2 and 3), any produce that is grown exclusively for medicinal purposes does not contain Kedushas Sheviis. [On the other hand and quite interestingly, there are several Acharonim including the Tiferes Yisroel on Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 7, Mishnah 2: 20) and Shu''t Minchas Shlomo (Tinyana, 123: 2), who seem to infer from the Yerushalmi's question in Ch. 8, that even such produce can contain Kedushas Sheviis.]*

*[18]Shu''t Minchas Shlomo and Halichos Shlomo (ibid.).*

*[19]Derech Emunah (ibid, Biur Hahalacha s.v. shemadlik). Rav Chaim additionally maintains (see Moadei HaGra''Ch vol. 1, pg. 292, 634 and vol. 2 pg. 330-331, 679 and 680) that even if that is the only oil available, it is nonetheless preferable not to light at all! Similarly, he held if one accidentally lit the Menorah with Shemitta oil it is considered a 'Mitzvah Haba'ah B'Aveirah.' Ergo, he holds that one may use Shemitta oil to light the 'shammash' as one is supposed to benefit from its light. However, see Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 1, Chanukah Ch. 15: 7, in the footnotes) for a possible defense of Rav Shlomo Zalman's position against Rav Chaim Kanievsky's challenge.*

*[20]See Shu''t Shevet Halevi (vol. 1, 184: 1), who although writing that m'sevarah it should be permitted, nevertheless l'maaseh concludes that since Gedolei Hora'ah of the previous generation (the Imrei Yosher, Shaarei Deah, and Ridbaz) prohibited it, one should follow their ruling. A similar assessment is given by the Mishnas Yosef in his later teshuvah on topic printed in Shu''t Sheima Shlomo (vol. 3, Inyanei Zeraim 24), as well as the Yalkut Yosef (Sheviis Ch. 15: 62), who after citing both sides of the machlokes, concludes that if one has no other oil with which to light, he may use Kedushas Sheviis oil.*

*[21]Many contemporary Gedolim, most notably the Chazon Ish, championed the cause of setting up Otzar Batei Dinim to enable distribution of Kedushas Sheviis produce, which still has to get from the field to the consumer, as well as ensuring proper Shemitta observance. See Chazon Ish (Sheviis 11: 7 and 12: 6 and 8) and Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish (vol. 2: 73). Orchos Rabbeinu (old print vol. 2; new print vol. 3) dedicates an entire chapter (titled 'Otzar Beis Din') describing how the Chazon Ish attempted to set up properly run Otzar Batei Dinim across Eretz Yisrael every Shemitta. Mishpetei Aretz (Sheviis pg. 230-232) prints the Chazon Ish's actual instructions to storekeepers and suppliers on how to properly set up and distribute Otzar Beis Din produce. See also Shu''t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 9: 319) as well as the 'Michtavim' printed in the back of Chut Shani on Hilchos Yom Tov v'Chol Hamoed (pg. 371-372) from Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Rav Nissim Karelitz on the importance of establishing Otzar Batei Din. For more on the nuances of Otzar Batei Din and how they are properly applied, see the 'Kuntress Otzar Beis Din' in Chut Shani on Shemitta, Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel Ch. 6: 19), Orchos Rabbeinu (old print vol. 2; new edition vol. 3 - Ch. 'Otzar Beis Din'), Shemitta Kehilchasah (Ch. 3: 16), Mishpetei Aretz (Sheviis Ch. 13), Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 20), Yalkut Yosef (Sheviis Ch. 18, 'Otzar Beis Din'), Shu''t Minchas Shlomo (Tinyana 123: 11), Shu''t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 9: 319), Minchas Shlomo (Sheviis Ch. 9: 8, pg. 250), Rav Tzvi Cohen's 'Shemitta' (Ch. 23), and Kara Shemitta (Ch. 9: 6, 'Otzar Beis Din'; he also details the first Otzar Beis Din set up in modern times - in 1910, for the Rechovot vineyards of Rav Tzvi Hirsch Kahn, author of Imrei Tzvi, by the Badatz of Yerushalayim, consisting of such luminaries as Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, Rav Chaim Berlin, and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank). On the other hand, many Poskim were and are wary of the Otzar Beis Din system, as it unfortunately lends itself to abuse. See the Badatz's Dvar HaShemitta (5775, pg. 30-31 and 50), citing Rabbanei Yerushalayim of over 100 years ago, that they never accepted 'Otzar Beis Din' as a practical means of allowing distribution of Kedushas Sheviis produce, as the system regrettably can lend itself to abuse by unscrupulous individuals, especially if it is not run properly. They cite examples of 'Otzar Beis Din' produce somehow finding its way into supermarkets and being sold in the normal manner, quite counter-indicative of its halachic Kedushas Sheviis status. Unfortunately not an uncommon occurrence, this author has seen Otzar Beis Din produce being sold in regular stores (ostensibly with reliable hechsherim) this past Shemitta year by weight and price. The Star-K's Kashrus Kurrents article titled 'Shemitta 5775' refers to a great deal of wine produced under the auspices of Otzar Beis Din that ended up in supermarkets… in the Unites States. See also Minchas Asher (Sheviis, Tinyana 48b) who cites an example of Esrog merchants abusing the Otzar Beis Din system by reserving top quality Esrogim for 'Admorim and Mechubadim'. Similarly, Orchos Rabbeinu (new print vol. 3, pg. 260-261: 3-4) relates that certain years the Steipler Gaon would not rely on an Otzar Beis Din for Esrogim, as he held that they (perhaps those specific ones) were improperly run, and charging too high of a price to only include actual expenses. Unfortunately, abusing the Hetter of Otzar Beis Din seems to be the norm nowadays (or at least 'a norm'), to this author's great consternation. Other contemporary poskim who were wary of 'Otzar Beis Din' include Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shemitta Kehilchasa Ch. 3: 16, Moadim U'Zmanim vol. 8, Leket Ha'aros to vol. 6: 54, and Teshuvos V'Hanhagos on Sukkos pg. 345 and pg. 357 - 358), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Shu''t Maamar Mordechai vol. 5, V'shavsah Haaretz, 11; he additionally notes that the Rambam did not cite such a provisio) [Others however, 'answer up' that 'Otzar Beis Din' is an 'eitzah'; not a chiyuv, and that is why the Rambam did not need to mention it], and the Karlsberg Rav, Rav Yechezkel Roth (Shu''t Emek Hateshuvah vol. 2: 1). See also Rav Yirmiyohu Kaganoff's excellent recent article titled 'Otzar Beis Din or Hetter Otzar Beis Din?'.*

*[22]Gemara Avodah Zarah (62a) and Bechoros (12b); see also Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 8, Mishnah 3 and 4), Tosefta (Sheviis Ch. 7: 6), Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 6: 1 & 10), Bartenura's commentary on the Mishnah (ad loc.),Pe'as Hashulchan (24: 56), Shaarei Tzedek (17: 24), and Sefer HaShemittah (Ch. 8: 1).TheAruch Hashulchan (Ha'Asid, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 25)dedicates an entiresiman to the many nuances of the Issur Sechorah of Peiros Sheviis. Hence, one may exclusively obtain Kedushas Sheviis produce in a non-standard way.*

*[23]Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 6, Mishnah 5; see also the Rash's and Vilna Gaon's Shnos Eliyahu commentary ad loc.), Sifra / Toras Kohanim (Parshas Behar, Perek 1: 9; see also the commentaries of the Raavad, Rash MiShantz, and Gr''a ad loc.), Tosefta (Sheviis Ch. 5: 1), Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 13),Pe'as Hashulchan (24: 18), Shaarei Tzedek (17: 24), Aruch Hashulchan HaAsid (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel 24: 25), Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 8: 1), Chazon Ish (Sheviis 13: 4 s.v. Pesachim), Shemittah Kehilchasah (Ch. 3: 17), andMishpetei Aretz (Sheviis, 20: 2).*

*[24]The Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 13 and Ch. 6: 1) implies that the actual produce is still permitted to be eaten. In fact, Tosafos (Kedushin 52a s.v. hamekadesh) explicitly rules this way regarding selling Shemittah produce and this is also the conclusion of the Mabit (Shu''t vol. 1: 21), the Noda B'Yehuda (Kama, Even Ha'ezer 77 s.v. umah shehavi mechutani), Ridbaz (Beis Ridbaz glosses to Pe'as Hashulchan 5: 18; regarding taking abroad), the Chazon Ish (Sheviis 10: 6 s.v. v'im shulchan - regarding Chutz La'aretz; and Kuntress Seder HaSheviis 7 - regarding merchandise), and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Shu''t Minchas Shlomo, Kama 44: 1 s.v ela). This is also how it is cited lemaaseh in Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 17: 2 and Ch. 27: 1). However, Rav Moshe Sternbuch in his Shemittah Kehilchasa (Ch. 3: 17) cites several machmirim who forbid their consumption, including the Raavad, the Ra''sh and the Vilna Gaon, and cites that Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein ruled that one should attempt to return them to Eretz Yisrael. He concludes that it is preferable not to consume them and rather leave them until they rot by themselves. Similarly, Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Derech Emunah vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 7, Tzion Hahalacha 125) concludes not to eat the produce but rather try to send it back to Eretz Yisrael. See footnote 26.*

*[25]Parshas Behar (Vayikra Ch. 25: 1- 5).*

*[26]This is essentially a machlokes Rishonim in the end of Gemaros Sukkah (39b) and Yevamos (122a) with Rabbeinu Tam taking the stringent approach and arguing on his grandfather, Rashi, who was lenient. Many other Rishonim take sides as well. In fact, the Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 1: 12; however, see his Shu''t Pe'er Hador 15, where he seemingly changes his mind) writes that any produce being grown during Shemitta, whether intentional or not, must be uprooted! Yet, lemaaseh, he implies that the actual produce is still permitted to be eaten (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 5: 13 and Ch. 6: 1). In fact, Tosafos (Kedushin 52a s.v. hamekadesh) concludes similarly. Other poskim who allowed it (as they held the issur is only on the seller, and not on the buyer) include the Mabit (Shu''t vol. 1: 21), the Kapos Temarim (Sukkah 39a), the Noda B'Yehuda (Kama, Even Ha'ezer 77 s.v. umah shehavi mechutani), Ridbaz (Beis Ridbaz glosses to Pe'as Hashulchan 5: 18; regarding taking abroad), and the Rogatchover Gaon (Shu''t Tafnas Pane'ach HaChadashos 94 s.v. harbeh). On a more contemporary note and quite interestingly, although the Chazon Ish (Sheviis, Ch. 26 Seder HaSheviis 1 s.v. avar) explicitly rules that such produce is forbidden for consumption, nevertheless it is widely quoted that he really held that it was muttar me'ikar hadin. See Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish (vol. 2: 162), Kreina D'Igresa (vol. 1: 147), Orchos Rabbeinu (vol. 2, Sheviis 81 and 82; however, the Steipler Gaon was stringent), Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 6, Tzion Hahalacha 12), ChutShani(Sheviis, Ch. 6: 1), Shu''t Cheishev Ha'Eifod vol. 1: 22), Shu''t Mishnas Yosef (vol. 3: pg. 149), Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 22: 1), Mishmeres HaSheviis (Ch. 11: 7), and Shevus Yitzchak (B'Dinei Sheviis U'Prozbol, end Ch. 9). However, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu''t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim vol. 1: 186) and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Shu''t Minchas Shlomo, Kama 44: 1 s.v ela) both outright permitted the food to be eaten. See also Rav Elazar Kahanow'sToras HaSheviis (Ch. 1-3) who avers similarly at length. This is also how it is cited lemaaseh in Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 17: 2 and Ch. 27: 1). On the other hand, it is known that many Gedolei Yerushalayim of previous generations forbade such produce outright. Indeed, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, in his Shemittah Kehilchasa (Ch. 3: 17) cites several machmirim who forbid their consumption, including the Raavad, the Ra''sh and the Vilna Gaon, and cites that Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein ruled that one should attempt to return them to Eretz Yisrael. He concludes that it is preferable not to consume such Shemitta produce in Chutz La'aretz, but rather leave them until they rot by themselves. Similarly, Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Derech Emunah vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 7, Tzion Hahalacha 125) concludes that it's preferable to rather try to send it back to Eretz Yisrael. Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Kovetz Teshuvos vol. 1: 232, 2; also cited briefly in Derech Emunah Ch. 6 ibid.) cites this issue as machlokes between the Noda B'Yehuda (ibid.) against the Sefer Hamakneh (Kiddushin 52a) and Rav Yitzchak Halevi (cited by the Makneh; see also his Metaamei Yitzchak, 17 and Ketzos Hachoshen 182: 2) whether or not the purchaser is also considered transgressing the Issur of Sechora. However, Rav Elyashiv's practical position (cited in Shevus Yitzchak, B'Dinei Sheviis U'Prozbol Ch. 9, pg. 88–89), citing precedent of the Pe'as Hashulchan and the Vilna Gaon, as well as that of the Badatz of the Eidah Hacharaeidis (in their Dvar HaShemitta 5775, 5: 1 and 2, pg. 56), citing precedents of the Ridbaz and Rav Chaim Berlin, that any produce that is Shamor V'Ne'evad is strictly forbidden to be eaten. For more on this topic, see Mishpetei Aretz (Sheviis, 19: 13 and 14), Minchas Asher (Sheviis, Tinyana 15: 2), Mv''R Rav Yaakov Blau zt''l's recent posthumously published Divrei Yaakov (vol. 1: 147), and Rav Ezriel Auerbach's recent extensive maamar on topic in Machon Madaei Technologia B'Halacha's Aspaklaria (39; Nissan 5782) detailing the halachic issues with sechora of Peiros Sheviis.*

*[27]Some maintain that one may rely upon the halachically controversial method of circumventing Shemittah restrictions colloquially known as 'Hetter Mechira' (selling Israeli land and its produce for the duration of the Shemittah year to non-Jews), as utilizing this would technically mean that the Israeli produce does not maintain Kedushas Sheviis status and may be sold, and hence gifted as usual. However, historical possible reliance notwithstanding [see, for example, Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's Sefer HaShemittah at length (who devotes the entire second half of his sefer to the nuances of reliance on 'Hetter Mechira'); Rav Avrohom Yitzchak Hakohen Kook - one of the prime proponents of 'Hetter Mechira' b'shaas hadchak – wrote numerous responsa on topic, including Shu''t Mishpat Kohen (86 and 87) and the preface to his Shabbos Ha'aretz (Ch. 14 and 15); and more recently, R' Sam Finkel's fascinating, historical Rebels in the Holy Land], nowadays, the vast majority of contemporary poskim [see, for example Chazon Ish (Sheviis, Ch. 21: 8 and 9, Ch. 24, and Ch. 27: 7), Kraina D'Igresa (vol. 1: 154), Shu''t Divrei Yoel (vol. 1: 96, 6), Shemittah Kehilchasah (Ch. 'Hetter Mechira Bizmaneinu'), Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 8,Itziyun Hahalacha 7and Michtavim M'Maran Zt''l 26-27), the Badatz Eidah Hacharaeidis' Dvar HaShemittah (and Kol Koreh printed in the beginning), Orchos Rabbeinu (new edition; vol. 3, pg. 258), and Chut Shani on Hilchos Yom Tov v'Chol Hamoed (Michtavim pg. 373-374) with Kol Koreh signed by Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner, Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Steinman, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz, Rav Nissim Karelitz, and Rav Yehuda Shapiro] categorically reject relying on or even utilizing the 'Hetter Mechira' for any purpose whatsoever, even as a 'snif lehakel.' On the other hand, it is known that several poskim including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (see, for example, Maadanei Aretz, Sheviis, Ch. 1; Shu''t Minchas Shlomo,Kama vol. 1: 44, 1 s.v. ela and vol. 3, 158: 4; and Shulchan Shlomo on Sheviis, end sec. 'Hetter Mechirah'), Rav Ovadiah Yosef (Shu''t Yabea Omer vol. 3, Yoreh Deah 19: 7; vol. 10, Kuntress HaShemittah, Yoreh Deah 37-44, at length; Shu''t Yechaveh Daas vol. 4: 53, pg. 267, and his letter printed at the beginning of Yalkut Yosef on Sheviis and Ch. 25 ad loc. at length), and Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Shu''t Ma'amar Mordechai vol. 5, 'V'shavsah Ha'aretz', 21), were of the opinion that there is validity to the sale b'dieved and that in extenuating circumstances one may indeed rely upon it, and the produce is permitted for consumption. It is also worthwhile to see Rav Meir Mazuz, Rosh Yeshivas Kisei Rachamim of Bnei Brak's impassioned defense of 'Hetter Mechira' nowadays (printed in Techumin vol. 35; 5775). Of course, the Israeli Chief Rabbinate relies upon it as well for their basic hashgacha. See also Shu''t Igros Moshe (Y.D. vol. 3: 131) who refers those in Chutz La'aretz to ask Gedolei Eretz Yisrael,including the talmidim of the great Rabbanim who lived there, such as the Chazon Ish and Brisker Rav, how they should treat Peiros Sheviis. This author has seen several recent accounts of farmers describing 'Hetter Mechira' as "signing some papers, and then business as usual – treating the Shemittah year just as any other." Rav Shmuel Bloom, in his recent excellent On the Shoulders of Giants, devotes several remarkable chapters detailing the incredible Mesiras Nefesh of Israeli farmers in letting their land lay fallow during Shemittah. Over Chol HaMoed Pesach this year, this author got to see this demonstrated firsthand by visiting the farm of Doron and Ilan Toweg in Moshav Azaria. Their rock-solid emunah, dedication, and sincerity is simply extraordinary! As part of a fascinating discussion about keeping Shemittah on their farm, they described how 'Hetter Mechira' is performed nowadays. In their words, "An agent from the Rabbanut comes by a few weeks before Rosh Hashanah with some papers and says "just sign here." We never see the new "owner" and have no idea who he is, just that we technically "sold" our land to him for the year and then we work it just the same as any other year. People say that "Hetter Mechira" is the same as Mechiras Chometz, which is acceptable by all, but although I am certainly not any sort of posek, in my eyes there are two very important differences. If the non-Jew would show up on Pesach and ask for the Chometz he bought, I would certainly let him have it. And more importantly, when I sell my Chometz, I am not enjoying it all Pesach long!" Taking all of the above into account, it would certainly seem that with all of the inherent issues with Kedushas Sheviis olive oil in Chutz La'aretz, using a non-problematic oil to light Chanukah licht, would undoubtedly be a preferred option. For detailed treatments on these subjects, see previous articles titled 'The Perplexing Puzzle of the Possibly Purloined Peppers' and 'Shemitta Sheilos: Using Arbah Minimof Sheviis.'*

*[28]See Ramban (Parshas Behar Ch. 25: 7), Rosh (Sheviis Ch. 9, Mishnah 8: 5), Rash (ad loc.), Minchas Chinuch (Parshas Behar, Mitzvah 329: 7), Shaarei Tzedek (19: 4), Pe'as Hashulchan (27: 3), Pnei Yehoshua (Pesachim 52b), Aruch Hashulchan HaAsid (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel 27: 8), Beis Ridbaz (Sheviis, Ch. 12: 7), Chazon Ish (Shemittah 11: 6 and 7), and Shemittah Kehilchasah (Ch. 3: 20). However, there is another opinion, that of the Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel Ch. 7: 1-3) that Biur refers to actually destroying said produce when it is no longer available in the field. However, this is not the normative halacha and Ashkenazim certainly follow the shittah of the Rosh, Rash, and Ramban, of removing it from the house and making it hefker, as cited by the aforementioned Poskim. [Interestingly, the Chochmas Adam (Shaarei Tzedek Ch. 19: 4 and 6) expresses preference to fulfilling Mitzvas Biur al yedei Sereifah, like the shittah of the Rambam.] However, whether Sefardim need be machmir for the Rambam's shittah is a matter of dispute between contemporary Sefardic authorities, with Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Ohr L'Tzion on Sheviis, Ch. 3, Question 4) ruling to be machmir and Rav Ovadiah Yosef (Ma'ohr Yisrael vol. 2, pg. 105; also cited in Yalkut Yosef on Sheviis, Ch. 21: 1, pg. 468) maintaining that making the produce hefker is sufficient. Either way, when the Zman Biur for a specific fruit arrives, the Mishnah (Sheviis, Ch. 9: Mishnah 8) teaches us that one may still keep enough of that particular fruit for three meals worth for every member of the household. For more on the topic of Biur, see Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 9), and Mv''R Rav Yaakov Blau zt''l's recent posthumously published Divrei Yaakov (vol. 1: 145).*

*[29]Pesachim (53a).*

*[30]Sheviis (Ch. 9: 2 and 3).*

*[31]Once one properly performs Biur he may actually reacquire the fruits himself, as the halacha follows Rabbi Yosi's opinion - see Mishnayos Sheviis (ibid.), Tosefta (Sheviis Ch. 8: 4); Yerushalmi (Sheviis Ch. 9, Halacha 4), Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 9: 8), Chazon Ish (Hilchos Sheviis 11: 6 and 26, Seder HaSheviis 1 s.v. pri), and Shu''t Minchas Shlomo (Tinyana 123: 10 and vol. 3: 132, 13).*



*L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda.*

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## *Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Nedarim 37-43*

### *For the week ending 17 December 2022 / 23 Kislev 5783*

### *Rabbi Moshe Newman*

*Torah is Free - Nedarim 37a*

"Just as I, Moshe Rabbeinu, taught you for free, likewise you (teachers of Torah) must likewise teach Torah for free."

Our gemara derives this from examining a verse in which Moshe tells the people, "And Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you" together with another verse with him saying, "See! I have taught you statues and judgments as Hashem commanded me." (Deut. 4:5, 14)

How do we see from here that Moshe was told to teach for free and that likewise all teachers of Torah should teach for free?

After Moshe told the people that he was commanded to teach them Torah, he added the words "as Hashem commanded me." What exactly was Moshe conveying to the people with this seemingly enigmatic phrase? Logical deduction shows that this can only mean that Moshe was commanded to teach Torah for free. The reasoning: Could it mean that Hashem commanded him to take payment? This is not logical since why should he be forced to require payment? Or it could theoretically mean that Moshe was teaching Torah just as Hashem taught it to him, and they should not doubt his teachings? This is also not logical since the Torah states that Hashem guaranteed that the people would always trust Moshe as their prophet and teacher: "And they will also believe in you (Moshe) forever." (Ex. 19:9) Therefore, the words "as Hashem commanded me" can only mean a directive to teach Torah for free. (Rabbeinu Nissim; for halachic sources and rulings regarding this topic see Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 246)

*One Who Has Knowledge Has Everything - Nedarim 41a*

Abayei said, "We have a tradition from our Forefathers and Rabbis that there is no true poverty except for one who is lacking Torah knowledge."

This is what was taught by the Sage in Bavel. Our gemara relates that a similar idea was taught in Eretz Yisrael in the following manner: "One who has knowledge has everything; without it, what does he have? Whoever has acquired knowledge, what is he lacking? One who has not acquired knowledge, what has he acquired?" (By the way, it is quite a snappy-sounding statement in Aramaic!)

Our Sages teach that the word "zaken" does not necessarily refer to an elderly person, but is an acronym for a Torah scholar — "zeh kana chochma" — "this person has acquired knowledge." One might

recognize that the words “zeh kana” (this one acquired) can be seen in the word “zaken,” but how do we see that he has specifically acquired “chochma” — Torah wisdom — and that the word zaken therefore refers to a Torah scholar? The answer: The only real acquisition a person has is Torah. Material assets come and go and are external to the person, while Torah is eternally part of the person who ‘acquires’ it. Torah knowledge and wisdom is our only true acquisition. (Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, “The Steipler Rav”)



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**Some Light Chanukah Questions**

**Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: My sister invited our family for Shabbos Chanukah, and we will be sleeping at her neighbor’s house. Where do we set up the menorahs, particularly since I do not even know the neighbor?

Question #2: My husband has a meeting at work tonight and will not be home until very late. What should we do about kindling Chanukah lights?

Question #3: I will be attending a wedding during Chanukah that requires me to leave my house well before lighting time, and I will not return until very late. Can I kindle at the wedding, just like the lighting that takes place in shul?

Question #4: I will be spending part of Chanukah in a hotel. Where should I kindle my menorah?

SOME BASICS

Each individual has a requirement to light Chanukah lights, or to have an agent kindle the lights for him (see Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 3:4). In places where the custom is that the entire household lights only one menorah, which is the predominant practice among Sefardim, the person who kindles functions as an agent for the rest of the family and the guests. (However, cf. Minchas Shelomoh 2:58:41 and 42, who understands this halacha differently.) Even in places where the custom is that each individual kindles his own menorah, as is common Ashkenazic practice, married women do not usually light, and most people have the custom that single girls also do not light (see Chasam Sofer, Shabbos 21b s.v. vehamehadrin, Elyah Rabbah 671:3, and Mikra’ei Kodesh #14 who explain reasons for this practice). In these instances, the male head of household kindles on behalf of his wife and daughters. A guest visiting a family for Chanukah can fulfill his or her obligation by contributing a token amount to purchase part of the candles or oil. By doing this, the guest becomes a partner in the Chanukah lights and fulfills his mitzvah when the host kindles them. An alternative way to become a partial owner of the Chanukah lights is for the host to direct the guest to pick up some of the oil or candles and thereby become a partial owner.

EATING IN ONE HOUSE AND SLEEPING IN ANOTHER

If someone is a guest and is eating at one house during Chanukah but sleeping in a different house, where should he light the menorah?

One should kindle where he is eating (Rema, Orach Chayim 677:1). In this situation, the place where one eats his meals is his primary “home.”

Many poskim contend that in Eretz Yisroel, the answer to this question depends on additional factors, including whether anyone else is staying in the house where the guest is sleeping. In their opinion, if no one else is kindling a menorah where the guest is sleeping, he should kindle the menorah there. Otherwise, he should kindle where he is eating.

The reason for this difference is that, in Eretz Yisroel, where the custom is to light outdoors when practical, someone walking through the street expects to find a menorah lit at every house. Thus, there is a responsibility to be certain that a menorah is kindled in every house that is occupied. In chutz la’aretz, since the menorah does not need to be visible outdoors to fulfill the mitzvah, a person walking outside the house and not seeing a lit menorah will simply assume that someone kindled indoors. Therefore, one does not need to make sure that every house has a lit menorah.

Similarly, someone in Eretz Yisroel who is using two houses should light a menorah in each of them, although he should recite only one bracha; in chutz la’aretz he does not need to kindle a menorah in each house.

I can now answer the first question I asked above: If someone will be eating in one house and sleeping in another, where should he kindle the menorah? The answer is that, in chutz la’aretz, he should kindle where he will be eating. In Eretz Yisroel, other factors may be involved, and one should ask a shaylah.

Many poskim contend that a guest who is spending Shabbos at someone else's home and is leaving after Shabbos may kindle the menorah at his host’s house on Motza’ei Shabbos (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:391). Some poskim suggest that someone who follows this approach should spend some time, preferably a half-hour, appreciating his lights at the host’s house before leaving (see Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:394).

At this point, let us discuss the second of our opening questions: My husband has a meeting at work tonight and will not be home until very late. What should we do about kindling Chanukah lights?

To answer this question, we need to discuss two issues. The first is:

WHEN SHOULD I KINDLE THE MENORAH?

Early poskim dispute concerning when is the optimal time to kindle the Chanukah lights. According to the Gra, the best time is immediately after sunset, whereas most Rishonim rule that it is preferable to kindle at nightfall or shortly before nightfall.

The usually accepted approaches are to kindle sometime after sunset but before it is fully dark. Thus, Rav Moshe Feinstein kindled the menorah ten minutes after sunset, the Chazon Ish lit his menorah twenty minutes after sunset, while others contend that the optimal time to light the menorah is twenty-five minutes after sunset.

UNTIL WHEN MAY I KINDLE THE MENORAH?

At the time of the Gemara, one fulfilled the mitzvah of lighting menorah only if one lit within a half-hour of the earliest time for lighting (Shabbos 21b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 672:2). This was because the focus of lighting the menorah was to publicize the miracle to people in the street. Since, in the days of Chazal, the streets were empty shortly after dark, there was no longer any mitzvah of kindling Chanukah lights half an hour later.

Today, the pirsumei nisa (publicizing the miracle) is primarily for the members of the household, and therefore many poskim hold that it is not essential to kindle the menorah immediately when it begins to get dark (see Tosafos, Shabbos 21b s.v. de’ei). Nevertheless, because this halacha is disputed, one should strive to kindle at the optimal time, which is close to twilight, as we mentioned above. In addition, there is also a halachic problem with working before one performs the mitzvah, similar to other mitzvos, such as bedikas chometz or hearing megillah, where it is prohibited to work or eat before fulfilling the mitzvah (Shu’t Maharshal #85; Mishnah Berurah 672:10; Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:395:4). Someone who missed lighting menorah at the proper time because of extenuating circumstances should kindle his menorah as soon as his family is assembled at home (Rema Orach Chayim 672:2 and Mishnah Berurah ad loc.).

An alternative method can be followed when a husband is delayed. The husband can arrange to have a member of the household, such as his wife, act as his agent and light at the optimal time (Mishnah Berurah 675:9; Teshuvos Vehanhagos 4:170). If he follows this approach, he does not need to light when he arrives home later, and if he does light, he should not recite the brachos. Alternatively, the wife can light at the proper time for herself, and the husband can light when he gets home. If one follows the latter approach, the husband and wife are no longer functioning as agents for one another, as they usually do germane to mitzvos such as ner Chanukah and ner Shabbos. Rather, each is fulfilling the mitzvah of ner Chanukah separately.

Whether to follow this approach depends on the sensitivities of the people involved. My Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Y. Ruderman zt”l, frequently lectured us on the importance of being concerned about others’ feelings. He often repeated the story of the Chofetz Chayim’s rebbe, Rav Nachumke, who waited several hours until his rebbetzin returned home before lighting the Chanukah lights. Therefore, if kindling the menorah early via an agent will create friction between family members, one

should wait and kindle at a time that creates more shalom bayis (see Shabbos 23b). It is important to discuss the matter in advance and decide on an approach that keeps everyone happy.

At this point, let us examine the third of our opening questions: I will be attending a wedding during Chanukah that requires me to leave my house well before lighting time, and I will not return until very late. Can I kindle at the wedding, just like the lighting that takes place in shul?

Answer: Let us ask this question about the baalei simcha themselves! If a wedding takes place during Chanukah, where should the baalei simcha light the menorah?

I have attended weddings during Chanukah where the baalei simcha brought their menorahs to the hall and kindled them there. However, this seems incorrect, because the baalei simcha are required to kindle Chanukah lights at their own homes (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:398). Therefore, they should light the menorah at their homes sometime during the evening. If this is not convenient, they should arrange for someone to act as their agent and kindle their menorah for them at their house (see Mishnah Berurah 677:12). Guests attending the wedding who cannot kindle their menorah at home should also arrange for someone to light their menorah at their house. If they are concerned about leaving unattended lights burning, they should have someone remain with the lights for half an hour, and then the "menorah sitter" may extinguish the lights. If someone wishes to light an additional menorah at the hall without a bracha, in order to make pirsumei nisa, he may do so. However, this lighting does not fulfill the mitzvah (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:398).

WHY IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM LIGHTING IN SHUL?

Since one fulfills the mitzvah only by kindling the menorah in or near one's residence, why do we kindle a menorah in shul?

Lighting the Chanukah menorah in shul does not fulfill the mitzvah of kindling Chanukah lights, but is a centuries-old minhag that we perform to make pirsumei nisa.

This practice prompts an interesting question. If lighting a menorah in shul is only a minhag, why do we recite a bracha on it? Do we ever recite brachos on minhagim?

The poskim explain that we recite a bracha because it is an accepted minhag, just as we recite a bracha on Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, even though Chazal did not obligate this recital of Hallel and it, too, is technically a minhag (Shu't Rivash #111; for other reasons see Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 671, s.v. uma shekasav shemeinichin).

THERE IS A CONCERT IN SCHOOL ON CHANUKAH. SHOULD WE LIGHT THE MENORAH WITH A BRACHA TO PERFORM PIRSUMEI NISA?

Although lighting a menorah at the assembly will also be an act of pirsumei nisa, one fulfills no mitzvah or minhag by doing so. Therefore, one should not recite a bracha on this lighting (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:398).

WHY IS THE CONCERT DIFFERENT FROM LIGHTING IN SHUL?

Lighting in shul is a specific, established minhag. We cannot randomly extend this minhag to another situation and permit reciting a bracha (Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:398).

LIGHTING IN A HOTEL

And now, let us analyze the last of our opening questions: I will be spending part of Chanukah in a hotel. Where should I kindle my menorah?

Answer: One should light the menorah in one's room (Chovas Hador, Ner Chanukah 2:9; see Shu't Maharsham 4:146, who requires one to kindle Chanukah lights even while riding the train). If there is concern about a fire hazard, one should remain with the menorah until a half-hour after nightfall, or at least for a half-hour after kindling, and then extinguish the lights. On Shabbos, place only enough oil to burn the required amount of time, which is until a half-hour after nightfall.

MENORAH IN THE WINDOW?

May one place the menorah near the window of his hotel room? This depends. If someone will be able to see the lit menorah from outside, then it is preferable to light in a window. If no one will be able to see the menorah from outside, he should simply kindle the menorah on a table in his room.

If a hotel forbids lighting flames in its bedrooms, and one is eating regularly in the hotel's dining room, one may light in the hotel dining room. Although frum hotels often set up menorahs in the hotel lobby, many poskim contend that one does not fulfill the mitzvah by placing a menorah there, since one is required to kindle Chanukah lights at one's "home," which is where one regularly eats or sleeps, and not in a lobby. Other poskim are lenient, and contend that the entire hotel lobby is considered one's living area -- just as one's entire house is considered one's living area. Therefore, according to these authorities, one may fulfill the mitzvah by lighting in the hotel lobby.

VISITING DURING CHANUKAH

Where do I light menorah if I visit a friend for Chanukah dinner, but I am not staying overnight?

Many people err and think that one may fulfill the mitzvah by kindling the menorah at someone else's house while visiting. I know of people who invite guests to their house for menorah kindling and dinner. The problem with this is that one is required to kindle Chanukah lights at one's own house. Therefore, the guest must kindle the Chanukah lights at his own house and then go to his friend's house for the festive meal (Taz 677:2; Mishnah Berurah 677:12).

YESHIVAH BACHUR

Where should a bachur in yeshivah kindle his menorah? This is a dispute among contemporary poskim. Some contend that he should light in the yeshivah dining room, since it is preferable to kindle where one eats, as we mentioned above. Others contend that his dormitory room is considered more his "dwelling" than the dining room, and that he should light there (Shu't Igros Moshe Yoreh Deah III 14:5; Shu't Minchas Yitzchok 7:48; Chovas Hador pg. 106). To resolve this issue, some bachurim have the practice of eating one meal each day of Chanukah in their dormitory room and kindling the menorah there.

What about a yeshivah bachur who spends his entire day in the yeshivah, but sleeps at home?

It is unclear whether his main obligation to light is at home or in yeshivah. Some poskim suggest that he fulfill the mitzvah by relying on the people kindling at each place — his family lighting at his home and his fellow students lighting in the yeshivah.

REWARD FOR LIGHTING NER CHANUKAH

The Gemara teaches that someone who kindles Ner Chanukah will merit having sons who are talmidei chachomim (Shabbos 23b, see Rashi). This is puzzling; since all observant Jews kindle Ner Chanukah, why aren't all our sons talmidei chachomim? The Rishonim explain that this bracha applies only to someone who observes the mitzvah carefully, in all its details (Sod Hadlakas Ner Chanukah, authored by Rabbi Yitzchok, the son of the Raavad). It is, therefore, in our best interest to be thoroughly familiar with all the halachos of kindling the Chanukah lights. May we all be blessed with a happy and healthy Chanukah!!

**לע״נ**

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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**
**==========**

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'?

# 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.