

### Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #9, December 20-21, 2024; 20 Kislev 5785; Vayeishev 5785  
Hanukkah starts Wednesday evening

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

---

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

---

**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world – and may our hostages soon return from captivity. May the stunning collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the cease fire with Lebanon be the beginning of better news for Israel and Jews in coming days.**

---

In our annual Torah cycle, Vayeishev normally comes shortly before the start of Hanukkah, at the darkest time of the year (earliest sunsets). Vayeishev is the first of four parashot whose primary subject is Yosef and his brothers. Our Avot all struggle with animosity among their sons – Yishmael and Yitzhak; Esav and Yaakov; and Yosef with his half brothers (sons of Leah). These struggles continue throughout much of Jewish history. Yishmael's descendants become the Arabs; Chazal identify Esav's descendants as Rome (Catholics and later other Christian groups, enemies of B'Nai Yisrael during much of the past two thousand years) After the death of King Solomon, the Jewish nation divides largely between Yehuda (Leah's descendants) and Yisrael (largely Ephraim, descendants of Rachel).

Yaakov contributes significantly to the animosity between the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel. The Torah makes the story explicit: "eleh toldot Yaakov Yosef" – here are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef. . ." (37:2). The Torah states that it is discussing the significance of Yaakov's children, and then it turns to Yosef (omitting the other dozen children). As soon as Rachel has a baby boy, Yaakov decides that it is time to return to Canaan, something that he does not do when the older children are born (see 30:22-25). Yaakov keeps Yosef at home with him while sending Leah's sons and the sons of the handmaidens out to care for his wealth (flocks). He dotes on Yosef and gives him a special coat of many colors while giving the other brothers one less coat. Yaakov acts as if Yosef is his Becor (first born son), even though he has ten older sons and an older daughter. (Binyamin is the only younger child.) The Torah rebukes Yaakov for favoring Yosef by prohibiting a man with two wives, one loved and the other hated, to give the double portion of a first born to the son of a beloved second wife when the first wife has an older first born son (Devarim 21:15). The result of Yaakov favoring Yosef over the other brothers is that they hate Yosef and cannot tolerate even speaking with him in peace. Even after Yosef reconciles with the brothers in Egypt, they never really trust Yosef, and the distrust keeps their descendants apart for hundreds of years.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the Haftarah for Vayeishev is the only one that lacks a positive, uplifting conclusion. Rabbi Brander extends the animosity among Yaakov's sons to the cry of Amos against the suffering of the poor in the Jewish society of his time. Rabbi Brander urges all of us to increase our efforts to love our neighbors, share with the needy, and act with humility. We should stop baseless hatred and cherish our fellow Jews. Chazal carry on this theme by deciding to start with one candle the first night and increase by another candle each succeeding night – a message to share the light of Hanukkah with our fellows.

The Los Angeles Free Press ran an article from 1997 by Simon Sebag Montefiore on the question of why Ireland has long been a center for anti-Semitic hatred (*The Deep Roots of Irish Antisemitism* (December 17, 2024)). Montefiore provides several examples to demonstrate that vicious Irish anti-Semitic attacks go back at least to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The refusal of the Irish women's basketball team to shake hands with Israeli players last February is not an isolated incident. The recent decision of Israel to close its embassy in Ireland has probably been coming for a very long time. Continued Irish anti-Semitism does not fit in with the spirit of Hanukkah.

The outbreak of vicious anti-Semitism in the past fourteen months has shocked me, especially since I did not experience any anti-Semitism while growing up or during my early years as an adult. My brother-in-law, ten years older than me, a tall blond man who does not look like a Jew, related many stories to me about his experiences when his associates in school and business made anti-Semitic remarks not realizing that he was Jewish. Hatred goes back at least as far as Sarah and Hagar – and it is always either up front or hidden. It seems no longer to be safe to wear a kippah in my old (almost entirely Jewish) neighborhoods in Los Angeles, in Canada, or in most of Europe. May the day come – in my lifetime if possible – when hatred goes away and we can live in peace again.

I did not appreciate the difficulty of coping with anti-Semitism, as my beloved Rebbe, Leonard Cahan, z"l, did many times during his life and career, until I could see in the past 14 months how ugly it can be. My parents may have tried to spare me this pain years ago, but I have come to realize that we must teach our children and grandchildren about this evil. May the time come when people can learn to live near each other in peace and with respect for all.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

---

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

---

**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.**

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

---

### **Haftarat Parshat Vayeishev: Rewriting Our Prophetic Story**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* © 5785 (2024)  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

In the background of the current conflict looms a deeper crisis that threatens the very fabric of our society. Even before the current war, one in five Israelis was already living below the poverty line. Those numbers have only increased as small business owners have been displaced or mobilized and tourism has been decimated.

Add to that a growing societal rift, as certain segments of the population shoulder the entire burden of the fighting while others do all in their power to desist, causing more polarization among the citizens and the political camps.

But this isn't just a contemporary scene – it's actually a rerun of the prophecy of Amos, one of Israel's earliest prophets, which makes up this week's haftarah. Amos decried a society in which the wealthy systematically exploited the poor and internal divisions threatened to tear a community apart. Thousands of years later, has nothing changed?

In order to reflect on this perennial crisis, let us reflect on the general purpose of the haftarah and why it was established.

Rabbi David Abudraham, a 14th century Spanish Jewish communal leader and expert on liturgy, in his magnum opus, Sefer Abudraham, writes about the institution of the haftarah:

*And after ]completing[ and wrapping the Torah scroll, we read the haftarah; which needs to be connected to the ]Torah[ portion of the day. And why do we read from the Prophets? Because of the legislation imposed upon the Jewish people forbidding them from reading from the Torah... ]Laws of Shabbat, Shacharit(.*

Rabbi Yoel Sirkes, one of the great 17th century Talmudic scholars in his commentary on the Shulchan Arukh known as the Bach, )an acronym for Bayit Chadash(, concurs with the opinion found in the Sefer Abudraham.

Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, in his 17th century commentary on the Mishnah, the *Tosafot Yom Tov*, further develops this idea, suggesting that the particular persecution causing the introduction of the haftarah happened during the historical period of the Chanukah miracle.

When the Greek Emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes prohibited reading from the Torah, the Rabbis instituted that sections from the Prophets be read focusing on a theme similar to the Torah portion:

*The reason for the haftarot ...that Antiochus king of Greece legislated that the Torah should not be read in public. What did the Jews do? They chose a section from the Prophets that was thematically similar to the Torah portion of the week. Even though this ]anti-semitic[ legislation has been annulled, the custom ]of reading from the Prophets[ was not discarded ]Megillah 3:4(.*

For this reason, haftarot are intended to leave us hopeful, with each haftarah complete with verses of redemption. It is also why the brachot of the haftarah focus on redemption. Therefore, haftarot, even those with harsh or mournful messages like that read on Tisha b'Av, always contain a positive, optimistic note.

It is against this backdrop that we approach the haftarah for Parshat Vayeishev. The Rav )Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik(, in an address delivered in 1980, noted the unusual character of this haftarah, which has no encouraging end to contrast with its dreary opening. Rabbi Soloveitchik writes, "*The final words of each haftarah express the idea that no matter how dismal our present situation, Israel can look ahead to a bright future. ]...[ This haftarah is the one exception.*" )*Divrei Hashkafa*, 30-34(.

Amos, one of the earliest prophets, does not mince words in calling out the thievery and corruption that has overtaken the kingdom of Israel, with the wealthy extorting money from the impoverished. "*The idea expressed here,*" Rav Soloveitchik states of this choice of haftarah, "*is that the community that acts corruptly is fit for punishment and censure*" )*ibid.*(. The opening line of the prophecy, which speaks of '*the sale of the righteous for money,*' )Amos 2:6( was read by our Sages as a reference to the sale of Yosef which appears in our parsha )*Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer* #37(.

Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that even when the Sages read Amos' words in reference to Yosef, they don't mean to deny the literal meaning of the verse. On the contrary, they are coming to highlight a crucial idea: that national corruption is not merely a passing phase in our history. The forms of contempt for one another, and for principles of justice, that repeatedly lead to violence between us have a deeply embedded history, signaling a great need for reflection and change.

As far back as we can trace, to the brothers who would go on to produce the tribes of Israel, there has been internal strife producing baseless hatred, theft and corruption, bringing about our own doom and destruction.

This is not a reason to lose hope; and it is surely not a reason to continue with our same comfortable patterns. We must take control, and take chances, much in the way the Maccabees did by lighting the tiny amount of oil they found, and as our modern Maccabees do today, willingly sacrificing all on the battlefield and the homefront to ensure that the light in our skies isn't coming from missiles but from the energy of a purposeful society.

In *"those times"*, it was the right thing to do, no matter how improbable it seemed that the oil would last even one night. And in *"our time"*, it has helped guarantee our immortality as a nation. With God's help we should all make increased efforts to love our neighbors, serve those in need and act with humility. Only that will help us begin to heal our rifts.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

---

## **Vayeishev: Looking for Our Brothers**

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2006 (5767)

A few years back I found out something about myself that surprised and amazed me. It was Erev Yom Kippur. A colleague (we'll call Zalman) and I were on our way to Williams College, a small liberal arts school in western Massachusetts, to meet some college students to talk about Yom Kippur and present them with an opportunity to come to Jerusalem for a winter session. We drove up the New York State Thruway before turning into the back woods of western Mass. It was hours before we found our destination and a warm delegation of thirsty souls. After our presentation and discussions ran their course, it was our turn to take the long trek home. It had certainly been worth our while. A number of students had shown interest in coming with us to Israel and as it turned out a few from that night made it "all the way to the Wall!"

Along the way home, Zalman and I had tossed our hats and jackets into the back seat of his station wagon, and we had ceased to talk about work and prospects, and we begun to talk "in pajamas" as the phrase goes. I asked Zalman how he had gotten involved Yiddishkeit and what had spurred him on. He began to tell me how he had a brother that went to camp one summer and drowned. My heart fell into my stomach. He explained how he started to wonder, "What's it all about?" and "Where do we come from and go to? Etc.

When he finished, I asked him if he had heard about my story. He acknowledged not. I told him that I had a little brother that went to the dentist to get a load of teeth fixed. They gave him gas, and he never woke up. I explained with vivid recollections all the haunting philosophical questions that have followed me since. Here we were two grown men with families at home barreling down the New York State Thruway, and we were both crying about matters that happened more than three decades earlier.

Then it occurred to me a verse from this week's Torah Portion. Yosef confronts a man who is really the angel Gabriel while he blunders on his way, and the angel asks him, "What are you looking for?" Yosef answers, "I am looking for my brothers!" (Breishis 37:15) I told Zalman, "Look at us two crazy guys! Here we are grown up guys with families and it's

Erev Yom Kippur! Under normal circumstances we should have been in bed along time ago but here it is already Two O'clock in the morning and we are hustling down the thruway to get home. If the angel Gabriel would turn on his police lights and pull us over and, instead of giving us a ticket, he would peak into the car and ask us, "What are you guys doing out here at this crazy hour so far from home? What are you looking for?" If he would ask us the same question he asked Yosef, I think we can give him the very same answer with the fullest of hearts, "We are looking for our brothers!"

I never understood this aspect of my own drive until that drive. Sometimes HASHEM puts a hole in our hearts, we get such a deep hurt that we spend the rest of our lives filling the gap and it may form the basis for our main accomplishments in life.

Each year on Chanukah, at some point shortly after candle lighting, I pile the kids into the car with a handful of candies of course and we take a ride all over our town and even to some uncharted areas. We drive through some of the wealthier and some of the more modest sections of town, but our goal is not to scout out real estate at all. Rather what we are looking for in the heart of the night, in the windows of Jewish homes, are flickering Chanukah flames, keeping in mind the words of the wise -- Solomon: *"The candle of G-d is the soul of man."* )Mishle'( It's always treat and a thrill of endless depth, especially on Chanukah, looking for our brothers.

\* <https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5767-vayeishev/>

---

## **Drasha: Vayeishev: Lighting Hanukkah Candles Without Burning Your House Down** by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2017

The story of Yosef and his brothers has, on the face of it, nothing to do with Hanukkah. But as it is often read right around Hanukkah time, it is not surprising that attempts have been made to find connections to Hanukkah. Perhaps the most famous one is based on the gemara in Shabbat )22a(. Immediately preceding the discussion of the mitzvah of lighting the Hanukkah lights, the gemara references a verse from our parashah: *"And the pit was empty; there was no water in it"* )Bereishit 37:24( – *there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it.* Torah Temimah comments that this passage is connected to Hanukkah lighting in the following way: Yosef's brothers would not have thrown him into the pit had they known it contained snakes and scorpions; but because the pit was so deep )20 amot, according to one source(, the snakes and scorpions were not visible. This becomes the basis for lighting Hanukkah lights within 20 amot of street level. If something is too high or too deep, people will not be able to see it properly.

Other connections may also be made. Yosef is as a model for resisting the temptations of assimilation when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife by invoking God's name and putting his own life at risk. And then, of course, there is Yehudah's signet ring )hotemet( and his cord )petilim( which evoke the flask of oil that was found with the seal )hotem( of the Kohen Gadol, and the Hanukkah lights which are lit with oil and wicks )petilim(. And, in that story, Tamar's presentation of Yehudah's signet ring and cord saves her from death by fire.

The lights of Hanukkah carry dangers as well. There are too many stories of people whose houses have burned down because they left Hanukkah candles burning unattended. This happens most frequently on Shabbat, when a family goes out to have their Friday night meal at the house of friends or at shul. Since it is Shabbat, the candles can't be blown out after they have burned the requisite amount of time, and people usually do not opt to stay behind to watch them until they burn down. But to leave the candles burning is not just a risk to property, it is often a risk to life as well, and the Torah teaches us that safety must always be our first priority.

So what – other than never going out on Friday night Hanukkah – can a family do in such a situation?

First, there are some obvious practical precautions they can take. Since the core mitzvah is fulfilled by one candle per household, they should light one candle, place it in the sink, in a bowl surrounded by water. This reduces the risk considerably, although it does not fully eliminate it.

Another option is to light candles that will last only a half hour. In general, on Friday we make sure that at least one of our candles will burn until 30 minutes after tzeit hakokhavim, approximately 1 hour, 15 minutes after sunset )see Mishneh Brurah, 679:2(. However, in this case, one can rely on the rule that 30 minutes suffices, especially given that nowadays we are primarily lighting for those in the house, which alleviates some of the concern with ensuring that the lights are burning when passersby will be on the street )SA OH 672:2(. A person could then stay at home until all the lights have burned out without having to be late for dinner.

Two other solutions are possible:

)1( to go to their friends' house or shul before Shabbat and light there and

)2( to light at home with electric candles

Lighting at one's friends' house is probably impractical in most cases, since the family will usually not arrive there before Shabbat begins. However, when one's shul is hosting a dinner on Friday night, it is possible to go to shul for mincha and light at shul. Does this count according to halakhah?

The prime obligation of lighting rests on the household, and one must light in one's house, or by one's front door, or by the opening to the courtyard leading to one's house. There are cases where a person can light in a place that is not his house, but that is only because he is living there, at least to some degree )SA OH 677:1(. If a person is a guest sleeping in someone's house, or staying at a hotel, or a patient in a hospital, then that becomes the person's domicile, and he lights where he is )see Piskei Teshuvot 677:1(. A guest can also contribute to the cost of the candles of his host. This is an alternative to lighting himself and allows him to fulfill his obligation through his host's lighting. But either way, this only applies when he is living – that is, sleeping – there. Students living in a dorm will often light in their cafeteria, but that is because they are living on campus, so even the cafeteria is a place connected to their "home" )see SA OH 667:1(. For a person who lives at home and is only at shul for the Friday night meal, lighting in the shul would not be an option.

That being said, there are some poskim who would allow a family to light in shul before sunset, provided that they were all present at the time of the lighting. This is based on the fact that nowadays we light primarily for the members of the household, and not for the passers by in the street. Thus, these poskim argue, if the entire family is not at home, there is no longer an obligation to light there, and one can light where the family is currently )Shut Kinyan Torah 5:72; see Piskei Teshuvot 677:4, fn. 29(. This solution would not work if one parent went to shul for mincha, and the other arrived with the kids after the sun had already set. When the mitzvah could be done – before sunset on Friday – some of the family was still at home and the obligation would be to light there and not at shul.

Which brings us to our second solution: lighting with electric lights. There are no halakhic requirements regarding which wicks and fuels can be used for the Hanukkah lights. What is stressed is that it is preferable to use candles that will give off a clean light )SA OH 673:1(. Based on this, it would seem that electric lights should be fine. Nevertheless, and perhaps not surprisingly, the use of electric lights for Hanukkah is debated by the poskim. Perhaps the strongest objection is that the "fuel" is not present at the time of lighting, and when the necessary fuel is added after the candles are lit, the act of lighting is not valid. This can easily be addressed, however, by using battery-powered lights.

Are electric lights fire? When it comes to Shabbat, there is almost total consensus that incandescent lights are fire: they generate heat, give off light, and burn something )the filament( in the process. Thus, while using electric lights for Hanukkah remains a debate between the poskim, it would seem to me that, when necessary, batter-powered incandescent lights can be used and a brak'hah can be recited )see Yabia Omer, OH 3:35, who surveys the poskim on both sides of this debate. In that teshuvah, Rav Ovadia Yosef concludes that because the matter is debated one should not make a brak'hah, but it is reported that in practice he advised people to make a brak'hah(. That being said, when there are no concerns regarding fire safety, it would be preferable, even on the eighth night, to use a single candle over an electric menorah.

Another convenient option would be to use electric tea lights, which are LEDs and not incandescent. We do not consider LEDs to be fire – they don't burn anything, and they give off only a very trivial amount of heat. But they are light. There is a preference to use oil and make the lights similar to those of the menorah, which were of course lit with fire (SA OH 673:1). But this preference does not translate into a requirement to use fire. It is hard to see why, as a matter of halakhah, the lights must be defined as fire; any light should, in theory, be fine.

In my opinion it would be acceptable, when there are no other options, to use LEDs. I believe that a brakhah can be made in this case as well, although a person might want to "play it safe" and light without a brakhah when using LEDs.

A person should not use a flashlight. When a flashlight is on, the light it gives off can be seen, but the bulb, that is, the "flame," is not visible. I do not believe that one could use a Hanukkah light which gives off visible light but which is not itself visible. One also should not use the standard lights in the home, or even a lamp purchased for this purpose. Not only are these lights not battery-powered, but they will also not accomplish *pirsumei nissa*, publicizing of the miracle, since there will be nothing to distinguish them as Hanukkah lights.

The use of electric lights for Hanukkah is quite important for those who are in hospitals, dorms, or elsewhere where they cannot light with an open flame. It also solves our problem of how to eliminate any fire risk when leaving one's home for a Friday night dinner elsewhere. Just use electric Hanukkah lights.

As a midrashic conclusion to this halakhic discussion, we note that Rav Shlomo Yosef Zeven, in *LaTorah u'la'Moadim*, explains that the debate of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai whether we go up or down in the number of candles we light, is a debate whether the Hanukkah candles represent fire or light. As fire, they symbolize destroying the evil in the world, which we wish to decrease with each passing day. As light, they symbolize spreading holiness and good, which we want to increase in the world. We rule like Beit Hillel both religiously – we should focus on increasing the good in this world – and halakhically, we start with one candle and go up to eight. For Rav Zeven, Hanukkah is about light, not about fire. This Hanukkah, let us all take special care when it comes to fire safety, and do everything we can to spread Torah and light throughout the world.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives.

---

## **Remembering Not to Forget: Thoughts for Parashat Vayeshev**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

*"And the chief butler did not remember Joseph, and he forgot him" (Bereshith 40:23)*

Joseph successfully interpreted the butler's dream, assuring him that he would soon be released from prison and regain his former position in Pharaoh's court. Joseph then asked the butler to intercede on his behalf so that Joseph too could be freed from prison where he had been unjustly held.

But when the butler regained his freedom, the Torah informs us that he 1) did not remember Joseph and 2) he forgot Joseph. While these phrases seem redundant, they point to two different things.

The butler did not remember Joseph. He was busy with his responsibilities. He had a lot on his mind. It is natural enough for people not to remember to say thank you, or to ignore responsibilities that are not pressing. If they are reminded, they might then take the proper action.

But willfully forgetting is another matter. It is not only a matter of being too busy or too careless to remember. It is about pushing the obligation far into the back of one's mind so that it is almost totally inaccessible. The butler not only didn't remember Joseph; he forgot Joseph. Joseph wasn't even a faint memory tugging at his consciousness. Only after two

years was the butler's memory jarred when Pharaoh needed his dreams to be interpreted. Only then, when the butler thought he could be useful to Pharaoh, did he remember Joseph.

Like the butler, we sometimes don't remember things because we are preoccupied with other seemingly more pressing matters. We don't remember to call a friend; or to make that contribution; or to express appreciation to those who have helped us. A gentle reminder might get us back on track.

But sometimes, we deeply forget. We don't feel tugs of guilt or remorse; we proceed with life as though the memories simply don't exist. It takes a jolt to make us retrieve the past. Maybe it's a life crisis. Maybe it's the passing of a loved one. Maybe it's an urgent cry from someone in need.

All people sometimes don't remember something or someone important. This is unfortunate but understandable. But it is more problematic when one insensitively and actively forgets something or someone important.

Are there people and things we should be remembering...but we're not remembering? A little mindfulness can help us. But are there people and things we have forgotten about...and most definitely should not have forgotten about? We need to think carefully and not wait for a crisis to awaken our memory.

The butler didn't remember Joseph; that was bad. The butler forgot Joseph; that was very bad.

Now, let's apply the lesson to ourselves!

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

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3301>

---

## **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.

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

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

---

## Vayeishev – Chanuka: The Sum of its Parts

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

The Yom Tov of Chanuka is an exciting one, full of inspiration and family time. It commemorates the victory over the Syrian Greeks and the rededication of the Beis HaMikdash.

Particularly remarkable is the way the Mitzva of lighting the Menorah was legislated. The Talmud (Shabbos 21) records it as *“Each man and his household.”* One light for every home. The description of the Mitzva is instructive. Menorah is a home-based Mitzva; each home should have a kindled light. Why is the commemoration of Chanuka — the Menorah — linked to the Jewish home?

There is a teaching from Rav Chaim Volozhion (Nefesh HaChayim 1:4) which can help us understand the significance of the Jewish home in the story of Chanuka. Regarding the Beis HaMikdash, Rav Chaim explains that the Beis HaMikdash is not an abstract, stand-alone palace of love between Hashem and the Jewish people. The Beis Hamikdash reflects the individual homes of the Jewish people. It is the national home for the Shechina (Divine presence) because of the Shechina which is in individual homes of the Jewish people. The strength of the Beis HaMikdash is directly proportional to the collective strength of the Jewish homes.

It follows that the destruction and rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash are up to us. The enemy could not destroy the Beis Hamikdash until the Jews themselves sullied and corrupted their own homes. Likewise, we rebuild the Beis HaMikdash by living lives of religious integrity. When Hashem has a strong relationship with us in our homes, then the national home — the Beis Hamikdash — reflects that strong relationship.

In the time of Chanuka, the Syrian Greeks tried to force the Jews to give up Judaism and exchange it for the worship and value system of the Greeks. Many Jews succumbed to the pressure. The Greeks proceeded to conquer the Beis Hamikdash and desecrate it. Eventually, the Maccabees roused the people to revolt. They insisted that Judaism is eternal, and that the value system of Torah and Mitzvos are forever. They routed the Greeks from the country and retook the Beis Hamikdash.

The bystander could easily interpret the events as a conflict between kings, armies, and nations. The bystander could mistakenly think that it is the story of the Beis HaMikdash, a stand-alone national treasure that was first conquered, then retaken by the people of Israel. Our Rabbis wanted to emphasize that the entire story is really the story of the individual home. When the individual homes of the Jews veered off course from fidelity to Hashem, their homes were in a stage of spiritual desecration, and the Beis HaMikdash reflected that desecration. When the individual homes returned to the way of tradition and observance and chose to defy the Greek directives, the Beis HaMikdash was infused with their holiness.

The Jewish home is known as a Mikdash Me’at, a mini sanctuary. The Beis HaMikdash was not just a beautiful building. It was the sum of the parts of the homes of the Jewish people.

It is no wonder that women take particular pleasure in the miracle of Chanuka and the Menorah. Regardless of the jobs or careers they may have, their devotion to the Jewish home stands above all other accomplishments. In the words of one grateful Talmudic sage, *“I call my wife, ‘My Home.’”* (Shabbos 118)

Thus uniquely, women have a custom not to do work during the first minutes that the Chanukah Menorah is burning. It is a time for reflection on the victory of Jewish continuity. While it may have been the Maccabees who physically routed the

Yevonim (Syrian Greeks) from the country and rededicated the Beis HaMikdash, it was the individual families in each and every home who infused the nation with the spiritual strength to enable that victory to occur.

May Hashem enable us each — men and women alike, as families, and as one great national family — to find that light of rededication and be blessed with miracles in our time as well.

With heartfelt blessings 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](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

---

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

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2020

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

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

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

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

Yitzchak knew himself well and understood that Yaakov's pain was so intense, that as a father he would be overwhelmed by his concern for Yaakov. He could not achieve the growth and accomplishment he needed to when sharing in Yaakov's

burden. He, therefore, struck an amazing balance. When he was with Yaakov, he focused on Yaakov's pain – and thereby felt Yaakov's pain to the point that he could fully cry with Yaakov. When he left, he changed his focus to think about the ultimate benefit down the road that G-d intended for Yaakov. In this way, he could fully empathize with Yaakov when with him, and still not drown in the anguish.

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

\* Rosh Kollel, Savannah Kollel, Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

---

### **Vayeshev - The Selling of Yosef**

#### **New Translation with Integrated Commentary**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

]Gen. 37:1[ Yaakov settled in the land of Canaan, where his father was a sojourner. ]2[ Despite having many children, Yaakov saw Yosef as his true descendant, because he was the son of his first and true love, Rachel. Though Binyamin was also Rachel's, he carried the burden of being the one who caused her death, and was therefore fully embraced by Yaakov only after Yosef's disappearance. Yosef was assigned to work with the children of Bilha and Zilpa, because the sons of Leah harbored hatred towards him, as their mothers did towards each other. Yosef, still immature, would tell his father what his brothers did, painting them in a negative light. ]3[ Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons and made for him a special robe. ]4[ His brothers understood that he is favored over them and hated him. They could not bring themselves to greet him. ]5-7[ Yosef had a dream in which his brothers' sheaves were bowing to his. He believed that if he told his brothers the dream, they will accept it as prophecy and will start loving him, but it just intensified their hatred. ]8[ They told him: "do you really think that you will become our king and ruler?" and they now hated him more for both his dreams and his gossip. ]9[ He then had another dream and told his brothers that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to him. ]10[ His brothers did not respond, so he told it to them again in his father's presence. His father rebuked him: "what is that silly dream? Do you think that I, your mother, and your brothers will come to bow down to you?" ]11[ His brothers grew jealous of him, because they felt that the rebuke was not genuine, and that his father ]not theirs!!!![ is keeping the dream in mind, maybe even hoping for it to be realized.

]12[ His brothers went to tend to their father's flocks in Shekhem. ]13[ Yaakov, who understood that he is causing tension between the brothers, and maybe felt Yosef's desire to be accepted by them, told him: "your brothers are with the flocks in Shekhem, can I send you to them?" He said: "I am ready!" ]14[ He said: "go and see how they and the flocks are doing and let me know." He sent him from the valley of Hebron and he came to Shekhem, but his brothers were not there. ]15[ A man found him wandering and searching in the field and asked him: "what are you looking for?" ]16[ Yosef said: "I am looking for the physical whereabouts of my brothers, but I am also craving their acceptance, I want to feel that I am their brother." ]17[ The man said: "they left this place, I know that because I have heard them saying that they plan to go to Dotan. The man is anonymous, and the encounter demonstrates how fleeting moments can change the course of history. Had Yosef not met him, the slavery in Egypt and the Exodus would not have happened the way they did. Even after hearing the man, Yosef could have chosen to go back home, but he was desperate to meet his brothers away from his father's sphere of influence, and so he followed them to Dotan. ]18[ They saw him from afar, and before allowing themselves to feel close to him, some of the brothers plotted to kill him. ]19[ To override the little love they had for him and their father, they verbalized their opinion of him: "here comes the master of dreams, ]20[ let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits, and see how his dreams would be realized then". ]21[ Reuven heard that and saved him from them, saying: "we shall not kill him." ]22[ Reuven said to them: "do not shed blood, just throw him into that pit in the desert, and

do not raise your hand against him.” He said that with the intention of saving him from their hand and bring him back to his father, but he was afraid to say that, and his plan failed miserably.

[23] When Yosef came to his brothers, they shocked him by grabbing him and stripping him of his robe, of his special, hated robe he wore as a symbol of being superior. [24] Yosef pleaded with them to have mercy, but they hardened their hearts and ignored him. They took him and threw him into the pit, which was devoid of water, thus assuring that he will die of thirst. [25] Disturbed by his screams and pleadings they went to sit in a remote place and eat their bread. Their meal was for some a vindication and for others an attempt to cover up for their nervousness following the wicked, treacherous act. They saw from afar an Ishmaelite caravan coming from Gilad in the north, carrying spices on their camels to sell in Egypt. [25] Yehudah, who was not aware of Reuven’s plan to save Yosef, devised his own plan and told the brothers: “what will we gain from killing our brother and covering up the murder?” [27] He understood that some brothers felt so strongly about Yosef, that they will not agree to save him and return him home, and therefore suggested: “let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and we will not raise our hand against him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” His brothers accepted his suggestion. [28] While the brothers were debating, Midyanite merchants passed by the pit. They heard screams, and when they approached the pit they found Yosef, naked and petrified. They pulled him up and for twenty silver coins, sold him to the Ishmaelites who brought him to Egypt.

[29] Reuven went back to the pit, but alas, where previously there was no water, now there was no Yosef in the pit. He tore his clothes in agony and despair. [30] He returned to his brothers and said: “the boy is gone! Me, what am I going to do? How can I face my father?” [31] Without saying a word, his brothers took Yosef’s robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood. [32] They did not have the face or heart to present it to Yaakov, so they sent it with a messenger. They told him to deliver that message: “we have found this, please identify! Is it your son’s robe or not?” Their words pierced their father’s heart like poisoned arrows. He suspected that they are the culprits, but they have protected themselves from retribution by using the same elements he used to trick his father and brother, a goat and special garments. Had he confronted them, they would have asked him why it was fine for him to trick his father. He probably did not miss their labeling of Yosef as “your son”. Instead of calling him Yosef they used the opportunity to jab him for considering Yosef his only son.

[33] Yaakov identified the robe and said: “it is my son’s robe! A wild beast ate him! Yosef has been devoured!” [34] Yaakov tore his robes and girded himself with sackcloth, and he mourned his son for many years. [35] All his sons and daughters attempted to console him, but he refused to be comforted, saying: “When I go down to Sheol [the underworld] to join my son, I will still be mourning.” His father mourned him. [36] The Midyanites [מדינים] were the ones who sold him, through the Ishmaelites, to the Egyptian minister Potifar, the chief executioner, but the real reason for his suffering was the fight [מדינים] between the brothers.

Chapter 37 of Genesis leaves us with some insights about our interactions with others and about taking responsibility:

**The importance of communication and empathy:** Yaakov, immersed in his mourning for Rachel, failed to see that his preferential treatment of Yosef is alienating the brothers from him and from Yosef; Yosef failed to understand that he will not win his brothers’ friendship by flaunting his superiority, and did not realize how deep was their hatred for him; The brothers refused to empathize with their father and understand that it is his longing for Rachel that makes him treat Yosef the way he did, and that if they showered the young orphan with love, he would return that love.

**Negligible things are sometimes impactful:** the random encounter with the man in the field and the additional value of Yosef’s robe played a crucial role in the selling of Yosef and the eventual slavery in Egypt.

**One’s actions come back to haunt him:** Yaakov tricked his father using goats and garments, and he was tricked by his sons in the same manner. In chapter 38, Yehudah will be similarly tricked by Tamar.

**Finally, we learn about responsibility and transparency:** Reuven and Yehudah both wanted to save Yosef, but since they were not able to confront the other brothers for fear of being overruled, they pretended to be with them, thus losing him completely. Had they stood up for him, they might have discovered that other brothers agree with them. Then, after Yosef has disappeared, the brothers cover up for it, instead of confessing their sin to their father. Had they done that, they could have searched for him immediately, and maybe even find him. By lying to Yaakov, they have erected a wall of

suspicion between them, an ominous presence in their relationships with their father that took away the little connection they had. Years later, when they ask their father to send Binyamin in order to bring back the captive Shimon and some food for the starving families, he refuses, telling them: "You know that I only had two sons from my only wife. One has left me, and I had no choice but to believe that he was devoured. If you take this one as well [as you did to his brother], a disaster will surely befall him, and you will bring me down to Sheol with agony!" It is a clear and open condemnation. They would have been better off admitting their actions, but once you start covering up it is very hard to retract the lie.

May we learn from this tragic story to be communicative, receptive, and emphatic, to pay attention to the seemingly marginal things, and to be transparent and responsible.

Shabbat Shalom \* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.**

---

## **Yosef's Efforts to Include His Brothers**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

Even our Patriarchs experienced sibling rivalry. Our portion details how Joseph's brothers couldn't stand him or speak to him peacefully.

Why did they have a problem with Joseph? Because they suspected Joseph wanted to rule over them or, worse, kick them out of the family and out of the Jewish people.

To be honest, they had a good point. Both of the Patriarchs before them had other children who were shown the door. Jacob usurped Eisav's spot by taking his blessing, and Yishmael was kicked out at Sarah's behest. The traditional pattern was one child gets it all and the rest are out. One for all. And Jacob's favoritism of Joseph indicated that Joseph would be the one who gets it all, leaving the brothers outside of the Jewish nation project.

So, while the brothers did a terrible wrong by selling Joseph and later regretted it, their motives had a rational basis.

This is why Joseph did not contact his family while he was in Egypt. Our commentators explain that Joseph knew that if he returned, the brothers would be kicked out for the wrong they did. So Joseph knew he had to create a test to show they had repented before the family could reunite as one.

Perhaps Joseph could have been the *"one."* But he didn't want to. He wanted to break the cycle and include all the brothers in the formation of the Jewish people. *"A house divided against itself cannot stand."*

And he did break it. Joseph achieved the goal, and the Jewish nation is stronger because of it. How inspiring that the book of Genesis ends with this story of strife and reconciliation. Even brothers with very different personalities and goals can come together with a common purpose.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

---

## **Rav Kook Torah Vayeishev: The Nature of Exile**

When the brothers threw Joseph into the pit, the exile began — not just Joseph's personal exile from his father's house and the Land of Israel. From that dark, empty pit, began the exile of the entire Jewish people to Egypt.

Joseph's pit is a metaphor for Galut, for each exile of the Jewish people from their land.

### **Three Types of Pits**

There are, of course, different kinds of pits. There are pits filled with water, wells that provide life to those living near them. One must be careful not to fall in and drown, but these are productive, useful pits.

Then there are empty pits. They serve no purpose, and are dangerous. Nonetheless, even empty pits have a positive side to them. With effort and skill, they may be filled with water and transformed into useful pits.

And there is a third type of pit. The Talmud (Shabbat 22a) quotes Rabbi Tanchum that Joseph's pit belonged to this third category. It was empty of water, but it contained other things — snakes and scorpions. Such a pit is of no use — neither actual nor potential - for humans.

Some mistake the pit of Exile for a well of water. Yes, one must be careful not to drown in it; but overall, they claim, it is a positive experience. If Jews are careful to act in a manner that will not arouse anti-Semitism, they can dwell comfortably in their foreign homes.

But the true nature of Exile is like Joseph's pit, full of snakes and scorpions. It is a dangerous and deadly place for the Jewish people. Such a pit has only one redeeming quality, intrinsic to its very nature: it will never mislead the Jews into mistaking it for their permanent homeland.

### **Snakes and Scorpions**

Rabbi Tanchum spoke of a pit containing snakes and scorpions. What is the difference between these two dangerous animals? A snake bites with its head, while a scorpion stings with its tail. The snakebite is a planned and intentional act, executed by the directives of the snake's brain. A scorpion stings from its tail instinctively, without thought.

Exile is accompanied by both of these "blessings." There are times of intentional and malevolent persecution, such as those perpetrated by the Crusaders, Chmielnicki's Cossacks, Nazi Germany, and other sinister snakes of history. These are dark hours for the Jewish people, but they are also times of shining heroism and self-sacrifice.

Worse than these intentional snakebites are the continual, unintentional scorpion stings which are an intrinsic part of Exile. Cultural dissonance, intermarriage, and assimilation take their slow, unintended toll on the Jewish people and their connection to the Torah.

The afflictions of Exile are by heavenly decree, lest we confuse a temporary resting place in the Diaspora for a permanent home for the Jewish people. The only true remedy for these snakebites and scorpion-stings is to rescue the Jews from the pit, and restore them to their proper homeland.

*)Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, pp. 67-68.(*

<https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYESH61.htm>

---

**Vayeishev: Reuben -- The Might-Have-Been (5768)**  
By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi,\*

Reuben is the greatest “might-have-been” in the Torah. His father Jacob says as much in his dying words:

*“Reuben, you are my firstborn, My power and the beginning of my might, Pre-eminent in bearing and pre-eminent in strength. Unstable as water, you will not be pre-eminent . . .”*

His story is of potential unfulfilled, virtue not quite realized, greatness so close yet unachieved. How so? What does his example teach us about what it takes to live an accomplished life?

There is an extraordinary moment in Vayeshev. The Torah freeze-frames a critical juncture in Reuben's life, showing the diverging paths he faced when confronted with a moral challenge.

The background to the scene is the early years of Joseph, Jacob's child by his second wife and first love, Rachel. Jacob – the man who loves more than any other figure in Bereishit – cannot help showing his favoritism, to the hurt and slight of the other sons. The vignettes we have of Joseph as an adolescent are )as Rashi notes( less than endearing. He tells tales to his father about his brothers. He has dreams in which his family bow down to him, and worse – he reports them. There is about him, as the commentators observe, the air of a spoiled child. His father tolerates his behaviour and even gives him a richly embroidered cloak, the famous “coat of many colours,” the sight of which acts as a constant provocation to the other sons.

One day, as his brothers are tending the flocks far from home, Jacob sends him to see how they are doing. On this encounter, the whole future of the children of Israel will depend. The brothers see Joseph from afar, and the sight of the cloak enrages them. They realize that, alone with no one to see them, they can kill Joseph and concoct a tale that will be impossible to refute. Only Reuben protests. It is at this point the Torah does something it does nowhere else. It makes a statement that, construed literally, is obviously false – indeed, the text goes on immediately to show that it was not quite so. The text states: *“Reuben heard and saved him ]Joseph[ from their hands.”* He did not. The discrepancy is so obvious that most translations simply do not translate the phrase literally. What Reuben actually did was to attempt to save him. The phrase *“Reuben heard and saved him”* tells us what might have been, not what actually was.

Reuben's plan was simple. He told the brothers not to kill Joseph but to let him die:

*“Let's not take his life,” he said. “Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him.”*

The text then – again unusually, for it is rare for the Torah to describe a person's thoughts – explains Reuben's intention: *“]Reuben said this[ in order to save him from their hand and take him back to his father.”* Reuben had no intention of letting Joseph die. His plan was to persuade the brothers to leave him in the pit so that, when their attention was elsewhere, he could come back to it, lift Joseph out and take him home.

What happens next is obscure, though the outcome is clear. While Reuben was somewhere else, Joseph was taken from the pit and sold to a passing caravan of merchants who carry him to Egypt to be sold as a slave. The text itself makes it impossible to determine whether this was done by the other brothers at the suggestion of Judah, or by passing Midianites )Nechamah Leibowitz has a fine analysis of the various readings given by the commentators(. Reuben, unaware of all this, returns to the pit to rescue Joseph but finds him gone. He is bereft. *“When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, ‘The boy is gone! And I, where can go?’”*

Commenting on this episode, the Midrash states:



*If Reuben had only known that the Holy One, blessed be He, would write of him, "And Reuben heard and saved him from their hands," he would have picked him up on his shoulders and carried him back to his father.*

This is a deeply puzzling comment. Did Reuben really need the endorsement of Heaven to do the right thing? Did he need God's approval before rescuing his brother? Yet, as we will see, it holds the essential clue about Reuben's character. It tells us what stands between what might-have-been and what was.

Reuben is the Hamlet of Bereishit, whose "*native hue of resolution*" is "*sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought*." He is a person of good intentions. He cares. He thinks. He is not led by the crowd or by his darker instincts. He penetrates to the moral core of a situation. That is the first thing we notice about him. The second, however, is that somehow his interventions backfire. They fail to achieve their effect. Attempting to make things better, Reuben makes them worse. The Torah clearly wants us to reflect on Reuben's character. To this end it paints a portrait of the young man, in a series of rapidly sketched yet revealing vignettes.

In the first, we see him in the fields during the wheat harvest. He finds some mandrakes. From the context it appears that mandrakes were believed to be both an aphrodisiac and a fertility drug (John Donne refers to this in a famous poem: "*Get with child a mandrake root*"). His first thought is to give them to his mother Leah. This tells us something about Reuben. He is not thinking about himself but about her. He knows she feels unloved and identifies with her anguish with all the sensitivity of an eldest son. He hopes that, with the aid of the mandrakes, Leah will be able to win Jacob's attention, perhaps even his love.

It is a strikingly mature and thoughtful act. Yet it has negative consequences. It provokes a bitter row between the two sisters, Leah and Rachel. Rachel sees the mandrakes and wants them for herself. The following exchange then takes place:

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "*Please give me some of your son's mandrakes*." But she said to her, "*Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?*"

This is the only time that angry words are reported between the two sisters. Reuben, seeking to help Leah, creates a scene in which her bitterness rises to the surface. That is scene one.

Scene two takes place when Rachel dies. An obscure incident takes place which has tragic consequences. The biblical text is cryptic:

*So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it . . .*

Read literally, this suggests that Reuben took his father's place in Bilhah's tent – an almost Oedipal act of displacement, as we discover later in the Bible when Absalom does the same with his father David's concubine (II Samuel 16: 21). Rashi, following midrashic tradition, prefers a gentler explanation. When Rachel died, Jacob, who had slept in her tent, moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, her handmaid. This, for Reuben, was an unbearable provocation. It was bad enough that Jacob preferred Rachel to her sister Leah, but intolerable that he should prefer her handmaid to his mother. He therefore removed Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's.

Even according to this interpretation, however, it is clear that Jacob misunderstood the act and believed that his son had in fact usurped his place. He never forgot or forgave the incident and on his death-bed he reminded Reuben of it:

Unstable as water, you will not be pre-eminent, For you went up onto your father's bed, Onto my couch and defiled it.

Earlier, at the time of the event itself, the text uses an unusual stylistic device. After the words, "*And Israel heard of it,*" the Masoretic text indicates a paragraph break in the middle of a sentence. The effect is to signal a silence, a complete breakdown in communication. Hence the pathos of the rabbinic interpretation of the passage, which certainly fits all we know about Reuben. He was not seeking to displace Jacob but rather to draw his attention to the hurt and distress of Leah. Yet Jacob says nothing, giving Reuben no opportunity to clear his name or explain why he did what he did. The result: a second tragedy.

Inevitably, we are drawn to the third scene, chronologically the first – Reuben's birth. One does not need to be a Freudian to hear, in this passage, the key to Reuben's character. Leah, we recall, had been substituted for Rachel on the wedding night. It was Rachel whom Jacob loved and thought he was marrying, after seven years working for her father Laban. The next morning, when Jacob discovered the identity of his new wife, there was an angry scene between the two men. Jacob accuses Laban of deception. Laban replies, "*It is not done in our place to give the younger before the elder*" hinting that this is what Jacob had done by disguising himself as Esau and taking his blessing, as if to say: what right have you to complain if what you did is done to you in return.

Jacob does marry Rachel a week later, and thereafter Leah must live with the knowledge that she was not her husband's choice. There then follows a passage of great pathos:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben *"see, a son"*, for she said, "*It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.*" She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "*Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.*" So she named him Shimon.

Leah hoped that the birth of Reuben would make Jacob love her. But he does not. We know this because she is still voicing the same hope when Shimon is born. Reuben has to carry with him throughout his life the knowledge of his mother's slight and his father's lack of attention. Significantly, it is Leah, not Jacob, who gives both Reuben and Shimon their names. It is almost as if Jacob was not there.

We now have a rich, composite and penetrating portrait of Reuben – and we now know that the psychological key to his character is already given at his birth.

Jacob is a hero of faith, the man who gave Israel its name, the only patriarch all of whose children remained within the covenant. Yet the complexity of Jacob's character is light years away from the idealised heroes of other religious traditions. In Jacob we discover that the life of faith is not simple. Not by accident does his name Israel mean "*the one who wrestled with God and with human beings and prevailed.*" We also discover something else. Every virtue carries with it a corresponding danger. The person who is over-generous may condemn his own family to poverty. The individual like Aaron (who chooses peace at any price can sometimes allow those around him to make a golden calf. There is no single authoritative role model in Judaism. Instead there are many: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Moses, Aaron and Miriam; kings, prophets and priests; masters of halachah and aggadah; Sages and saints, poets and philosophers. The reason is that no one can embody all the virtues all the time. A strength here is a weakness there.

Jacob loved, passionately and deeply. That was his strength, but also his weakness. His love for Rachel meant that he could not bestow equal favour on Leah. His longing for a child by Rachel meant that there was something lacking in his relationship with Leah's firstborn, Reuben. Had he loved less, there might have been no problem. He might have divided his attention more equally. But had he loved less, he would not have been Jacob.

The result, however, is that Reuben carries with him a lack of confidence, an uncertainty, that at critical moments robs him of his capacity to carry through a course of action that he knows to be right. He begins well but does not drive the deed to closure. Returning with the mandrakes he might have bided his time until Leah was alone. After Rachel's death he might have spoken directly to his father instead of moving the beds. In the face of his brothers' murderous intentions toward

Joseph he might, as the Midrash says, have simply carried him home. Instead he hesitated, choosing to put off the moment until the brothers were elsewhere. The result was tragedy. It is impossible not to recognise in Reuben a person of the highest ethical sensibilities. But though he had conscience, he lacked courage. He knew what was right, but lacked the resolve to do it boldly and decisively. In that hesitation, more was lost than Joseph. So too was Reuben's chance to become the hero he might and should have been.

If Reuben had only known – says the Midrash. If only he had known that the Torah would write of him, *“And Reuben heard and saved him from their hands”* – meaning that his intention was known and valued by God as if it were the deed. Knowing this, he might have found the courage to carry it through into action. But Reuben could not know. He had not read the story. None of us can read the story of our life – we can only live it. The result is that we live in and with uncertainty. Doubt can lead to delay until the moment is lost. In a moment of arrested intention, Reuben lost his chance of changing history.

Reuben could not read his story, but we can. If there is a single verse in Tanach that stands as a commentary on his life it is the inexpressibly poignant line from Psalm 27: *“Though my father and mother may forsake me, the Lord will receive me.”* Jacob, being human, loved some, not others. God, not being human, loves each of us, and that is our greatest source of strength. God heeds those not heard. He loves those whom others do not love. Reuben, still a young man, did not yet know this. But we, reading his story and the rest of Tanach, do.

We are here for a reason, conceived in love, brought into being by the One who brought the universe into being, who knows our innermost thoughts, values our good intentions, and has more faith in us than we have in ourselves. That, if only we meditate on it, gives us the strength to turn intention into deed, lifting us from the person we might have been into the person we become.

\* <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayeshev/reuben-the-might-have-been/> 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. Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah.

---

## **Life Lessons from the Parsha: Joseph the Happy Lamplighter**

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l \* © Chabad 5785

The parshah of Vayeshev marks the beginning of a series of Torah portions focused on Joseph, whom I consider among the most phenomenal personalities in the entire Torah.

Let's review the poignant tale of Joseph and his brothers:

Jacob was blessed with a large family, and Joseph was his favorite son. In an overt display of favoritism, Jacob gifted Joseph the famous “coat of many colors.” At 17, Joseph shared two dreams with his father and brothers — visions of his family bowing down to him. These dreams further fueled his brothers' animosity.

One day, while Joseph's brothers were off shepherding, he was sent by their father to provide supplies. *“Here comes the dreamer!”*<sup>1</sup> they remarked bitterly, after spotting him from a distance. Initially plotting to kill him, they decided instead to sell him to a passing caravan, who then sold him as a slave in Egypt.

Remarkably, his master, Potiphar, took a real liking to him and put him in charge of his household and affairs.

Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him, but Joseph, aided by a vision of his father, resisted her advances. She then falsely accused Joseph and he was thrown into prison, where he languished for 12 years.

Again, Joseph rose to the top of his new environment and was put in charge of the prison. While incarcerated, he interpreted the dreams of two fellow prisoners, the royal butler and the royal baker.

His talent for dream interpretation proved pivotal when he was called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, leading to his release from prison and his appointment as viceroy, Pharaoh's second-in-command.

Joseph played a crucial role in saving Egypt from famine and, ultimately, saved his own family, too.

What continues to strike me every year is that throughout his entire ordeal, Joseph never once expresses self-pity. Not once does he say, "Poor me!" Not once does he say, "Why me?" Not once does he say — to quote a placard I once saw on someone's desk — *"I'm having a nervous breakdown. I earned it. I deserve it, and no one has a right to take it away from me!"*

If anyone had the right to have a nervous breakdown, it was Joseph. Yet, he never utters a single word of complaint.

### **G d's Ambassador**

In analyzing this story, the Rebbe highlighted a remarkable detail: While in prison, Joseph observes that the butler and the baker appear despondent. *"Why are your faces looking so sad today?"* he asks them.<sup>2</sup> *"Do you have a problem? How can I help?"*

But why does Joseph care if these guys are having a bad day? They were not his friends. In fact, the Midrash teaches that these two individuals were associates of Potiphar — the very man who threw Joseph into prison!

One might have expected Joseph to harbor bitterness and resentment. Instead, he is upbeat and chipper, concerned only that two total strangers appear unhappy! Where did he get his strength?

The answer lies in his unwavering belief that G d was with him throughout his entire ordeal.<sup>3</sup> He lived with the awareness that nothing happens without reason. He understood that whatever befell him — being sold into slavery, thrown into prison, or interpreting dreams for others — was orchestrated by G d for a reason. In every circumstance, Joseph recognized that Divine Providence places us where we are for a purpose.

If Joseph had not been sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned for years, he would have never become the viceroy, Egypt would not have survived the famine, and the Children of Israel would not have been saved.

### **Seeing the Opportunity**

This theme resurfaces later in Joseph's life after his father's passing.<sup>4</sup> When his brothers seek forgiveness for selling him into slavery, Joseph is incredulous. *"Am I G d?"* he responds. *"Only G d can see the future. G d placed me here to save my life, your lives, and all of our lives. Please don't feel bad. G d sent me here as a force of life before you. It's a good thing."*

We must learn from Joseph's example, taught the Rebbe. Despite only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob being called our Patriarchs, the Jewish people are also referred to as the *"sons of ... Joseph."*<sup>5</sup> Each of us carries a little bit of Joseph within.

And we must summon the strength, fortitude, and courage to confront any challenges that might, G d forbid, come our way, understanding that everything stems from G d and serves a Divine purpose. Rather than falling into the "Poor me!" trap, we must strive to maximize the opportunities given to us by Divine Providence.

### **Joseph's Mission Statement**

I distinctly recall hearing a related teaching from the Rebbe, a lesson that my friends and I thoroughly absorbed and subsequently shared whenever possible:

The very first positive commandment in the Torah, right at the beginning of Genesis, is *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”*<sup>6</sup>

The Rebbe explained that the first mitzvah a Jew is given is to create another Jew. This commandment encompasses both the literal act of bringing children into the world and the figurative act of reaching out to Jews who are, G d forbid, lost, assimilated, have forsaken or are unaware of their Jewish heritage, and guiding them back to their roots, thus “creating” another Jew.

This profound lesson is drawn from the life of Joseph — a life devoted to caring for the needs of others — and is reflected in his very name. When Joseph was born, his mother, the matriarch Rachel, called him Joseph, saying, *yosef Hashem li ben acher*, *“May G d grant me an additional son.”*<sup>7</sup> On a basic level, she was expressing her deep desire for at least one more son. But Rachel’s prayer also encompassed the hope that her infant son would grow up to be a special kind of Jew — the kind that adds another Jew, someone who brings Jews back into the fold of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The kind of Jew that will find a Jew who may have strayed from the path of Torah and mitzvot and help them rediscover their way.

The Rebbe emphasized that the term *acher* )“*other*”( can refer to any person who has strayed from a life of Torah. The Talmud recounts the story of Elisha ben Abuyah, the great scholar and sage, who abandoned his studies and religion, embarking on a vastly different path. He veered so far off course that he became known as *acher* – “*the other one*” – because he turned away from his heritage.

Rachel’s prayer, as explained by the Rebbe, expresses the hope that Joseph, her son, will possess the ability to transform a wayward Jew from an “*acher*,” an “*other one*,” into a son of Torah, a follower of G d’s ways.

The Sixth Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, of righteous memory, initiated the modern concept of Jewish outreach. Aptly named Joseph, the Sixth Rebbe led a campaign to seek out wayward Jews and, with non-judgmental love, bring them back to G d — transforming the *acher* into a devoted son.

For the first 17 years of his life, Joseph studied with his father, Jacob. After that, whether in a caravan to Egypt, a slave in Potiphar’s house, imprisoned with the butler and baker, standing before Pharaoh, or ruling Egypt, Joseph consistently served others, helped them, saved them, brought them into the fold, and breathed life into their very existence.

Joseph’s mission statement is one that each of us must embrace as our own.

### **An Army of Lamplighters**

The Torah portion of Vayeshev is often read in proximity to the 19th of Kislev, the day that marks the miraculous 1798 liberation of the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, from Czarist Russian imprisonment, where he languished for 53 days. The teachings of Chassidus thrived after his release. As the old Chassidic expression goes, there is “*fahr* )*before*( *Peterburg*,” representing Chabad before the Alter Rebbe’s imprisonment in St. Petersburg, and “*noch* )*after*( *Peterburg*,” as Chassidus blossomed and flourished after the miracle of the 19th of Kislev.

Nearly 100 years later, in 1897, when the Fifth Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber, established Tomchei Temimim, a yeshivah where students would study the teachings of the Alter Rebbe, he referred to the students of his new yeshivah as “*lamplighters*.”

Rabbi Sholom Dovber intended to create an army of students who would serve with self-sacrifice, going out and igniting the souls of their fellow Jews, bringing them back to Judaism.

On a very personal note, I have the great merit that both of my grandfathers, my maternal grandfather, Rabbi Eliyahu Simpson, of blessed memory, as well as my paternal grandfather, Reb Yochanan Gordon, of blessed memory, studied at

Tomchei Temimim in the city of Lubavitch. Both merited to establish generations of soldiers in the Rebbe's army of lamplighters, engaged in the sacred work of *"adding another son."*

When the Rebbe initiated the Mitzvah Campaigns, dispatching the *"lamplighters"* onto the streets to find Jews and assist them in performing a mitzvah, he emphasized a crucial point: aiding a fellow Jew should not be viewed merely as a positive, wonderful, one-time experience. Instead, we must consider the countless future generations that can be shaped by that singular act. An encounter with a *"lamplighter"* has the power to transform someone's life, to impact generations to come, igniting one candle after another in an ongoing chain.

May we merit to truly incorporate these lessons from Joseph into our lives, steadfastly avoiding the victim mentality, striving to be ambassadors of G d in every situation. Let us all enlist in the Rebbe's army of lamplighters, and engage in the sacred work of *"adding another son,"* seeking out the *"acher"* among us, with kindness and love, and helping them rediscover their connection to G d.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 37:19.
2. Genesis 40:7.
3. Genesis 39:2, 39:23, 40:8, 41:16.
4. Genesis 25:1-8.
5. Psalms 77:16.
6. Genesis 1:28.
7. Genesis 30:24.

\* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/6197557/jewish/Joseph-the-Happy-Lamplighter.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6197557/jewish/Joseph-the-Happy-Lamplighter.htm)

---

## Vayeishev: Overcoming Hardship

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

### Overcoming Hardship

Joseph had been sold as a slave to Potiphar, Pharaoh's chief butcher. Recognizing Joseph's intelligence, integrity, piety, and regal bearing, Potiphar appointed him to oversee his household affairs, which Joseph handled outstandingly.

*His master saw that G-d was with him, and that G-d granted success to his hand, in everything he did. )Gen. 39:3(*

Joseph's dedication and loyalty to his master was rewarded with betrayal and bad faith.

One would think that confronted by a world filled with falsehood and bereft of justice and fairness, Joseph would have been inclined to escape, fleeing to the solitude of the desert, or at least to seek revenge against his oppressors. Yet he did no such thing, remaining instead focused on doing his work faithfully, thereby showing the world that belief in G-d makes a person genial, resilient, idealistic, and reliable. Joseph became and remained capable of such seemingly superhuman behavior by studying the Torah. Throughout his years in Egypt, he constantly reviewed the teachings that he had studied with his father. The spiritual fortitude he acquired through studying the Torah enabled him to overcome every hardship.

Like Joseph, we too can maintain a consistent schedule of Torah study despite our other commitments. As it did for Joseph, this commitment will provide us with the strength and idealism to remain focused on our Divine mission of bringing light into the world, despite the disappointments and seeming injustices that life can present. Moreover, the Torah's inherent ability to "*restore the soul*" will make us a positive influence on reality, inspiring others to tap into the source of our energy and optimism.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

**May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.**

Good Shabbos.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

\* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on the parshah, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to [AfisherADS@Yahoo.com](mailto:AfisherADS@Yahoo.com). The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

---

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Sponsored by Dr. Larry Bryskin & Family  
in memory of Larry's father,  
Yitzchok Shlomo ben Leibel HaLevi, a"h

Volume 31, Issue 9

Shabbat Parashat Vayeshev

5785 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Speech Therapy

From Vayeshev to the end of the book of Bereishit we read the story of Joseph and his brothers. From the very beginning we are plunged into a drama of sibling rivalry that seems destined to end in tragedy.

All the elements are there, and it begins with ominous parental favouritism. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons. The Torah says this was because "he had been born to him in his old age." But we also know it was because Joseph was the first son of his beloved Rachel, who had been infertile for many years.

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

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him, *velo yachlu dabro le-shalom*. Gen. 37:4

What is the meaning of this last phrase? Here are some of the standard translations:

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

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

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprimand your neighbour and not bear sin because of him. Lev. 19:17

This is how Maimonides interprets this command as it relates to interpersonal relations: When a person sins against another, the injured party should not hate the offender and keep silent . . . it is his duty to inform the

offender and say to him, why did you do this to me? Why did you sin against me in this matter? . . . If the offender repents and pleads for forgiveness, he should be forgiven. *Hilchot Deot* 6:6

Rabbi Eybeschutz's point is simple. Had the brothers been able to speak to Joseph they might have told him of their anger at his talebearing, and of their distress at seeing the many-coloured coat. They might have spoken frankly about their sense of humiliation at the way their father favoured Rachel over their mother Leah, a favouritism that was now being carried through into a second generation. Joseph might have come to understand their feelings. It might have made him more modest or at least more thoughtful. But *lo yachlu dabro le-shalom*. They simply couldn't bring themselves to speak. As Nachmanides writes, on the command: You shall not hate your brother in your heart: "Those who hate tend to hide their hate in their heart."

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

The classic case is that of Absalom and Amnon, two half-brothers who were sons of king David. In a shocking episode, Amnon rapes Absalom's sister Tamar: Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate tunic that she wore; she put her hand to her head and went off, weeping as she went.

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

And Tamar remained, forlorn, in the house of her brother Absalom. When King David heard all about this affair, he was absolutely livid. And Absalom would not speak a word to Amnon, neither good nor bad, for Absalom despised Amnon for having violated Tamar, his sister. 2 Samuel 13:19-22

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

Hate grows in silence. It did with Absalom. It did with Joseph's brothers. Before the chapter ends, we see them plot to kill Joseph, then

throw him into a pit, and then sell him into slavery. It is a terrible story and led directly to the Israelites' exile and slavery in Egypt.

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

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

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

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

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

The Sages were eloquent in speaking about the

## What Does Judaism Say About ... Podcast with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is **Is Being Good the Most Important Jewish Thing?**

- Next week: Alternative Medicine in Judaism

Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:

Apple: [tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays](http://tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays)

Spotify: [tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays](http://tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays)

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:  
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350  
or email: [sgreenberg@jhu.edu](mailto:sgreenberg@jhu.edu)  
<http://torah.saadia.info>



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

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

Language is the redemption of solitude, and the mender of broken relationships. However painful it is to speak about our hurt, it is more dangerous not to do so. Joseph and his brothers might have been reconciled early on in their lives, and thus spared themselves, their father, and their descendants, much grief. Revealing pain is the first step to healing pain.

Speech is a path to peace.

---

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

---

#### **Jews, Not Reuvs**

“And Judah said unto his brethren: What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?” (Genesis 37:26)

A Jew’s identity – at least as far as the word Jew itself is concerned – is related specifically to descendants from the tribe of Judah. The other ten tribes, led off into captivity, were lost to history. Thus, the vast majority of Jews in the world owe their very existence to one tribe, Judah. The others who survived come from the tribe of Levi; these are fewer in number, and they – the regular Levites and the more elevated sons of Aaron, the kohen-priests – ministered in the Holy Temple, and retained their special lineage to this very day.

The mere fact that a person can still call himself a Jew 3,500 years after Sinai and despite close to 2,000 years without our own homeland, is no small miracle. He/she is one of the rare ones, a delicate and miraculous survivor sustained and nurtured and kept alive despite exile, wars, pogroms, and assimilation. To understand what it is that allows a Jew to survive despite all the forces against him, we ought to turn to the founder of this particular line, Judah himself.

What special traits did he possess which were absent from his brothers? Apparently, father Jacob-Israel identified his uniqueness as well, having granted him – and not his first-born

brother Reuven – the gift and birthright of messianic majesty: ‘the scepter shall not depart from Judah...and unto him will gather the community of nations’ [Gen. 49:10]. We still pray every day for a ruler in Jerusalem from the House of David – a descendant of Judah!

What serves to especially sharpen our query is the fact that – at the moment of truth, when an angry and jealous mob of brothers cast the hapless favorite son Joseph into a pit (according to the Midrash, filled with snakes and scorpions) – Reuven and Judah each react, with Reuven’s words appearing to be the more courageous and edifying. It turns out that Reuven steps into his role as first-born and acts accordingly, as he attempts to abort the brothers’ evil design: ‘Let us not kill him...Shed no blood...Cast him into this pit...but lay no hand upon him...’ [Gen. 37:21]. His plan, as the text seems to tell us and which Rashi confirms, is that Reuven’s intention was to return to the pit afterwards and to personally restore Joseph to their father.

Reuven, however, never gets the chance to execute his possible rescue. The text records that Judah sights a caravan of Ishmaelite traders in the distance, and suggests to his brothers that there is no point to murdering Joseph when they could just as easily earn money from his sale:

“What profit [mah betzah] is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh....” (Genesis 37:26)

Judah’s proposal is accepted, and Joseph joins the caravan as a slave in tow, the silver that his head brought now in the pockets of the brothers. We then read how Reuven returns, finds an empty pit, ‘and rent his garments’ [Gen. 37:29]. His despair is deep and painful: “The child is not and I, whither shall I go?” And now the others have no choice but to invent a story about animals having torn apart their brother Joseph – for how can they possibly admit to their father that they sold his beloved son into slavery?

If we compare the responses of Reuven and Judah, the heroic one seems to be the response of Reuven. He risks his brothers’ wrath when he initially stops them from carrying out an act of murder, and devises an alternative plan which, albeit dangerous, might allow him to bring about a rescue.

Judah, on the other hand, is crass and commercial, turning it all into a question of profit. He speaks like an opportunist, a cool businessman. He sees a good deal, a group of traders in the distance and so convinces the brothers to get rid of their nemesis and enjoy a material advantage at the same time. In this

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

light his concluding words “for he is our brother and our flesh” sound hypocritical. If Judah indeed harbored fraternal feelings for Joseph, how could he subject him to the abject slave conditions and to the thousand gods of Egypt?!

Nevertheless, Jacob chooses Judah as the recipient of the birthright, rejecting Reuven: “...unstable as water, you will no longer be first...” (Genesis 49:4). Thus our question is, why Judah, and not Reuven? Why are we called Jews and not Reuvs?

Let’s examine Judah from two perspectives. One way of interpreting the text is that Judah was wrong by citing the profit motive, and had the blessings of Jacob been given the following week, Reuven, and not Judah, would probably have received the birthright. But Judah’s life didn’t end at the side of the pit. He continued to grow and evolve. He is the archetypal ba’al-teshuva, the classic penitent. When he impregnates his daughter-in-law Tamar, we see the greatness of a person able to admit his mistake, despite the personal risk and shame involved in revealing his guilt. Indeed, he says publicly, “She is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26).

And when we follow Judah’s development to the point when he offers himself as a slave to the Grand Vizier of Egypt in exchange for Benjamin’s release into the arms of their aged father, we see just how far a distance Judah has travelled. Jacob’s words regarding his fourth son, “...from the prey, my son, you have gone up...” (Genesis 49:9) confirms the ascent of Judah from jealous veniality to altruistic heroism. And perhaps it is just this ability to pick oneself off the ground and raise one’s head up high, to redeem one’s past, to recreate one’s life, not to be victimized by fate but to rise above it, which made Judah the most worthy namesake for his Jewish descendants.

But there is also a second way to view Judah: perhaps he is not so much a penitent as practitioner, a shrewd realist who understands the art of compromise. As far as Judah is concerned, leaving Joseph inside the pit (especially if it was really filled with snakes and scorpions) was tantamount to leaving him to die a cruel death. When Judah saw the Ishmaelites in the distance, he seized the opportunity to save his brother.

In order to be heard by his angry and jealous brothers, he understood that he had to conceal his pure-hearted motivations under the guise of a profit-making venture. Although he realizes that sending Joseph off to Egypt poses an obvious danger, it is a paltry risk when compared to the certainty of death by starvation in the pit. Reuven may have had the best intentions for Joseph, but intentions alone

are not enough. "Let us not kill him," Reuven declared, but his words fell on deaf ears. Judah, on the other hand, understood that his brothers had murder in their hearts and therefore he couched his plea in accordance with the politicians' 'art of the possible'. It is for this reason that he used a word which would be likely to strike a responsive chord in his brothers' hearts: betzah – profit, money, cash. His goal was to do whatever it took to divert their passion for blood.

Since Judah was effective in his very first test of leadership, as an individual who was able to sway nine very angry men away from their intention to murder, it is Judah who becomes worthy of receiving the birthright from Jacob-Israel.

These opposite interpretations of Judah at the pit are echoed in a later Talmudic debate surrounding the attitude of our sages towards arbitration and compromise, using a cognate term for compromise – botzea – which is derived from betza (profit). R. Meir insists that it is forbidden to compromise or arbitrate, that the law must express absolute purity. Indeed, he who blesses the compromiser – Judah, who used the word betza – is to be scorned by God (Psalms 10:3). Moreover, R. Eliezer asks: "If one stole a measure of wheat, ground and baked it and then performs the ritual act of separating the Challa, what blessing does he make?" And the answer he gives is that in such a situation the individual crass enough to make a blessing on stolen goods is to be scorned by God. And he, too, cites the aforementioned verse from the Psalms, giving it a slightly different twist: "the one who steals (botzea) and blesses is to be scorned by God" (Sanhedrin 6b).

Clearly, these sages are telling us that Judah's statements in our Torah portions are duplicitous, a comparison being made between his ignoble speech to his brothers and a man pronouncing a blessing over stolen cake. How can Judah have declared "he is our brother, our flesh" and then turn around and sell his 'brother' to the highest bidder! Judah the crook is attempting to whitewash his crime with a blessing! Whoever praises the one who said 'betzah – profit' is to be scorned by God!

But the final word in the Talmud is not given to this opinion. We go on to learn R. Judah b. Korcha's definitive statement, "Settlement by arbitration is a meritorious act... [mitzvah livtzoah]." Hence there is also a second way to view Judah's actions, from the lens of the sage who honors arbitration and compromise. This implies that Judah had to compromise in order to save Joseph's life, and so he must be praised for his wisdom. We even find halakhic decisors taking two views regarding the question of making a blessing over 'forbidden'

food. Maimonides rules that whoever eats forbidden food should not make a blessing, neither before nor after the meal (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Blessings, 1:19).

This ruling would be in line with the idea that a hypocrite should be scorned, that Jewish law must be followed in an absolute fashion. But the Ra'avad rules differently, distinguishing between a blessing made over a ritual performance (birkat hamitzva) and a blessing made because of the intrinsic pleasure one derives from a particular object (birkat hanehenin). The Ra'avad would agree that it is forbidden – and hypocritically foolish – to attempt to perform a ritual act for God with an object acquired by devious methods; the individual who makes the blessing of having performed God's commandment over such an object is in reality blaspheming God! He does not do a mitzvah but a mockery! But an individual who derives enjoyment from a cheeseburger, for example, ought at least thank the Almighty for his pleasure, even though Jewish law forbade him from eating the cheeseburger in the first place!

I remember how, many years ago, a fourteen-year-old girl at a youth seminar told me that she was the opposite of most Jews she knew: in those days many Jews kept kosher at home and ate non-kosher food on the outside (at least their dishes would go to heaven!). However, she ate only strictly kosher outside the home, but had to make certain compromises when she ate at her parents, who were not willing to keep a kosher kitchen. I ruled that she ought to make the proper blessings even when eating at home, using the Ra'avad as an indisputable source for my decision. Today this young girl has grown into one of the most effective rebbeztins in North America.

The truth is that you have to do the best you can, and a half a loaf is better than none. 'All or nothing' may be the ideal in a perfect world, but it hardly applies for us today. Why does Judah become the leader of the brothers and then the leading tribe of the nation? Penitence and compromise, the ability to rise after a fall and to realize that striving only for the absolute may well prevent one from being very good, albeit not quite perfect.

---

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

#### **What Was Yehudah Thinking? What Was Tamar Thinking?**

---

For a variety of reasons, Parshas Vayeshev is a difficult parsha to understand. One of the more difficult parts of the parsha is the story of Yehuda and Tamar. Tamar married two of Yehudah's sons and they both died. There was a form of yibum (levirate marriage) in those days, and Yehudah was saving his third son for subsequent marriage to Tamar, but was hesitant to allow that marriage to go forth. At

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

any rate Tamar appears at the crossroads as a zonah (prostitute) and Yehudah, without realizing that it was his daughter-in-law, hires her services.

Yehudah has relations with this woman who he thought was a zonah, and she becomes pregnant from him. When Yehudah learns that his daughter-in-law is pregnant, he assumes she had been unfaithful to his third son and ordered her to be put to death. Tamar proves to Yehudah that she was pregnant from him, and he responds, "She is more righteous than I." (Bereshis 38:26)

The Medrash asks, how is it that Yehudah, patriarch of one of the Twelve Tribes of G-d, could do such a thing? What prompted him to have relations with a zonah that he happens to see at the crossroads? The Medrash answers that the Ribono shel Olam sent Yehudah "Malach ha'me'muneh al ha'tayvah" (an Angel appointed over the attribute of human sexual desire). In effect, Yehudah was almost forced into this unseemly act. He didn't want to do it, but somehow a spiritual entity "forced him" to do it.

The reason this malach was given such a mission was that it was part of the Divine Plan that the Davidic monarchy, and ultimately the Moshiach himself, would descend from this union.

So this Medrash explains Yehudah's action. It was not part of Yehudah's normal behavior to consort with zonahs. Fine. But what about Tamar? What was Tamar thinking? Did she not realize that her father-in-law Yehudah was a tzadik? How in the world did she expect that she could dress up as a zonah and entice him to have relations with her so that he might father a child through her?

I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Avir Yaakov: The observation is that a person needs to do what he needs to do! Somehow, she knew that she needed to bear a child from Yehudah's family. She saw that Yehudah was not letting her marry Shelah. If the only way for her to conceive from a member of this family was to dress up as a zonah and try to seduce Yehudah into a relationship, that is what she had to try, regardless of how far-fetched an idea this plan was.

This is a basic principle in Avodas Hashem (Divine Service). We cannot always pause to ask ourselves "What are the chances of this happening? What are the statistics? Is this going to succeed or is it not going to succeed?" It does not work like that. "Ours is not to reason why, ours is just to do and die" (Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Charge of the Light Brigade")

If every Rosh Yeshiva who came to America in the 1930's and 1940's would have thought "How is this going to happen?" then no yeshiva would have ever been built. Ner Yisroel started with four talmidim (students). You do what you need to do, despite the fact that the odds of success may be slim, and you need to hope for the best. That is what Tamar was thinking.

### Were You More Handsome Than Yosef?

There is a very beautiful and powerful Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:10) that needs explanation. The Rambam writes: If a person sins, not because he is overcome by lust or passion, but he does it simply out of spite for the laws of the Torah, because "he doesn't care," he has made a Chillul HaShem (desecrated the Name of G-d). (In other words, besides punishment for whatever aveira (sin) he committed, he will also be punished for the aveira of Chillul HaShem.) The Torah uses this expression of Chillul Hashem in connection with taking a false oath. Similarly, anyone who abstains from an aveira or does a mitzvah, not for any ulterior motive, neither out of fear nor to seek honor, but simply for the sake of being in compliance with the will of the Creator, blessed be He, has made a Kiddush HaShem (sanctified the Name of G-d).

Who does the Rambam marshal as an example of someone who made a Kiddush HaShem by abstaining from aveira, not out of fear or to seek honor, but for the sake of being in compliance with the Divine Will? The Rambam marshals the example of Yosef abstaining from having relations with his master's wife.

A dramatic passage in the Gemara (Yoma 35) states: A poor person, a rich person, and a wicked person each came (to Heaven) to be judged. The poor person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah? If he answers "I was poor and I was busy earning my living" they ask him "Were you poorer than Hillel (about whom the Gemara relates his great dedication to learning and studying Torah despite his great poverty)?"

The rich person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah? If he answers "I was rich and was occupied with my properties" they ask him "Were you richer than Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom (about whom the Gemara relates his great dedication to Torah study despite the great wealth he inherited from his father)?"

The wicked person is asked: Why did you not occupy yourself with Torah. If he answers "I was very handsome and was absorbed in my passions" they ask him "Were you more handsome than Yosef?" (The Gemara proceeds to discuss the great efforts Potiphar's wife

made to try to seduce Yosef, and Yosef's steadfast refusal to listen to her arguments.)

The Gemara concludes that Hillel serves as the "prosecutor" of the poor, Rabbi Elazar ben Charsom serves as the "prosecutor" of the wealthy, and Yosef serves as the "prosecutor" of the wicked.

This is what the Rambam alludes to when he cites the righteous Yosef as the paradigm of Kiddush Hashem.

There are two problems with this Rambam.

Problem #1: The Gemara (Sotah 36b) says that Yosef was actually about to commit an act of adultery with Potiphar's wife until the image of his father, Yaakov, appeared to him in the window, convincing him to back off. Now if we were tempted to do an aveira and we suddenly miraculously saw our father's image in the window, we would also stop. Why then does the Gemara cite Yosef as the paradigm of someone who successfully withstood the temptation of his evil inclination?

It is possible that when the Gemara says that "the image of his father appeared to him in the window" the Gemara is alluding to this not being the first time that the image of Yaakov appeared to Yosef. Yosef lived his life by always asking himself "What would my father do in this situation? What would my father say?" Since Yosef lived his life like that on a daily basis, the mention of "his father's image appeared to him in the window" is not talking about a supernatural event. There was no miracle here. Yosef always saw his father peering at him through the window. He always asked himself "What would my father do?" If we lived our lives like that, we would also abstain from giving into sinful temptation.

Many times, I told the story of Mr. Harry K. Wolport. The old timers in Baltimore remember him. Harry K. Wolport was a businessman. He was a talmid of Rav Boruch Ber. He learned in Kamenetz and came to the United States of America in the early 1900's. Every one of his Jewish acquaintances felt that they needed to keep their stores open on Shabbos to survive in business. He was tempted to keep his store open on Shabbos as well. But he said, "I cannot do this to Rav Boruch Ber!" Rav Boruch Ber used to appear to him in the window because Mr. Wolport kept that image in front of him. That is how he was able to withstand the temptation to open his store on Shabbos. When a person lives his life like that on a daily basis, such visages in the window are not supernatural.

Problem #2: Why does the Rambam chose the story of Yosef as the paradigm of stopping to do an aveirah "not out of trembling and not out

### Likutei Divrei Torah

of fear and not for the sake of honor"? Why Yosef? The Chiddushei HaRim says that if after 120 years, we go to Heaven and they ask us "Why didn't you stop sinning like Yosef did?" we have a simple answer to that question: "I am not Yosef". They don't call me "Yissacher haTzadik" (the righteous one). They call me "Yissacher." Yosef is given the attribute "HaTzadik". "What do you want from me? I am not Yosef!"

"Why don't you make a siyum every year on the entire body of Torah literature like Rav Chaim Kanievsky?" The answer is obvious: "It is because I am NOT Rav Chaim Kanievsky." Rav Elyashiv used to learn in the Beis Medrash on Erev Pesach. Why don't you do that?" The answer is "It is because I am NOT Rav Elyashiv!" I am not Rav Elyashiv and I am not Rav Chaim Kanievsky and I am not Yosef haTzadik.

The Chiddushei HaRim answers: Yes, you are Yosef HaTzadik, because that is what Yosef HaTzadik did for Klal Yisrael. He gave us the spiritual strength to withstand temptation. That is why the Rambam marshals the act of abstention of Yosef haTzadik.

Just like Avraham Avinu gave us the spiritual ability to be a martyr for Kiddush HaShem. Rav Chaim of Volozhin explains that all the patriarchs put qualities of self-sacrifice and other spiritual powers into our spiritual DNA. Yosef gave us the ability to say "No."

That is one answer to this second problem. I was told that the Brisker Rav also gave an answer to this question of why the Rambam uses the example of "like the act of abstaining by the righteous Yosef."

The Brisker Rav says that when Potiphar's wife is trying to seduce Yosef, he gives her a list of reasons why it would be inappropriate for him to do that (Bereshis 39:8-9) "Look – my master concerns himself with nothing in the house, and all that he has, he placed in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate this great evil?" Finally, at the end of his list, Yosef adds "And I would be sinning before Elokim."

The Brisker Rav said Yosef's final remark is his key argument. Every other argument can be answered with an excuse. "He wasn't such a good boss; he made me work too hard; he wouldn't mind anyway; he is fooling around himself..." All these justifications can be offered. A person can rationalize everything. There is only one thing that cannot be rationalized: "And I would be sinning before Elokim."

The Brisker Rav says this is the meaning of this Rambam. When a person is faced with such temptation, he should remember Yosef haTzadik. Yosef haTzadik overcame his temptation by remembering "And I would be sinning before Elokim." Any person who keeps that in mind, will not do an aveira.

---

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

---

##### **Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

##### **From a Tent to a House - Yaakov's Journey**

The name "Bais Yaakov - the house of Yaakov" has become synonymous with the Jewish People. Yaakov's efforts to build the foundation of the Jewish People are related in the parshios of Vayeitzei and Vayishlach. There is another house that Yaakov built in these parshios. Parshas Vayeitzei begins with his promise to build a house for Hashem upon his return to Eretz Yisrael and Parshas Vayishlach concludes with the fulfillment of this commitment. Chazal comment that unlike Avraham and Yitzchak who liken the future location of the Beis Hamikdash to a mountain and a field, Yaakov calls it a home. It is this term that becomes the permanent name, as we refer to the Beis Hamikdash which is built on the Har Habayis. What is the significance of a house that plays such a vital role in Yaakov's existence and particularly in his relationship with Hashem?

The emphasis on a house was not always part of Yaakov's life. Yaakov is described as a dweller of tents, which Chazal interpret to refer to the tents of the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. In his youth, Yaakov relates to Hashem through the vehicle of a tent, yet in later years he serves Hashem in a house. This model of transformation from tent to the house is not only found in the personal life of Yaakov. The Jewish People in their youth worship Hashem in a tent-like structure, i.e. the Mishkan, which is referred to as a tent. It is only centuries later when the tent of the Mishkan is replaced with the house known as the Beis Hamikdash. How does a house differ from a tent and why is it crucial that both Yaakov and his descendants incorporate aspects of the world of tents and of houses into their Avodas Hashem?

A tent conjures up the image of being temporary. It is a dwelling place for those who are traveling and have not yet set down their roots. In contrast, a house is a symbol of prominence. The Mishkan was a tent as it was dismantled and reassembled as the Jewish People traveled through the desert. Although the Mishkan was endowed with sanctity, as soon as it was moved from its location it lost its holiness. Even the sanctity of the location of the Mishkan in the city of Shiloh, which housed the Mishkan for 369 years, was only temporary. After the Mishkan was destroyed, Shiloh lost its unique status. Only Yerushalayim, which housed the Beis

Hamikdash, would take on the status of a permanent sanctuary. The Beis Hamikdash was not a tent but a house in the fullest sense.

In Tehillim, Dovid HaMelech describes his yearning to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of his life and to visit the sanctuary of Hashem. These two requests seem contradictory. How can one simultaneously live somewhere permanently and yet merely be a visitor? Obviously the optimal reality in avodas Hashem is to be in Hashem's presence all the time. Yet, there is a danger in such an existence since we tend to take for granted things that we constantly have; we lose enthusiasm if we no longer view something as being fresh and new. Dovid is beseeching Hashem to enable him to serve Him on a constant basis with the excitement of a first time experience. He wants to be a dweller all of his days yet never lose the passion of a visitor.

Yaakov begins his avodas Hashem in the world of the tent. The freshness and excitement that accompanies one on his travels are found in the tents and Shem and Ever. As Yaakov gets older, he must build a permanent home for his family to serve Hashem. Nevertheless, he must draw inspiration from the days of his youth. As Dovid HaMelech taught us, he must live in a house with the enthusiasm of a tent. The tent and the house of Yaakov becomes the model from his descendants. They first construct a tent and then endow the house of Hashem with the enthusiasm of the Mishkan in the now permanent structure.

This message speaks to many of us at different stages of life. Those who are still in the tents of Torah in their youth should continue to thrive and grow with the enthusiasm of youth. Many of us have reached the stage in which we are building structures of permanence for ourselves and our families. At this critical period, we can sometimes lose sight of our original goals in life which we may have formulated during our years in the tents. The challenges of daily life can make it difficult to approach avodas Hashem with the excitement of youth. Yet, we must rise to the challenge. If we do not create a permanent structure of avodas Hashem with the enthusiasm of our youth, our structure will be hollow and devoid of meaning. Let us turn to our great models from the past who taught us how to thrive in both the tents and houses of Torah. Let us turn to Hashem with a sincere plea to be able to dwell in His house all of the days of our lives and still remain like visitors in His home.

---

#### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

---

##### **The Dream**

##### **Rabbi Aviel and Michal Javasky**

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed... I have a dream... I have a dream."

These are the opening words of Martin Luther King's famous speech, "I have a Dream". The words are a leitmotif of sorts, repeated time and time again throughout the speech. With time, King's dream did, in fact, come true. However, beyond the question of whether a dream will ultimately be realized or not, the very act of dreaming is in itself meaningful.

Our parsha begins with the dreams of Yosef. He dreams that his brothers' sheaves are bowing down to his own sheaf. He also dreams that the sun, moon and eleven stars are bowing down to him. The key word in the beginning of the portion is undoubtedly "dream" [chalom] – which recurs seven times in only three verses.

Yosef is not the first in his family to have dreams. Two portions earlier, in Parshat Vayetze, we read of Yaakov's dream of a ladder reaching to the heavens, with angels descending and ascending on it. And behold God Himself is standing upon it, and then blesses Yaakov.

If so, are dreams significant? Is there a reason why dreams are given such a prominent place in the Book of Bereishit?

A closer reading of Yaakov's dream of the ladder, along with the commentary written on these verses throughout the ages, reveals that in addition to Rashi's well-known explanation – that the angels that ascended the ladder were those that had escorted him until he reached the border of Eretz Yisrael, while those that descended were angels that would be escorting him outside the Land – there are also other ways to interpret these verses.

One such interpretation is offered by Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, also known as "Manitou", who claimed that the ladder was not simply another object depicted in the dream, but was, in fact, a product of the dream itself.

Manitou believes that Yaakov did not see a ladder or angels in a dream; rather, all of the above were products of his dream. In other words, only one who is a Dreamer, is able to connect heaven and earth. Hence, the minute Yaakov becomes a Dreamer, a connection between heaven and earth is instantly formed resulting in: "behold a ladder stood on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."

The renowned writer and poet, Gibran Khalil, once said that one should believe in dreams for in them is concealed the door to eternity.

Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Friedman, author of Chayei Shlomo, writes in his book that the ladder which stood upon the ground symbolizes the need to begin any process while standing 'on the ground'. In other words, only when one is firmly rooted, can one aspire to reach the heavens. One must first be connected to reality, to people; only then can one be a visionary, a dreamer, and ascend upwards. One must therefore be cautious not to ascend too quickly without making sure there is a firm foundation on the ground. For the higher the ladder, the firmer its base footing must be.

The fact that we live in a rational world might make us repress our dreams or even scoff at them. Moreover, our very busy daily routine doesn't always leave much room for dreaming, or envisioning a better reality. However, dreams come to express man's deeper essence. Often times our dreams teach us much about ourselves and the people we want to be. As such, dreams should not be taken lightly; in fact, the Torah invites us to examine them and learn from them. Much like Yaakov's dream expresses the ambition to connect between heaven and earth, God and man, the spiritual and the mundane – so, too, the dreams of all people express their deepest hopes and desires.

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, describes dreams as "the royal road to the unconscious". In other words, dreams are the gateway to the subconscious of the human mind. In his writings, Freud describes how his patients' dreams are a form of confrontation with the traumas experienced by them during their lifetime. Freud talks of dreams as of one's deepest inherent desires. When we are asleep, our defense mechanisms are down, and content that would otherwise be blocked out during times of wakefulness, rises to the surface and is given expression through dreams. Thus, Freud concluded that dreams are a window into those concealed parts of the human soul.

Dreams also have the power to break through boundaries and penetrate spheres that are otherwise concealed. Rav Kook describes dreams as "defying reality, heedless of its borders". In his view, since dreams are free of the boundaries of reality, they can actually show us the unobscured reality to which we aspire. For two thousand years we dreamed of our return to Zion, despite the fact that the limitations imposed upon us by reality made it seem impossible – "When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like those who dream." In much the same way, we, too, must free ourselves of the limitations of

the physical world and allow ourselves to dream of a future filled with hope.

Manitou tells a story of one Tzaddik who asks one of his chassidim what he lives on. The chassid replies that he buys flour, adds to it some water and yeast, kneads it into dough, turns it into bread, sells the bread and uses the money to buy more flour. When the Tzaddik hears this, he says: "I did not ask you how you spend your time. I asked you what you live on!" The chassid once again renders a description of his livelihood. The Tzaddik then realizes that he would have to rephrase his question because the chassid was clearly missing the point: "I was not asking what you live on, but what keeps you alive! What is the thing that gives meaning to your life? What do you dream of?"

Sometimes we are inclined to think that we depend on our livelihood to stay alive, and on the food that we eat. However, we forget that these only sustain the physical dimensions of life. The bigger question is – of what do we dream? What gives meaning to our life? What are our ambitions for ourselves and for the world?

When one embarks on emissary work, shlichut, one has big dreams. But pretty quickly we fall into routine and the dreams get pushed aside. It is important that we remind ourselves, throughout the shlichut, of our dreams, our ambitions, our aspirations. The more we dream, the more meaningful will our emissary work be, and our very lives as well.

---

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

---

##### **That's How He Got Out of Jail**

And Yosef came to them in the morning, and he saw them and behold, they were troubled. And he asked Pharaoh's chamberlains who were with him in the prison of his master's house, saying, "Why are your faces sad today?" And they said to him, "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it." Yosef said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to G-d? Please tell me now." (Breishis 40:7-8)

Many years ago, I was invited to visit and speak to a group of Jewish prisoners. This was a new type of audience for me and so I thought long and hard about what I should and shouldn't say. I was wondering to myself, "What would they like most?" The answer, of course, was, "To get out of jail." Now I wasn't coming there to hatch a plot for them to escape or to frustrate them with conversations about fantastically impossible things. So, I asked myself, "Who in the Torah was ever in jail and how did they get out?" Yosef HaTzadik immediately jumped onto the screen of my consciousness and I started to comb carefully

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

through the Torah's description of his time in jail. I made an amazing discovery!

When I finally came to meet these unfortunate gentlemen locked in that situation, I was shocked at how much they seemed like you and me. It was sad. This is what bad choosing can cause. I asked them, "Who here would like to get out of prison?" They all chimed in unanimously, "Me!" I asked them if there was anybody in the Torah who was ever in prison.

When they let me know that Yosef was a prisoner, I asked them, "How did he get out?" One fellow immediately told how Yosef interpreted the dream of the butler and when Pharaoh had a troubling dream and he needed someone to interpret it. He recalled his experience with Yosef in prison as a dream interpreter and he was summoned before Pharaoh to interpret his dream and that was his ticket to freedom. Everyone was nodding in agreement but I told him blankly, "That's not how Yosef got out of jail." Another fellow told over the same narrative emphatically but with some different details and when he concluded, I told him the same thing, "That's not how he got out of jail."

A few more attempts to explain the same story were met with the same response, "That's not how he got out of jail." They were getting agitated and so to calm their nerves and pique their interest I told them, "The problem with you guys is that you saw the movie, but you didn't read the book."

I took out a Chumash and I started to read and translate slowly, how the butler and the baker of Pharaoh ended up in jail. Then we came to the important point. It says, "And Yosef came to them in the morning..." I explained that if anybody on the planet had a good reason to sleep late, stay under the covers, and be depressed, it was Yosef. He was cast away as a young man by his family to a foreign land with contrary values. He worked his way to the top and was then falsely accused of having done what he refused to do. So, he was thrown into jail. Now, in a prison in a foreign land, the present is gloomy and the future is even more bleak. If he would have curled up into a fetal position and retreated from life no one could blame him, but no! What did he do? He got up in the morning to visit these other prisoners.

Maybe he came to them to be cheered up and hear some good news. Maybe that was his motivation. It seems not. When he sees their troubled and sad faces he could have justifiably turned around and returned to his bunk, telling himself, "I've got my own problems. I don't need to be dragged down by needy people." Again, that's not what happened. Instead, he said four words that changed the world. He asked them, "Lama

Pneichem Ra-im HaYom?" – "Why are your faces so down today?" Then they told him about their troubling dreams and he invited them to share their dreams with him." The rest is history!

In fact, Yosef was never in prison. Sure, his feet and his body were there, locked into that limited and limiting space, but he was busy serving others. He made the best of every situation by not wallowing in self-pity. He was busy helping and being useful to other people wherever he was. Though, technically he was in jail, but from a deeper perspective, he was never in prison even while he was in prison, and that's how he got out of jail.

---

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's  
Derashot Ledorot**

---

**Afterwards - Straightening Out Jumbled Priorities**

I. In the whole sordid story of the selling of Joseph, it is the oldest brother, Reuben, who comes out better than all the others. "And Reuben heard, and delivered him out of their hand, and said, 'let us not take his life. 'And Reuben said unto them, 'shed not blood; cast him into this pit that is in this wilderness, but lay not hands upon him'--that he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father (Gen. 37:21, 22)

Yet, Reuben's plan comes to naught. At the crucial moment, Reuben fails. When he is most needed, he is not there. For by the time he has returned to the pit in order to release Joseph, the brothers had already sold him into slavery. "And Reuben returned unto the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; said, 'the child is not there; and as for me, whether shall I go?" (Gen. .)37:29,30

Where was Reuben? Why wasn't he there in time to avoid the tragedy? The Rabbis give a עסוק היה בשוק ותעניתו על שבלבל יצועי אביו :number of answers, one of them somewhat surprising Reuben was preoccupied with doing penance because of his previous sin of "changing the bed of his father"--in taking up the cudgels for his mother Leah, he offended his father Jacob by removing Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent, into Leah's tent. He meant to establish his mother's primacy as chief wife over her co-wives. But in so doing, he deeply hurt Jacob. Reuben was seized by remorse and contrition. He was so engrossed in his own spiritual rehabilitation--that he missed the opportunity to save Joseph.

Reuben meant well, but it came out all wrong. His priorities were jumbled. He failed to appreciate that life and survival come first, and only then can one attend to his own spiritual growth and religious development. Pikuah nefesh (saving a life) precedes teshuvah (repentance).

II. At the recent National Convention of the UOJCA which was attended by myself and a number of leading members of the Jewish Center, the focus of debate was the problem whether or not the UOJCA should secede from the Synagogue Council of America, in which are represented both the rabbinic and lay organizations of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform groups. The point of view that I advocated was that we should stay in. But the secessionists too had a point, and they pressed their argument vigorously. Fortunately, the Convention decided that now is not the time for divisiveness and factionalism. In order to avoid an open battle, it was decided to postpone the issue for three months. But the sentiment of the majority was clear. It was for staying in, not pulling out.

When all the House of Israel is threatened, you do not go off in a corner yourself. When everyone else seems to be against you, you do not divide yourself against yourself. When Jews are in danger of being sold out; when supposed friends and allies and brothers stand by impassively; when רעה אכלתו, "an evil beast has eaten him"--when the P.L.O. is acknowledged as a legitimate group in international forums--this is not a time to go away and brood over the spiritual problems על שבלבל יצועי אביו, worrying lest innocent Jews will confuse Conservative and Reform for Orthodox and vice versa.

In Israel too the same principle of priorities must hold. Now is not the time for political bickering and interparty sniping. Now is not the time to insist upon the purity of the principles of each individual group. Now is the time for all factions to work together, and to postpone individual self-assertion and ideological pursuits. Would that the government be broadened to include all groups in a national coalition!

III. The same message is subtly woven into the very structure of our Hanukkah prayer, Al Hanisim. We say that in the days of Mattathias, when the evil Greek-Syrian government oppressed Israel להשכיחם תורתך, Israel cause them to forget the Torah and to violate the commandments, the Lord miraculously saved us. We would expect that our song of praise would indicate immediately that the Lord came to our rescue by allowing us to study the Torah and observe the mitzvot. The rational assumption is--an immediate resumption of spiritual and religious activity. Instead, we read a rather long passage, ואתה ברחמיך הרבים עמדת להם בעת צרתם רבת את מסרת גיבורים, נקמת את נקמתם, דנת את דוים, ריבם ולעמך ישראל עשית...ורבים ביד מעטים, ביד חלשים תשועה גדולה ופורקן כהיום הזה "And You, in Your great compassion, stood by them in the time of of their woe, You fought

**Likutei Divrei Torah**

their battles and championed them in judgement and avenged them. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few...And for Your people Israel did you perform a great salvation and redemption on this day."

And only then do we read, וטהרו, ופינו את היכלך, ואחר כך באו בניך לדביר ביתך וקבעו שמונת, והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך, את מקדשך ימי חנוכה אלו...

"And afterwards Your children came into Your holy house, and cleaned Your sanctuary, and purified Your Temple, and kindled lights in your sacred court, and established these eight days of Hanukkah..."

What this prayer is telling us by its very construction is that before all else, the very first item on the national agenda is survival against the common foe. The Greeks must be repulsed, their armies scattered, and military triumph assured. Only then, ואחר כך, afterwards--will they attend to the fulfillment of their ideological commitments, to "cleaning house" internally.

IV. If this is true of principles, especially of religious principles, how much more so is it true of purely personal concerns, of luxuries and convenience and comforts! All these must take a back seat to our central and foremost concern: the survival of the people of Israel, which in our days is to such a great extent contingent upon the survival of the State of Israel. We therefore expect that all members of The Jewish Center, without any single exception, will subordinate their personal needs and considerations to support Israel בעת צרתם, in their time of woe, in greater measure than ever before.

V. Yet, this principle of ואחר כך, "afterwards"--that first must come the fact of survival and only then can we attend to the quality of that survival and the purity of Jewish existence--holds true only where indulgence in one's own ideals may jeopardize kelal Yisrael, the totality of Israel. It is an institutional, not a personal priority. The priority of the question of life-and-death is valid only in the area of organizational activity, in the arena of practical undertakings.

Each man for himself must realize at the very outset that without emunah (faith), without the Holy One, all is lost. Fundamentally, our struggle for survival itself begins with and is contingent upon an act of will and faith. The taking up arms must be undergirded by a pervasive awareness that the battle is the evil in the hands of the righteous, the wicked in the hands of students of Torah. It is עוסקי תורתך

is not only a military battle of unequal odds, גיבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים--but also one of moral confrontation.

The State of Israel--its founding and survival these past 26 years--as well as the persistence of Jews for over 2,000 years in enduring the exile, all this is irrational and improbable and unpredictable without the spiritual-historic dimension. There is more than a grain of truth in that famous anecdote about a rabbi who turned to his people during the War of Independence in 1948, after noticing the poverty of Israel's arms and the multitude of its enemies, and called out,

זעגט תהלים, כארלטאט זיך נישט אויך ניסים, אידן  
"Jews! Do not rely upon miracles! Recite Psalms!"

To rely on the U.N. or the United States or even one's own armed forces is to rely naively on miracles. To rely on God, to act with hope and confidence and בטחון and אמונה, is the only sane and rational course. With all prior attention to the exigencies of economics and arms and politics, underneath all and before all else, the issue of success and failure ו"ה, will hang on faith--faith in God, faith in Israel, faith in the justice of our case, faith in ourselves, faith in our future.

A recent issue of the Israeli newspaper Maariv, relates that there was an old Hasid of the Brazlaver group in Jerusalem. He came to Israel, then Palestine, at the end of the 1920's, when Russia forbade emigration and the English let no one in to the Holy Land. The late Rabbi Elimelech Bar Shaul ז"ל tells, that he once asked this old Jew how he managed to cross the international borders at such a difficult time in order to get into Palestine. The Hasid answered, "What kind of question is that? I knew that a Jew must come to the Holy Land, and so I wanted to come, and so I came."

"How about the certificates?"

"Bah, that's nothing. I knew that if I wanted to come, that if I believed that I must come to Eretz Israel, then I will with the help of God reach it. Indeed, I once stole across the borders in Syria, but the Englishmen caught me and sent me back."

"And after that you did get a certificate?"

"No, not at all. I knew that something must be wrong with my faith, that I did not believe with my whole heart, and that is why I did not succeed in stealing across the border. So I sat in the Bet Hamidrash and I worked on my faith. Again I tried, and again I was caught. So again I returned to the Bet Hamidrash, to strengthen my faith and my trust. I thought that if I believed with my whole heart and whole might, that I desired with every bone in my body to reach Eretz Israel, that the Holy One will help me. So I tried a third time, and then I believed as one must believe, and that is why I am here."

As we enter Hanukhah, we reaffirm our priorities: first, we must strengthen our own emunah, our own faith and hope. Second, we must dedicate all our efforts to save kelal Yisrael and the State of Israel. Afterwards, ואחר כך, we must make sure to rid ourselves of the desecration of contemporary Hellenism, of the flippancy to Torah and Halakhah, of the insinuation of assimilation and quasi-assimilation into our religious life. Then must we clean the sanctuaries of Judaism, purify its temples, kindle lamps in its court-yards and, with the light of god and Torah, illuminate the life of all Jews, and through them become אור לגויים, a light to all the nations. (1974)





BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io  
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYEISHEV - 5785

[parsha@groups.io](mailto:parsha@groups.io) / [www.parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net) - in our 30th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [parsha+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:parsha+subscribe@groups.io) Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com) A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov.

In memory of Sara Masha bat R' Yaakov Eliezer a"h, Baila bat Arye Leib a"h & Ana Malka bas Yisrael a"h.

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)  
(proceeds to tzedaka)

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)>

date: Dec 18, 2024, 10:45 PM

### **The Lesson of Ki Im Zechartani – So That You Will Remember Me Parshas Vayeishev**

Posted on December 19, 2024 (5785) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand | Series:

Rav Frand | Level: Intermediate

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: ##1316 – Endangering Oneself to Perform The Mitzvah of Kibbud Av. Good Shabbos!

Among Rav Akiva Eiger's world-renowned Talmudic and Halachic lomdus questions are two questions on Chumash in this week's parsha.

Yosef is languishing away in prison. The sar haofim (baker) and the sar hamashkim (wine butler) each have dreams. They tell their dreams to Yosef, who provides them with the correct interpretations. The reason the sar hamashkim was thrown into prison was that he had unwittingly served Pharaoh a cup of wine into which a fly had fallen. Yosef interpreted his dream, saying "...In another three days, Pharaoh will count you and will restore you to your post and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as was the former practice when you were his cupbearer (k'mishpat ha'rishon asher mashkehu)." (Bereshis 40:13).

Rav Akiva Eiger asks why Yosef needs to emphasize "as was the former practice when you were his cupbearer?"

In other words, imagine if the Secretary of the Treasury is fired. One night he has a dream. A dream interpreter says, "Guess what? You are going to be the Secretary of the Treasury again." Does the dream interpreter need to state the job description of the Secretary of Treasury? There is no need to describe the role of Secretary of the Treasury!

Why would it not have been sufficient for Yosef to just tell the sar hamashkim that Pharaoh will give him back his job? Period. Why does Yosef need to go on to say "And you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just like you did originally?"

Rav Akiva Eiger asks a second question about the words "ki im zechartani..." (at which time, if you would think of me...) Yosef's intention is surely to say "And by the way, remember me." How should that be expressed? Yosef should have just said "u'zechartani" (and remember me).

The expression "ki im zechartani" is peculiar. It almost seems to say "SO THAT you can remember me."

Rav Akiva Eiger answers beautifully: If Yosef would have just told the sar hamashkim that he will get his job back, the sar hamashkim would have been a nervous wreck. He would be petrified that the same thing might happen again. If it happened to him once that a fly fell into the wine, what is to prevent that from happening again? He would be thinking to himself, "The next time if there is a fly in the wine, I will not be merely given a jail sentence. I will lose my head!"

The sar hamashkim would be so jittery about carrying out his duties that the wine would be spilled all over Pharaoh's lap! He would be a nervous wreck! So, Yosef told him that he does not need to worry at all. I want to tell you that you did nothing wrong. It was not your fault. Every time you served Pharaoh a goblet, you checked to make sure there was not a fly in there. Do you know why this happened? It happened because it was the hand of G-d. It happened because the Ribono shel Olam wants you to remember me – "ki im zechartani."

Therefore, not only are you going to get your job back, but "you will place Pharaoh's cup into his hand" – ka'mishpat harishon – JUST LIKE YOU USED TO. You used to be calm, cool, and collected when you served Pharaoh his wine, and that is how you will be once again. You will go back to your sar hamashkim role and perform it well because the only reason Hashem made the fly go into Pharaoh's cup is so that you will be able to remember me and get me out of here.

I recently heard an incident involving the same type of "ki im zechartani." Last Shabbos was the "The President's Conference of Torah U'Messorah" in Florida. The event was attended by presidents of institutions – movers and shakers of Klal Yisrael. There were speeches that encouraged lay leaders to get involved in supporting large mosdos. One of the speakers was Gary Turgow from Detroit, Michigan. He is involved in many different organizations, is a premier askan (communal leader) and is a very successful businessman.

He spoke at the conference and told of two amazing incidents involving hashgacha pratis:

He is on the Board of Directors of Blue Cross – Blue Shield of Michigan. He was attending a meeting of the organization at which he was planning to announce his resignation. (He had been there for several years; he felt that he had done whatever he could do, and he had other obligations.) He was sitting on the dais next to a woman who was the head of Blue Cross – Blue Shield of Michigan. While sitting there, he received a text message that someone in NYU needed an emergency life-or-death operation. However, Blue Cross – Blue Shield had not yet signed off on the operation, which needed to happen now or never.

They asked Gary Turgow if he had any connections with Blue Cross – Blue Shield that can help with the emergency situation. He took his cell phone and showed it to the woman sitting next to him and within five minutes, the operation was approved by Blue Cross – Blue Shield. Gary Turgow told the Torah U'Messorah convention: "Guess what? I did not resign my post on the board of Blue Cross – Blue Shield."

This is literally an incident of ki im zechartani. Why did the Ribono shel Olam put Gary Turgow on that board for who knows how many years? Mr. Turgow said that he felt like it was abas kol coming down from heaven telling him, "You need to be on the board of Blue Cross – Blue Shield. You have been placed in that position in order to help with this life-saving incident."

The second incident he mentioned was the following:

Mr. Turgow was the president of a bank, a major financial institution in Detroit. He received a call from a Jew who started chastising him: "I don't know how you, as a Jew, can be president of this bank. They are a bunch of wicked people." Mr. Turgow asked, "What is the problem?" The caller explained that his wife died and he fell behind on his mortgage payments. The bank sent him a letter that they were foreclosing on his property. The man only had \$5,000 left on his mortgage and the house was worth several



hundred thousand dollars. He was seven months behind on his monthly payments toward this \$5000 and now the bank was foreclosing!

“How could you be president of such a bank? They are such wicked people!” Mr. Turgow promised to look into the matter. He looked into it and found out that the facts were as the caller explained but in truth, his bank had sold the mortgage to another bank and the other bank saw that they could make a killing on this foreclosure. Mr. Turgow personally paid off the fellow’s mortgage and the man was able to stay in his house.

However, Mr. Turgow was surprised that he did not hear anything back from this fellow. The bank president thought to himself, I saved this person’s house, and he did not even thank me for it! However, several months later, this fellow died and it was revealed in his will that he left the entire house to Gary Turgow with the instructions to give the proceeds from the sale of the house to any charity of his choice.

Again – ki im zechartani: That is why Gary Turgow merited to be the bank president.

For most of us, such “ki im zechartani” moments do not happen so dramatically. But “heavenly voices” reach out to all of us and force us to ask “Why did the Ribono shel Olam put me here? Why is this in my lap?” That is the lesson of “ki im zechartani”.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD

dhoffman@torah.org

This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

<https://rabbiefremgoldberg.org/birthrate>

## **The Greatest Threat Americans Face**

**By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

December 19, 2024 | ח"ה כסלו ה'תשפ"ה

Ask Americans what the greatest threat we face is and you will get a range of answers. Some will say it is global warming and climate change. Others think it is the issue of illegal immigration and unsecured borders. Still others say it is the threat of terrorism or a nuclear war. The truth is it is none of the above.

Our greatest threat is extinction. The National Center for Health Statistics reported the total fertility rate in the United States was 1.62 in 2023. That’s the lowest rate ever recorded in the United States and well below the rate needed to maintain a growing population. Recently, the EU reported another declining birth rate, their lowest in 60 years. Many developed countries’ birth rates are below the rate needed to maintain and grow the population. Projections suggest that by century’s end, a shocking 93% of countries, including the UK and the US, will confront underpopulation given the present trajectory. The statistics seems clear - extreme birth rate collapse is the biggest danger to human civilization by far.

The Jewish people are doing our part with a birth rate of 1.7 overall, an average of 3.3 for Orthodox Jews, 1.4 for non-Orthodox Jews, and 6.6 for “Ultra-Orthodox” Jews. Israel’s birth rate remains the highest among countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and is the forum’s only member state reproducing above replacement rate. The Talmud (Shabbos 31a) reports that each of us will be asked a series of questions by the heavenly court at the end of our lives. One of them is Asakta b’pirya v’rivya, did you occupy yourself with populating the world? The Maharsha points out that we will not be asked whether we fulfilled the mitzvah to have children, because that is beyond our control. We will be asked, asakta, were you oseik, did you take responsibility for continuity, did you contribute to creating a better future, irrespective of whether you had children. The Chochmas Shlomo, Rav Shlomo Kluger, rules that one can fulfill the mitzvah of pru u’rvu, to have children, by caring for children, even if not biologically their own. (It goes without saying that we daven daily that all who want children and who are waiting should be blessed with healthy children who give them nachas.)

One can have no biological children but still be the proud progenitor of generations by living for and being dedicated towards the future. And one

can have a large biological family but be entirely consumed with themselves and their own pleasure, indifferent and apathetic to creating continuity and to the next generation.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe and Rebbetzin had no biological children, but they were the parents and grandparents of generations, of worlds of spiritual heirs.

Two weeks ago, over 6,500 rabbis who each see and feel the rebbe as a father gathered for the annual Kinus Hashluchim.

As an American, the birth rate collapse is a genuine concern but as a Torah Jew, what it reflects about our society is even more concerning. The world around us is increasingly more concerned with the here and now, with pleasure, comfort, and convenience rather than in the effort, sacrifice, faith, hope, and optimism it takes to bring and raise children in this world. Is it any surprise that we are suffering from a population threat when many states have laws that require insurance companies to cover birth control while simultaneously refusing to cover fertility treatments such as IVF, leaving many couples with the burden of exorbitant expenses when trying to have a child privately?

Soon, in Sefer Shemos, we will read how Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to make the boards of the Mishkan out of shittim wood. Rashi says that the wood used for the Mishkan came from special trees that Yaakov Avinu planted in Egypt. Just prior to his death, he instructed his children to remove these trees and take the wood with them when they left Mitzrayim. Where did Yaakov get the wood? The Midrash on Vayigash tells us that on his way down to Egypt, Yaakov stopped in Beer Sheva and he gathered cedar wood that his Zayda, Avraham, had planted there years earlier. This wasn’t ordinary wood from ordinary trees. This was intergenerational. It represented and reflected the effort, sacrifice, forethought, and investment of earlier generations.

Are you planting the trees that your great-grandchildren will be nourished by and will build their religious lives from? Do you prioritize building the future over indulging in the pleasure of the present? Is Jewish continuity a concern for you and what are you doing to educate, enrich, empower, and inspire future generations?

Chanukah begins this week and ironically, though it is not even a Biblical holiday, it is perhaps the most observed Jewish holiday, including by those who would not define themselves as observant. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that the root of the word Chanukah is chinuch because at its core, the battle against the Hellenists was about the continuity of Jewish identity and who would define our future..

A couple of years ago, Yeshivas Rav Yitzchak Elchanon (RIETS/YU) celebrated the 50th anniversary of Rav Hershel Schachter Shlita serving as Rosh Yeshiva. In an interview, he was asked: “What are you most proud of accomplishing in these 50 years?” Rav Schachter responded: “Over this 50-year period I am most proud of raising together with my eishes chayil a wonderful family. To me, that comes way before anything else I accomplished.”

What is your greatest source of pride? How do you define success? Do your calendar and credit card statements reflect a commitment to the future or the present, to others or to yourself, to ensuring our continuity or to prioritizing the here and now?

This Chanukah, let’s touch our candle to others to pay the flame forward, to make our Menorah shine with the light that illuminates the world.

---

YUTORAH IN PRINT • Vayeishev 5785

### **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

The complex story of Yosef and his brothers is a study in sibling rivalry, simmering family tensions, and fractured relationships. It showcases the toxic effects of unresolved conflict, favoritism, and jealousy, which slowly erode the family’s unity. This tragic chapter in our history is a powerful reminder of how destructive unchecked jealousy and a lack of communication can be to a family.

However, this saga is also a story of two specific brothers-Yosef and Yehuda- who emerge as the dominant contenders for leadership of our nascent nation. Over the next few parshiyot, these two figures will wrestle

with one another for the mantle of leadership. In the climactic moment of this entire epic, Yehuda directly challenges Yosef, demanding freedom for his brothers.

Long term, each of these two strong personalities is destined to establish a branch of Jewish monarchy. Numerous monarchs will emerge from Yosef's descendants, while the primary royal lineage of our nation will trace back to the house of Yehuda.

Surprisingly, the arcs of these two brothers are quite bizarre. Yosef is despised by his brothers, hijacked from his father, sold into slavery multiple times, and is ultimately incarcerated in a dungeon. Not exactly the storyline you would expect for someone destined for leadership.

Yehuda's arc is equally unconventional and unsettling. He takes a foreign wife with whom he bears three children. Two of them pass away prematurely, and afterwards, Yehuda ignores his widowed daughter-in-law. Ultimately, he mistakenly has relations with her, which results in her becoming pregnant with twin boys. She is nearly executed for her perceived crimes until Yehuda comes clean and confesses to being the father.

These are very strange accounts for individuals who will eventually lead our nation. Evidently, these future leaders must confront real-life challenges, and the trials and scandals they endure along the walk of life will teach them hard lessons of leadership.

#### In Your Dreams

Yosef is a dynamic personality with natural charisma. He possesses striking looks, flashy clothing, and effortlessly attracts everyone within his radius. He is a man of grand vision, dreaming of glory and greatness. Convinced that his dreams will serve the greater good and shape Jewish history, he speaks about them openly, hoping to influence and persuade others of his innate talent and potential.

What he fails to realize is that leadership is not about materializing your own dreams or imposing your will and vision upon others. Leadership isn't about influencing others to adopt your ideals, but about helping others reach and attain their own hopes and dreams.

At the beginning of Parshat Vayeishev, he dreams of himself at the center. By the end of the parsha, he becomes part of other people's dreams. Only after being thrown into prison, does he learn the art of listening to others' dreams and of helping them make sense of their own personal aspirations and desires. In that dark and dank prison he finally becomes part of someone else's story.

#### Hard Times

In prison, he also realizes that not everyone has the luxury of dreaming about their future success. Yosef's dreams are grandiose and atmospheric. He witnesses his family collecting the grain and cashing in on their material success, while he stands in the middle.

He also dreams of planets orbiting in the heavens, envisioning his own meteoric power and influence. His dreams inhabit a rarefied, higher plane, far removed from the drudgery and monotony of everyday life. His dreams are rooted in success, power, and the pursuit of greatness.

In prison, he meets people who have fallen on hard times, who have been given a rough turn in life and feel stuck in the mud. The two prisoners are former members of the royal court who have fallen from grace, and are grappling with the sting of being cast out and forgotten.

The prisoners Yosef meets don't dream of stars or material abundance but just of finding some purpose in life, a way to redeem themselves from emptiness. Not everyone's life is rosy and cheery. People suffer hardships and setbacks as they navigate an unforgiving world. Until Yosef learns to listen to other people's dreams, he cannot be a leader. Likewise, until he realizes how hard some people have it, he cannot be a leader.

Leadership has nothing to do with influence or popularity. Just because you speak into a microphone doesn't make you a leader. In the world of social media, it is relatively easy for people to grab megaphones and self-deputize as "pretend leaders". Leadership resides in the quiet empathy that flows from understanding the struggles of others and the courage to embrace dreams that are not your own.

Do you uplift the dreams and aspirations of others, or do you merely leverage their attention to serve your own ambitions? This is the hard lesson which Yosef must learn in prison before he can become a "leader".

#### Spare Parts

Yehuda must learn different lessons. Devoid of dreams himself, he has no need to learn the art of nurturing the dreams of others. Instead, he must recognize that people are fragile, marked by both moments of strength and episodes of vulnerability. Even saints sin, and everyone has a dark side to them. Human beings mustn't be held to impossibly high standards – even great people will have their moments of weakness.

Yehuda can only learn this lesson by experiencing his own moral hiccups. Though he becomes ensnared in an unseemly tale, he redeems himself by taking full responsibility for his missteps, despite the personal dishonor it brings. He learns that leadership consists in tolerating others and their imperfections rather than holding them to impossible standards.

Had he learned this lesson earlier, perhaps he would have been more magnanimous toward Yosef. He would have appreciated the sincerity of Yosef's aspirations, even while realizing how toxic and dangerous runaway ambition can be. Likewise, had he appreciated human fragility, Yehuda would have better understood the pain and anguish of his daughter-in-law, who was twice widowed, rather than blaming her or casting her as a black widow.

Leadership means tolerating others' failures, exhibiting patience when people stumble and trusting in their ability to recover. Yehuda must visit his own inner darkness to understand the darkness that resides within every human soul. Truth and Reckoning Yehuda must also confront the painful lesson of honesty, even when it comes at a personal cost. Trust is the cornerstone of all relationships and the foundation of leadership. Without being trustworthy and holding to a personal code of honor, a person has no right to influence or affect the lives of others. People follow those who embody integrity and possess moral compass.

Yehuda exemplifies this honesty and integrity when he chooses to shame himself rather than let an innocent woman carry their dark secret to her grave. In doing so, he earns the trust of everyone around him. They place their confidence in him to navigate the difficult crises ahead. Ya'akov will trust him to travel with Binyamin to free Shimon from prison, and the brothers will trust him to serve as their representative in prosecuting for their collective freedom. Without unwavering honesty and a life grounded in integrity, one forfeits the right to lead.

Yosef and Yehuda each embark on their own personal odyssey toward leadership. Yosef learns to shift the focus from his own dreams to the aspirations of others. Along his journey, he also discovers that life is not always bright and carefree, and he learns to empathize with the struggles of ordinary people, who face hardship, disillusionment, and displacement. Along his own journey to leadership, Yehuda learns that human beings are naturally imperfect, and therefore people shouldn't be harshly judged for their flaws and limitations. Additionally, he realizes that without honesty and integrity, he should not be taking decisions on behalf of others.

-----  
**from: Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Dec 19, 2024, 7:00 PM

subject: **Tidbits Klal Gavoah in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l**

Parashas Vayeishev 5785

December 21st • 20 Kislev 5785

On Wednesday, Erev Chanukah, Tachanun is omitted at Mincha. Tachanun and Lamenatzei'ach are omitted throughout Chanukah, as well as Kel Erech Apayim before Kerias Hatorah, and the Yehi Ratzons that follow. Fasting and hespeidim are generally prohibited. Al Hanisim is said in Shemoneh Esrei and Bircas Hamazon. The omission of Al Hanisim does not need to be corrected. However, if one remembers before completing Bircas Hamazon he may recite the compensatory Harachaman at the end of Bircas Hamazon, followed by Bimei Mattisyahu. Similarly, one can add the compensatory Harachaman at the end of Elokai Netzor, followed by Bimei Mattisyahu

Each day of Chanukah, the complete Hallel is recited during Shacharis. The Kerias Hatorah of each day of Chanukah corresponds to the day of the bringing of the Korbanos Ha'nesiim. Some congregations recite Mizmor Shir (Psalm 30) after the Shir Shel Yom. A woman should recite Hallel.

The Achronim agree that there is a mitzvah to gather at a meal and give thanks to Hashem; through this we publicize the Chanukah miracles. Singing and saying words of praise to Hashem renders the meal a Seudas Mitzvah. There is a minhag to eat dairy foods in commemoration of Yehudis's defeat of the enemy general by feeding him dairy items. The practice of eating latkes, doughnuts and fried foods commemorates the miracle involving oil (Rabbeinu Maimon, Ibn Ezra).

There is a praiseworthy minhag of giving gifts to the melamdin of one's children (R' C. Palaggi zt"l). This sets an example of hakaras hatov for your child and displays the importance of their chinuch. A gift accompanied by warm words of thanks is a tremendous source of chizuk for our Rebbeim and teachers.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Sanhedrin 4 • Yerushalmi: Shabbos 25 • Mishnah Yomis: Sanhedrin 1:5-6 • Oraysa: Next week is Beitza 32b-34b. Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Chanukah begins on Wednesday evening, December 25th.

Shabbos Chanukah, as well as Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Teves, is next Shabbos Parashas Miketz, December 28th.

The fast of Asarah B'Teves is on Friday, January 10th.

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

Haftarah: The Navi Amos (2:6-3:8) warns that although Hashem may have mercy for three sins, there is a fourth sin which will bring about certain Divine wrath. The Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer says that this fourth sin is related to the brothers' selling of Yosef. As even if it was necessary for Yosef to be distanced, using the profits to purchase shoes demonstrated a level of indignity and insensitivity.

Parashas Vayeishev: 112 Pesukim • No Mitzvos listed

"וַיִּמְלִיכֵם נְשָׂאִים נְכֹאֲת וְצָרִי לָנֶשׁ" "And their camels bearing spices, balsam and lotus" (Bereishis 37:25)

Rashi explains that the Yishme'alim would generally transport goods that had a foul-smelling odor. However, when Yosef was sold and transported to Mitzrayim, he merited that the caravan in which he was transported was carrying goods with a pleasant aroma. But what is the significance of this small 'comfort' when one is being carted off to servitude?

The Telzer approach, attributed to Rav Mottel Pogremonski zt"l, explains this with a parable. Both a surgeon and a murderer bring a knife to the skin. Yet the distinction between the one that seeks to heal and the one that seeks to injure is observed in the surgeon's meticulousness and delicate approach. Although Yosef was being cast away, it was ultimately for the later good; a "Refuah Kodem L'makkah". This small detail of the pleasant aroma despite the circumstances demonstrates that the master plan was perfect and meticulous.

In a similar vein, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that this pleasant aroma was Hashem's message to Yosef that He is with him in his suffering. On Chanukah we recognize and express our gratitude for the miracles performed. Along with the great miracles of the times of the Chashmonaim, we also need to recognize the many smaller miracles that take place in our times and get a good 'scents' of all the everyday blessings in our lives. Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org

Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gpagency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

from: Weekly Tefilah Focus weeklytefilahfocus@gmail.com

date: Dec 16, 2024, 6:59 PM

subject: Hallel Revisited

For Rabbi Mordechai Finkelman's video and audio shiurim, which are based on our Tefilah Focus segments but also include his insightful and inspiring additions, please visit TorahAnytime.com or simply search for "TorahAnytime Rabbi Finkelman."

Hallel Revisited - Hallel

There are numerous opinions in the Gemara, in Masseches P'sachim, as to who authored these chapters of T'hilim (113-118), which comprise what we refer to as "Hallel." It has been suggested that there is really no dispute in the Gemara. The basic framework was established by the early Prophets and later enhanced by successive generations. Eventually, David HaMelech organized these chapters into the final form we have today in T'hilim (T'shuvah MeiAhavah, Vol. II, responsa 264).

\*\*\*\*\*

ה' הִלְלוּ-נִי, הִלְלוּ עַבְדֵי ה', הִלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם ה' (All of klal Yisrael) praise Hashem (that is, the Name that signifies that He created the worlds with a yud and a hei). Praise (Him) especially, you servants of Hashem (who went out of Mitzrayim and saw this clearly, (and) praise the full Name of Hashem [הו"י] since you witnessed Its greatness by the Makos in Mitzrayim. [Pathway to Prayer Siddur, by Rabbi Mayer Birnbaum]

Avdei Hashem refers to all of B'nei Yisrael. Midrash Shocher Tov relates that the B'nei Yisrael sang Hallel after the last plague. Pharaoh was awakened by cries of all the Egyptian homes whose first-borns were dying. He pleaded with Moshe and Aharon to leave immediately! They replied that he would have to issue an official proclamation of emancipation in order for the plague to end. Pharaoh responded by shouting: "In the past you were my slaves, but now you are free men! You are on your own, you are servants of G-d, so you must give praise, you servants of Hashem!"

בְּרַחֲמֵי ה' מְעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם ה' מְבָרַךְ, מְעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם Blessed be the Name of Hashem, from this time and forever.

We express our desire and tefilah to see the entire world recognize that Hashem is the source of blessing now and forever.

מִמְנוּחַ שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבוֹאוֹ, מְהֵלֵל שֵׁם ה' From the rising of the sun to its setting, Hashem's name is praised. High above all nations is Hashem, above the heavens is His glory. מי כה' אֵל-לֵה-יִינוּ הַמַּגְבִּיחַ Who is like Hashem, our G-d, Who is enthroned on high – yet deigns to look upon the heaven and the earth?

These three p'sukim convey the vast difference in how we relate to Hashem vs. how the nations of the world relate. "High above all nations is Hashem." To the nations of the world, Hashem is only exalted way up high, and it is beneath Him to have anything to do with this world. However, to us, He is "Elokeinu" – our G-d – Hashem is "מְשַׁפִּילֵי לְרִאּוֹת" [He] deigns to look upon the heaven and the earth." To Hashem, heaven and earth are equal. He has to lower Himself either way. We understand that Hashem is involved in every detail of our lives, both nationally and individually.

T'hilim 99:2 states: "ה' בְּצִיּוֹן גָּדוֹל, וְרָם הוּא עַל כָּל הָעַמִּים" For us ("Zion"), Hashem is Gadol, like a tower (migdol) which has its feet on the ground, but the top of the ladder is in the highest place of the Universe. Hashem is most exalted beyond our comprehension. At the same time, He controls and guides every detail in our lives. To the nations, He is "רָם-רָם." Just exalted way above, without any connection to this world.

Hallel Revisited - Hallel 2 He (looks even to the lowest and) raises up the extremely poor from the dust, (and) He lifts up the destitute from the garbage dumps. עִם נְדִיבִי עִם, מוֹשִׁיבֵי עֶקְרַת הַבַּיִת, אִם- (Not only does He lift them up from their low state, but He raises them) to seat them with nobles, (even) with nobles of His people. ה' הִלְלוּ-נִי, הִלְלוּ עַתָּה הַבְּנוֹת שְׂמֵחָה, הִלְלוּ-נִי He causes the barren woman of the house to sit as a joyous mother of children (raising her children in the house); praise Hashem

(for all these wonders that show that He is involved even in this lowly world)!

\*\*\*\*\*

In the previous segment, we discussed the primary difference between other nations and us, as described in p'sukim 4-6. We believe that Hashem is not just exalted above and higher than all, but rather we also believe and know that He has designed our lives precisely in every detail and is intimately involved in every aspect continuously. Our belief in hashgachah pratis is what sets us apart from the rest of the world and is the component of emunah that the Rosh calls the "y'sod (foundation) of the entire Torah."

The Malbim explains the rest of the p'sukim in this chapter as advancing this crucial point further.

Hashem's involvement in our lives is not just for great people. It is for all of us and even for the lowest of people. Hashem raises up the extremely poor from the dust and even the lower destitute people from the garbage dumps. He doesn't just raise them up a notch, but rather, He raises them up to join the most noble of His people. Hashem also causes barren women to become joyous mothers. We praise Hashem for being involved in every aspect, even in this lowly world.

\*\*\*\*\*

Up to now, we discussed the difference between our emunah and that of the nations of the world who believe in G-d. We believe that Hashem is not just exalted above, higher than all, but rather that He has designed our lives precisely in every detail and is intimately involved in every aspect continuously. Our belief in hashgachah pratis is what sets us apart from the rest of the world and is the component of emunah that the Rosh calls the "y'sod (foundation) of the entire Torah."

How can we train ourselves and our children to be more aware of Hashem's continuous involvement in our lives? In 1984, HaRav Moshe Feinstein and HaRav Yaakov Kamenetsky wrote a joint open letter to all the Jewish people. The following is an excerpt (the original was in Hebrew):

Every understanding heart understands how great the urgency is, in these times, to embed the emunah of hashgachah pratis (Divine Providence) in the hearts of each and every one, and especially the younger ones, because it is the "stake" that everything hangs on... It is a good practice to strengthen this emunah by writing down the Divine Providence we see in our own lives daily."

I know of someone who made this a family project for their grandchildren, with monetary rewards. They bought journals or diaries for those who preferred to write; but what seems to work better for younger children, and many times even for older ones, is a simple digital recorder (under \$20 on Amazon). Even children aged seven and eight were excited to embark on the program and are daily becoming more aware of Hashem in their lives.

I know of others who routinely share their daily or weekly stories with their families. Every situation is different, and we must think about what would work within our own inner circles or even for ourselves.

It's nice to read and listen to other people's stories through the many books and shiurim that are available. There is even a phone line, which anyone can call into, that is dedicated to sharing hashgachah pratis stories.

However, other people's amazing stories will not make even a fraction of the lasting impact that awareness of our own "small" day-to-day observances will make. It is exciting and invigorating to see Hashem in our lives every day. The more we seek, the more we will be shown.

ה' שומרך, ה' צלך על-נך וְיִמְנָךְ Hashem is your Guardian; Hashem is your protective Shade at your right hand. [T'hilim 121:5]

Hashem is like a shadow. He responds to our initiative. The more we seek His Presence in our lives, the more He shows us. If we put up one finger, we see one finger in our shadow. If we put up five, we see five.

HaRav Avigdor Miller would point out that while affixing a mezuzah is a great mitzvah, how many mezuzos can we affix? Emunah is a constant mitzvah. Every second we spend on seeking, recording, journaling is a mitzvah of the highest caliber.

Many put great effort into buying a beautiful esrog, spending many hours to find the perfect esrog. That is a beautiful "hiddur mitzvah" – a beautification

of the mitzvah. Shouldn't we, all the more so, put much greater effort into the foundation of the entire Torah, the stake that everything hangs on?

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/haftarat-parshat-vayeishev-rewriting-our-prophetic-story/>

### **Haftarat Parshat Vayeishev: Rewriting Our Prophetic Story** **Rabbi Kenneth Brander**

Dec 16, 2024, 3:34 PM

In the background of the current conflict looms a deeper crisis that threatens the very fabric of our society. Even before the current war, one in five Israelis was already living below the poverty line. Those numbers have only increased as small business owners have been displaced or mobilized and tourism has been decimated.

Add to that a growing societal rift, as certain segments of the population shoulder the entire burden of the fighting while others do all in their power to desist, causing more polarization among the citizens and the political camps. But this isn't just a contemporary scene – it's actually a rerun of the prophecy of Amos, one of Israel's earliest prophets, which makes up this week's haftarah. Amos decried a society in which the wealthy systematically exploited the poor and internal divisions threatened to tear a community apart. Thousands of years later, has nothing changed?

In order to reflect on this perennial crisis, let us reflect on the general purpose of the haftarah and why it was established.

Rabbi David Abudraham, a 14th century Spanish Jewish communal leader and expert on liturgy, in his magnum opus, Sefer Abudraham, writes about the institution of the haftarah:

And after [completing] and wrapping the Torah scroll, we read the haftarah; which needs to be connected to the [Torah] portion of the day. And why do we read from the Prophets? Because of the legislation imposed upon the Jewish people forbidding them from reading from the Torah... (Laws of Shabbat, Shacharit).

Rabbi Yoel Sirkes, one of the great 17th century Talmudic scholars in his commentary on the Shulchan Arukh known as the Bach, (an acronym for Bayit Chadash), concurs with the opinion found in the Sefer Abudraham. Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, in his 17th century commentary on the Mishnah, the Tosafot Yom Tov, further develops this idea, suggesting that the particular persecution causing the introduction of the haftarah happened during the historical period of the Chanukah miracle.

When the Greek Emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes prohibited reading from the Torah, the Rabbis instituted that sections from the Prophets be read focusing on a theme similar to the Torah portion:

The reason for the haftarah ...that Antiochus king of Greece legislated that the Torah should not be read in public. What did the Jews do? They chose a section from the Prophets that was thematically similar to the Torah portion of the week. Even though this [anti-semitic] legislation has been annulled, the custom [of reading from the Prophets] was not discarded (Megillah 3:4). For this reason, haftarot are intended to leave us hopeful, with each haftarah complete with verses of redemption. It is also why the brachot of the haftarah focus on redemption. Therefore, haftarot, even those with harsh or mournful messages like that read on Tisha b'Av, always contain a positive, optimistic note.

It is against this backdrop that we approach the haftarah for Parshat Vayeishev. The Rav (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik), in an address delivered in 1980, noted the unusual character of this haftarah, which has no encouraging end to contrast with its dreary opening. Rabbi Soloveitchik writes, "The final words of each haftarah express the idea that no matter how dismal our present situation, Israel can look ahead to a bright future. [...] This haftarah is the one exception." (Divrei Hashkafa, 30-34).

Amos, one of the earliest prophets, does not mince words in calling out the thievery and corruption that has overtaken the kingdom of Israel, with the wealthy extorting money from the impoverished. "The idea expressed here," Rav Soloveitchik states of this choice of haftarah, "is that the community that acts corruptly is fit for punishment and censure" (ibid.). The opening line of the prophecy, which speaks of "the sale of the righteous for money,"

(Amos 2:6) was read by our Sages as a reference to the sale of Yosef which appears in our parsha (Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer #37). Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that even when the Sages read Amos' words in reference to Yosef, they don't mean to deny the literal meaning of the verse. On the contrary, they are coming to highlight a crucial idea: that national corruption is not merely a passing phase in our history. The forms of contempt for one another, and for principles of justice, that repeatedly lead to violence between us have a deeply embedded history, signaling a great need for reflection and change.

As far back as we can trace, to the brothers who would go on to produce the tribes of Israel, there has been internal strife producing baseless hatred, theft and corruption, bringing about our own doom and destruction.

This is not a reason to lose hope; and it is surely not a reason to continue with our same comfortable patterns. We must take control, and take chances, much in the way the Maccabees did by lighting the tiny amount of oil they found, and as our modern Maccabees do today, willingly sacrificing all on the battlefield and the home front to ensure that the light in our skies isn't coming from missiles but from the energy of a purposeful society.

In "those times", it was the right thing to do, no matter how improbable it seemed that the oil would last even one night. And in "our time", it has helped guarantee our immortality as a nation. With God's help we should all make increased efforts to love our neighbors, serve those in need and act with humility. Only that will help us begin to heal our rifts.

---

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

date: Dec 19, 2024, 7:22 PM

**Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg**

**The Divine Conductor**

The parshiyos of Vayeishev and Mikeitz are always read around the time of Chanukah. What is the connection between these parshiyos and the miracle of Chanukah?

One of the distinguishing features of Yosef throughout his experiences in Mitzrayim is his fervent belief in hashgacha pratit (Divine Providence). The pasuk describes that when Yosef is successful in Potiphar's home, "His master saw that Hashem was with him, and that Hashem brought him success in all his endeavors" (Vayeishev 39:3). How did his master know that Hashem was the source of his accomplishments? Rashi explains that G-d's name was constantly on Yosef's lips - sheim shamayim shagur b'fiv. Therefore, when Yosef was successful, Potiphar naturally attributed that success to the G-d that Yosef always mentioned.

When the head butler and head baker are troubled by their dreams, Yosef tells them, "Don't interpretations of dreams belong to G-d? Tell me (your dreams) if you please" (Vayeishev 40:8). Similarly, when Pharaoh says to Yosef that he heard Yosef can interpret dreams, Yosef answers, "That is beyond me; it is G-d who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare" (Mikeitz 41:16). Rashi and Sforno explain that Yosef was saying that only Hashem can enable him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

Later, when Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, he tells them, "And now, do not be distressed, nor be angry with yourselves, for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you" (Vayigash 45:5). After Yaakov's death, when Yosef's brothers beg his forgiveness for having sold him, Yosef responds once again that they have nothing to fear.

"Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good" (Vayechi 50:20). Yosef constantly attributed his success to Hashem, and he realized that all his trials and tribulations were divinely ordained.

This ability to see Hashem's hand in all of life's experiences is something Yosef learned from his father Yaakov. On his journey to Lavan's home, Yaakov asks Hashem to protect him and provide for him (Vayetzai 28:20). And on his way back to his parents' home, Yaakov tells his family, "Let us go up to Beis-El, and I will make there an altar for G-d who answered me in my time of distress, and was with me on the road that I traveled" (Vayishlach 35:3).

When Yaakov is reunited with Yosef after twenty-two years of separation, the pasuk says that Yosef cried on Yaakov's shoulders, but it does not

mention Yaakov crying (Vayigash 46:29). Chazal comment that Yaakov was instead reciting the shema at that time (see Rashi there). The Maharal (Gur Aryeh there) explains that Yaakov was not reciting the shema to fulfill the mitzvah of kriyas shema, but rather as an expression of love and appreciation toward Hashem for reuniting him with his beloved son.

Yaakov understood that Hashem had orchestrated all his experiences in life - the pleasant ones and the challenging ones. They had all emerged from the same Source - Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad. Even the difficulties which seemed to emanate from Hashem's middas hadin (attribute of judgement - Elokim) really stemmed from his middas harachamim (attribute of mercy) - Hashem echad. This is a lesson that Yaakov imparted to Yosef, and that is why Yosef constantly expressed his belief that Hashem was in control of all that happened to him.

The miracle of Chanukah involving the jug of oil gave the Jewish people a heightened appreciation for Hashem's involvement in their lives. As the commentators point out (see Penei Yehoshua, Shabbos 21b, among others), since ritually impure oil may be used to light the menorah (tumah hutrah b'tzibbur), the miracle of the jug of oil was not even necessary. But Hashem wanted to show his love for Klal Yisrael, to reinforce their understanding that even when His presence is not readily apparent, He still is watching over them and orchestrating events from behind the scenes.

This message was especially significant for the Jews of that time. After all, one of the decrees the Greeks had issued against the Jews was to forbid them from even mentioning G-d's name (Rosh Hashana 18b). After the Chashmonaim defeated the Greeks, they instituted that people should mention G-d's name even in their legal documents. The Greeks wanted to remove G-d from the public square. Making reference to G-d's name reminds man that ultimately he will be held accountable to a Higher Authority for his actions. Talking about G-d and religion forces man to reassess his sense of priorities; it gives him a different focus in life. The Greeks fought to suppress these values.

After the Greeks were defeated, Chazal wished to reaffirm the importance of recognizing Hashem's presence in this world by instituting that Hashem's name should be mentioned even more frequently than before. Although this enactment was later abolished for certain practical reasons, the intent of the decree remains as relevant as ever, because the more people mention Hashem's name, the more they connect with Him, and the more they appreciate how involved He is in their lives. The miracle of the jug of oil served to further highlight this idea, to remind us that Hashem is still watching over the Jewish people, even in our darkest moments, even when His presence seems hidden.

Chazal say (Shabbos 22a) that the best way to perform the mitzvah of ner Chanukah is to light near the doorway of a home, on the left side of the entrance, so that the mezuzah will be on the right side, and the Chanukah lights will be on the left. The Mishna Berura (671:33) explains that this is to ensure that a person is surrounded by mitzvos on all sides. But perhaps there is a deeper connection between the mezuzah and the Chanukah lights. The Rambam (Hilchos Mezuzah 7:13) writes that the purpose of the mitzvah of mezuzah is to remind a person of Hashem every time he passes his doorstep, and that will keep him focused on the path of Torah and mitzvos. It is not surprising then that Chazal instituted that the Chanukah lights and the mezuzah should be placed on either side of the doorway because both of these mitzvos serve the same purpose, namely, to remind us of Hashem's presence in our lives.

May we merit this Chanukah to see Hashem's light, His love and salvation, for us and the entire Jewish people.

© 2024 by TorahWeb Foundation. All Rights Reserved TorahWeb.org 94  
Baker Ave Bergenfield, NJ 07621-3321

---

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

date: Dec 19, 2024, 10:01 PM

subject: Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Vayeishev  
5785 BSD

I strongly recommend downloading the Internet Parsha Sheet, which normally posts shortly after midnight, from parsha.net. This outstanding compilation includes Devrei Torah from several more outstanding Torah scholars. Alan December 20, 2024

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #9, December 20-21, 2024; 20 Kislev 5785; Vayeishev 5785

Hanukkah starts Wednesday evening

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world – and may our hostages soon return from captivity. May the stunning collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the cease fire with Lebanon be the beginning of better news for Israel and Jews in coming days.

In our annual Torah cycle, Vayeishev normally comes shortly before the start of Hanukkah, at the darkest time of the year (earliest sunsets). Vayeishev is the first of four parashot whose primary subject is Yosef and his brothers.

Our Avot all struggle with animosity among their sons – Yishmael and Yitzhak; Esav and Yaakov; and Yosef with his half brothers (sons of Leah). These struggles continue throughout much of Jewish history. Yishmael's descendants become the Arabs; Chazal identify Esav's descendants as Rome (Catholics and later other Christian groups, enemies of B'Nai Yisrael during much of the past two thousand years) After the death of King Solomon, the Jewish nation divides largely between Yehuda (Leah's descendants) and Yisrael (largely Ephraim, descendants of Rachel).

Yaakov contributes significantly to the animosity between the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel. The Torah makes the story explicit: “eleh toldot Yaakov Yosef” – here are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef. . .” (37:2). The Torah states that it is discussing the significance of Yaakov's children, and then it turns to Yosef (omitting the other dozen children). As soon as Rachel has a baby boy, Yaakov decides that it is time to return to Canaan, something that he does not do when the older children are born (see 30:22-25). Yaakov keeps Yosef at home with him while sending Leah's sons and the sons of the handmaidens out to care for his wealth (flocks). He dotes on Yosef and gives him a special coat of many colors while giving the other brothers one less coat. Yosef acts as if Yosef is his Becor (first born son), even though he has ten older sons and an older daughter. (Binyamin is the only younger child.) The Torah rebukes Yaakov for favoring Yosef by prohibiting a man with two wives, one loved and the other hated, to give the double portion of a first born to the son of a beloved second wife when the first wife has an older first born son (Devarim 21:15). The result of Yaakov favoring Yosef over the other brothers is that they hate Yosef and cannot tolerate even speaking with him in peace. Even after Yosef reconciles with the brothers in Egypt, they never really trust Yosef, and the distrust keeps their descendants apart for hundreds of years.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the Haftarah for Vayeishev is the only one that lacks a positive, uplifting conclusion. Rabbi Brander extends the animosity among Yaakov's sons to the cry of Amos against the suffering of the poor in the Jewish society of his time. Rabbi Brander urges all of us to increase our efforts to love our neighbors, share with the needy, and act with humility. We should stop baseless hatred and cherish our fellow Jews. Chazal carry on this theme by deciding to start with one candle the first night and increase by another candle each succeeding night – a message to share the light of Hanukkah with our fellows. The Los Angeles Free Press ran an article from 1997 by Simon Sebag Montefiore on the question of why Ireland has long been a center for anti-Semitic hatred (The Deep Roots of Irish Antisemitism (December 17, 2024). Montefiore provides several examples to demonstrate that vicious Irish anti-Semitic attacks go back at least to the beginning of the 20th Century. The refusal of the Irish women's basketball team to shake hands with Israeli players last February is not an isolated incident. The recent decision of Israel to close its embassy in Ireland has probably been coming for a very long time. Continued Irish anti-Semitism does not fit in with the spirit of Hanukkah.

The outbreak of vicious anti-Semitism in the past fourteen months has shocked me, especially since I did not experience any anti-Semitism while

growing up or during my early years as an adult. My brother-in-law, ten years older than me, a tall blond man who does not look Jewish, related many stories to me about his experiences when his associates in school and business made anti-Semitic remarks not realizing that he was Jewish. Hatred goes back at least as far as Sarah and Hagar – and it is always either up front or hidden. It seems no longer to be safe to wear a kippah in my old (almost entirely Jewish) neighborhoods in Los Angeles, in Canada, or in most of Europe. May the day come – in my lifetime if possible – when hatred goes away and we can live in peace again.

I did not appreciate the difficulty of coping with anti-Semitism, as my beloved Rebbe, Leonard Cahan, z"l, did many times during his life and career, until I could see in the past 14 months how ugly it can be. My parents may have tried to spare me this pain years ago, but I have come to realize that we must teach our children and grandchildren about this evil. May the time come when people can learn to live near each other in peace and with respect for all.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations. Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom Hannah & Alan

Alan A. Fisher American Dahlia Society 1 Rock Falls Ct. Rockville, MD 20854 USA

[AFisherADS@yahoo.com](mailto:AFisherADS@yahoo.com)

from: **Michal Horowitz** <[contact@michalhorowitz.com](mailto:contact@michalhorowitz.com)>

date: Dec 19, 2024, 11:01 AM

subject: **Vayeishev 5785: Yosef's Dreams & Longing for Shabbos**

In Parshas Vayeishev, we begin the end of Sefer Bereishis. The last four parshios – Vayeishev, Miketz, Vayigash and Vayechi – relay to us, in great and fascinating details, the life and times of Yosef ha'Tzaddik and his brothers, and Yaakov Avinu's final years. The details are many; the passions are high; the emotions are great; the events are surprising, powerful, evocative, and compelling. There is so much to be learned from Yosef, his brothers, and the family of Yaakov.

In Vayeishev, we learn of:

\*Yaakov's special love for Yosef, the kesones pasim he gifts Yosef, Yosef's dreams of field/sheaves and heavens/sun, moon and stars, the brothers hatred and jealousy, the abduction, and ultimately, the sale, of Yosef (Bereishis 37);

\*Yehuda and Tamar, the birth of their twins, Peretz and Zerach, and the founding of the dynasty of malchus beis Dovid through the efforts of heroic Tamar, and the humble courage of Yehuda who fathers her twins (Ch.38);

\*Yosef in the house of Potiphar, the chief executioner in Egypt, the attempted seduction of Yosef by Eishes Potiphar, Yosef's tremendous spiritual strength to resist her advances, the first blood libel in history when she frames Yosef and accuses him of trying to seduce her, and Potiphar's throwing Yosef into jail as punishment(Ch.39);

\*Yosef in jail, where he meets the butler and baker, whose dreams he interprets. The baker – who is jailed for serving Pharaoh bread with a pebble in it – dreams of baskets atop his head filled with bread, and the birds eating from the bread. Yosef correctly predicts that he will be killed. The butler – jailed for serving Pharaoh a glass of wine with a fly in it – dreams of squeezing grapes into Pharaoh's cup and serving Pharaoh wine. Yosef correctly predicts that he will be restored to his post as royal butler for Pharaoh. Yosef asks the butler to remember, and not forget him, when he is released from jail. The parsha ends by telling us that the butler forgot Yosef and did not remember him (Ch.40).

Towards the beginning of the parsha, when Yosef dreams of rulership – with the brothers sheaves bowing down to his sheaf in the field, and the sun, moon and eleven stars of the heavens bowing down to him – he relays the



first dream to his brothers, and the second dream, to his brothers and his father.

The Torah tells us that after he relayed the second dream, the reaction of the family is: *וַיִּקְנְאוּ-בּוֹ אָחָיו; וַיִּשְׂמְרוּ אֶת-הַדָּבָר* – and his brothers were jealous of him and his father guarded the matter (37:11).

What does it mean that his father was *וַיִּשְׂמְרוּ אֶת-הַדָּבָר*, ‘guarded’ the matter?

Rashi (ibid.) explains that it means that Yaakov was *יָבֵא וּמַצְפֵּה קֵטִי*, waiting and anticipating for the time when the dream would come true.

Hence, to be *וַיִּשְׂמְרוּ* means to wait and anticipate.

Interestingly, in a totally unrelated passage in Torah, we are told about the importance of Shabbos to our nation. The pasuk tells us: *וַיִּשְׂמְרוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת, לְעֵשׂוֹת אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם, כְּבְרִית עוֹלָם* – and the Children of Israel guarded the Shabbos, to do the Shabbos for generations, an eternal covenant (Shemos 31:16).

In his lengthy and beautiful commentary to this pasuk, the Ohr Ha’Chaim ha’kadosh presents ten different interpretations of what to be ‘shomer Shabbos’ means. Amongst his many explanations, the Ohr Ha’Chaim teaches that to be a Jew who is shomer Shabbos is to be a Jew who waits and anticipates – all week long – for Shabbos to come. The Ohr Ha’Chaim learns this from our pasuk, regarding Yaakov who was *וַיִּשְׂמְרוּ אֶת-הַדָּבָר*. He teaches that Shabbos should not be viewed as a *tircha* (a burden) because we are prevented from doing work. Rather, *צָרִיכִין לַשְׂמֹחַ בּוֹ בְּשִׁלְמוֹת הַרְצוֹן וְהַפֶּן* – one is required to rejoice in Shabbos with a complete desire and will, and to always wait and long for Shabbos, for the day that she will arrive once again.

Just as Yaakov waited and longed for the fulfillment of Yosef’s dreams, so too, we must wait and long all week for Shabbos. As the saying goes, “It’s not that the Jews keep Shabbos, but it is Shabbos that keeps the Jews.” But we learn from here that it is not only on Shabbos that we must enjoy, benefit, and delight in her presence. We must have a “Shabbos mind” all week long, and know that no matter where we are, or what business we are involved in, soon, in a few days, Shabbos will be here to spiritually redeem us once again!

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l, the Rav, teaches, “Allow me, please, to make a ‘private confession’ concerning a matter that has caused me much loss of sleep. I am not so very old, yet I remember a time when ninety percent of world Jewry were observant and the secularists were a small minority at the fringes of the camp. I still remember – it was not so long ago – when Jews were still close to G-d and lived in an atmosphere pervaded with holiness. But, today, what do we see? The profane and the secular are in control wherever we turn. Even in those neighborhoods made up predominantly of religious Jews one can no longer talk of the ‘sanctity of the Sabbath day.’ True, there are Jews in America who observe the Sabbath... But, is it not for the Sabbath that my heart aches, it is for the forgotten ‘eve of the Sabbath.’ There are Sabbath-observing Jews in America, but there are not ‘eve-of-the-Sabbath’ Jews who go out to greet the Sabbath with beating hearts and pulsating souls. There are many who observe the precepts with their hands, with their feet and/or with their mouths – but there are few, indeed, who truly know the meaning of service of the heart!” (Soloveitchik on Repentance, p.88).

May we lovingly await and anticipate our weekly Shabbos, which brings us tremendous spiritual gains each and every week, so that even during our mundane weekdays, our minds and hearts are always longing for Shabbos. And in the merit of our shemiras Shabbos, may we very soon – in our day and our time – merit the ultimate redemption, *יָמֵינוּ שְׂכֹל שַׁבַּת וּמְנוּחָה לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָמִים*, בְּבִרְכַּת בְּשׂוֹרוֹת טוֹבוֹת וְשַׁבַּת שְׁלוֹם,  
Michal Horowitz

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Dec 19, 2024, 1:53 AM

**Rav Kook on Vayeishev:** The Special Teshuvah of Reuben  
“Reuben returned to the pit, but Joseph was no longer in the pit. He tore his clothes [in grief].” (Gen. 37:29)

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

According to the Midrash, Reuben was “occupied with sackcloth and fasting,” as he repented for changing his father’s sleeping arrangements.

(The word *vayashov* (“he returned”) can also mean “he repented.”)

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

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

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

**Internal and External Consequences**

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

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

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

**Reuben’s Teshuvah**

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

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

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

**Israel Alone**

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

Hosea, however, spoke of a higher form of teshuvah. He described a teshuvah like that of Reuben — an attempt to repair all the repercussions of one’s errors. Therefore he called out, “Return, Israel, to the Eternal your God.” Hosea encouraged a complete teshuvah, performed by Israel alone. (Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 191-194)

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

YUTORAH IN PRINT • Vayeishev 5785

**If We Only Knew**

**Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh**

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid, with the help of internet-based AI tools, from the YUTorah shiur presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on November 24, 2021)

In this week's Parsha, we have the story of Mechiras Yosef. And we know that Reuven tried to save Yosef, telling the rest of the brothers to throw him into a pit instead of killing him—va-yishma Reuven, va-yatzilehu mi-yadam, va-yomer, lo nakenu nafesh. There's an interesting midrash on this. Amar Rabbi Yitzchak, ba ha-kasuv lomar, ke-she-adam oseh mitzvah, ya'asena be-lev same'ach. Torah is teaching you that you should do mitzvos wholeheartedly—with simcha. Why? Had Reuven known that Hashem would write in the Torah, Va-yishma Reuven va-yatzilehu mi-yadam, he wouldn't have subtly tried to influence them. He would have put him on his shoulders and danced back to Yaakov. And had Boaz known that Hashem would write about him in Megillat Rus, that he gave the roasted grains to Rus—agalos petumos haya ma'achila—he would have given her filet mignon. And this shows how excited we should be to do mitzvos. Had Reuven and Boaz known their mitzvos would be written in the history books, they would have done them even better. Now, at first glance, this seems like a very strange midrash—should you be excited about mitzvos because you could get praise and fame and fortune? No! It's not proper to do mitzvos she-lo li-shmah, just to go down in the history books and get a lot of praise. We do mitzvos because it's ratzon Hashem and the right thing to do. So, what's the meaning of this enigmatic midrash?

Rav Yosef Yehuda Leib Bloch, the Rosh Yeshiva of Tel Zion in the early 20th century, says in his Sefer Shiurei Da'as: Of course, the midrash doesn't mean that. That's not why we do mitzvos. But why were their actions written down? Because they changed history. Had Reuven known that saving his brother was not only an expression of mercy and brotherly love, but he was changing the course of his story—saving Klal Yisrael—he would have done it with even more hislahavus. Not because he would earn fame or praise, but because he would make a difference for Am Yisrael for thousands of years. Had Boaz known, when he gave this poor lady some extra food, that this little mitzvah would create Davidha-Melech and Moshiach, he would have done so much more. The midrash is not suggesting that these great tzadikim would have acted shelo lishmah. Rather, had they realized that not only were they doing the right thing but also changing history, saving Klal Yisrael in the process, and bringing Geulah, they would have done it with even more excitement. We try to live lishmah because we want to do the right thing. Had Yosef known, when he saw his colleagues in jail frowning one morning and decided to be nice and ask them what was bothering them, that this one small kindness would make him viceroy of Egypt and rescue the world from famine, he would have done that mitzvah with even more hislahavus. If you know that every small mitzvah, every seemingly unimportant thing, could change your entire life, history, all of Klal Yisrael, and bring the whole world to Geulah, how much more would we do it with hislahavus?! And that's the mussar here, that every-thing you do is much more than meets the eye.

The effect of every mitzvah you do could be unfathomable—you have no idea what you might be accomplishing (and chas ve-shalom, it works in the other direction as well). Think of Chanukah. One pach katan. What a difference it made! Think of that guy in the Beis Ha-Mikdash—before the whole story began—who was in charge of storing the oil. What did he do? Like most people, he could have said, I have a hundred jars of oil here; no need to be so makpid. But instead, he said, I have one jar of oil that came in today; let me make sure it's sealed and put away properly—let me do this mitzvah of shmiras ha-Kodshim properly. Little did he know that this one jar of oil, which seemed so trivial and unimportant, led to the entire Chag of Chanukah. Who knows what effect one action can have?

The midrash continues by talking about the current era, after it is too late to be included in Tanach: Rabbi Cohen ve-Rabbi Yehoshua ve-Rabbi Shimon ve-Rabbi Levi said that le-she-ovar haya adam oseh mitzvah ve-Navi kosvah. In the olden days, the Navi would write your mitzvah in Tanach. And the midrash asks, Ve-achshav, ke-she-adam oseh mitzvah, mi kosev? But what about nowadays? Who writes it down? And it answers,

Eliyahu u-Melech ha-Moshiach and Hashem signs off on it. But why davka Eliyahu and Moshiach? It's to emphasize the chashivus of our every action. Who knows if that one action you do, that one correct decision, that one mitzvah you do with extra hislahavus, could bring Eliyahu and Melechha-Moshiach—in ways that we could not have predicted, like our ancestors could not have predicted that va-yitzbat la kali leads to Dovidha-Melech, and va-yatzilehumi-yadam leads to the salvation of Klal Yisrael?!

There's one thing we learn from nearly every story in Tanach. Whether it is chesed like the one done by Reuven and Boaz or any other mitzvah—if you make an extra effort to do every little thing in the best way, if you take advantage of every opportunity that Hashem gives you to do a mitzvah, you never know what the effect of that action could be. It could lead all the way to the coming of Eliyahu and Melechha-Moshiach.

## THE TWO ROLES OF YOSEF

From **the Sefer Novominsk (Rebbe Rav Yaakov Perlow zt"l) on Chumash** by Yechezkel Ostreicher

ViYisrael Ahav es Yosef Mikol Banav Ki ben Zkunim hu lo.

Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons since he was a child of his old age (Bereishis 37:3).

Targum Onkelos as well as the Midrash explain that Yaakov loved Yosef because the two learned together.

He was the son who was taught all the Torah that Yaakov had learned in the beis midrash of Shem and Eiver.

Interestingly, though, Yosef's status as one of the founding figures of Klal Yisrael is not his role as the wise son of Yaakov who absorbed all that his father taught, but as Yosef HaTzaddik, for overcoming the nisayon with Potiphar's wife.

Perhaps this is because the advantage of being the wise son was not something he had worked on himself; he was merely the recipient of what his father taught him. But when he was all alone, without the support or assistance of his father, and he himself worked to achieve greatness in serving Hashem, he earned his eternal and defining title — tzaddik. This title was given to Yosef when he passed the nisayon placed before him in Mitzrayim, and it is how he is known for all eternity.

Yosef shows us that we too can overcome the challenges we face and live lives of kedushah. By serving as our light in the galus, Yosef rose above the other Shevatim, becoming a quasi-Av, as the pasuk (Tehillim 77:16) says of Bnei Yisrael, bnei Yaakov v'Yosef selah, the sons of Yaakov and Yosef, selah. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 19b) derives from here that Bnei Yisrael are considered the children of Yosef; Yosef serves as a father for us all, guiding us through galus. These two distinct roles of Yosef are highlighted in the difference between Nusach Sefard and Nusach Ashkenaz regarding the order of the Ushpizin. In Nusach Ashkenaz, Yosef comes after Yaakov — in chronological order; in Nusach Sefard he comes between Aharon HaKohen and Dovid HaMelech — in

the order of the Sefiros (spheres of holiness) that each of the Ushpizin exemplifies. Yosef's, Yesod [lit., foundation], representing kedushah, is the sixth, followed by Malchus, that of Dovid HaMelech. Perhaps there is something deeper here as well. Yosef had two qualities: He learned Torah from Yaakov, and he served as a bridge between Yaakov and the rest of the Shevatim. This avodah lasted only as long as Yosef was in his father's home. When he was taken down to Mitzrayim and faced the impurity of that land all alone, he became a tzaddik, the one who illuminates the way for us in galus. Thus, while Nusach Ashkenaz places Yosef as the son of Yaakov, the one who inherited Yaakov's Torah and passed it on to his brothers, Nusach Sefard focuses on the aspect of his being a tzaddik, the one who assists us in our preparation for the arrival of Mashiach ben Dovid.

The coffin holding Yosef's remains was carried through the Midbar as Bnei Yisrael wandered from place to place. Yosef was with them, and the example of his life inspired them to overcome the struggles of galus until they entered Eretz Yisrael. That is why in Nusach Sefard Yosef is placed after Moshe and Aharon: Even with the benefit of the greatness of Moshe and Aharon, Bnei



Yisrael still needed support to guide them into the land of geulah, the land where Dovid's malchus would eventually shine forth. Shortly before Yaakov passed away, he called for Yosef, and an interesting encounter ensued.

Then Yaakov saw Yosef's sons and he said, "Who are these?" And Yosef said to his father, "They are my sons whom Hashem has given me here." He said, "Bring them to me, if you please, and I will bless them" (Bereishis 48:20).

It seems that something that Yosef said stimulated Yaakov to bless Menashe and Efraim with a special berachah. What was it? One word: נ lit., in this] — in this decadent land, in this seemingly hopeless situation. Yosef was telling his father that these children of his were born in the land of Egypt, far from any connection to ruchniyus, and yet they retained their kedushah. For this they earned a special berachah. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 17b) says that when someone defeats his yetzer hara he receives extra reward; the berachah of Menashe and Efraim was Yosef's reward for maintaining his kedushah in a land so far removed from anything holy.

The merit and memory of Yosef HaTzaddik empowers us to forge through and gives us the strength to overcome wave after wave of tumah that life in galus sends our way.

Artscroll Shabbos Table

---

from: **Steinsaltz Center** <steinsaltz@steinsaltz-center.org>

date: Dec 19, 2024, 9:00 PM

subject: 1 Minute on the Parasha with **Rav Adin Steinsaltz z"l**

Parashat Vayeshev

The Struggling Jew

Rashi introduces this week's parasha with the words of the Midrash: Jacob wished to live in tranquility, but then the trouble of Joseph sprang upon him. When the tzaddikim wish to live in peace, The Holy One, Blessed Be He, says, "Is it not enough for the tzaddikim that so much is prepared for them in the next world, that they seek to live in peace in this world?" (Genesis Rabba 84:3)

Despite Jacob's desires for a peaceful existence after enduring many challenges, his life is marked by continual struggles and crises. The paradox highlighted is that while tzaddikim strive for peace of mind, their journeys are often filled with sorrow and grief, suggesting that suffering is not merely a trial but an essential aspect of their spiritual growth. This notion is reinforced by various sources from Jewish tradition that assert the absence of rest for the righteous, indicating that tranquility is not part of their divine reward.

In general, questions are central to Jewish faith. The pursuit of understanding and the growth of faith are deeply intertwined with the arduous, continuous questioning. There is no rest for the weary. However, rather than evading doubts and uncertainties, tzaddikim engage with them, leading to a richer spiritual life.

This ongoing quest for knowledge and clarity challenges the preconceived notion that a life of faith should be devoid of struggles. Instead, it embraces the idea that questioning is vital for personal and spiritual development. Anguish and inner struggle are par for the course for the faithful.

It has been said that the verse, "Seven times a tzaddik falls and gets up" (Prov. 24:16), is not a description of the tzaddik's failures but of his natural progression. Struggles and questions are part of this journey.

Ultimately, a life of faith and adherence to Torah and mitzvot does not guarantee tranquility but rather offers a structured framework within which individuals can navigate their challenges. Embracing the complexities of their journeys, tzaddikim find not a quiet resolution but an opportunity for deeper engagement with significant questions. The progression they experience is not one of achieving peace but of evolving through their inquiries, leading to higher spiritual truths, leading to deeper questioning. This perspective redefines tranquility not as an end goal but as a byproduct of meaningful struggle and growth in the pursuit of righteousness.

Questions to Contemplate

How can one reconcile the idea of tranquility and peace in our lives with the endless struggle in pursuit of righteousness?

-----  
Morals and Meanings in Vayeshev

From: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

Thu, Dec 19, 7:00 AM (17 hours ago)

You are Not What you Wheat – Lessons from Yosef's Dreams

The beginning of our parsha describes the two dreams that Yosef dreamt, and which he told to his brothers. It is interesting to note that the reaction of the brothers to each dream, while negative, was not exactly the same:

After Yosef told them the first dream about the sheaves of wheat bowing down to him, the verse states: "And they continued to hate him on account of his dreams." [1] After telling them the second dream with the sun, moon and stars bowing down to him, the verse says: "And his brothers were jealous of him." [2]

Now, hatred and jealousy are both negative reactions, but they are not the same. Why did the first dream provoke feelings of hatred and the second dream jealousy?

In order to answer this question, we must first consider another one. How exactly are the brothers represented in these two dreams?

Anyone who knows the story will tell us that in the first dream they are represented by sheaves of wheat, and in the second dream, by stars.

Actually, that is not entirely correct. It is true that in the second dream Yosef describes his family members as the sun, moon and stars. But in the first dream he says, "Behold we were gathering sheaves of wheat in the field." Thus, it emerges that in the first dream, the brothers were not represented by sheaves of wheat. They were represented by themselves!

What is the meaning of this?

The Beis Halevi [3] explains. Although the two dreams were very similar to each other in substance, i.e., that Yosef would achieve eminence over his brothers; nonetheless, they refer to two different planes. The first dream deals with wheat, and represents their reliance on him for physical sustenance. The second dream talks about stars, i.e., heavenly entities, and represents Yosef's ascendancy over them in spiritual matters.

It is for this reason that the brothers reacted to the first dream not with jealousy, but with hatred. The brothers would never be jealous of someone who had more wheat than them, for that is not something to be jealous over. If anything, it would elicit feelings of dislike within them for someone even bragging about superiority in material matters. The second dream, which related to spiritual attainments, brought out feelings of jealousy from within the brothers, for spiritual matters are worth being jealous about.

This is what lies behind the question as to whether the brothers themselves feature as part of the dream. The second dream had stars in it, which represents the brothers' spiritual attainments. As such, the brothers did not need to feature in the dream separately as themselves, for their spiritual attainments are them! The first dream, by contrast, relating to material acquisitions, had to have the brothers featuring as themselves. There is no way they could be represented by their sheaves, because a person is not a sheaf of wheat!

These, then, are the fundamental lessons to be derived from the dreams:

First, a person should not be jealous over someone else's material possessions, but rather their spiritual attainments. Second, one needs to know what defines him as a person, and how he should define himself. Spiritual attainments are what we are. Physical possessions are what we have.

This idea of what constitutes a person's identity is succinctly phrased in the verse at the end of Koheles: [4] "The sum of the matter, when all has been considered, fear God and keep His commandments, for that is all of man." Koheles is telling us that man's essence is the sum total of his fear of God and performance of mitzvot. All other assets are things that he has, but not what he is.

[1] Bereishis 37:8. [2] Ibid., verse 11. [3] Vayeshev, ibid. [4] 12:13.

Copyright © 2024 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved

\*\*\*\*\*

**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org)**  
***In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag***  
**Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**  
\*\*\*\*\*

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

Could it be that the brothers DID NOT sell Yosef!

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

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

**INTRODUCTION**

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

So what difference does it make?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WHERE ARE THEY EATING?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**2) Where is Reuven?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE

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

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

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

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

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

## SOMEBODY GOT THERE FIRST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## WHAT DO THE BROTHERS THINK?

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### WHAT DOES YOSEF THINK?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### HASHEM'S PLAN

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

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

their plotting that eventually led to the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams to come true.

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

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

#### FOR FURTHER IYUN

##### A. RASHI'S SHITTA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

##### WHAT'S IN IT FOR REUVEN!

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

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

##### WHY THE BROTHERS HATED YOSEF

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

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

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

## **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.

Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.



## Parshat Vayeshev: Yosef

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

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

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

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

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

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

### PARASHAT VAYESHEV:

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

### THE TORAH FORESTALLS A MYTH:

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

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

healthy... but our often less-than-perfect reality is affirmed by the family snapshots we see in the Torah's album.

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

### **TALENT . . . WHAT A BURDEN!**

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

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

Of course, Yosef also faces many challenges:

- 1) He is his father's favorite -- which makes his brothers hate him.
- 2) His mother is Ya'akov's favored wife -- but she dies while he is still young.
- 3) He is physically very attractive -- but this contributes to his self-absorption (see Rashi) and helps land him in jail later on.
- 4) He is a leader of rare capability -- but this makes him a threat to some of the other brothers, who are hoping to one day lead the family. It also gives him authority over the others, which makes him unpopular.
- 5) He is a brilliant interpreter of dreams -- but his own dreams of leadership fuel his brothers' hatred and jealousy.

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

### **SIBLINGS FOR SALE:**

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

BERESHIT 37:2-4 --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **1) Ya'akov:**

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

#### **2) Potifar:**

BERESHIT 39:2-6 --

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

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

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

#### **3) Prison Warden:**

BERESHIT 39:21-23 --

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

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

4. Paro himself:

BERESHIT 41:38-43 --

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

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

#### **BACK TO THE BROTHERS:**

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

- 1) He reports on them to their father (this may explain why Yosef, unrecognized by his brothers when they come to Egypt for food, accuses them of being spies -- because one of the reasons they hated him long ago was for his spying on them and reporting back to his father!)
- 2) He is the best loved of them all because he does so much for Ya'akov and spends so much time with him.

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

#### **KETONET PASIM:**

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

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

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

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

## YOSEF KNOWS THE SCORE:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## YOSEF:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **YA'AKOV:**

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

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

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

A) BERESHIT 31:20 --

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

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

BERESHIT 31:26-27 --

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

Ya'akov responds, explaining why he ran away:

BERESHIT 31:31 --

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

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

BERESHIT 40:14-15 --

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom