

Potomac Torah Study Center

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

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at 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.

Hanukkah always comes close to the winter solstice – days with the fewest hours of sunlight during the year. We most frequently read Miketz during the week that includes the beginning of Hanukkah. How do the winter solstice and Hanukkah connect with the story of Yosef's release from prison, his being brought before Paro to interpret Paro's dreams, his elevation to chief of agriculture and food for all of Egypt, and his reunions with his brothers?

I have discussed before Rabbi David Fohrman's explanation that Paro's dreams repeat in reverse Yosef's life history over the previous twenty-two years. When Yosef hears Paro's retelling of his dreams, he only needs to make one connection to understand the dreams. The numbers of beautiful and ugly cows, and beautiful and ugly stalks of wheat do not connect with anything in his life, except that the numbers fit with his father's history (working seven years for Rachel, ending up with Leah as his first wife, and then working another seven years for Rachel plus seven more years for the cattle that he earned). Yosef understands that cows and wheat in Paro's dreams mean years – if he replaces years for the wheat and cows, he has the entire meaning of the dreams before him in his own life.

How do the dreams and his life over the previous twenty plus years relate to Yosef's mission going forward? Yosef realizes that the sun and moon bowing down to him do not represent his father, mother, and brothers. When his brothers come to purchase wheat, he realizes that God sent him to Egypt and put him in charge of the food to save his family during the famine. Yosef works hard to find a way to move away from past disputes, avoid any discussion of fault, and bring all the brothers together with love. Yosef's goal is what we Jews need today, when our brothers (extended Jewish family) spent too much time on disputes and not enough time working for a stronger Judaism and world in which to live.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine and Rabbi Dov Linzer (with author Abigail Pogrebin) also connect Yosef's meeting with his brothers and Hanukkah with machloket (disputes) among Jews. Go to any yeshiva, and the most memorable sight is likely to be two students arguing strongly with each other over the meaning of a few words in the Gemorah (Talmud). These arguments can become very heated and go on for quite a while. Do the disputing students come to blows? No. After a time, they stop the argument and go back to the Gemorah. The classic interpretation of such disputes comes from the *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers)*. The followers of Hillel and Shammai would argue constantly. The Gemorah explains, "*The words of both schools are the words of the living God, but the law follows the rulings of the school of Hillel.*" Our tradition is that disputes such as those of Hillel and Shammai are disputes for the sake of heaven while other disputes (such as those of Korach) are not for the sake of heaven and will not endure.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer and author Abigail Pogrebin also extend the history of disputes among Jews to Hanukkah and recent history. During the time of the Maccabees, the major dispute was between Orthodox Jews (the Maccabees) and assimilated Jews who followed the Syrian Greeks and abandoned many of the Jewish practices. Should the Jews of the time stick with the traditional mitzvot or blend in with the Greeks? One aspect of this dispute is whether the light from Hanukkah candles should represent fire (death of our enemies) or light (Jews working together for a better world). The winning side of this dispute is light – Jews should work toward a more inclusive and positive Jewish life. We see the distinction in Hassidic tradition. Many secular Jews consider Hanukkah to be a celebration over a military victory. Hassidic Jews, such as Chabad, however, consider Hanukkah to be a very important holiday, one focused on the beauty and joy of traditional Judaism.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander has emphasized many times in recent months that we Jews should move ahead, away from disputes on ritual and politics. We should focus on coming closer to benefit Klal Yisrael, share the burdens of the wars of the past 14 months, and help those of our people who have suffered the most during this period. As Rabbi Marc Angel reminds us, no matter what we Jews do, anti-Semites hate and blame us. The late Nobel laureate Saul Bellow said that Jews have never been able to take the right to live as a natural right. He said that our challenge is to take a long view of history, not to be afraid, and to live proudly as Jews. May we work together to benefit all our people.

Shabbat Shalom Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; 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 Shabbat Chanukah: Wearing Our Proper Robes

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.

This week's parsha is dedicated to the memory of
First Sergeant Netanel Pessach z"l,

a graduate of our Derech Avot High School in Efrat who fell in battle in northern Gaza and to all of the IDF heroes who fell this week while protecting our people and our land. Our hearts ache for Netanel's family. May Netanel's memory – and the memory of all our fallen soldiers – be a blessing.

The themes appearing in the Haftarah for Shabbat Chanukah come across as especially well fitted for the occasion. Taken from the book of Zechariah, whose prophecies address the early years of the second Beit Hamikdash, the Haftarah opens with a vision of the exuberant celebration of the return of the divine presence to Jerusalem and the Temple, and closes with the angelic lighting of the Menorah, along with the fitting Chanukah message of “*not by might, not by power, but by my spirit*”)4:6(. Finding the connection to the holiday seems pretty straightforward.

The middle of the Haftarah, though, feels mostly like filler material, less directly related to the holiday's themes. Zechariah addresses Yehoshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest at the time of the construction and dedication of the second Beit Hamikdash, under the leadership of Zerubabel. Despite Yehoshua's stature and position, even complimentary described by the prophet as “*a brand plucked from the fire,*”)3:2(Yehoshua is reprimanded for wearing “*soiled garments,*” which are replaced with more dignified “*robes*” in the prophetic vision)3:4(.

Throughout the Torah portions that are potentially connected with this haftarah – namely Shabbatot that can fall out on Chanukah – the clothing of protagonists often serves as a symbolic language. It communicates messages of transition, moral turpitude, or elevated stature. This recurring motif enriches the haftarah's message, with Yehoshua's soiled and then purified robes reflecting a transition from sin to spiritual renewal.

While the commentators agree that these soiled garments in our haftarah are a reference to some sinful behavior, they debate what act is referenced here. The Gemara)Sanhedrin 93a(claims that Yehoshua was punished for the fact that his children married non-Jewish women, as we are told in Ezra 10:18, a behavior that is especially unbecoming of the high priest's children. The sin, represented by the dirty garments, is his future, which is soiled due to the fact that Yehoshua does not reprimand his children for this behavior.

Yet Abarbanel, in his commentary)Ch. 3(to Zechariah, points to another sin: it would be committed by the Hasmonean descendants of Yehoshua. Abarbanel claims they would defy the division of roles between the king and spiritual teachers and the priests. Following the defeat of the Greeks, the Hasmoneans asserted power, taking claim not only of the priesthood, but also of the monarchy. This is a sinful contradiction to the requirement that the monarchy stay in the hands of the Davidic line from the tribe of Judah, as Ramban similarly notes in his commentary to Parshat Vayechi)Bereishiet 49:10(.

It is for this reason, Ramban notes, that the Hasmoneans are eventually punished, losing their power and status in the later years of the Second Temple period. The role of the priests, Zechariah insists, is to retain the sanctity of their priestly robes and be concerned for the spiritual future of the people and not to dirty themselves with the politics of the monarchy.

At the heart of this prophetic vision addressing the Hasmonean kingdom is the principle of the separation of powers. A surplus of power and dominance for any one person or group, a lack of checks and balances, poses a major threat to the strength of a society, as the history of the Hasmonean dynasty demonstrates.

Yet even for us, at the more personal level, separation of powers has great meaning as well. In Zechariah's vision, the danger of the priests serving as kings is that they will fail in the completion of their priestly mission as spiritual leaders of the people. They will be unable to maintain the purity of mind and deed that being the spiritual teachers of the Jewish people requires. All of us have a range of skills and capabilities, yet we would be mistaken if we attempted to stretch ourselves beyond our unique abilities. Our goal to achieve success is to focus on our unique capabilities while working with others who have different responsibilities and different unique capabilities.

Chanukah offers us a reminder to direct our energies to those areas where we are best fitted to shine, rather than trying to do it all and finding ourselves failing in activities in which we have no competence. Each of us has been blessed by the

Divine with certain strengths and with a certain mission.

Rather than working to overstep into someone else's role and engage in activity that is not natural, we should find within ourselves the capacity to live out our own missions to the fullest in fulfillment of the divine gifts bestowed upon us.

While each of us is called to shine through our unique capabilities, we must also recognize that our individual lights are not meant to compete with or diminish one another – but rather to collectively illuminate the world. In our current era of deep divisions and polarization, the message of Chanukah becomes even more relevant: just as each of the Menorah's individual flames stands alone (in fact, a candle with two wicks is forbidden), they create a unified radiance as they burn together. So too must we learn to honor our distinct paths while working together toward our shared goals.

Indeed, we are charged to light up the world – each of us, through our own unique light, contributing to a greater, stronger brilliance.

* 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 or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Miketz: The Good Times are Rolling

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2002 (5763)

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, *“Since G-d has informed you of all this, there can be no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and by your command shall all my people be sustained...”* (Breishis: 41:39-40)

This chapter in the story of Joseph should be used as a primer for those who are seeking employment. We are privy to one of the greatest job interviews of all time. After Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh, he gives a detailed job description, and Pharaoh hires him on the spot. In moments he is elevated from prison to become the highest-ranking officer.

All Joseph did was interpret a few dreams. Maybe he deserved to become the court psychiatrist. What in his resume' convinced Pharaoh that he would make a worthy project manager?

The Chovos HaLevavos – *Duties of the Heart* describes a deeper dimension of the human condition in a way that might help shed some light on the success of Joseph's job interview.

A child is washed upon the shore. A committee welcomes him. They promptly crown him “the king” and cloak him in royal robes. They carefully shower him with all of his personal needs as is fitting a true king. The food is tailored to his particular tastes. His attendees dress him and wash him upon demand. A cabinet of wise advisers surrounds him.

One day, in a fit of curiosity, the young king asks one of his advisors, *“How did I become “the king”? How long am I “the king”? Where do I go when I am no longer “the king”?*

The wise men tell him that he was installed as king when he was washed up on the seashore. He will remain the king until the next king is washed ashore. They show to him, through a telescope, a deserted island, the place that is to be his future residence. “The king” didn't want to believe his ears or his eyes.

At first he is dismayed and later overcome with new courage, declaring, “I am “the king.” He calls his ministers to an

emergency meeting. They begin to plan a paradise to be installed at that empty plot. Little by little over the course of years he builds beautiful buildings, transcribes libraries, and plants lush gardens and orchards.

Not too soon, a young baby is washed upon the shore and declared “the new king.” “The old king” now yields to those who remove his royal garbs. He is escorted with joyful anticipation to revel in the splendor of the treasure-full island he thoughtfully prepared during his term in power.

“The new king,” however, was not so wise and had allowed himself to become distracted and intoxicated with power. He forgot to ask some basic questions. When he was suddenly confronted with those who rushed to remove his royal robes, he resisted violently and was forced into a small boat. We cannot fathom the endless frustration of confronting a barren island, like getting a blank check and then no pen.

This may help explain the language of the Mishne which is quoted at the beginning of every chapter of Pirke’ Avos, “*All Israel have a portion to the world to come.*” It is not said that everyone has a portion “in” but rather the preposition employed is “to” the world to come.

Each person is like that little king, for a brief time, till future generations come to roam the earth. Understanding the Talmudic aphorism that “*the wise one sees what will be born in the future*” doesn’t mean he picks good stocks. It means to see clearly the ultimate consequences born of today’s activities and invest accordingly.

Joseph was the obvious choice for the job. He understood best the urgency of the day. The one who owns the clearest vision is the most motivated man in the kingdom. Who else would be able to apply the necessary discipline to save up and prepare for a world unseen when now the good times are rolling?

Good Shabbos!

This Hanukkah, Choose Light Over Heat

By Abigail Pogrebin and Dov Linzer **

Many of us grew up with a straightforward Hanukkah story. It is a parable of resilience, told and retold throughout the ages, and a powerful metaphor for the Jewish people: We endure despite repeated, often brutal efforts to snuff us out.

This retelling represents a choice ancient rabbis made about what to emphasize about our identity and values.

The narrative is this: In the second century B.C.E., the practice of Judaism was outlawed and punished by a cruel Syrian Greek king, Antiochus IV. Under his rule, Jews were put to death if they studied Torah, kept kosher or observed the Sabbath. The king and his army desecrated Jerusalem’s holy temple — then the locus of Jewish life — building an altar to the Greek god Zeus and sacrificing a pig on it.

In response, an intrepid Jewish family, the Maccabees, formed a small rebel army, rose up against the king and, using scrappy guerrilla tactics, managed to vanquish the enemy.

To this history, the ancient rabbis added the miracle of the oil. When the temple was reclaimed and rededicated by the Maccabees — “Hanukkah” means “dedication” — they could find only a single container of oil to light the menorah that was supposed to burn with an “eternal light.” Miraculously, the flames lasted eight days, long enough to find more oil to keep the candelabra glowing.

The Talmud teaches us to place the menorah in the window to “publicize the miracle.” Those burning candles have come to represent fearlessness in the face of anti-Jewish hatred.

What the ancient rabbis downplayed in this account was a complicated truth about the Maccabean wars: The battles were not just Jew versus oppressor but Jew versus Jew, religious extremist against Hellenizing assimilationist. “*This was a war about philosophy and ideology,*” the scholar and rabbi Adin Steinsaltz once explained in an interview with one of us.

The Maccabees were the zealots of their day, insisting on strict adherence to Jewish practice in the face of Greek secularism. They attacked their brethren whether they had been seduced by Greek culture or embraced it out of fear. Not simple saviors of Jewish life, the Maccabees forced circumcisions on Jewish boys and tyrannized those who abandoned traditional ways.

As study partners, we have spent hours discussing Jewish texts together. Though we are both Jews of faith, we sit on different ends of the spectrum of observance. This year we are paying closer attention to the less celebrated aspect of the Hanukkah narrative: that of the struggle inside our own people. And we are embracing the idea that the story we tell about ourselves can help shape who we strive to be.

The ideological war that Rabbi Steinsaltz identified is not simply a story of the ancient world, but one we also might tell today. Those modern divisions intensified in the aftermath of Oct. 7, 2023, the war in Gaza and in this era of hardening partisan discord. The internecine rifts of the moment feel especially distressing at a time of escalating antisemitism. All the more reason to revisit the wisdom of our ancient sages, who pointedly decided not to make Jewish civil war the core narrative of Hanukkah.

Shlomo Yosef Zevin, the Russian-born 20th-century rabbinical authority, wrote in a 1979 book that the rabbis had a choice to make regarding the message of Hanukkah: Should the eight flames represent fire — the destruction of our enemies — or light, working together toward a better world? The rabbis chose light.

They did not want future generations to glorify extremism or the vilification of ideological opponents. As moderate voices writing after centuries of sectarian discord, the rabbis sought a more inclusive form of Jewish life.

We are not suggesting that we hide from historical facts or bury evidence of divisions. But the glue of the Jewish people for 3,000 years — indeed, the key to our survival despite all those who tried to destroy us — has been the beauty, joy and rituals of Judaism. We can all benefit from the study of Torah, the mandates to visit the sick, feed the poor, pursue justice, welcome the stranger. There is a yearning for this beauty, this rooted history. We see it in a post-Oct. 7 surge in synagogue attendance, Jewish learning and communal connection. We can lean into our shared tradition and values as a beacon for what we aspire to, or we can highlight the fractures in America over Israel, campus protests and whether Donald Trump is good for the Jews.

Denigrating one another is a decision, not an inevitability. Could we opt for inquiry over invective? How might we sit in a hevruta, or group study, and debate our texts, our principles, our future, without shutting down conversation?

Debate is part of our inheritance. Jewish tradition was built on robust, respectful disputation — what is known as machloket l’shem shamayim, or arguments for the sake of heaven. In other words, we verbally spar not to win, but to arrive at a greater truth or understanding. The two of us do not think it is utopian or naïve to believe that such a model remains within reach.

This Hanukkah, whose first night falls on Christmas for the first time in two decades, we must decide: Will we increase the light or stoke the fire?

In their shaping of this holiday our ancient rabbis’ answer to this question is clear: Choose the light.

** Abigail Pogrebin is the author of *My Jewish Year* and *Stars of David*. Rabbi Dov Linzer is president and rabbinic head of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. Together, they wrote *It Takes Two to Torah: An Orthodox Rabbi and Reform Journalist Discuss and Debate Their Way Through the Five Books of Moses*.

Surprised by Anti-Semitism? Yes and No

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Although Jews have faced anti-Semitism from time immemorial, it always comes upon us as something new. It surprises us. We don't understand it.

We strive to be good people, good citizens; we are kind hearted and generous. We devote ourselves to the education of our children, to the betterment of society, to justice and compassion. We have our share of faults along with all other human beings; but by and large, we are a good, responsible, hard-working community.

And yet, no matter what we do, people hate us! They don't see us as individual human beings but as a vast stereotype. They don't care if we are religious or not religious; if we are liberals or conservatives. If we are Jewish, they are against us and want to hurt us.

It was once thought that the establishment of the State of Israel would bring anti-Semitism to an end. After all, Jews would then have a feeling of security in the world, a safe haven where no one would bother us.

But the Jewish State has simply become a new target for the anti-Semites. They now couch Jew-hatred for hatred of *"the Zionists."* Anti-Semites don't have a problem with Hamas firing thousands of missiles at civilian centers in Israel; but when Israel responds by bombing the enemy, Israel is immediately condemned and vilified by the haters. For the anti-Semites, Israel is always wrong regardless of what it does or doesn't do.

Happily, there are many millions of people who feel warmly toward Jews and the Jewish State. Happily, many millions of people admire the accomplishments of the State of Israel in the face of so many obstacles; they respect Israel's right — and obligation — to defend its citizens.

But when we see outbreaks of blatant anti-Jewish violence, anti-Jewish rhetoric, anti-Israel demonization — it surprises and pains us! In spite of thousands of years dealing with anti-Jewish hatred and persecution, we still are not used to it. We somehow think that humanity will improve, will judge us fairly. We grow optimistic at any sign of peace and understanding, mutual cooperation and solidarity.

We keep telling ourselves that most people are good and that reason will ultimately prevail. The haters will eventually overcome malice and violence; they will realize the value of peaceful and respectful cooperation. In a world of over seven billion human beings, surely there must be room for the infinitesimal presence of 15 million Jews. In a world with so many countries, surely there must be room for one tiny Jewish State that wants nothing more than to be able to live in peace and security.

But the anti-Semites and anti-Zionists don't really care. They don't want to be reasoned with; they don't want to listen. They have their agenda of hate.

Saul Bellow, the American novelist who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, wrote in his book *To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account*: "...*There is one fact of Jewish life unchanged by the creation of a Jewish state: you cannot take your right to live for granted. Others can; you cannot. This is not to say that everyone else is living pleasantly and well under a decent regime. No, it means only that the Jews, because they are Jews, have never been able to take the right to live as a natural right....This right is still clearly not granted them, not even in the liberal West.*"

Bellow's complaint is not new. Jews throughout the generations have had to face the same stark reality: Jews, because

they are Jews, cannot take the right to live as a natural right.

That's the sad part of the story.

But that's not the end of the story. Even if there has long been hatred and violence directed against Jews...we are still here! We continue to live, to thrive, to hope.

The late Jewish thinker, Simon Rawidowicz, wrote an essay about "Israel: the Ever-Dying People." He noted that Jews have often felt that theirs was the last Jewish generation. Jewish survival seemed hopeless. But although we were "ever-dying," we were in fact ever-living! We often felt despair; but hope and persistence prevailed. Jews found ways to overcome all who would decimate us.

Although current manifestations of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are ugly and painful, we must take the long view of things. This isn't the first period of Jewish history where Jews faced viciousness and violence. It likely won't be the last period either. But long experience has taught us to stay strong, stay confident, stay positive. The challenge to our generation is to stand tall as Jews, to stand strong on behalf of Israel.

And we do look forward to a time when humanity will overcome the disease of anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, we recall the words of Rav Nahman of Bratslav: *"All the world is a narrow bridge; the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all."*

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. This article appeared in the *Jewish Journal of Los Angeles*, December 23, 2024.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/surprised-anti-semitism-yes-and-no>

Light and Shadows: Thoughts for Hanukkah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dignity and Inner Strength: Thoughts for Parashat Mikkets

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“And Pharaoh called Joseph Zaphenath Paneah...” (Bereishith 41:45).

When Pharaoh elevated Joseph to high office, he gave Joseph an Egyptian name. Egyptologists have suggested various translations of this name: *“the god speaks and he lives;”* or *“says the god, he will live;”* or *“food-man of the life.”*

Jewish exegetes sought to translate Zaphenath Paneah as though it had roots in Hebrew language. Targum Onkelos translated it as *“the man to whom hidden things are revealed.”* Rashi interpreted it as *“explainer of hidden things.”* Other commentators have similarly defined the name as relating to Joseph’s talent in revealing secrets.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, a 19th century rabbinic sage known widely as the Netziv, offered an interesting analysis in his Torah commentary, *Ha’amek Davar*. Also seeking Hebrew roots for Zaphenath Paneah, he suggested that the *“pa”* of Paneah refers to glory and honor (hofa’ah); and the *“neah”* alludes to pleasantness and spiritual contentment (nahat). Pharaoh gave Joseph this name because he detected something amazing about Joseph, beyond ability to decipher dreams.

Pharaoh wondered: here was a young Hebrew slave who has spent long months in prison. How could someone with this background appear to be entirely comfortable assuming a position of great power and leadership? How was Joseph able to carry himself with so much confidence? Pharaoh intuited that Joseph was inherently not a slave at all; rather, Joseph had natural poise; he carried himself as a nobleman. So Pharaoh gave him a name that meant: a man who has hidden powers of glory, leadership, and serenity.

While the Netziv’s etymological theory is questionable, his psychological insight is apt. Although many people would have viewed Joseph as a lowly slave, Pharaoh was perceptive to see the *“real”* Joseph. He was impressed with Joseph’s self-image as a dignified, competent human being. The key to Joseph’s greatness was that he did not let negative external circumstances undermine his own self-worth.

People — especially those who suffer from various kinds of discrimination — need the strength of character to withstand negative pressures. One must be strong to avoid internalizing feelings of inferiority.

Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, who had been a Jewish prisoner in a German concentration camp, wrote that prisoners feared not only for their physical lives; they feared that they would come to see themselves as the Nazis saw them — as animals. *“The main problem is to remain alive and unchanged...the more absolute the tyranny, the more debilitated the subject.”*

The Jewish People have understood this idea very well. We have been subjected to all sorts of abuse, calumnies, lies, ugly stereotypes. Some Jews, unfortunately, lost their pride and self-confidence; they withered under pressure. But the masses of Jews — like Joseph — maintained their inner nobility, idealism, and self-respect.

Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, who survived the Kovno ghetto, wrote a book, *“Mima’amakim,”* in which he recorded his responses to various questions put to him during the Holocaust years. One person inquired whether it was still appropriate to recite the morning blessing thanking God *“for not having made me a slave.”* After all, Jews were indeed reduced to slave conditions.

Rabbi Oshry replied that one must continue to say the blessing, to remind himself that he is not innately a slave, that God did not create him to be a slave, that he should not internalize a slave mentality. It is vital to retain self-awareness of who we really are; we must not surrender our inner identity to the wicked oppressors who seek to debase us.

Joseph set a model of maintaining pride, dignity and self-worth even in difficult conditions. It’s a model relevant to us

today.

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

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Mikeitz -- Relearning to Fight

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

It was the calm before the famine that would bring Yosef's brothers to reconnect with him.

Yosef was the viceroy and the administrator of the food collection and was anticipating the famine about which Paroh dreamt. It was during this time that Yosef was blessed with children. Yosef called his firstborn, Menashe, which means to forget. In this way Yosef expressed his thanks that, *"Hashem had helped him forget the toil of his father's house."* (Bireishis 41:51) What toil was Yosef referring to and why was he so glad to move on from it?

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that there are two ways to disagree. One way is confrontational which is a terrible drag physically and emotionally, and the other way is a healthy exchange of ideas. The second approach, described as a healthy exchange of ideas, will not necessarily be calm. It could involve a raging battle of opinions, words, and emotions. But it takes place with a sense of trust and with a sense of safety. The Talmud (Brachos 27) describes the scholars of the Beis Medrash (study hall) as engaged in battle, arguing passionately as they expound their interpretation of the Law. Yet, the scholars are described (Kiddushin 30) as, *"Endeared to each other at the end,"* because of the fundamental affection, respect, and trust that exists between them.

I recall with fondness watching guests, including government officials, visiting the Beis Medrash in Lakewood where I studied for many years, and watching their concern as they observed Chavrusos (study partners) arguing with each other, often at the top of their lungs, about the correct interpretation of a Talmudic passage. On more than one occasion the guests expected the passionate argument to escalate and turn to fists. Yet, they watched the Chavrusos alternate screaming and listening, making their case forcefully, and then settling down to examine the Talmud text once again.

When we consider Yakov, Yosef, and the brothers, we realize that they were very great people who were assigned the task of creating the Jewish people. Unlike Avraham and Yitzchak, who did not merit having all of their children stay within the fold, Yakov's mission was to create an all-inclusive family of diversity — all unique personalities, and all loyal to Hashem. That journey was a bumpy one and involved many misunderstandings.

Yosef, for example, sensed within himself leadership qualities and his destiny to care for the family, as is the Jewish perception of Jewish leadership. The brothers, however, understood his dreams and aspirations as a conflict with their understanding that Yehuda and his descendants were to be kings. They also thought Yosef was trying to marginalize them and become the exclusive heir to the family destiny. Just as Yitzchak and Yakov were chosen to the exclusion of

Yishmoel and Esav, it seemed that the favoritism that Yakov showed towards Yosef would result in them being excluded. Disagreements between Yosef and his brothers were part of the journey to create a diverse Jewish family comprised of Shevatim (tribes) united by Hashem's Torah. Instead, those disagreements took on a bitter twist full of fear and misunderstanding.

Rav Schwab explains that this old form of disagreement is what Yosef was grateful to forget. It was a style of disagreement full of conflict and drag. Over the years, Yosef reflected on those disagreements and misunderstandings, and now, as a viceroy, seeing the meaning of his dreams emerging, embraced a new approach to disagreement which was more mature, nurturing, and would prove to be mutually beneficial.

Similarly, each of us, during our life journey, can expect to experience disagreement. Our initial approach might well be one full of suspicion, fear, and misunderstanding. The journey of Yosef and his brothers can serve as a paradigm for us. As a family they journeyed from intense conflict to reconciliation. The key to their success is something that Yosef celebrated. He was grateful to shift away from confrontational disagreement and instead look forward to the Torah version of disagreement which, in its purest form, is described as, *"Both opinions are the valid word of Hashem."* (Eiruvim 13)

It is interesting that the word *"Machlokes,"* which means disagreement, has connotations both of nobility and of terrible destruction. Korach's rebellion, for example, is called a Machlokes. In that context, Machlokes destroys. But, as the students of Talmud and Jewish law know, ***the bedrock of every discussion is filled with differing opinions, known as Machlokes. In this context, the Machlokes between scholars creates the perspective and beautiful mosaic that is the Jewish people.***

The key difference between Machlokes that destroys and Machlokes that builds, is whether we live together to a higher calling. Differences of opinion are normal. Passionate expressions of intensity can be expected. But if we agree to dialogue in trust and in safety then we live the legacy of Yosef and his brothers, eventually arriving at resolution and reconciliation.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos and a delightful Chanuka,

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

Parshas Mikeitz – The Wise Risk

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2021

There is a surprising scene in the beginning of this week's parsha. When Yosef is brought before Pharaoh and asked to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Yosef seems to take a shocking liberty by going beyond the interpretation to offer advice, as well. Yosef was at this point an incarcerated slave from a foreign country. He was standing before one of the most powerful kings of his day. Why did Yosef think it appropriate, and moreover, how did he find the audacity to offer advice to Pharaoh?

The Ramban explains that Yosef was taking a very calculated risk. He was aware that this was not what he had been asked for. Yet, he was also aware that there may be a golden opportunity here. He had impressed Pharaoh greatly by interpreting dreams which no one else in Egypt could interpret. If he coherently explained the need to stockpile wheat now and the importance of hiring a wise and understanding man to oversee the process, there was a real chance he would be chosen for that position.)As we know, indeed they did.(If Yosef remained silent, he would more likely end up

back in the dungeon he had been in. Yosef decided to risk it.

The Rambam concludes by stating that this decision Yosef made is an illustration of the statement of King Solomon that “*A wise man has his eyes in his head*” (Koheles 2:14). A wise man is one who has his eyes open to see what is coming down the road and prepares accordingly. Yosef here was displaying his great wisdom in seeing that an opportunity had arisen to leave the dungeon. He was able to recognize it, says the Rambam, because he had this attitude of being aware of what was going to happen.

This last statement of the Rambam is rather difficult to understand. Yosef had been held in a dungeon for over a decade. He suddenly finds himself being rushed out of the pit and hurriedly washed, cleaned and dressed to be brought before Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the country. Why does it take a high level of wisdom to be looking ahead and searching for an opportunity to leave the dungeon? Wouldn't anyone in Yosef's position find themselves searching every detail of every moment for a way to stay out of the dungeon?

A concept we heard often in Yeshiva is the importance of recognizing life in real time – the “*traffic of life*.” Very often in life, we can know the proper way to handle a given situation but continue to mess it up when the situation arises. We don't do this because we don't care, but simply because we were not ready and didn't realize what was happening in time. It is only when we have practiced that knowledge regularly and inculcated that attitude within ourselves that we can expect to handle the situation properly in real time.

Just as when learning to drive a car, the traffic surrounding the car is overwhelming. One feels as though they cannot possibly keep track of all that one has to do, while being aware of all the surrounding cars and where they are going. As time proceeds, though, and with practice, we find that we make all those calculations instantly and without any conscious thought, sometimes even driving great distances almost unaware of what we are doing. It is the same with handling all complex situations in life. When we are told of a situation, we know what to do. The difficulty is processing all that is happening around us in real time and recognizing the situation for what it is.

For Yosef to be searching for opportunities was obvious. What stood out about Yosef was how adept he was at recognizing what opportunities lay before him. As Yosef is carefully explaining Pharaoh's dream, even before he finishes his explanation, he is recognizing the opportunity. As he finishes his speech, he is already incorporating his advice into his response. He was clearly practiced and seasoned in the art of looking ahead in life. Being adept at handling any difficult situation can only come through hard work and ongoing practice. Just like driving, we need to practice and try again and again. Only then can we succeed in real time.

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Miketz: The Chess Grandmaster

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

A thorough analysis of Joseph's interchange with Pharaoh reveals that Joseph's every move was carefully planned, always anticipating his rival's reaction. The inevitable conclusion is that the Joseph may be the most brilliant Chess Grandmaster in the history of politics. Here is a brief review of his greatest moves (all the numbers refer to Genesis). Here is a brief review of his greatest moves (all the numbers refer to Genesis), which will also answer the great riddle of why Joseph never contacted his father to let him know that he is alive and well in Egypt.

The Grand Plan

Upon being called from jail, Joseph knew that his time has come, and upon hearing Pharaoh's dreams, he realized how exactly his own dreams will unfold in reality. He saw himself as an emissary carrying out God's plan, which was paving the way for the safe arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt, finding a place for them to dwell in, and feeding and sustaining them. Their coming to Egypt was inevitable because of the ancient prophecy to Abraham at the Covenant of the Pieces, and he understood his role as being sent to Egypt to improve the conditions of that exile. This understanding, however, put Joseph in an excruciating predicament, since he was not able to make contact with his father or the whole plan would be aborted. The reason for that was that Canaan and Egypt were hostile to each other (archeologists found the Execration Texts or Prescription Lists, from the 20th-17th C BCE, containing curses against Egypt's enemies, mainly Canaanite cities). Joseph's position, which he cleverly managed to secure, put him above many veterans and cronies of the royal court, and the fact that he was a Canaanite expatriate and a former slave and prisoner obligated him to consider his steps carefully. If he would have sent a message to his father, his enemies would declare it high treason, demand punishment, and destroy his vision for carrying out the divine plan. The only option he had for informing his father was to flee Egypt with his family and live permanently with Jacob, but that also would have meant aborting his mission, so he had to stay put and wait for the right moment for his family to come. It is true that in the process of fulfilling his mission he saw his dreams materializing to the last detail and his brothers repenting in accordance with the four stages of Teshuva, but that was a bonus. The downside of his suppression of his emotions and great love for his father is that it was never clear whether Jacob was satisfied with this explanation, but that is a matter for another discussion.

Gathering the Wheat

41:48-49; 56: He stored food from the fields surrounding each city in that city, Joseph has accumulated grain like the sand of the sea, so much that he stopped counting because there was no count... Joseph opened all of them and fed the Egyptians...

Joseph knew that pure communism is bound to fail. Had he told the Egyptians that what they are gathering would be distributed equally between all citizens, they would have no incentive to work and their productivity would have diminished. By building granaries in each city and storing there only local yields, he gave the impression that the distribution would be local, thus creating a sense of competition and a selfish incentive, with the citizens of each city willing to work expeditiously and consume less in order to survive better when the famine arrives. However, when the famine seized Egypt, Joseph turned the granaries into a collective warehouse – he opened all of them and fed [all] of Egypt.

The Distribution

41:55: The land of Egypt was famished, the people cried out to Pharaoh asking for bread, and Pharaoh told all Egyptians: "go to Joseph, and do whatever he tells you."

There is something missing here. It was a well-known fact that Joseph was the Minister of Wheat, so why didn't the people turn to him first? The answer is that they did, but he remained inactive, insinuating that he could not do anything without permission from the king. He did so for two reasons: a) he showed loyalty to Pharaoh, waiting for his approval with this new, albeit anticipated, development; and b) he forced Pharaoh to admit that he could not function without Joseph. Had Joseph launched the distribution immediately, Pharaoh would have never known how dire the situation was. Joseph waited for the mobs to surround the palace and for the king to send the people over to him.)*"Let them eat cake"* did not work well for monarchs.

The Brothers' First Visit

Joseph harshly and publicly accuses his brothers of spying. He does so in anticipation of their future immigration to Egypt, because the tension between Egypt and Canaan could have been used by his opponents to frame Jacob and his family

as a hostile element. Joseph took care of that by accusing them, imprisoning Simon, and forcing them to return with Benjamin to prove their innocence, thus clearing their name before the revelation that they are related.

The Revelation and Encounter

45:1-2; 16: None was with Joseph when he revealed his identity to his brothers. He cried out loud, and the Egyptians heard, and Pharaoh's court heard... and the rumor was heard in Pharaoh's court, saying: "the brothers of Joseph came," and Pharaoh and his servants found it favorable.

Joseph did not want to make the encounter a public one, nor did he want to inform Pharaoh of the encounter, because doing so could have been interpreted as a request to bring his family to Egypt. Instead, Joseph conducted the encounter in privacy, letting the rumor spread and reach Pharaoh. The king, who knew he could not afford to lose Joseph, insisted on Joseph's family coming to Egypt. We may assume that it was Joseph's feigned refusal that brought the king to make this offer a royal command, one which could not be retracted (45:19). As in the past, Joseph already predicted Pharaoh's reaction accurately, as can be seen when we go back and read his words to his brothers during the encounter, with no one there but them to hear him (45:9): *come down to me, do not delay!* He has no doubt that Pharaoh will want Jacob and the family to come, but he waits for the king to say it as if it was his own idea.

Settling in Goshen

Pharaoh said... I will give you the choicest of the land of Egypt; 46:28:]Jacob and his family[came to the land of Goshen; 46:33-47:6.)Joseph instructs his family(: when Pharaoh calls you and asks what is your profession, say that you are shepherds... in order to dwell in Goshen because the Egyptians worship the shepherds... they said to Pharaoh we are shepherds... let us dwell in Goshen... Pharaoh told Joseph... let your father and brothers dwell in the choicest of the land, let them dwell in Goshen...

Already at the family reunion, when Joseph revealed his identity, he promised his brothers to bring them to Goshen. His wish was echoed by the king, who insisted that the family settle in the choicest of the land, which is Goshen. The meeting of Joseph and Jacob, as well as the temporary location of the Israelite immigrants, is Goshen. Before his brothers have an interview with the king, Joseph guides them to emphasize their expertise in sheep herding in order to secure a place in Goshen. The words מצרים תועבת are a euphemism, calling idolatry an abomination, but they actually mean that since the Egyptians worshipped the sheep, they also held their custodians, the shepherds, in high regard. It comes as no surprise that Joseph's plan is a great success, not only does his family end up in Goshen, but Pharaoh feels as if it was his own idea.

Jacob's Last Wish

49:29-30: Bury me with my ancestors at the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite... the field which Abraham purchased...

Jacob wished to be buried in Canaan, and even though this request is directed to all his children, he already prearranged with Joseph to be in charge of assuring it so happens (47:29-31). Jacob knows that Joseph is the only one who will be able to arrange for the burial at Canaan, and Joseph indeed takes no chances as he approaches Pharaoh, taking into account the possibility that the monarch will refuse, either because he needs Joseph's services and does not want him to defect, or because he respects Jacob and wants him to be buried in Egypt. In either case, for Joseph, failure is never an option, so he carefully phrases his request:

50:4-5: *Joseph's spoke to Pharaoh's courtiers, saying, if you favor me please speak to Pharaoh and tell him on my behalf: my father made me take an oath, saying, I am about to die, in my grave which I have dug at the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.*

There are two problems with these verses: a) The method of delivery seems cumbersome – why doesn't Joseph address Pharaoh directly? b) Why is Joseph saying that Jacob dug the grave?

The answer lies with the burial culture of ancient Egypt. Egyptian monarchs invested a lot of thought and resources in securing their eternal place in the World of the Dead. They built magnificent structures, the pyramids, whose sole purpose was to serve as mausoleums, and created sophisticated methods to protect them from tomb-raiders. But with all their power and prowess, the kings and queens always had one weak link in the whole system – loyalty. Who would assure them that following their death, they will be treated properly and buried according to their specifications? The only way to assure that this will happen was to surround themselves with loyal servants. Joseph is well aware of the problem, and he takes full advantage of it with subtle shrewdness.

Instead of approaching the king directly and discretely, he sent the request through the royal courtiers, practically releasing it to the media. In doing so, he made it harder for Pharaoh to refuse now that so many people are aware of the request, since refusing Joseph's request might cost him his servants' loyalty. Joseph also paraphrased Jacob's words. Instead of speaking of a purchased grave, he uses the word קריתי – I dug, making an allusion to the Pyramids which were usually constructed by order of the king and under his watchful eye. While Pharaoh might have still been able to refuse Jacob's request to be buried in a purchased grave without losing his servants' trust, because he could have claimed that the real "Mitzvah" is to be buried in a grave you made yourself, he cannot make the same argument regarding a grave which Jacob dug with his own two hands.

So was Joseph lying? Not at all! He merely exchanged the verb קנה – to purchase, with the verb כרה which has two meanings: the more common one is "to dig," and the other, less frequent, is "to purchase" (see Deut. 2:6 and more indisputably in Hos. 3:2). Joseph has only reiterated his father's request, but Pharaoh understood that Jacob personally prepared the grave and had therefore no option but to acquiesce.

Coda: The Grandmaster Beaten

In conclusion, we see that Joseph is a thorough and methodical person who leaves nothing for chance. He indeed deserves the Kabbalistic designation of the attribute of Yessod to him (Zohar Pinehas 236:1), since Yessod means foundation as well as thoroughness. Joseph managed to lay the foundations for the survival of the Israelites in Egypt and bring his plan to fruition.

However, there is one lingering question: if Joseph is so calculated and perfect, how come the leadership of the Jewish people was eventually transferred to the house of Judah?

The answer is that Joseph was a grandmaster of chess, but he was beaten by a backgammon expert (that's my riddle; solve it and you will merit a prize!).

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samaich

* 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.

Relight

By Rabbi Moshe Rube * © 5782

The Hasmonean dynasty ended about 200 years after the Channukah story, when two Hasmonean brothers, Aristobulus and Hyrkanus, fought a civil war over who would be in control. The Romans were eventually able to play off this weakness, and eventually Israel became a protectorate of Rome. The Talmud tells us that the whole family was eventually killed, the last one jumping to her death with her last words being, "*All who claim to be from Chashmonai are lying for the last one is about to die.*"

I invite you to look at the historical record and do your own research on the ups and downs of the Hasmonean dynasty. The events of Channukah, both the story and what happened after, are far more nuanced and interesting than, "They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat."

For our purposes here, let us think about how it affects our outlook to know that the Jewish independence established by Channukah did not last and had a tragic ending. Can we find light in this hindsight?

Let's first wonder how our ancestors experienced the Channukah holiday during those first 200 years. No doubt it was a holiday of triumph. The light signifies how we won the war and declared our independence. We light in our homes to show our spirit can never be extinguished.

But how did our ancestors celebrate the Channukah right after Israel came under Roman dominion? Could they really celebrate a holiday of triumph when they were back under foreign rule?

Of course they could. And they did. They kept celebrating Channukah even when the Romans destroyed the Temple and kicked us out of our land. All through our wanderings and exiles throughout the world, our forefathers and foremothers celebrated this holiday.

But why? If Channukah was born in triumph, how could it be celebrated when Jews had forfeited that victory?

Again, how Jews experienced themselves and Channukah is another matter that requires us to look at the research and writings of history. But for us, I think we can safely conclude that Channukah must have been more than just a victory party. Who celebrates a victory after losing the next time? Would anyone still celebrate the Tide's national championship if they don't win again the next year?)Note: Rabbi wrote this message when he was Rabbi in Birmingham, AL.(

So what is Channukah aside from a victory party?

Let's look at two unique aspects of Channukah that may give us a clue.

1(Channukah was a rededication not a dedication

The Jews at the time of Channukah did not build the Temple anew, but repaired it. The Al Hanissim prayer details how after the war, "*the Jews came into the Temple, cleaned it up, purified the Sanctuary, and lit the Menorah.*" This idea of Channukah being a rebirth rather than a start of something new was a central aspect of the Channukah experience since its inception.

1(Channukah is the only holiday where a Rosh Chodesh)New Moon(holiday passes through the middle.

On the first days of Channukah we see the moon declining. This Shabbat, it will disappear, and we should see it again on the final days of Channukah. The Jewish calendar and our calculations of the months run chiefly by the sighting of the moon. Hashem gave us this as our first communal mitzvah. Woven into the Jewish experience since our creation was this idea of rebirth. The Jewish people go by the moon. The sun is always visible, but the moon is dynamic in how we see it. On Channukah we experience this moon -- rebirth with the rededication/rebirth of the Temple. This fact that ties Channukah to our national identity as a people with the power to renew itself could not have been lost on our ancestors.

So Channukah was not and is not just a victory party. It must have been and still is a party of rebirth. If the holiday was just about celebrating the fact that we have light, it would have gone out when the Hasmoneans fell – i.e., when the light went out.

But Channukah is a holiday of rebirth. Even when the world is dark and the Jews in exile, we can and did celebrate Channukah because no matter what, we always recognize that the light can and will renew. This is an eternal element of the Jewish people expressed in the new moon, in Channukah, and continues to be expressed today (especially in the modern State of Israel(regardless of whatever became of the Hasmoneans.

We don't light Channukah candles. We relight them.

Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov and Channukah Sameach!

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

Rav Kook Torah * **Chanukah: The Sacred Protects Itself**

Why is it that the Menorah we use in our homes for Chanukah must be different than the Menorah in the Temple, bearing eight or nine branches instead of seven?

People think that kodesh and chol — the realms of sacred and secular — are adversaries battling one another. But in truth, there is no conflict between kodesh and chol. Our national life requires that both of these domains be fully developed and channeled toward building the nation. We should aspire to combine them and imbue the secular with holiness.

We strive for kiddush, to sanctify the mundane and extend the influence of kodesh on chol. But we also need havdalah to differentiate between the two realms. Havdalah is necessary to prevent the blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, to preclude the debasement of kodesh and its misuse for secular purposes.

There exists a perfect kodesh, lofty and sublime. We draw from its essence, from its content, from its living treasure. And we are commanded to protect it from any secular influences that could dullen the rich tapestry of the kodesh.

Thus, Jewish law forbids us to fashion a Menorah similar to the one used in the holy Temple. In this way, the kodesh defends itself from any flow of secular influences that may diminish its value. It is because of this self protection that the kodesh is able to retain its power to strengthen and vitalize secular frameworks.

Greek thought asserted that there is no holiness in the practical world. The Greek mind could only see in the universe — from the lowest depths to the farthest stars — mundane forces. Knesset Yisrael, however, knows how to join heaven and earth. We know how to unite kodesh and chol, how to sanctify ourselves with that which is permissible, to eat a meal in holiness and purity.

We are able to attain this ideal unification because we maintain the necessary barriers, we know how to distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Eternal Israel is built on these complementary principles of chibur and havdalah, unification and distinction.

In an institution where both sacred subjects and secular disciplines are taught, we must not forget that our ancient battle against Greek culture is not over. If we are careless, the sacred will become profane.

We must remember that we are descendants of those heroes who sacrificed their lives to guard the holy. Like the Temple Menorah, Torah study is the highest level of kodesh. We must be careful that our study of Torah does not degenerate into a study of literature, not even a study of national literature or an ancient science. Torah is the word of the Living God. Our practical activities must be illuminated by the holy light of Torah and its mitzvot. As the psalmist said,

“Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.”)Psalms 119:5(

)Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah*, pp. 181-182, and *Celebration of the Soul* by Rabbi Pesach Jaffe, pp. 99-100.(

Rav Kook made these comments when speaking at the inaugural ceremony for the Mizrahi Teachers Institute in Jerusalem during Chanukah, 1932.

https://ravkooktorah.org/CHANUKAH_65.htm

Mikketz: The Universal and the Particular (5779)

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

The story of Joseph is one of those rare narratives in Tanach in which a Jew)Israelite/Hebrew(comes to play a prominent part in a gentile society – the others are, most notably, the books of Esther and Daniel. I want here to explore one facet of that scenario. How does a Jew speak to a non-Jew about God?

What is particular, and what is universal, in the religious life? In its approach to this, Judaism is unique. On the one hand, the God of Abraham is, we believe, the God of everyone. We are all – Jew and non-Jew alike – made in God’s image and likeness. On the other, the religion of Abraham is not the religion of everyone. It was born in the specific covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. We say of God in our prayers that He *“chose us from all the peoples.”*

How does this work out in practice? When Joseph, son of Jacob, meets Pharaoh, King of Egypt, what concepts do they share, and what remains untranslatable?

The Torah answers this question deftly and subtly. When Joseph is brought from prison to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, both men refer to God, always using the word Elokim. The word appears seven times in the scene,]1[always in biblical narrative a significant number. The first five are spoken by Joseph: *“God will give Pharaoh the answer He desires ... God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do ... God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do ... The matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon”*)Gen. 41:16-32(.

The last two are uttered by Pharaoh himself, after Joseph has interpreted the dreams, stated the problem)seven years of famine(, provided the solution)store up grain in the years of plenty(, and advised him to appoint a *“wise and discerning man”*)Gen. 41:33(to oversee the project:

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, *“Can we find anyone like this man, in whom is the spirit of God?”* Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, *“Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace...”*)Gen. 41:37–39(

This is surprising. The Egypt of the Pharaohs was not a monotheistic culture. It was a place of many gods and goddesses – the sun, the Nile, and so on. To be sure, there was a brief period under Ikhnaton (Amenhotep IV), when the official religion was reformed in the direction of monolatry (worship of one god without disputing the existence of others). But this was short-lived, and certainly not at the time of Joseph. The entire biblical portrayal of Egypt is predicated on their belief in many gods, against whom God “executed judgement” at the time of the plagues. Why then does Joseph take it for granted that Pharaoh will understand his reference to God – an assumption proved correct when Pharaoh twice uses the word himself? What is the significance of the word Elokim?

The Hebrew Bible has two primary ways of referring to God, the four-letter name we allude to as Hashem (“the name” par excellence) and the word Elokim. The Sages understood the difference in terms of the distinction between God-as-justice (Elokim) and God-as-mercy (Hashem). However, the philosopher-poet of the eleventh century, Judah HaLevi, proposed a quite different distinction, based not on ethical attributes but on modes of relationship² – a view revived in the twentieth century by Martin Buber in his distinction between I-It and I-Thou.

HaLevi’s view was this: the ancients worshipped forces of nature, which they personified as gods. Each was known as El, or Eloah. The word “El” therefore generically means “a force, a power, of nature.” *The fundamental difference between those cultures and Judaism, was that Judaism believed that the forces of nature were not independent and autonomous. They represented a single totality, one creative will, the Author of being. The Torah therefore speaks of Elokim in the plural, meaning, “the sum of all forces, the totality of all powers.”* In today’s language, we might say that Elokim is God as He is disclosed by science: the Big Bang, the various forces that give the universe its configuration, and the genetic code that shapes life from the simplest bacterium to Homo sapiens.

Hashem is a word of different kind. It is, according to HaLevi, God’s proper name. Just as “the first patriarch” (a generic description) was called Abraham (a name), and “the leader who led the Israelites out of Egypt” (another description) was called Moses, so “the Author of being” (Elokim) has a proper name, Hashem.

The difference between proper names and generic descriptions is fundamental. Things have descriptions, but only people have proper names. When we call someone by name, we are engaged in a fundamental existential encounter. We are relating to them in their uniqueness and ours. We are opening up ourselves to them and inviting them to open themselves up to us. We are, in Kant’s famous distinction, regarding them as ends, not means, as centres of value in themselves, not potential tools to the satisfaction of our desires.

The word Hashem represents a revolution in the religious life of humankind. It means that we relate to the totality of being, not as does a scientist seeing it as something to be understood and controlled, but as does a poet standing before it in reverence and awe, addressing and being addressed by it.

Elokim is God as we encounter Him in nature. Hashem is God as we encounter Him in personal relationships, above all in speech, conversation, dialogue, words. Elokim is God as He is found in creation. Hashem is God as He is disclosed in revelation.

Hence the tension in Judaism between the universal and the particular. God as we encounter Him in creation is universal. God as we hear Him in revelation is particular. This is mirrored in the way the Genesis story develops. It begins with characters and events whose significance is that they are universal archetypes: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, the builders of Babel. Their stories are about the human condition as such: obedience and rebellion, faith and fratricide, hubris and nemesis, technology and violence, the order God makes and the chaos we create. Not until the twelfth chapter of Genesis does the Torah turn to the particular, to one family, that of Abraham and Sarah, and the covenant God enters into with them and their descendants.

This duality is why Genesis speaks of two covenants, the first with Noah and all humanity after the Flood, the second with Abraham and his descendants, later given more detailed shape at Mount Sinai in the days of Moses. The Noahide covenant is universal, with its seven basic moral commands. These are the minimal requirements of humanity as such,

the foundations of any decent society. The other is the richly detailed code of 613 commandments that form Israel's unique constitution as "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*")Exodus 19:6(.

So there are the universals of Judaism – creation, humanity as God's image, and the covenant with Noah. There are also its particularities – revelation, Israel as God's "*firstborn child*," and the covenants with Abraham and the Jewish people at Sinai. The first represents the face of God accessible to all humankind; the second, that special, intimate and personal relationship He has with the people He holds close, as disclosed in the Torah)revelation(and Jewish history)redemption(. The word for the first is Elokim, and for the second, Hashem.

We can now understand that Genesis works on the assumption that one aspect of God, Elokim, is intelligible to all human beings, regardless of whether they belong to the family of Abraham or not. So, for example, Elokim comes in a vision to Avimelech, King of Gerar, despite the fact that he is a pagan. The Hittites call Abraham "*a prince of God JElokim[in our midst.*" Jacob, in his conversations with Laban and later with Esau uses the term Elokim. When he returns to the land of Canaan, the Torah says that "*the terror of God JElokim[*" fell on the surrounding towns. All these cases refer to individuals or groups who are outside the Abrahamic covenant. Yet the Torah has no hesitation in ascribing to them the language of Elokim.

That is why Joseph is able to assume that Egyptians will understand the idea of Elokim, even though they are wholly unfamiliar with the idea of Hashem. This is made clear in two pointed contrasts. The first occurs in Genesis 39, Joseph's experience in the house of Potiphar. The chapter consistently and repeatedly uses the word Hashem in relation to Joseph)"*Hashem was with Joseph... Hashem gave him success in everything he did*"]Gen. 39:2, 5[(, but when Joseph speaks to Potiphar's wife, who is attempting to seduce him, he says, "*How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against Elokim*")Gen. 39:9(.

The second is in the contrast between the Pharaoh who speaks to Joseph and twice uses the word Elokim, and the Pharaoh of Moses' day, who says, "*Who is Hashem that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know Hashem and I will not let Israel go*")Exodus 5:2(. **An Egyptian can understand Elokim, the God of nature. He cannot understand Hashem, the God of personal relationship.**]emphasis added[

Judaism was and remains unique in its combination of universalism and particularism. We believe that God is the God of all humanity. He created all. He is accessible to all. He cares for all. He has made a covenant with all. Yet there is also a relationship with God that is unique to the Jewish people. It alone has placed its national life under His direct sovereignty. It alone has risked its very existence on a Divine covenant. It testifies in its history to the presence within it of a Presence beyond history.

As we search in the twenty-first century for a way to avoid a "*clash of civilisations*," humanity can learn much from this ancient and still compelling way of understanding the human condition. We are all "*the image and likeness*" of God. There are universal principles of human dignity. They are expressed in the Noahide covenant, in human wisdom)chochmah(, and in that aspect of the One God we call Elokim. There is a global covenant of human solidarity.

But each civilisation is also unique. We do not presume to judge them, except insofar as they succeed or fail in honouring the basic, universal principles of human dignity and justice. We as Jews rest secure in our relationship with God, the God who has revealed Himself to us in the intimacy and particularity of love, whom we call Hashem.

The challenge of an era of conflicting civilisations is best met by following the example of Abraham, Sarah and their children, as exemplified in Joseph's contribution to the economy and politics of Egypt, saving it and the region from famine. To be a Jew is to be true to our faith while being a blessing to others regardless of their faith. That is a formula for peace and graciousness in an age badly in need of both.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[The word *Elokim* appears nine times in Genesis 41, the last two in the later episode in which Joseph gives names to his two sons.

]2[Judah HaLevi, *Kuzari*, book 1v, para. 1.

Around the Sabbath Table:

]1[What aspects of your life and your faith connect you to people of other faiths?

]2[What aspects of your faith do you find are an obstacle to connecting and forming relationships with people from other faiths?

]3[Do you think the fact that Jews have a particular and special relationship with God and a specific covenant with Him make the Jewish people superior in any way?

]4[Do you think it is ok to just study chochmah or Torah? Do you think it is important to involve yourself in both?

]5[How does Judaism's dual approach of universalism and particularism to the world make it unique message?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/mikketz/the-universal-and-the-particular-2/#_ftnref1

The Slow Road to Instant Success

By Yossi Goldman * © Chabad 5785

How long does it take to become successful?

Steve Jobs famously said, *"If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time."* Jeff Bezos pinned the figure at 10 years.

Certain businesspeople, artists, authors, athletes, or celebrities may seem to have become famous rather quickly, but they usually put in years of quiet effort before becoming well known on the global stage.

One sees this clearly in the story of Joseph.¹ Pharaoh has his disturbing dreams of fat cows being swallowed by skinny cows, and thin ears of grain swallowing healthy ones, and no one can interpret them to the monarch's satisfaction.

Suddenly, the chief butler remembers Joseph, who was once his fellow prisoner and able to interpret his and the chief baker's dreams correctly. He suggests that Joseph may be able to solve Pharaoh's problem, and in a flash the young Hebrew is hauled out of the dungeons, cleaned up, and brought before the king.

Joseph interprets the dreams, Pharaoh is happy, and immediately he appoints Joseph Viceroy of Egypt, second only to the king himself.

In a single day, Joseph was catapulted from prisoner to Prime Minister! An overnight sensation indeed.

But what was the history here? Where was Joseph until now? First, he was a slave to Potiphar, having been sold into servitude by his own brothers. Then, denounced by Potiphar's wife who falsely accused him of sexual impropriety, he was sent to prison. How long was he there? Some say it was 12 years² before he was called to Pharaoh to interpret the dreams.

Overnight success? Sure. But not before he paid his dues and sowed the seeds of his reputation two years earlier when interpreting the butler's dream correctly.

Power and position certainly came quickly to Joseph. But don't forget that he languished in the dungeons for many years waiting for that window of opportunity to open.

And then, the economic plan that he instituted across Egypt — collecting and storing grain during the seven years of plenty in preparation for the seven years of famine to follow — was also not an overnight solution.

It was only after seven years of saving and two years of hunger that the fruits of his labor became apparent, sparing the whole region from starvation.

Clearly, Joseph had a long-term outlook.

The message is clear: Much time, hard work, patience, and perseverance must be expended before one becomes an overnight success.

In life, we need not only faith, but patience too. Theologically, we believe that G d is good and that, somehow, everything is for the best — whether we see it immediately or not. That doesn't mean that we will wake up the morning after bad news and everything will be fine and dandy. The "*vast, eternal plan*" can sometimes take what truly feels like an eternity to unfold.

"*Patience is a virtue*" is an old philosophical truism. Coupled with faith, it can help us live our lives with serenity and equanimity.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 41.

2. Sefer Hayashar 44, Seder Olam Rabbah §2 and Shemot Rabbah 7:1.

* Life Rabbi Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg, South Africa and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5734786/jewish/The-Slow-Road-to-Instant-Success.htm

Chanukah: The Message of the Public Menorah Lightings by The Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l *

The Message of the Public Menorah Lightings

By the Grace of G d

On the eve of Chanukah, 5741]1980[

Brooklyn, N.Y.

To all Participants in the Public Lighting of the Chanukah Menorah in the U.S.A.:

Greeting and Blessing!

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, recalls the victory — more than 2100 years ago — of a militarily weak but spiritually strong Jewish people over the mighty forces of a ruthless enemy that had overrun the Holy Land and threatened to engulf the land and its people in darkness.

The miraculous victory — culminating with the rededication of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem and the rekindling of the Menorah which had been desecrated and extinguished by the enemy — has been celebrated annually ever since during these eight days of Chanukah, especially by lighting the Chanukah Menorah, also as a symbol and message of the triumph of freedom over oppression, of spirit over matter, of light over darkness.

It is a timely and reassuring message, for the forces of darkness are ever present. Moreover, the danger does not come exclusively from outside; it often lurks close to home, in the form of insidious erosion of time-honored values and principles that are at the foundation of any decent human society. Needless to say, darkness is not chased away by brooms and sticks, but by illumination. Our Sages said, *“A little light expels a lot of darkness.”*

The Chanukah Lights remind us in a most obvious way that illumination begins at home, within oneself and one’s family, by increasing and intensifying the light of the Torah and Mitzvos in the everyday experience, even as the Chanukah Lights are kindled in growing numbers from day to day. But though it begins at home, it does not stop there. Such is the nature of light that when one kindles a light for one’s own benefit, it benefits also all who are in the vicinity. Indeed, the Chanukah Lights are expressly meant to illuminate the *“outside,”* symbolically alluding to the duty to bring light also to those who, for one reason or another, still walk in darkness.

What is true of the individual is true of a nation, especially this great United States, united under G-d, and generously blessed by G-d with material as well as spiritual riches. It is surely the duty and privilege of this Nation to promote all the forces of light both at home and abroad, and in a steadily growing measure.

Let us pray that the message of the Chanukah Lights will illuminate the everyday life of everyone personally, and of the society at large, for a brighter life in every respect, both materially and spiritually.

With esteem and blessing in the spirit of Chanukah,

]Signed[M. Schneerson

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

A festive Chanukah and Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* From our "To the Sons and Daughters of Our People Israel Everywhere....," a Chanukah letter by the Rebbe on the obligation to illuminate the world.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Sibling Rivalry

Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him. Gen. 42:8 The Torah is a deep book. We make a great mistake if we think it can be understood on one superficial level.

On the surface, the story is simple. Envious of him, Joseph's brothers initially planned to kill him. Eventually they sell into slavery. He is taken to Egypt. There, through a series of vicissitudes, he rises to become Prime Minister, second only, in rank and power, to Pharaoh.

It is now many years later. His brothers have come to Egypt to buy food. They come before Joseph, but he no longer looks like the man they knew many years before. Then, he was a seventeen year old called Joseph. Now he is thirty-nine, an Egyptian ruler called Tzofenat Paneach, dressed in official robes with a gold chain around his neck, who speaks Egyptian and uses an interpreter to communicate with these visitors from the land of Canaan. No wonder they did not recognise him, though he recognised them.

But that is only the surface meaning. Deep down the book of Bereishit is exploring the most profound source of conflict in history. Freud thought the great symbol of conflict was Laius and Oedipus, the tension between fathers and sons. Bereishit thinks otherwise. The root of human conflict is sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and now Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph has the misfortune of being the youngest. He symbolises the Jewish condition. His brothers are older and stronger than he is. They resent his presence. They see him as a trouble maker. The fact that their father loves him only makes them angrier and more resentful. They want to kill him. In the end they get rid of him in a way that allows them to feel a little less guilty. They concoct a story that they tell their father, and they settle down to life again. They can relax. There is no Joseph to disturb their peace any more.

And now they are facing a stranger in a strange

land and it simply does not occur to them that this man may be Joseph. As far as they are concerned, there is no Joseph. They don't recognise him now. They never did. They never recognised him as one of them, as their father's child, as their brother with an identity of his own and a right to be himself.

Joseph is the Jewish people throughout history.

Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him.

Judaism was the world's first monotheism but not the last. Two others emerged claiming descent, literal or metaphorical, from Abraham, Christianity and Islam. It would be fair to call the relationship between the three Abrahamic monotheisms, one of sibling rivalry. Far from being of mere antiquarian interest, the theme of Bereishit has been the leitmotiv of the better part of the last two thousand years, with the Jewish people cast in the role of Joseph.

There were times – early medieval Spain was one – when Joseph and his brothers lived together in relative harmony, convivencia as they called it. But there were also times – the blood libels, the accusations of poisoning wells or spreading the plague – when they sought to kill him. And others – the expulsions that took place throughout Europe between the English in 1290 and the Spanish in 1492 – when they simply wanted to get rid of him. Let him go and be a slave somewhere else, far from here.

Then came the Holocaust. Then came the State of Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey since the days of Abraham, the homeland of the Jewish people since the days of Joshua. No nation on earth, with the possible exception of the Chinese, has had such a long association with a land.

The day the State was born, 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion, its Prime Minister, sought peace with its neighbours, and Israel has not ceased seeking peace from then until now.

But this is no ordinary conflict. Israel's opponents – Hamas in Gaza, Hizbollah in Lebanon, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, are not engaged in a border dispute, these boundaries or those. They deny, as a matter of non negotiable religious – not just political – principle, Israel's right to exist within any

boundaries whatsoever. There are today 56 Islamic states. But for Israel's neighbours a single Jewish state the size of Wales, is one too many.

Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him.

There is no State among the 192 member nations of the United Nations whose very existence is called into question this way. And while we as Jews argue among ourselves as to this policy or that, as if this were remotely relevant to the issue of peace, we fail to focus on the real issue, which is, so long as Joseph's brothers do not recognise his right to be, there can be no peace, merely a series of staging posts on the way to a war that will not end until there is no Jewish state at all.

Until the sibling rivalry is over, until the Jewish people wins the right to be, until people – including we ourselves – realise that the threat Israel faces is ultimate and total, until Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah agree that Jews have a right to their land within any boundaries whatsoever, all other debate is mere distraction.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Why Didn't Joseph Contact His Father?

"And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not. But he behaved like a stranger and spoke harshly to them. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of, and said unto them, 'You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you have come.'" (Genesis 42:8-9)

In the Torah portion of Miketz, the drama of Joseph and his brothers takes on new dimensions. From a situation in which Joseph is the hunted and the brothers are the hunters, we move into the very opposite. Joseph becomes the hunter and the brothers the hunted, although they don't understand why!

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But we also realize that until now the text has been silent about Joseph's relationship to his past. This forces us to query how Joseph can spend twenty-two years of his life in a foreign country like Egypt without ever looking over his shoulder to find out how his family in Canaan is faring. When he sat in Egyptian prisons it was impossible to communicate, but what about the years when he ruled as the Grand Vizier of a great empire? Could he not have sent servants, carrier pigeons, messages on papyrus? Even if he had no desire ever to see his brothers again, should his aged father who loved him so much have been made to suffer for their sins?

Nahmanides tells us that Egypt is only a six-day journey from Hebron but "...even if it was a year's journey, he should have notified him" (Genesis 42:9). The longer Joseph is silent, the longer Jacob is deprived of his beloved son, the greater our question on Joseph's character.

Nahmanides explains that Joseph was prevented from contacting his father because he was driven by his dreams, and guided by their inevitable course. It was his intention to wait until all elements of his dream – the sun, moon and eleven stars, symbolic of his father, mother and eleven brothers bowing down to him – came together in Egypt, when and where the details could be fulfilled exactly. The dreams controlled Joseph. Emotions could not outweigh what he believed was destiny. Therefore, sending word home before the famine would force his entire family to go down to Egypt and would have negated the possibility of his dreams being fulfilled (Nahmanides on Genesis 42:9).

Abarbanel paints Joseph differently, saying that it was impossible for him to contact his father until he was convinced that his brothers had truly repented; otherwise the joyous news that Joseph was still alive would have also meant a father facing ten lying brothers who now would be forced to reveal their role in the murderous deception amidst all sorts of recriminations. From this perspective everything Joseph does while concealing his identity is intended to increase the brothers' awareness, reliving what they inflicted upon him. Since he was thrown into a pit, he puts them in a pit. Then he tells them to return home without Shimon whom he keeps in prison as a hostage until Benjamin will be brought to Egypt. This should make them realize that for the second time in their lives they are returning with a brother missing – and Shimon had been the primary instigator against Joseph. And indeed they declare,

"We deserve to be punished because of what we did to our brother. We saw him pleading with us, but we would not listen..." (Genesis 42:21).

It is only after Joseph treats Benjamin with favoritism, and then condemns him to imprisonment as a thief – and Judah offers himself and all the brothers in Benjamin's stead – that Joseph realizes the depth of his brothers' repentance. After all, Benjamin is also a son of Rachel, a favorite of Jacob – and this could have been a marvelous opportunity to be rid of him as they had gotten rid of Joseph. If the brothers are now willing to offer themselves as slaves so that their father will not have to suffer further grief at the loss of Benjamin, they apparently really have changed and repented for their sale of Joseph!

A third way to understand why Joseph didn't get in touch with his family is the simplest in terms of the plain meaning of the text. What happened to Joseph in Egypt was a natural result of remembrances of past resentments, a man who was almost murdered by his own brothers, whom he never suspected bore him such evil designs.

Until he had been cast into the pit, Joseph was basically an innocent child, basking in the love of his father with no comprehension as to how much his brothers hated him. He was so beloved that he took that love for granted; he naïvely and unselfconsciously believed it was shared by everyone in his family. Only someone with absolutely no guile could have advertised his supercilious dreams of mastery over his brothers to those very same brothers. But in the harsh reflection of the fact that his brothers were willing to leave him to die in a provision-less pit, the venom of their hatred was clear.

And in addition to condemning his brothers, he lays a good part of the blame upon the frail shoulders of his father, who should have realized where his unbridled favoritism would lead. The coat of beautiful colors was the first thing the brothers tore off him, eventually turning it into a blood-soaked rag. In the pit, Joseph comes to realize that the ingredients of excessive love can be transformed into a poisonous potion and that his father had totally mismanaged the family dynamic. One might even justify Joseph's uttering in the pit: I hate my father's house. I will never communicate with my father or my brothers again.

Joseph's subsequent behavior in Egypt would indicate that he really tried to escape his father's house, severing all ties to the past. The Midrash teaches that there are three reasons why the Jews didn't assimilate in Egypt: "They didn't change their names, their clothes, or their language." If the Midrash is an indication of how to protect oneself against assimilation, Joseph, who changed all three, left himself completely open. The first step begins after his

Likutei Divrei Torah

success in interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. In reward, Joseph is appointed Grand Vizier, and the text is explicit about his change of garb: "[Pharaoh] had him dressed in the finest linen garments; and placed a gold chain around his neck..." (Genesis 41:42).

The second change is a new name which Pharaoh gives him, Tzofnat Paneach – from all textual indication, an Egyptian name. With this new name, he marries Asnat, the daughter of the priest of On, hardly a fitting match for Jacob's beloved son and Abraham's great-grandson.

When the first child of Tzofnat and Asnat is born, the name given to the boy, Menasheh, seems to hammer in the nail of farewell to Joseph's former life. "God has allowed me to forget my troubles and my father's house" (Genesis 41:51), the verb 'nasheh' meaning forgetting.

And although the Jewish slaves in Egypt may not have changed their language, Joseph obviously did. Amongst themselves, his brothers speak Hebrew; "...They knew not that Joseph understood them, for the interpreter was between them" (Genesis 42:23), testifies the biblical text.

Given such changes, one may very well conclude that the Grand Vizier and Joseph, the son of Jacob, had drifted worlds away from each other. To be sure, in his moral life, Joseph certainly remains true to the teachings of his father and grandfather. He demonstrates almost superhuman piety in rejecting the advances of Mrs. Potiphar – being unable to display faithlessness to his generous employer and still unwilling to "sin against God" (Genesis 39:9). And indeed, he turns to God constantly, stressing that whatever he accomplishes is actually due to the Almighty. However, the name of God the text chooses is Elokim, the universal presence of the universe, while the four-letter personal and more nationalistic (Abrahamic) name is deliberately avoided.

Joseph remains moral and may even privately have conducted himself in accordance with his childhood rituals. However, certainly from the public perspective, he willfully turned himself into a consummate Egyptian. And I would certainly maintain that he has no desire to contact the family which caused him such pain and suffering – especially his father, who must ultimately assume responsibility, albeit inadvertent, for the sibling enmity. And indeed, it would seem that Joseph had succeeded in erasing his childhood years and settling in quite well in the assimilating environment of Egypt – until his brothers' arrival to purchase food.

Their arrival brings back a flood of thoughts, memories and emotions which Joseph had desperately tried to repress. First, we see his anger. He treats his brothers with understandable hatred and punishes them by taking his revenge and casting them into a dungeon similar to the one they had cast him into. But that night he cannot sleep, his mind overactive with pining for his full brother Benjamin, who had been too young to join his half-brothers in their crime against Joseph. Joseph aches to see this pure and whole brother from his same mother – and so sends the brothers (sans Shimon) back with the mission to return with Benjamin.

Joseph's ruse with the silver goblet plan may very well have been to keep Benjamin at his side, thereby holding on to a part of the past he now realizes he has deeply missed, while rejecting the rest. But when Judah evokes the image of an old grieving father whose life will be reduced to a pathetic waste if word reaches him that Benjamin has become a slave in Egypt, Joseph, the Grand Vizier breaks down.

Perhaps as Judah speaks, Joseph poignantly remembers Shabbat moments inside his father's tent, whose simple beauty far eclipses the rowdy Egyptian debaucheries. Perhaps, he conjures the wisdom of Jewish teachings he heard as a child at his father's knee. The mature Joseph finally understands that although his father may have 'set up' the family dysfunction, it was not because he loved Joseph too little, but rather because he loved Joseph too much. And if Jacob's love had been the first step causing Joseph's alienation from the family, it was that same love which had given him the ego strength to always land on his feet and eventually return to his father's and brothers' embrace.

In effect, according to this interpretation, Joseph was our first ba'al teshuva (penitent). The Joseph stories – and the book of Genesis – conclude, "And Joseph dwelled in Egypt, he and his father's house" (Genesis 50:22) – he and his father's household, he and his father's lifestyle from their common home in the land of Canaan. He even recognizes the centrality of the land of Israel, telling them with his dying breath that God will surely remember them and take them to the land He promised their fathers, adjuring them at that time "to bring up my bones from this place [Egypt] with you" (Genesis 50:22).

From this perspective, Joseph teaches that no matter how far one wanders, one always returns in some fashion to 'beit abba', one's earliest memories and one's original traditions. This is especially true if those formative years were filled with parental love.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Joseph, Chanukah, and Wisdom

Wisdom is the rarest of all important human qualities. Observers of the contemporary state of affairs often remark that wisdom, which is especially necessary in this day and age, is now particularly lacking.

Yet, at the same time, we are told that there is an age in life when most of us finally do obtain wisdom. Erik Erikson, the famous psychologist and thinker, believes that the course of the lifespan is marked by a series of developmental stages. At each stage of life, we master different developmental tasks. In late middle age, about age sixty, one begins to achieve wisdom. Erikson's book, *Childhood and Society*, devotes an entire chapter to defining wisdom and to detailing the process by which one achieves it, or fails to achieve it.

What is wisdom from a Jewish perspective? And what does wisdom have to do with this week's Chanukah theme?

The search for wisdom is a frequent biblical theme. King Solomon was once assured by the Almighty that he would be granted the fulfillment of one wish. He wished for wisdom, obtained it, and is therefore termed in our tradition the wisest of all men.

Reading this story of Solomon and other sacred texts leads to the conclusion that there are at least two components to wisdom. There is a knowledge base; mastery of the facts and its data. There is also, however, the essential ability to select from this database those bits of knowledge which apply to the situation at hand.

There is the mastery of material, and there is the ability to advance that material and make it relevant.

One of the early 20th century masterpieces in the field of Jewish ethics is a book by Rabbi Joseph Hurvitz of Novardok, entitled *Madregas Ha'Adam* (Man's Stature). Torah wisdom is one of Rabbi Joseph's themes. He insists that mastery of the corpus of Jewish law in and of itself does not constitute wisdom. Knowledge in "matters of the world" is also necessary; abstract knowledge must be interrelated with concrete reality.

The symbol of the Chanukah festival is, of course, the Menorah. The original Menorah in the holy Temple was situated in the southern end of the inner Temple shrine and consisted of seven branches.

The Menorah symbolizes the light of wisdom, and its seven branches, the seven classical

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areas of wisdom, which include not only knowledge of the divine, but also mathematics and music.

Combining the wisdom symbolized by the Menorah with Rabbi Joseph's insights, we begin to appreciate the complexity of the concept of wisdom. It encompasses theoretical and practical knowledge, and it involves the seven major areas of human inquiry.

It is in this week's Torah portion, Miketz, we encounter the first man to be known as wise, to be recognized as a fount of wisdom. That man is the biblical Joseph, and it is the Pharaoh of Egypt who calls him wise.

You know the story. The Pharaoh has his dreams, Joseph interprets them and suggests a plan of action. Pharaoh is pleased by the plan and says to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" And he continues and says to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you".

The Pharaoh recognizes that wisdom is not only mastery of facts and the ability to apply them; it is more than familiarity with the seven branches of worldly wisdom, and it is even more than life experience. Besides all that, it is a gift of God.

I have had the good fortune of meeting several wise people in my life, and I am sure that most of you have as well. Whenever I have met such people, I have been struck by how their words seemed to come from a higher place. Their insights reflect that they have access to a source beyond my ken.

This was Pharaoh's experience when he heard Joseph's interpretation. He realized that no course of study – no training, no mastery of expertise – was sufficient to account for the good counsel that he was hearing. He knew that the man in front of him was blessed with the Spirit of God.

There is no better time than this Shabbat, as we celebrate Shabbat Chanukah and read the story of Joseph, to reflect upon the quality of human wisdom and to fully appreciate this lesson: Whatever else wisdom comprises, it has one indispensable ingredient. It is ultimately the inspiration of the One Above.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Pharaoh's Advisors Bought Into Yosef's Interpretation Based on a False Assumption

After Pharaoh's advisors failed to satisfactorily interpret his dreams, Yosef was brought out of the dungeon and in front of Pharaoh. Yosef not only interprets the dream, but he also offers a plan how to mitigate the situation that the

dream portends. Egypt must save up during the good years to prepare for the bad years, and a wise and discerning individual must be placed in charge of implementing this plan.

The pasuk says “And the matter found favor in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.” (Bereshis 41:37). Consider the following two scenarios:

Scenario #1: A high-powered law firm is considering a tough case. All the partners are in the conference room trying to figure out what is the best legal approach to the case. They can't figure out a good plan. Suddenly, the guy from the mail room walks into the conference room and hears the issue that the lawyers are discussing and makes a suggestion. The entire legal team of \$650-an-hour lawyers unanimously say “You know what? This kid knows what he is talking about!”

Scenario #2: A group of medical specialists are trying to diagnose a patient and determine a course of treatment for a particularly mysterious illness. They don't know what to do. Suddenly, an orderly who is merely trained to assist patients' daily living activities walks in and suggests a plan for how to treat this patient. All the doctors are blown away by the suggestion, and they tell the orderly, “You know what? You may only have a grade school education, but you are right!”

The chances of either of these scenarios actually occurring is between zero and none. “I, the \$650 an hour lawyer, should listen to this little kid from the mail room?” or “I, the great physician, am going to listen to an orderly?” People's egos won't let that happen. And yet the Torah says “The matter found favor in Pharaoh's eyes, and in the eyes of all his servants!”

Pharaoh's advisors said “This guy is right!” How did that happen? Yosef was a slave who spent the last who knows how many years in prison. Go to the detention center downtown. Yosef should have had as much credibility as any of those prisoners.

Yosef was aware of this challenge. Yosef knew that if he merely suggested an interpretation, no one would believe him. That is why Yosef added the other detail that the solution to this problem is “to get a wise and discerning individual and to give him the authority to implement this plan and to thereby become the viceroy to Pharaoh, the second most important person in the land of Egypt.” Every single advisor thought, “Who is this wise and discerning individual? Who is Pharaoh going to appoint?” Each advisor

assumed that he would be chosen as the one. Consequently, they all agreed to Yosef's plan.

The story was similar a thousand years later with Haman. “... And the king said to him, ‘What shall be done to the man whom the king wishes his welfare?’ And Haman said to himself ‘Who does the king wish to honor more than me?’” (Esther 6:6)

That is why Yosef not only explained the dream, but also suggested a solution for it. Who asked Yosef to advise Pharaoh? Yosef was asked to interpret Pharaoh's dream, not tell Pharaoh what to do! The answer is that Yosef knew what he was up against. He understood that all of Pharaoh's advisors were going to belittle his interpretations and reject anything he told Pharaoh. But once the advisors heard that this interpretation created an opportunity to be appointed CEO, every advisor thought to himself “Aha! I am CEO material!”

Mixing Up Cause and Effect in World Events

The parsha begins with the words “And it was at the conclusion of two years, Pharaoh dreamt...” (Bereshis 41:1) The Medrash on these words references the pasuk in Iyov (28:3) “Ketz sam l'choshech” (He set an end to the darkness...) and states that “Hashem set an end to Yosef's imprisonment, determining ahead of time how long he would need to remain in prison. Once the end arrived, Pharaoh immediately had his dream.”

There is a very important vort from the Beis HaLevi, which is an important insight into how to understand life, and how to understand current events and history.

For instance, if a person has property or merchandise to sell and he sells it and makes a windfall profit, how do we look at that? We say, because he had this merchandise or this property and he sold it, that is why he made money. We view the “cause” as the merchandise and the “effect” as the profit.

The Beis HaLevi says that is not how it works. Those labels need to be reversed. The Ribono shel Olam decided that this person will make X amount during this year. It is because it has been determined in Heaven that he will make X amount this year that he got a hold of the merchandise and was able to sell it at the windfall profit.

This is like the old issue of ‘what comes first, the chicken or the egg?’ In Rabbinic terminology, we need to know what is the “Seebah” (cause) and what is the “Mesovev” (effect). Many times in life, we confuse cause and effect. By the story of Yosef and Pharaoh,

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someone could say “Pharaoh had a dream. He had no one to interpret it. Yosef was a great interpreter of dreams. Therefore, he summoned Yosef to the palace. That is why Yosef got out of prison!” We see Pharaoh's dream as being the cause and Yosef's freedom being the effect.

The Medrash views the matter differently. Ketz sam l'choshech (An end was set for the darkness). Yosef needs to get out of prison because he was in there for X amount of time, per Heavenly decree. He won't stay there a minute longer. (“And they hurried him out of the pit.” (Bereshis 41:14)) Yosef needs to get out. (This is the cause). Therefore, what needs to happen? “And Pharaoh dreamt.” (This is the effect.)

I saw the following interesting incident brought in the name of Rav Yaakov Galinsky, who was the great Maggid of Yerushalayim (1920-2014):

Rav Galinsky's mother wrote for a newspaper known as Tag Blatt (“The Daily Page”) in Poland, which was published by Agudas Yisrael. There were women there who spoke Polish and understood Polish but could not read Polish. This was not uncommon. There are people who are illiterate even though they can understand and speak a particular language. Especially in Poland in those days, women did not go to school so they did not learn to read. Yet, these women wanted to know the news. What did they do? Every night, they gathered in Mrs. Galinsky's house and she read the Polish paper to them. This is how they got their news. They understood Polish and Mrs. Galinsky not only understood Polish, she could read it and write it as well.

One night, a certain woman came into the Galinsky home earlier than usual. While Mrs. Galinsky was peeling potatoes in the kitchen, the woman picked up the newspaper and gave out a shout. She ran into the kitchen. “Devorah!”, she shouted, “A boat sank in the ocean and you are here in the kitchen peeling potatoes?” (The picture was a picture of a new ship that set sail from England. It was such big news that it made the front page of the Tag Blatt.)

Mrs. Galinsky did not know what this woman was talking about. She came into the front room and saw that this woman (who could not read Polish) was holding the paper upside down. Held upside down, it looked from the picture like the boat sank into the water. Mrs. Galinsky showed her the proper way to hold the paper. There was no tragedy of a boat sinking.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky drew a homiletic lesson from this story to understanding world events.

He said that we often read the paper upside down! We look at world events and we say "Aha, because of 'X', that is why Y happened." We believe that X is the cause and Y is the effect. But so many times in life, what we see as the cause is really the effect and vice versa.

This is especially true because we know that everything in the world happens because of the Jewish people ("HaKol bishvil Yisrael") (Medrash Tanchuma Shoftim Siman 9). When there are wars or political turmoil in the world, wait to see what happens. Everything is for the sake of Israel. We look at these events backwards and say because of "X" that is why "Y" happens. We need to approach the matter with wisdom. We need to know how to read the newspaper. We need to read it right side up. e HeH

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

There are still some Pharaohs in our world today. We learn this from the commencement of Parshat Mikeitz. Pharaoh had dreams. The Torah tells us, 'uPharoh choleim' – 'Pharaoh dreamt', 'vehinei omed al hayor' – 'and behold he was standing by the river'. Notice the Torah does not say 'vehinei amad' – 'he stood' but rather 'vehinei omed' – 'Pharaoh is standing', in the present tense.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his Sefer Oznam laTorah tells us, that from here we learn that the Pharaoh phenomenon was not a one-off historical event. 'Pharoh omed', there are Pharaohs still standing in the world today. Pharaoh styled leadership is still with us.

And what was the main feature of Pharaoh's leadership? He strove always to maintain his grip on power and to preserve his ideology, through purposefully sacrificing the lives of thousands of his own people.

When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams to him, Joseph was saying to Pharaoh: A great leader is somebody who is there for the people and who only wants the best for their own people. A great leader is somebody who preserves life, life for their own people, life for everyone.

And that's exactly what Joseph helped Pharaoh to achieve, after he was appointed to be his deputy in Egypt.

At the beginning of the book of Shemot, we see yet another Pharaoh who, similarly, forced his people to endure the ten plagues, through which thousands upon thousands of them died, only in order to maintain his power and to strengthen his own ideology.

Just look around and you will see indeed sadly and tragically, there are still some Pharaoh styled leaders in the world today and the lessons of Joseph are more relevant than ever

before.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash Responsibility and Dependence Harav Yaakov Medan

On Chanuka we commemorate the miracle, the salvation, and the battles. In order to understand the significance of the days of Chanuka and the lessons we should learn from them, let us consider two of the main players in the events: Matityahu the Chashmonai and Yehuda the Makkabi.

The Zeal of Matityahu - Sefer Ha-Makkabim records Matityahu's defiant response to the king's decree and compares his zeal for God to that of Pinchas: "Even if all the nations subservient to the king will each abandon their ancestors' laws, I and my family shall not do so, for we shall not turn right or left from following our ancestors' laws. Far be it from us to leave the commandments of the Lord our God and to violate His covenant with us. Therefore we shall not obey the king's decrees, nor shall we exchange our laws for those of the king."

When he had finished speaking, a man of the Children of Israel came forward in the sight of all those present, to the altar in Modiin, to offer a sacrifice according to the king's command. And when Matityahu saw it, his heart seethed and his zeal burned for the Torah of his God. And he ran, in his fury, to the man, and killed him by the altar, and also killed the officer, and tore down the altar. He acted for the Torah of his God, as Pinchas had done with Zimri, son of Salu. (Sefer Makkabim I 2:20-27)

Matityahu is a religious zealot whose primary concern is his obligation towards God. In this respect, he belongs to a minority within society that is fighting against the majority – the Hellenists – who are desecrating God's Name. This is a civil war. The situation echoes other instances where we see zeal leading to civil war, including the zealots at the time of Vespasian's siege of Jerusalem (Gittin 56a); the episode of Pinchas and Zimri; Eliyahu at Mount Carmel; and others.

In Chapter 19 of Mesilat Yesarim, the Ramchal addresses the attribute of zeal. He argues that the zeal of Pinchas and Eliyahu (Ramchal equates them, on the basis of Chazal's teaching that "Pinchas is Eliyahu") is zeal for God's honor. Obviously, their actions are not "regular" expressions of concern for God's honor, but rather spontaneous outbursts in extreme situations where Am Yisrael faces annihilation. Notably, Matityahu's inclusion in this category indicates that the danger need not involve physical annihilation. Zeal for God can also be prompted by the prospect of the

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spiritual death of the Jewish people. This is an important and eternal lesson.

Still, it seems that Chanuka would not have been established as a festival for all future generations solely on the basis of Matityahu's act. We must therefore seek some additional explanation, and this leads us to focus on his son, Yehuda.

Yehuda's Double Success - As noted, Matityahu was the leader of a small minority of Am Yisrael that was zealous for God and for the Torah, and which consequently found itself at war not only with an external enemy but also with enemies from within. The game-changer in this situation is Yehuda, Matityahu's son. Yehuda is more closely connected to the general milieu. We might characterize him as having a greater measure of the attribute of kindness, and less of the attribute of strict justice. He manages to transform the internal, civil war against Hellenist Jews into a battle fought collectively by the Jewish nation against the external enemy.

But Yehuda also introduces another innovation, which we will explore below. It is told that the Rebbe of Kotzk taught that when we pray, we should be like a young child, crying and screaming, "Abba!" However, in my mind, while pray to God and beseech him, we should do so not as infants but rather as adults. How so?

Yehuda appears to achieve the impossible by merging two spiritual elements that are inherently contradictory: on one hand, he leads the army into battle, planning and employing different military tactics, and not just displaying helpless weeping – all with the aim of impacting and molding history. On the other hand, he never for a moment forgets his complete, constant reliance on God, as evidenced in many different places.

The combination of these two elements finds expression, for example, in the battle against Siron at Beit Choron: Yehuda replied and he said: "Is God's hand incapable of delivering the many into the hand of the few? Is there anything that can stop Him from saving by many or by few? Deliverance belongs to God, and it is not the size of the army that decides the matter. They rely on their numbers and their military might to destroy us with our wives and children and to despoil us. But we shall defend ourselves, and fight for our lives and for our Torah. Therefore do not fear them and do not be afraid of them, for God will surely crush them before our eyes." (Sefer Makkabim I 3:18-22)

Likewise, in the battle of Beit Tzur, against Lysias: Yehuda went out to them with ten thousand men. When he saw the great might of

the enemy camp, he prayed to God and said: "Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel and their Redeemer; You smote the giant at the hand of David, Your servant, and gave the host of Philistines into the hand of Yonatan, son of Shaul, and his armorbearer. Deliver also now this camp into the hand of Your people, Israel; let them be confounded and ashamed in their great power and their numbers. Put fear in their hearts; cast terror and fear upon them, set Your hand against them, let them tremble in their destruction, that they may fall by the sword of Your beloved ones, and let all who know Your Name sing songs of Your praise." (Sefer Makkabim I 4:27-32)

In Those Days, At This Time - This combination of activism and initiative to shape history, together with remembering one's complete dependence on God, is very special and unusual – in those times, and in ours.

Secular Zionism adopted the former principle – a sense of responsibility for molding history – while completely ignoring the latter one. Not just disregarding Divine Providence, but deliberately ignoring it. Thus, songs came to include lines such as "al ha-nissim ve-al ha-niflaot asher cholelu ha-Makkabim" ("on the miracles and wonders that the Makkabim brought about") and "mi yemal gevurot Yisrael" ("Who will number the mighty acts of Israel?"), instead of "mi yemal gevurot Hashem" ("Who will number the mighty acts of God?"). At the same time, the charedi world fully embraced the latter principle, of Divine deliverance, but rejected the idea of assuming responsibility. Religious Zionism tried to add a layer to secular Zionism: to start with a foundation of initiative and action motivated by a sense of responsibility, while constantly feeling and remembering our smallness in relation to God. We still have a long road ahead of us in this regard, and need to work hard in order to fully achieve the goal.

We can draw inspiration from the visions of two personalities who were successful in this combination. The second is Yehuda Ha-Makkabi, as described above. The earlier model for this vision is King David.

A reader with no prior background would find it hard to accept that David, as described in Sefer Shmuel, is the same David who composed Sefer Tehillim. The same energetic doer and military tactician, sat playing his harp and composing songs? In truth, David's success lay precisely in the combination described above: he brought action and initiative together with a constant and profound consciousness of his complete dependence on God.

This combination was what inspired Yehuda Ha-Makkabi, and it will be the same special combination of these qualities that will

characterize Mashiach, may he come speedily in our days. (*This sicha was delivered on Shabbat Parashat Vayeshev 5777 [2016]. Adapted by Yair Oster - Translated by Karen Fish*)

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Glowing in Your Heart

In the beginning of G-d's creation of the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was astonishingly empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the face of the water. And G-d said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And G-d saw the light that it was good, and G-d separated between the light and between the darkness. And G-d called the light day, and the darkness He called night, and it was evening and it was morning, one day. (Breishis 1:1-5)

And G-d saw the light that it was good, and G-d separated: Here too, we need the words of the Aggadah: He saw it that it was not proper for the wicked to use it; so, He separated it for the righteous in the future. – Rashi

What happened to that original light from the beginning of creation? Where can it be found?

I asked one of my grandchildren who was learning Breishis in school, "What kind of light was that first light? At that point the sun and the moon and the stars were not yet created!" He answered without hesitation, "Zeidy, it was a different kind of light!" He's 100% right. This light is a hidden spiritual light that is hard for us to describe from a materialistic vantagepoint. Dovid HaMelech writes in Tehillim, "A light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart, joy. (Tehillim 97:11)" Rashi explains, "A light is sown for the righteous: An actual sowing is prepared to sprout for them." This is not a theoretical abstract light. It's real! It exists! It can be found! But where!?

Every Friday Night before making Kiddush I make the same declaration. I can see my children from the corner of my eye mimicking the words and saying it like a parrot along with me. That's OK! It's exactly what I am aiming for. While holding the Kiddush cup, I say in differing ways, "We are remembering now that HASHEM made the world YEISH M'AYIN-Something from nothing." Meaning that before HASHEM decided there was to be a world there was nothing. HASHEM created everything, small and large particles, energy, gravity, human nature, you name it. It's all the precise and explicit work of HASHEM.

That's only the first declaration. Now the second statement goes something like this, "From a physical standpoint HASHEM created the world YEISH M'AYIN- Something from

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Nothing, but from a spiritual vantage point HASHEM created the world AYIN M'YEISH – Nothing from Something!" That statement is crying out for an explanation! Before the BEIS of Breishis, prior to the Big Bang or the Big Beis, what was there? What comes before BEIS? The Aleph of "Adon Olam Asher Malach B'Terem Kol Yetzir Nivra, Master of the Universe Who was King before the world was created". HASHEM Who is real, existed, exists, and will exist. This is ultimate and current reality. The Zohar refers to HASHEM as OHR AIN SOF- An endless light! Infinity is beyond our finite minds, but we appreciate that HASHEM's light is the source of all existence!

When we were kids, we used to play a game called "Hot and Cold". I played with my own kids many times. Somebody hides an object and the people who are invited to search for it are given verbal clues that they are getting closer or farther away. The further away you go, "you're getting cooler". The closer you get, "you're getting warmer". When you are so close and maybe even touching it then, "YOU ARE ON FIRE!" You can't get closer than that! It seems you can be that close and not even realize it.

Moshe Rabeinu tells us, "It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us and fetch it for us, to tell to us, so that we can fulfill it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us and fetch it for us, to tell to us, so that we can fulfill it?" Rather, [this] thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it. (Devarim 30:12-14)

Whatever we are busy searching for is not in the heavens. It's not far off or transcendent. It's not someplace else. Rather it is very close, not just close, but very close. Moshe is telling us, "You're on fire!"

On Chanukah that light shows up in an obvious way. It is not in heaven, in a mystical book, or across the sea. It is in your home, growing in your window, glowing in your heart.

After All These Years

Why is this coming Tuesday, the eighth day of Chanukah titled "Zos Chanukah"? Of all the days of Chanukah, that name "Zos Chanukah", why should the eighth day after all the candles have sunset be called "Zos Chanukah"? The word Zos or Zeh "–this" is reserved for times when there's something to point to.

It would make more sense to refer to the first night of Chanukah when the light begins to grow in the window or the eighth night when the Menorah is in full bloom for all to see.

When the Jewish people went through the split sea they declared, "This is my G-d..." Rashi tells us that they all witnessed loftiest of visions... When Moshe was introduced to the Mitzvah of the new month he was told, "this month is for you..." Again, we are informed by Rashi that Moshe was shown a sliver of the moon. In each case the word "Zeh"- "this" means something visible or tangible.

Similarly, when a Torah scroll is lifted in synagogue congregants gather around and point with their finger while reciting, "This is the Torah that Moshe placed before the children of Israel by G-d through the agency of Moshe" Many are careful to position themselves to see the script inside the scroll while indicating with a finger.

Why is this time without visuals called "Zos Chanukah"? The simple answer is that over the course of the eight days of Chanukah we read in the Torah about the inaugural activities of the heads of the tribes which concludes on the eighth day of Chanukah when we say, "this is the inauguration of the altar". It is followed by Aaron's invitation to light the menorah of the Tabernacle. It is because of those words, "Zos Chanukas HaMizbeach" "this is the dedication of the altar"- this day is titled based on the first two words, "Zos Chanukas...". Still there must be something more.

Chanukah is an expression of -Chinuch- education. How do we know when education has taken place? Sure, when we look into the classroom and watch the teachers teaching and the students learning we assume that that's education. However, that might just be the process of education. How can we measure when education has taken place?

One of my Rebbes used to tell us that the final exam, the symptom that Torah learning has been absorbed into the psyche of the student is when one sees how they behave in the dining room and with each other after the classes are complete. Here too, after the lights are out, after eight full days of lighting the Chanukah candles, after all the scholastic activities are concluded a burning question remains.

Somebody once came to a great Rabbi and boasted with extra pride, "Rabbi, I finished the entire Talmud!" The Rabbi, sensing his haughty attitude answered him sharply, "And what did the Talmud teach you?!" We spend eight days lighting the Chanukah Menorah but what does the Chanukah Menorah light within us!?

We can find no greater example of ZOS CHANUKAH, of someone who remained loyal and dutiful without the watchful eye of a parent or the blessed coercion of community

and family, than Yosef HaTzadik. He is the poster child, the perfect example, the portrait of success! How did he do it? How did his father do it? Perhaps we have a giant hint in last week's Parsha. The same exact word is used seemingly independently, "VaYema'ain". In one verse Yaakov refuses to be comforted over the loss of Yosef and in another Yosef is refusing the advances of Eishes Potifar. What is the connection? Yaakov never gave up on Yosef. He held out a deep seeded belief that OD YOSEF CHAI, that Yosef is still alive. When a father believes in his son that is the highest form of motivation. When a parent tells a child, "I trust you will do the right thing!", the child does not want to disappoint his parent.

How was Yosef able to dodge a world of temptation? Rashi tells us that an image of his father appeared to him. Perhaps it was the image his father had of him that appeared to him and that is what he refused to disappoint. In his mind his father was always alive, "OD AVINU CHAI". With that mindset, Yosef remained a Tzadik while living so far from the watchful eye of his father, and so we are surviving in a long dark and difficult exile. That's a Chanukah we can point to and be proud of. Here we are, loyal still, after all these years!

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot Three Tables

The Bible, as the Word of God, inspires in us deep feelings of reverence and awe, sometimes even fear. For when we confront it, we stand face to face with the immortal and imperishable words of the Creator of the universe in all His awesome infinity and power.

That is why the Torah often seems to us so austere, so severe. Probably the last thing in the world we would attribute to the Bible is – a sense of humor. It certainly would seem discordant in the context of Biblical solemnity and incommensurate with the weightiness of the Biblical message.

Yet if one reads our Sidra in truly perceptive fashion he cannot help but notice that the Torah is not at all straitlaced. Indeed, in one verse it gives us an insight into a situation that is genuinely comical, even downright funny.

Consider the situation: at the second visit of the brothers to Joseph, the viceroy of all Egypt orders his Egyptian subjects to prepare a royal banquet for him, the viceroy, for the Egyptian subjects, and for the visitors from Canaan. One would expect that a large official table be set around which would be seated all the guests in appropriate order. Instead, the royal dining room is broken up into three parts, and instead of a large and majestic dining room table, we have three tables: the equivalent of a small bridge table for the sovereign by himself, a slightly larger one for the Canaanite visitors, and probably the largest of all for the various subordinates and

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lackeys amongst the Egyptians. "And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, that did eat with him, by themselves; because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is abomination unto the Egyptians." The King orders a banquet and the subjects bring in – three tables. It is only a Divine sense of humor that caused this verse to be written down for all eternity. A Divine sense of humor – and also a Divine act of goodness because God wanted to teach His Jews something for all ages to come.

Let us analyze this comical situation a bit more carefully. I can understand very well two of the tables. The brothers would not want to eat with the Egyptians. After all, they have their peculiar Abrahamitic tradition which endowed them with a special attitude towards food. Even from the days of Noah it was known that some foods are tahor and some tameh, some kosher and some non-kosher. A child of Jacob blesses God over his food and blesses God after his food. His whole approach to eating is consecrated and therefore, by Egyptian standards, abnormal. So they would want a separate table.

The Egyptians too are understandable. They refuse to break bread with these Canaanite Jews. Why should they? Once upon a time, when all of us were younger, in our more ungracious vocabulary, such Canaanites would have been called "greenhorns." They were foreigners, they were aliens, they were – to put it bluntly, Jews. Furthermore, as Onkelos explains, the Egyptians found the Hebrews religiously objectionable for the latter ate the flesh of animals the former considered sacred. The Egyptian noblemen had no pretense of ecumenical love, they just did not want to eat at one table with the Jews. So two of the three tables are quite understandable.

But the humor of the situation comes to the fore with that special table for Joseph himself. And here the joke is bitter indeed. I do not refer to Joseph as a specific historical personality, for he had to do what he did as part of the unfolding drama. Rather, Joseph becomes a symbol, he represents the galut Jew who finally made it, the Jew who came to the big country as an unlettered and uncultured foreigner, speaking a Jewish jargon and dressed in Jewish clothes, unacquainted with the sophistication of the big and great Egyptian civilization, who was thrown into a dungeon, and was able to rise from the depths to the heights, from the dungeon to the throne. He became not only an influential politician, but also a powerful financier who manipulated the grain market. He now dressed like an Egyptian, changed his name from a Hebrew to an Egyptian-sounding name, and even especially named his children so that they would remind him to forget his own origins. Joseph, quite unfairly to the historical Joseph who was a tzaddik, has become the symbol of the assimilated Jew whose only real passion is to obliterate any residual Jewishness that may still taint him.

And yet, this assimilated Jew, who will not break bread with his own brothers, who will not share a table with those too Jewish Jews – is still unaccepted by the Egyptians. How galling!

He is not invited to sit at the same table by these Egyptians who are, after all, his subjects, his subordinates, his employees! They will obey him, they will flatter him, they will do his bidding – but they will not let him eat with them, for they consider him, no less than those Jewish-Jews, a to'evah, an abomination!

This successful assimilationist is, after all, a pitiful failure. He has power and money and influence – and the goy won't have him. He will no more accept him than the Jew who shakes while he prays, or reads the Yiddish paper, or eats special kosher foods, or sends his child to a Yeshiva. The Joseph-Jew succeeds in everything – except that he cannot become a WASP, and that he regards as the tragedy of his life. So the goy will do business with him, play politics with him, even conduct a dialogue with him – but he won't let him into his private clubs – even if he, the Jew, married out of his faith. And if he does allow him into his club, he will not really invite him into his home and let him share his table. From 9 to 5, the goy and the Jew are on equal footing. After 5 P.M., the Joseph, the Egyptianized Jew, is no better than Yehudah or Simeon or Binyamin, the Palestinian Jews.

So the Torah turns sardonic in this verse: "They set a table for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians that did not eat with him by themselves." The Bible is inviting us to laugh along – not to guffaw, not to utter a belly laugh, but to engage in an ironic smile, perhaps accompanied by a tear of pity. Poor, rich, assimilated Jew!

The joke is really on the inauthentic Jew who tries so hard to make it and never does. The three tables are a scene in a situation comedy as old as the Jewish people.

It is not really too difficult to see how this situation is relevant to ourselves in our own time. It is a tragi-comedy of the first order. The authentic Jew and the authentic Gentile can practice brotherhood with dignity, and both can only be amused by the inauthentic Jew who shuns the table of his brothers and will not be invited to the table of the others.

Some time ago, Dr. Yaakov Herzog told of a lecture he gave before 15 presidents of non-Jewish religious universities. He reports a comment made by one distinguished and wise Christian woman, who was the president of a theological college in Wisconsin. She told him, "The Jew in our university who is proud of his Judaism is distinctive; the Jew who hides his heritage is even more different." The joke is on the Jew who hides his heritage. Much as he tries to be the same as the goy, he ends up at a table – all by himself. He isn't even distinctive, he is only different.

Let me now turn to another aspect of the matter. It touches a more sensitive nerve, a more serious dimension. And that is, if three tables are comical – only one table is tragic. The third table is funny, but if there are not two tables, it is a disaster.

Recently we were informed that Rome had approved a new step in the ongoing Catholic-Jewish dialogue. In addition to announcing a number of long overdue and welcome revisions of its theology concerning Jews, it has given its

permission for Jews and Catholics to engage in joint prayer.

Let us be fair. It took character and courage for Rome to discard some of the pernicious, archaic nonsense it had been teaching about Jews for centuries. Its new stance is certainly encouraging. But there are three items that require wariness on our part.

First, its statement excluding all attempts at conversion of the Jews: I wish I could believe it. Centuries of unfortunate Jewish experience with Christendom cannot be obliterated with a mere written statement. We shall have to judge by fact, not resolutions. Moreover, only a short time ago a leading Catholic theologian also stated that dialogue should not aim at conversion. But a perceptive reader could notice that later in the same article the priest began to hedge his remarks: only in "this" stage of dialogue do we exclude proselytizing. But the goal is "reunion" . לשמירה remains שמירה of Judaism and Christianity. And to me a deferred

Second, the understanding the statement evinces of the relation between Jewish religion and the State of Israel is certainly a step in the right direction. But again there is a modification that indicates large implications: this should not imply "any judgment on historical occurrences or on decisions of a purely political order." That sounds too much like a begrudging and belated recognition of the State of Israel – provided we give up Jerusalem. And that we shall never do – not if the Pope asks us to do so, not if U Thant demands it, not even if the President and Secretary of State order it.

Third, and most important – the invitation to Jews to join in prayer services with Catholics.

Let me at once state our position clearly and unequivocally: NO! – a courteous and respectful but forceful and determined NO. Two tables, and not one table. There can be no "reunion" of the faiths. We are not prodigal sons who are going to come back, even in the guise of pareve "services." We are perfectly willing to cooperate with any religious or secular

community on matters of common concern to all civilized human beings. But we will never consent to spiritual promiscuity or religious adultery.

I should like to spend less time, however, on the Catholic invitation, and more on the probable Jewish response. I do not envy the Catholics their fate. The Jews who respond will be the third table type – the kind who will not eat with Jews and are trying desperately to crash the party of the goyim. They are the kind who will give the Church the least nachas. Who but a sycophantic, ungentle, public-relations minded, social-climbing, politicized Jew would run to pray together in such bizarre conglomerate services!

I shall venture a guess. The Jew who will rarely participate in praying with Catholics is one who rarely if ever prayed with Jews. Only a denatured Jew, one who has never really lived in his own religious tradition and has no faith of his own, will flock to interfaith services.

Poor Catholics. In their statement they make a gesture to Jews by affirming Israel's "permanent election" – we were and remain the Chosen People, and are not, as they once taught, a people

Likutei Divrei Torah

who were once chosen and then rejected when we failed to embrace their faith. But the Jews they will get will be those who never believed that we were chosen in the first place.

The Catholic Church speaks of Israel's covenant with God. Most of their Jewish customers do not believe in God, let alone in One who can or did make covenants.

Rome speaks reverently of circumcision. How many of their Jewish subscribers use mohalim for their children, and how many allow pediatricians to operate on their children before the 8th day?

The Vatican seeks to compliment us by speaking of the Torah as a "word that endures forever." This is good Orthodox Jewish doctrine. How many of their Jewish table-hoppers really believe that? How many are committed to Torah as enduring and therefore lay the tefillin or refrain from work on Shabbat or eat only kosher?

The Church will be short-changed. And they will deserve it, for the invitation to joint services is a shallow thing, an unworthy ploy. They will deserve the kind of Jews they will get. These Jews, in addition to the severely unlettered and hopelessly naïve, will be the political Jews on the payrolls of the big public relations-minded organizations.

So let us make a prediction: such Jews will ultimately be rejected by their hosts. They will be thrown a few crumbs from the Catholic table, and then they will be asked to leave. But then we Jews, sons of Jacob, who sit around our Jewish table, will not accept them back. They will be condemned to the ridiculous absurdity of their ignominious third table forever.

Chanukah, just concluded, began just in that way. It is simply not true that the only battle fought on Chanukah was by valiant Jews carrying out the first battle for religious freedom against the oppressive Syrians. It is time we came to understand that history is more than a Sunday School story, and far more complex than such a simplistic version of it. The major battle was not the military one but the inner spiritual-cultural battle that took place in the Jewish community. The story of Chanukah is the story of revulsion by loyal Jews against the Jewish Hellenists who no doubt considered the Maccabees as benighted bigots because they would not share the table of the Syrian Greeks.

I have no doubt that those who today take the stands of rejecting this offer of joint services will similarly be classified as intolerant, narrow-minded, benighted, bigoted.

So be it. But our stand is clear. We are Jews, we remain Jews, we refuse to pollute the most unique experience of religion, which is prayer.

Two tables and not one table. Two tables and not three tables. There is as much value and insight and morality in Biblical humor as there is in Biblical solemnity. The Biblical comedy is as immortally precious as the Biblical tragedy – and sometimes they are the very same thing.

So, every time we return to the portion of Miketz and read of the three tables, let us laugh at the Jew who table-hops, perhaps even laugh at ourselves – because who, in this pluralistic, affluent society does not sometimes entertain such an inclination? – and then let us shed a tear

for the Jew who, caught up in this mad situation, cannot extricate himself from it in time.

And having laughed and having wept, may the Almighty grant that we can in the future smile as we await the great redemption, which will begin not with arms, not with might, but with the solid determination of every Jew to remain what he is, and what he yet may become – a true Jew. For the redemption is a time that the Almighty too will smile and laugh – smile for His redeemed children, and laugh at those who would deny them their land, their freedom, their Torah, and their Holy City of Jerusalem. ה' יושב בשמים ירחק. ילעג למר. "He that sitteth in Heaven laugheth; the Lord hath them in derision" (Ps. 2:4).

Home Weekly Parsha MIKEITZ
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Yosef always expected his dreams to come true in this world. So did his father Yaakov. And in truth so did the brothers and that is why he discomfited them so deeply. Had they felt the dreams of Yosef to be utter nonsense they would not have reacted as strongly when he related the dreams to them. They were threatened not because the dreams were nothing but rather because they were something.

Their apparent blindness and stubbornness, at not recognizing Yosef standing before them, stemmed from their necessity to deny the validity of his dreams. When Yosef will reveal himself to his brothers they will instinctively believe him because of the stock they subconsciously placed in his dreams all along.

Practical people are afraid of dreamers not because of the dreamer's impracticality but because the dreamer may turn out to be right after all. This has been proven time and again in Jewish history. The holiday of Chanukah, that we are currently celebrating, proves the dreams of the Maccabees overcame the practicalities of the Hellenist Jews who chose to survive by becoming more Greek than Jewish.

Jews over the ages could have reasonably quit and given up the struggle to survive as Jews countless times. It was always the dreamers that persevered and they have always been proven to be right and practical.

The Torah attributes the success of Yosef to the fact that he remembered his dreams. It is one thing to remember dreams of grandeur when one is poor and imprisoned. Then the dream provides hope and resilience to somehow continue. Yosef's greatness lies in his ability to remember and believe those dreams when he has risen to power. He could easily have ignored his brothers and put all of his past behind him.

He was now a great success so why continue to pursue his dreams, which by so doing could ultimately sorely endanger his position and achievements.

But Yosef doggedly pursues the full realization of his dreams. Many times in life we are frightened of advancing because we think we might risk what we already have. Judaism preaches caution in tactics and how to achieve certain goals, both spiritual and physical. But it never advocates compromising the great Jewish dreams as outlined in our Torah and tradition.

We are bidden to be prudent about life's decisions but the goal of ascending the ladder of Yaakov is never erased from our consciousness. When seeing his brothers before him, Yosef has the choice to leave everything as it is. But he chooses to pursue his dreams to their fateful end. That has become a lesson for all later generations of Jews as well. The full realization of Yosef's dream is the catalyst for reuniting all of Israel as a nation.

Shabat shalom.

Chanuka sameach.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Author of Our Lives

Mikketz

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It was Joseph's first real attempt to take his fate into his own hands, and it failed. Or so it seemed.

Consider the story so far, as set out in last week's Parsha. Almost everything that happens in Joseph's life falls into two categories. The first are the things done to him. His father loves him more than his other sons. He gives him a richly embroidered cloak. His brothers are envious and feel hatred towards him. His father sends him to see how the brothers are faring, attending the flocks far away. He fails to find them and has to rely on a stranger to point him in the right direction. The brothers plot to kill him, throw him in a pit, and then sell him as a slave. He is brought to Egypt. He is acquired as a slave by Potiphar. Potiphar's wife finds him attractive, attempts to seduce him, and having failed, falsely accuses him of rape, as a result of which he is imprisoned.

This is extraordinary. Joseph is the centre of attention whenever he is, as it were, onstage, and yet he is, time and again, the done-to rather than the doer, an object of other people's actions rather than the subject of his own.

The second category is more remarkable still. Joseph does do things. He dreams. He runs Potiphar's household superbly. He organises a prison. He interprets the steward's and baker's dreams. But, in a unique sequence of descriptions, the Torah explicitly attributes his actions and their success to God.

Here is Joseph in Potiphar's house:

God was with Joseph, and He made him very successful. Soon he was working in his master's own house. His master realised that God was with [Joseph], and that God granted success to everything he did.

Gen. 39:2-3

As soon as [his master] had placed him in charge of his household and possessions, God blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph. God's blessing was in all [the Egyptian] had, both in the house and the field.

Gen. 39:5

When Joseph is in prison, we read:

God was with Joseph, and He showed him kindness, making him find favour with the warden of the dungeon. Soon the warden had placed all the prisoners in the dungeon under Joseph's charge. [Joseph] took care of everything that had to be done. The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care. God was with [Joseph], and God granted him success in everything he did.

Gen. 39:21-23

And here is Joseph interpreting dreams:

"Interpretations are God's business," replied Joseph. "If you want to, tell me about [your dreams]."

Gen. 40:8

Of no other figure in Tanach is this said so clearly, consistently, and repeatedly. Joseph seems decisive, organised, and successful, and so he appeared to others. But, says the Torah, it was not him but God who was responsible both for what he did and for its success. Even when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife, he makes it explicit that it is God who makes what she wants morally impossible:

"How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before God!"

Gen. 39:9

The only act clearly attributed to him occurs at the very start of the story, when he brings a "bad report" about his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaids.[1] This apart, every twist and turn of his constantly changing fate is the result of someone else's act, either that of another human or of God.[2]

That is why we sit up and take notice when, at the end of the previous Parsha, Joseph takes destiny into his own hands. Having told the chief steward that in three days he would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position, and having no doubt at all that this would happen, he asks him to plead his cause with Pharaoh and secure his freedom:

"When things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me this favour and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place."

Gen. 40:14

What happens? "The chief steward did not remember Joseph. He forgot about him. (Gen. 40:23)" The doubling of the verb is powerful. He did not remember. He forgot. The one time Joseph tries to be the author of his own story, he fails. The failure is decisive.

Tradition added one final touch to the drama. It ended Parshat Vayeshev with those words, leaving us at the very point that his hopes are dashed. Will he rise to greatness? Will his dreams come true? The question "What happens next?" is intense, and we have to wait a week to find out.

Time passes and with the utmost improbability (Pharaoh too has dreams, and none of his magicians or wise men can interpret them – itself odd, since dream interpretation was a specialty of the ancient Egyptians), we learn the answer. "Two full years passed." Those, the words with which

our Parsha begins, are the key phrase. What Joseph sought to happen, happened. He did leave the prison. He was set free. But not until two full years had passed.

Between the attempt and the outcome, something intervened. That is the significance of the lapse of time. Joseph planned his release, and he was released, but not because he planned it. His own attempt ended in failure. The steward forgot all about him. But God did not forget about him. God, not Joseph, brought about the sequence of events – specifically Pharaoh's dreams – that led to his release.

What we want to happen, happens, but not always when we expect, or in the way we expect, or merely because we wanted it to happen. God is the co-author of the script of our life, and sometimes – as here – He reminds us of this by making us wait and taking us by surprise.

That is the paradox of the human condition as understood by Judaism. On the one hand we are free. No religion has so emphatically insisted on human freedom and responsibility. Adam and Eve were free not to sin. Cain was free not to kill Abel. We make excuses for our failures – it wasn't me; it was someone else's fault; I couldn't help it. But these are just that: excuses. It isn't so. We are free and we do bear responsibility.

Yet, as Hamlet said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will." God is intimately involved in our life. Looking back in middle or old age, we can often discern, dimly through the mist of the past, that a story was taking shape, a destiny slowly emerging, guided in part by events beyond our control. We could not have foreseen that this accident, that illness, this failure, that seemingly chance encounter, years ago, would have led us in this direction. Yet now in retrospect it can seem as if we were a chess piece moved by an invisible hand that knew exactly where it wanted us to be.

It was this view, according to Josephus, that distinguished the Pharisees (the architects of what we call rabbinic Judaism) from the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees denied fate. They said God does not intervene in our lives. The Essenes attributed all to fate. They believed that everything we do has been predestined by God. The Pharisees believed in both fate and freewill. "It was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion [of Divine providence and human choice] and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate" (Antiquities, xviii, 1, 3).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life of Joseph as told in Bereishit, and nowhere more so than in the sequence of events told at the end of last week's Parsha and the beginning of this. Without Joseph's acts – his interpretation of the steward's dream and his plea for freedom – he would not have left prison. But without Divine intervention in the form of Pharaoh's dreams, it would also not have happened.

This is the paradoxical interplay of fate and freewill. As Rabbi Akiva said: "All is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:15). Isaac Bashevis Singer put it wittily: "We have to believe in freewill: we have no choice." We and God are co-authors of the human story. Without our efforts we can achieve nothing. But without God's help we can achieve nothing either. Judaism found a simple way of resolving the paradox. For the bad we do, we take responsibility. For the good we achieve, we thank God. Joseph is our mentor. When he is forced to act harshly, he weeps. But when he tells his brothers of his success, he attributes it to God. That is how we too should live.

[1] Genesis 37:2

[2] As for Joseph's dreams – were they a Divine intimation or a product of his own imagination? – that is another story for another time.

Non-Jewish Holidays and Gregorian Calendar Dates Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

It is forbidden for a Jew to celebrate the holidays of a foreign religion * It is not appropriate to celebrate civil holidays that were originally religious holidays * In practice, there is no prohibition as long as the celebration is held without religious reference * When the celebration of the beginning of the Gregorian year is called "Sylvester," the celebration becomes forbidden * Jews are forbidden from placing a Christmas tree in their homes, offices, or stores * It is appropriate for immigrants from the former Soviet Union who celebrate New Year (Novy God) to mark it

as a day of thanksgiving for having had the privilege of immigrating to the Land of Israel * The Jewish custom is to use the Hebrew calendar, which expresses faith in God, the Creator of the world * In necessary situations, it is permissible to use the Gregorian date

Q: Is it permissible for Jews to celebrate the holidays of other religions and nations, such as Christmas, January 1st, or Chag Hakorban (Eid al-Adha)?

A: There are three types of non-Jewish holidays:

Religious holidays, which are forbidden for Jews to celebrate, such as Christmas and Easter for Christians, and Eid al-Adha for Muslims and Druze.

Civil holidays that were originally religious holidays, which it is not appropriate to celebrate, but there is no prohibition. An example of this is January 1st.

Clear civil holidays that are permissible to celebrate, including Thanksgiving in North America, Novy God for immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and the Independence Days of various countries.

Foreign Religious Holidays Are Forbidden to Celebrate

A Jew is forbidden to celebrate the holidays of a foreign religion, even when all those celebrating are Jews, and are doing so without any religious symbols. This is prohibited due to the Torah's prohibition, "You shall not follow their laws." It is written: "Like the practices of the land of Egypt, where you lived, you shall not do; and like the practices of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you, you shall not do; and you shall not walk in their statutes" (Leviticus 18:3). One interpretation of this prohibition is that Jews should not imitate the customs of non-Jews that are rooted in their religion, as imitating them may lead to adopting their culture and beliefs, and abandoning the commandments of the Torah.

Celebrating the Beginning of the Gregorian Year

Civil holidays that were originally religious holidays, such as January 1st marking the start of the new Gregorian year, are not appropriate to celebrate. However, in practice, as long as the celebration is held without religious reference, there is no prohibition.

Therefore, it is permissible for educators abroad to organize a celebration for Jewish youths on January 1st, so that they can celebrate the beginning of the Gregorian year with Jewish friends, and not be tempted to celebrate with non-Jews in a forbidden manner (as also ruled by Rabbi Nachum Rabinowitz ztz"l, in M'arei HaBazak 5:46).

Additionally, when necessary, such as in the context of a business event, it is permissible to celebrate, since this date marks the end of the business year and taxes. However, when the participants are non-Jews, there are two limitations:

It is forbidden to drink alcohol, and only kosher foods may be sampled.

If it is a meal, it is even forbidden to eat kosher foods there (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 29:12).

Celebrating Sylvester Is Forbidden

When the celebration of the beginning of the Gregorian year is called "Sylvester," as is common in some Christian countries, the celebration becomes forbidden, as it turns from a civil holiday, into a religious one. Sylvester was a pope who died on December 31st, so the celebration ties his memory with the beginning of the year. It should be noted that Sylvester worked to Christianize the Roman Empire, a process that caused much suffering for the Jewish people.

There were kosher businesses in Israel that wanted to hold a Sylvester party, but the kosher supervisors notified them that they would not be able to supervise the kashrut, and would therefore have to remove the kashrut certification from the business. The simple solution for them was to call the party "A Celebration for the Beginning of the Gregorian Year," which would remove the prohibition from the celebration.

Christmas Tree

Q: Is it permissible to put up a Christmas tree for the beginning of the Gregorian year, as many do in the United States and Europe? Is it permissible for a maintenance worker to place a Christmas tree in a building he is responsible for? And is it permissible for a store owner to sell a Christmas tree to non-Jewish customers?

A: The Christmas tree, which Christians are accustomed to placing at the beginning of the Gregorian year, is a practice of a Christian holiday. Therefore, Jews are forbidden to place a Christmas tree in their homes, offices, or stores, due to the prohibition “You shall not follow their laws.” The same applies to other distinctive holiday symbols used by various religions, such as a Santa Claus figurine.

However, since the Christmas tree and other holiday symbols are not used for worship, they are not considered idolatry. Therefore, it is permissible for a Jew to provide them to non-Jews when necessary. For example, a Jew who owns a store that is asked to sell Christmas trees for the beginning of the Gregorian year may bring them to his store and sell them to non-Jews. Similarly, a Jew responsible for the maintenance of a building owned by non-Jews, and asked to place a Christmas tree there, may do so (see Shevet Halevi 10:141; M’arei HaBazak 3:111). A Jew who owns a printing press may fulfill an order to print greeting cards for the non-Jewish holidays, as there is no element of worship in the card (Masoret Moshe 4:52).

Permissible Civil Holiday – Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a civil holiday that the first European settlers in North America celebrated as an expression of joy for successfully settling in the new continent. The holiday meal typically includes turkey, which was discovered by Europeans in the new world. The settlers set it around the same time as Sukkot, when they express joy and thanksgiving for the year’s harvest.

Since it is a civil holiday, there is no prohibition in celebrating it. However, Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner wrote that since it is celebrated according to the Christian calendar, it is forbidden to celebrate it due to ‘avizrayhu’ (lit., ‘its accessories’, – prohibitions associated indirectly with idolatry). However, most rabbis wrote that there is no prohibition, including Rabbi Soloveitchik (Nefesh HaRav, p. 204), and Rabbi Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 4:12). (Also in Mishneh Halachot 10:116; B’nei Banim 3:37; see also Torat Menachem, Sichot 1987, vol. 2, p. 54).

Novy God

Novy God is a civil holiday that was instituted during the communist rule in the Soviet Union as a substitute for the Christian holidays marking the beginning of the Gregorian year. Therefore, its status is similar to Thanksgiving, a holiday that does not have roots in a foreign religion. The translation of “Novy God” is “New Year.”

Indeed, it is forbidden to engage in practices that remind one of the laws of non-Jews, such as setting up a Christmas tree. However, if a different potted plant is placed instead of a Christmas tree, there is no prohibition. It is appropriate for immigrants from the former Soviet Union who celebrate Novy God to assign it meaningful value, marking it as a day of thanksgiving for having had the privilege of immigrating to the Land of Israel, and contributing to the building of the nation.

Gregorian Calendar

Q: Is it permissible to use the Gregorian calendar date?

A: The Jewish custom is to use the Hebrew calendar, which expresses faith in God, the Creator of the world, and its months are those by which the holidays are determined. In modern times, as trade and scientific connections between cities and countries became numerous and complicated, there was an increasing need to use an agreed-upon date in letters, bills, and newspapers. Since Christian countries were the leaders, the date they used became the global standard. As a result, Jews who came into contact with non-Jews began using it as their main date, and most rabbis in Western Europe and the United States agreed that there was no prohibition.

Opponents of the Gregorian Calendar Date

On the other hand, some of the Gedolei Yisrael (imminent rabbis) strongly opposed using the Gregorian date, claiming that those who used it were being dragged after foreign culture and using an idolatrous date, since its origin is tied to the birth of oto ha’ish (Jesus) whom Christians made an idol. As the Chatam Sofer wrote: “Not like those who recently began counting... the birth of the Christian messiah, writing and signing that they have no part in the God of Israel, woe to them for they have repaid their souls with evil” (Drashot Chatam Sofer, vol. 2, p. 221). His

student, Rabbi Maharam Shik (Yoreh Deah 141), even wrote that this is a Torah prohibition, as it is written: “And you shall not mention the names of other gods” (Exodus 23:13), and our Sages learned from this (Sanhedrin 63b) that a person should not say to his friend “wait for me next to such and such an object of idol worship,” and similarly, according to him, it is forbidden to mention the date marking the birth of the man whom Christians made an idol.

However, even the Chatam Sofer himself used the Gregorian date “November 8, 1821” in a letter to the government (cited in Sefer Igrot Sofrim, p. 105). Therefore, he did not think there was an absolute prohibition, and he used it out of necessity. It seems his argument was that those using the Gregorian date do so unnecessarily, with the intent to resemble the non-Jews. Other rabbis who prohibited its use also did not consider it a strict prohibition, but rather, that one should make every effort to avoid using it (Responsa Hillel Posek, Yoreh Deah 65; Yafeh LeLev Vol.5, Yoreh Deah 178:3). Similarly, this was the view of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, the Rishon L’Tzion, Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim (Responsa Yayin HaTov, Orach Chaim 8), and our teacher and mentor, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook (L’Netivot Yisrael, vol. 2, p. 99).

The Opinion of the Majority of Authorities to Permit

However, even two generations ago, when the use of the Gregorian date was not as widespread as it is today, the majority of poskim (halakha authorities) ruled that lechatchila (optimally), it is preferable to use the Hebrew date rather than the Gregorian date, but in necessary situations, it is permitted to use the Gregorian date, as it is used in a secular context, just like the use of the names of the months and days of the week, most of which are named after idols. Some poskim added that, according to historians, this date is not the date of the birth of oto ha’ish, as he was actually born four to seven years earlier than the beginning of their counting of years (As’eh Lecha Rav 5:55; Yabia Omer, vol. 3, Yoreh Deah 9).

Practical Halacha

As a result of the development of transportation and communication, all countries became interconnected in countless ways, and the need for a universally agreed-upon international date for trade, contracts, email, communication, news, and history increased. The use of the Gregorian date thus became constant, and its religious context faded. Therefore, it is permissible to use it without restriction, though it is important to also write the Hebrew date.

We have also found that in recent generations, rabbis who interacted with the general public have regularly included both the Hebrew and Gregorian dates in their letters, as did Rabbi Goren ztz”l. Similarly, Rabbi Shalom Meshash wrote: “There is absolutely no prohibition to use the Gregorian date, and there is no concern about it” (Responsa Shemesh U’Magen, vol. 3, Orach Chaim 60:3). Likewise, the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote: “In all our countries, it is simple practice to use it when there is some need or reason” (Shulchan Menachem, vol. 4, §16).

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The State of the Jewish Nation: Navigating Paradox Why Was Pharaoh Blown Away by Joseph?

RABBI YY JACOBSON

It is a riveting story. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has two dreams, we learn in this week’s Torah portion, Miketz.

In the first, Pharaoh sees himself standing over the Nile River, “And, behold, there came up out of the River seven cows, handsome and fat of flesh, and they fed in the reed grass. And, behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the River, ugly and lean of flesh, and stood by the other cows upon the bank of the River. And the ugly and lean cows ate up the seven handsome and fat cows.” [1]

In the second dream, Pharaoh sees seven thin, shriveled ears of grain swallow seven fat ears of grain. None of the wise men of Egypt can offer Pharaoh a satisfactory interpretation of his dreams.

Then, the “young Hebrew slave,”[2] Joseph, is summoned from his dungeon to the palace. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty, symbolized by the fat cows and fat grain, will be

followed by seven years of hunger, reflected by the lean cows and the shriveled ears. The seven years of famine will be so powerful that they will "swallow up" and obliterate any trace of the years of plenty.

Joseph then advises Pharaoh how to deal with the forthcoming crisis[3]: "Now Pharaoh must seek out a man with insight and wisdom and place him in charge of Egypt. A rationing system will have to be set up over Egypt during the seven years of surplus," Joseph explains, "in which grain will be stored for the upcoming years of famine."

Pharaoh is blown away by Joseph's vision. "Can there be another person who has G-d's spirit in him as this man does?" Pharaoh asks his advisors. "There is none as understanding and wise as you," he says to Joseph. "You shall be over my house, and according to your word shall all my people be ruled; only by the throne will I outrank you." Joseph is appointed Prime Minister of Egypt, the most powerful man in the ancient superpower, besides the king.

Four Questions

Torah commentators struggle with four questions concerning this story.[4]

A) Following his interpretation of the dreams, Joseph proceeded to give Pharaoh advice on how to deal with the impending famine. How is a freshly liberated slave not scared of offering the King of Egypt, the monarch who ruled a superpower, unsolicited advice? Pharaoh summoned Joseph to interpret his dreams, not to become an advisor to the king! Such chutzpah could have cost him his life.

B) Pharaoh was thunderstruck by Joseph's solution to the problem. But one need not be a rocket scientist to suggest that if you have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, you should store food during the time of plenty for the time of hunger. What was the genius in Joseph's advice?

C) Pharaoh also was amazed by Joseph's interpretation of the dreams themselves, which none of his own wise men could conceive. But Joseph's interpretation seems simple and obvious: When are cows fat? When there is lots of food. When are they lean? When there's no food. When is grain fat? When there is a plentiful harvest. When is grain lean? During a time of famine. So why was Pharaoh astonished by Joseph's rendition of his dreams? And why could no one else conceive of the same interpretation?

D) How did Pharaoh confer upon Joseph the highest position in the land not even knowing if his interpretation will materialize? Why did the Egyptian king immediately appoint Joseph as viceroy without any evidence that this young slave was the right man for the job?

Uniting the Cows

On Shabbos Parshas Miketz, 27 Kislev, 5734, December 22, 1973, the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented the following explanation.[5]

The dream experts of Egypt did conceive of Joseph's interpretation to Pharaoh's dreams, that seven years of hunger would follow seven years of plenty. Yet they dismissed this interpretation because it did not account for one important detail of the dream.

In Pharaoh's first dream, he saw how the seven ugly and lean cows that came up after the seven handsome cows "stood near the other (fat) cows upon the bank of the River." [6] There was a moment during which both sets of cows coexisted simultaneously, and only afterward did the lean cows proceed to swallow the fat cows.

It was this detail of the dream that caused the wise men of Egypt to reject the interpretation that Joseph would later offer to Pharaoh and compelled them to present all types of farfetched explanations.[7]

Because how is it possible that plenty and famine should coexist? Either you have fat cows alone or you have lean cows alone, but you can't have them both together! Either you are satiated, or you are starving, but you can't be satiated while you are starving, and you can't be starving while you're satiated! The seven years of famine simply cannot be present during the seven years of surplus. Either you have lots of food, or you have no food, but you can't have both at the same time. You can't be wealthy and poor at once.

This is where Joseph's brilliance was displayed. When Joseph proceeded to tell Pharaoh how to prepare for the coming famine, he was not

offering him advice on how to run his country; rather, the advice was part of the interpretation of the dream.

Joseph understood that the coexistence of the two sets of cows in the dream contained the solution to the approaching famine: During the years of plenty Egypt must "live" with the consciousness and awareness of the pending years of famine as though they were already present. Even while enjoying the abundance of the years of plenty, Egypt must experience in its imagination the reality of the upcoming famine, and each and every day store away food. The seven lean cows ought to be very much present and alive, in people's minds and in their behaviors, during the era of the seven fat cows. Conversely, if this system was implemented, then even during the years of famine, the nation would continue enjoying the abundance of the years of plenty. The seven fat cows would be present and alive even during the era of the seven lean cows, because of all the food they saved up.

This is what impressed Pharaoh so deeply about Joseph's interpretation. To begin with, Pharaoh was struck by Joseph's ingenious accounting for that one detail of the dream that had evaded all the wise men of Egypt.

But what thrilled him even more was Joseph's demonstration that Pharaoh's dreams not only contained a prediction of future events, but also offered a solution, a remedy, on how to deal with those events. The dreams did not only portend problems, but also offered solutions.[8] Many people can tell you all about the pending problems; Joseph's brilliance was that within the very dream which predicted the crisis he perceived the solution. In the very dream predicting calamity, he saw the way out of disaster,

Paradox

The stories of the Torah describe not only physical events that took place at a certain point in history, but also timeless tales occurring continuously within the human heart.

All of us experience cycles of plenty and of famine in our lives. There are times when we have moral, emotional and spiritual clarity, and our consciousness is filled with love and connection; our souls are on fire with authenticity and truth. At other times, we are hungry: for integration, for clarity, for bliss. We are feeling anxiety and stress because we are not experiencing our connection with our souls and the soul of the universe.

This was Joseph's power. He taught us how to integrate the two paradoxical states of consciousness. And this always happens in dreams: When we are awake, our brain shuns paradox. When we dream, or enter altering states of consciousness, paradoxes converge and dance together. Joseph is the master of explaining dreams—he knew how to help people remove the fear of paradox and integrate it into their regular state of consciousness.

And when we do that, we can discover that all the parts of ourselves are welcome; each of them contains the still inner voice of oneness and love. Each of them helps us bring light and truth into the spaces we need to work through.

We, the Jewish people, are living today with so much paradox (I can talk about myself, but I think it's true for many of us). We feel so much pain, but also so much love. We feel abandoned, but also profound resolve and resilience. We are dreamers. The two experiences coexist not only because of weakness and inconsistencies; but as Joseph, the master of dreams, has taught us—these paradoxes summon us into a much deeper space of consciousness, where infinite light can illuminate profound darkness.

May we embrace each other with endless love, clarity, and resolve to become the people we need to become, to shine the light we are called upon to shine, to confront the nasty but meaningless powers of fakeness, stupidity, cruelty, and hate. Reality will prevail because it is real.

[1] Genesis 41: 1-4. [2] Ibid. 41:12. [3] Ibid. 41:33-40. [4] See Ramban, Bechayah, Akeidah, Abarbenel, Ralbag, Alshich, Kli Yakar, Or Hachayim and Maharik—in their commentaries on the story. [5] Published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 15, pp. 339-347. The Rebbe's explanation follows Rashi's interpretation of the story. See however Ramban to Genesis 41:4, Ralbag and Or Hachaim ibid. 41:33 for an alternative perspective, which would be invalid according to Rashi

(Likkutei Sichos *ibid.* footnote #9). [6] Genesis 41:3. [7] See Rashi *ibid.* 41:8, from Midrash Rabah Genesis 89:6. [8] There is a problem here. The detail of the cows coexisting at the river was not repeated by Pharaoh when sharing his dreams with Joseph. See Likkutei Sichos *ibid.* for an explanation. One possible approach is based on what the Ramban says here, that it is obvious that Pharaoh repeated all the details to Yosef and the Torah does not have to say it, because it is obvious. The Kli Yakar (41,3) says clearly that it was this coexistence which led Yosef to his interpretation, so although the Torah doesn't explicitly mention it in Pharaoh's version of the dreams, Yosef certainly heard it (or sensed it) from him. But maybe there is something deeper: Perhaps the Torah does not mention it because Pharaoh underscored it, as he could not find meaning in it. At times, we try to ignore or suppress that which does not "make sense to us." This was part of Yosef's brilliance to pick up on it and turn it into a central theme of the dream and the solution to the crisis. We see this in our lives: What we repress often turns into the most meaningful awareness in our lives. [9] King Solomon in his profound wisdom put it simply: "A friend's love endures for all times" (Proverbs 17:7).]

Parshat Miketz: Why Didn't Joseph Contact His Father?
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"And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew him not. But he behaved like a stranger and spoke harshly to them. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of, and said unto them, 'You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you have come.'" (Genesis 42:8-9)

In the Torah portion of Miketz, the drama of Joseph and his brothers takes on new dimensions. From a situation in which Joseph is the hunted and the brothers are the hunters, we move into the very opposite. Joseph becomes the hunter and the brothers the hunted, although they don't understand why!

But we also realize that until now the text has been silent about Joseph's relationship to his past. This forces us to query how Joseph can spend twenty-two years of his life in a foreign country like Egypt without ever looking over his shoulder to find out how his family in Canaan is faring. When he sat in Egyptian prisons it was impossible to communicate, but what about the years when he ruled as the Grand Vizier of a great empire? Could he not have sent servants, carrier pigeons, messages on papyrus? Even if he had no desire ever to see his brothers again, should his aged father who loved him so much have been made to suffer for their sins?

Nahmanides tells us that Egypt is only a six-day journey from Hebron but "...even if it was a year's journey, he should have notified him" (Genesis 42:9). The longer Joseph is silent, the longer Jacob is deprived of his beloved son, the greater our question on Joseph's character.

Nahmanides explains that Joseph was prevented from contacting his father because he was driven by his dreams, and guided by their inevitable course. It was his intention to wait until all elements of his dream – the sun, moon and eleven stars, symbolic of his father, mother and eleven brothers bowing down to him – came together in Egypt, when and where the details could be fulfilled exactly. The dreams controlled Joseph. Emotions could not outweigh what he believed was destiny. Therefore, sending word home before the famine would force his entire family to go down to Egypt and would have negated the possibility of his dreams being fulfilled (Nahmanides on Genesis 42:9).

Abarbanel paints Joseph differently, saying that it was impossible for him to contact his father until he was convinced that his brothers had truly repented; otherwise the joyous news that Joseph was still alive would have also meant a father facing ten lying brothers who now would be forced to reveal their role in the murderous deception amidst all sorts of recriminations. From this perspective everything Joseph does while concealing his identity is intended to increase the brothers' awareness, reliving what they inflicted upon him. Since he was thrown into a pit, he puts them in a pit. Then he tells them to return home without Shimon whom he keeps in prison as a hostage until Benjamin will be brought to Egypt. This should make them realize that for the second time in their

lives they are returning with a brother missing – and Shimon had been the primary instigator against Joseph. And indeed they declare, "We deserve to be punished because of what we did to our brother. We saw him pleading with us, but we would not listen..." (Genesis 42:21).

It is only after Joseph treats Benjamin with favoritism, and then condemns him to imprisonment as a thief – and Judah offers himself and all the brothers in Benjamin's stead – that Joseph realizes the depth of his brothers' repentance. After all, Benjamin is also a son of Rachel, a favorite of Jacob – and this could have been a marvelous opportunity to be rid of him as they had gotten rid of Joseph. If the brothers are now willing to offer themselves as slaves so that their father will not have to suffer further grief at the loss of Benjamin, they apparently really have changed and repented for their sale of Joseph!

A third way to understand why Joseph didn't get in touch with his family is the simplest in terms of the plain meaning of the text. What happened to Joseph in Egypt was a natural result of remembrances of past resentments, a man who was almost murdered by his own brothers, whom he never suspected bore him such evil designs.

Until he had been cast into the pit, Joseph was basically an innocent child, basking in the love of his father with no comprehension as to how much his brothers hated him. He was so beloved that he took that love for granted; he naïvely and unselfconsciously believed it was shared by everyone in his family. Only someone with absolutely no guile could have advertised his supercilious dreams of mastery over his brothers to those very same brothers. But in the harsh reflection of the fact that his brothers were willing to leave him to die in a provision-less pit, the venom of their hatred was clear.

And in addition to condemning his brothers, he lays a good part of the blame upon the frail shoulders of his father, who should have realized where his unbridled favoritism would lead. The coat of beautiful colors was the first thing the brothers tore off him, eventually turning it into a blood-soaked rag. In the pit, Joseph comes to realize that the ingredients of excessive love can be transformed into a poisonous potion and that his father had totally mismanaged the family dynamic. One might even justify Joseph's uttering in the pit: I hate my father's house. I will never communicate with my father or my brothers again.

Joseph's subsequent behavior in Egypt would indicate that he really tried to escape his father's house, severing all ties to the past. The Midrash teaches that there are three reasons why the Jews didn't assimilate in Egypt: "They didn't change their names, their clothes, or their language." If the Midrash is an indication of how to protect oneself against assimilation, Joseph, who changed all three, left himself completely open. The first step begins after his success in interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. In reward, Joseph is appointed Grand Vizier, and the text is explicit about his change of garb: "[Pharaoh] had him dressed in the finest linen garments; and placed a gold chain around his neck..." (Genesis 41:42).

The second change is a new name which Pharaoh gives him, Tzofnat Paneach – from all textual indication, an Egyptian name. With this new name, he marries Asnat, the daughter of the priest of On, hardly a fitting match for Jacob's beloved son and Abraham's great-grandson.

When the first child of Tzofnat and Asnat is born, the name given to the boy, Menasheh, seems to hammer in the nail of farewell to Joseph's former life. "God has allowed me to forget my troubles and my father's house" (Genesis 41:51), the verb 'nasheh' meaning forgetting.

And although the Jewish slaves in Egypt may not have changed their language, Joseph obviously did. Amongst themselves, his brothers speak Hebrew; "...They knew not that Joseph understood them, for the interpreter was between them" (Genesis 42:23), testifies the biblical text. Given such changes, one may very well conclude that the Grand Vizier and Joseph, the son of Jacob, had drifted worlds away from each other. To be sure, in his moral life, Joseph certainly remains true to the teachings of his father and grandfather. He demonstrates almost superhuman piety in rejecting the advances of Mrs. Potiphar – being unable to display faithlessness to his generous employer and still unwilling to "sin against God" (Genesis 39:9). And indeed, he turns to God constantly, stressing that whatever he accomplishes is actually due

to the Almighty. However, the name of God the text chooses is Elokim, the universal presence of the universe, while the four-letter personal and more nationalistic (Abrahamic) name is deliberately avoided.

Joseph remains moral and may even privately have conducted himself in accordance with his childhood rituals. However, certainly from the public perspective, he willfully turned himself into a consummate Egyptian. And I would certainly maintain that he has no desire to contact the family which caused him such pain and suffering – especially his father, who must ultimately assume responsibility, albeit inadvertent, for the sibling enmity. And indeed, it would seem that Joseph had succeeded in erasing his childhood years and settling in quite well in the assimilating environment of Egypt – until his brothers' arrival to purchase food.

Their arrival brings back a flood of thoughts, memories and emotions which Joseph had desperately tried to repress. First, we see his anger. He treats his brothers with understandable hatred and punishes them by taking his revenge and casting them into a dungeon similar to the one they had cast him into. But that night he cannot sleep, his mind overactive with pining for his full brother Benjamin, who had been too young to join his half-brothers in their crime against Joseph. Joseph aches to see this pure and whole brother from his same mother – and so sends the brothers (sans Shimon) back with the mission to return with Benjamin.

Joseph's ruse with the silver goblet plan may very well have been to keep Benjamin at his side, thereby holding on to a part of the past he now realizes he has deeply missed, while rejecting the rest. But when Judah evokes the image of an old grieving father whose life will be reduced to a pathetic waste if word reaches him that Benjamin has become a slave in Egypt, Joseph, the Grand Vizier breaks down.

Perhaps as Judah speaks, Joseph poignantly remembers Shabbat moments inside his father's tent, whose simple beauty far eclipses the rowdy Egyptian debaucheries. Perhaps, he conjures the wisdom of Jewish teachings he heard as a child at his father's knee. The mature Joseph finally understands that although his father may have 'set up' the family dysfunction, it was not because he loved Joseph too little, but rather because he loved Joseph too much. And if Jacob's love had been the first step causing Joseph's alienation from the family, it was that same love which had given him the ego strength to always land on his feet and eventually return to his father's and brothers' embrace.

In effect, according to this interpretation, Joseph was our first ba'al teshuva (penitent). The Joseph stories – and the book of Genesis – conclude, "And Joseph dwelled in Egypt, he and his father's house" (Genesis 50:22) – he and his father's household, he and his father's lifestyle from their common home in the land of Canaan. He even recognizes the centrality of the land of Israel, telling them with his dying breath that God will surely remember them and take them to the land He promised their fathers, adjuring them at that time "to bring up my bones from this place [Egypt] with you" (Genesis 50:22).

From this perspective, Joseph teaches that no matter how far one wanders, one always returns in some fashion to 'beit abba', one's earliest memories and one's original traditions. This is especially true if those formative years were filled with parental love.

Shabbat Shalom

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Yosef, Planner of the Egyptian Economy

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Wise

Why does Yosef mention "Understanding" before "Wise?"

Question #2: Power!

Why does the Economic Minister need to control the Army?

Question #3: Bureaucracy

Are Bureaucracies Ever Good?

Parshas Mikeitz devotes a considerable discussion to Yosef's plans to save Egypt, and indeed, to save all of mankind in their part of the Fertile Crescent. Our goal will be to see how a careful reading of the words of the Torah reading demonstrate Yosef's financial brilliance and his unbelievable care and concern for all of humanity. We will begin at the beginning of the parsha.

Pharaoh has two dreams that not one of his advisers has been able to interpret to Pharaoh's satisfaction. As a result, Yosef is hauled from the pit, brought before Pharaoh, and interprets the dreams: There will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Reading Chapter 41, pasuk 32, "Regarding the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh, this is because the plan is already prepared as far as G-d is concerned; He will be bringing it to fruition very soon."

At this point, Yosef has done everything he was "hired" to do. He was brought out of the pit in order to interpret the dream, and he has done so. However, he now goes on to provide unsolicited advice.

Personally, I have a policy not to provide advice unless asked for it. My experience is that when you provide advice that someone has not asked for, you are doing them a disservice. Advice that is not sought is usually rejected, and the dismissal of this option or mode of operation becomes entrenched into the individual's psyche. Even if later on someone else suggests this approach or they might realize on some level that this is the best option, they may still reject it due to their emphatic initial dismissal of the advice. Thus, it is better for them if I not suggest what they should do.

Yosef does not follow this approach. I assume that Yosef trumps Kaganoff, and he has a far better idea of how to take care of matters. Bottom line, Yosef now gives Pharaoh unsolicited advice.

"Pharaoh should identify a man of deep understanding and wise." There are two different terms in Hebrew for wisdom: binah and chachmah. They are not the same thing; they are complementary. Navon, the word used in the pasuk for a man of deep understanding, has become an English word as the noun, a maven.

A chacham is one who has a wide variety of information. A mavin or a navon, on the other hand, is one who can take that information, analyze it, and use it.

Yosef emphasizes to Pharaoh that what is needed is a man who is both a navon and a chacham, placing navon first. This is quite odd, since chachmah is usually placed first. After all, in order to analyze information and make plans based on it, one first needs to acquire the information. However, here, Yosef prioritizes navon before chacham.

The reason for the inverted order is that they are faced here with an unprecedented situation. We know that this part of the world is prone to droughts and famines. Both Avraham and Yitzchak experienced them. However, this case is unusual. Yosef is telling Pharaoh: We have been told in advance that there will be a number of years of unusual plenty, and they will be followed by a number of years of famine. We need to tighten our belts during the years of plenty so that we can provide our own solution for the coming difficulty. This unusual situation requires an unusual man, one who is more navon than chacham. He needs to imagine what to do and plan for an unprecedented circumstance. Chachmah, knowledge of facts, is necessary, but less so than binah, imagination how to plan and implement a program for a world that no one has ever seen or experienced.

And Pharaoh repeats Yosef's terminology, placing navon before chacham: "There is none so discerning and wise as you."

We see many unusual qualities in this Pharaoh. He is willing to listen to unsolicited advice, which itself is a rare quality. We will soon see other unusual characteristics about this man.

"And he should be appointed over the Land of Mitzrayim." Why does this man need to be appointed over the entire land of Egypt? We can certainly understand the need to appoint a wise economic minister, but why does this man need to have power over the entire nation, including over the military which, at that point in history, was the most powerful in the world. This economic minister needs to create a plan that would enable Egypt to survive the famine. Why does Yosef insist that he have absolute authority over the entire country?

I have several suggestions for an answer, and they are not mutually exclusive.

Egypt was a regimented society. Everyone was born into a caste system, one that controlled everything in their lives including their profession, whether or not they had skill in that area. However, economic leaders, economists, chairmen of banks, secretaries of commerce and such are generally not accorded meaningful respect or esteem, especially by the military. The military generally makes the country's decisions or has a large say in the decision making.

This is my first suggestion: Yosef realized that for the man in command to have the respect he needed to make decisions, he would need to be placed above everyone else, except Pharaoh. He could not be put in a position where he would have to fight for power with the military or the like.

Another reason why the economic planner must be provided virtually total control is that some of his decisions will not be popular. This could lead to rioting in the streets, and the economic minister would need to command the military authoritatively.

The pasuk continues: "Pharaoh should appoint many middle-managers, vechimeish the land of Mitzrayim." The word "vechimeish" is a military term, to arm. Of course, when talking about a famine, we do not mean that he is providing the population with bows and spears to fight a famine. In this context, it means that the middle management must organize the bureaucracy in an expedient way on the same level that they would if they were planning a military campaign.

Once this is completed, what is done then?

"They shall gather all the food from the good years and place it into storage for the bad years."

Obviously, this cannot mean literally "all" of the food from the good years --- people need to eat during the good years also. Rather, the lion's share of the food from the good years would be placed in storage. This is not how matters are usually handled. When people have extra disposable income, they spend it. In this case, they would have eaten or disposed of the extra food.

"Gather all the good grain under Pharaoh's hand."

I would assume that, under normal circumstances, Pharaoh was not involved in the production and storage of grain in Mitzrayim. He did not need it for himself, as he certainly had a large personal store. We also know that Egypt's economy was based on the Nile's annual flooding cycle. In ancient times, Egypt was a major producer of cotton, a notoriously thirsty crop. In general, Egypt had enough flooding water to be a major producer and exporter of cotton. This would mean that they certainly had ample grain production – you don't produce cotton when you have no food.

Continues the pasuk: "Gather together all the food in the cities, and have it protected there."

It is interesting to note that Yosef utilizes the local governments -- each province or county of Egypt will be in charge of storing their own grain. They will be in charge of whatever grows in their area. In those days, there was not much shipping of foodstuff. Each city was supplied by the fields around the city. Yosef's advice the locals in each city should ensure that whatever is not necessary for immediate use is stored. Note that in the advice given here and when Yosef later follows up, there is no mention of the construction of storage houses. This should be quite surprising, as it would be odd if Egypt had a massive amount of storage houses in advance, and not having sufficient storage space would be a problem for the plan that Yosef is proposing.

Although it is not mentioned in the Torah anywhere, I would suggest that these storage silos had to be constructed, and that this is another reason why Yosef needed to be second in command to the king. He needed to be able to redirect all resources away from other construction projects, such as roads and canals, and direct them toward constructing grain storage silos. This is just a suggestion; it is not supported -- or negated -- by anything in the text.

"The food shall be kept for the land so that it will be there for the seven years of want – thereby the country will not collapse in its era of shortage."

This is now the end of Yosef's suggestion, his unsolicited advice. He has finished his interpretation of the dream, including that the events will take place soon – therefore swift action is required. He suggests his program, and Pharaoh immediately accepts it in all its details. There is no indication here that Yosef was interrupted at any point during the advice-giving session, while Pharaoh, and the rest of the advisors, all listen. The pasuk (ibid. v. 37) closes: "The plan was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants."

Pharaoh has seen that Yosef is a man who knows how to think and who knows how to plan. However, we are all aware that the man with the great idea is often not the person best qualified to carry it out. The "ideas guy" is not necessarily the best at actualizing that idea. The reason why, nevertheless, Yosef is chosen to be in command is found in the next pasuk.

They all liked Yosef's plan. Pharaoh now says to his advisors (ibid. v. 38): "Have we found any man like him who contains the spirit of G-d?"

This is a fascinating insight on Pharaoh's part. He recognizes in Yosef something exceptional, something metaphysical, something beyond what we deal with in the regular world. This characteristic is one that Yosef has and no one else has. This characteristic turns Yosef from being simply an "ideas guy" to something much more.

Pharaoh says to Yosef (ibid. v. 39): "After G-d has told you all this, there is no navon and chacham like you in the whole land of Egypt." Note again the order of the words. We noted that the unprecedented circumstances called for a person with an unprecedented source of wisdom. Because "G-d has told you all this," no other factors need to be considered. Pharaoh sees that Yosef has an ability that he, Pharaoh, cannot measure, but certainly has the best chance to be successful in the uncharted territory that he foresees...

We will continue this topic next week. In the interim, please check our opening questions to see whether we have answered them to your satisfaction.

Rav Kook Torah

Chanukah: The Sacred Protects Itself

Rav Kook made the following comments when speaking at the inaugural ceremony for the Mizrahi Teachers Institute in Jerusalem during Chanukah, 1932:

Why is it that the Menorah we use in our homes for Chanukah must be different than the Menorah in the Temple, bearing eight or nine branches instead of seven?

People think that kodesh and chol — the realms of sacred and secular — are adversaries battling one another. But in truth, there is no conflict between kodesh and chol. Our national life requires that both of these domains be fully developed and channeled toward building the nation. We should aspire to combine them and imbue the secular with holiness.

We strive for kiddush, to sanctify the mundane and extend the influence of kodesh on chol. But we also need havdalah to differentiate between the two realms. Havdalah is necessary to prevent the blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, to preclude the debasement of kodesh and its misuse for secular purposes.

There exists a perfect kodesh, lofty and sublime. We draw from its essence, from its content, from its living treasure. And we are commanded to protect it from any secular influences that could dull the rich tapestry of the kodesh.

Thus, Jewish law forbids us to fashion a Menorah similar to the one used in the holy Temple. In this way, the kodesh defends itself from any flow of secular influences that may diminish its value. It is because of this self-protection that the kodesh is able to retain its power to strengthen and vitalize secular frameworks.

Greek thought asserted that there is no holiness in the practical world. The Greek mind could only see in the universe — from the lowest depths to the farthest stars — mundane forces. Knesset Yisrael, however, knows how to join heaven and earth. We know how to unite kodesh and chol, how to sanctify ourselves with that which is permissible, to eat a meal in holiness and purity.

We are able to attain this ideal unification because we maintain the necessary barriers, we know how to distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Eternal Israel is built on these complementary principles of *chibur* and *havdalah*, unification and distinction.

In an institution where both sacred subjects and secular disciplines are taught, we must not forget that our ancient battle against Greek culture is not over. If we are careless, the sacred will become profane.

We must remember that we are descendants of those heroes who sacrificed their lives to guard the holy. Like the Temple Menorah, Torah study is the highest level of *kodesh*. We must be careful that our study of Torah does not degenerate into a study of literature, not even a study of national literature or an ancient science. Torah is the word of the Living God. Our practical activities must be illuminated by the holy light of Torah and its *mitzvot*. As the psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalms 119:5)

Parshas Mikeitz

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Miriam bas Yoel, Mery Sterental.

Trying Too Hard

And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed; and, behold, he stood by the river (41:1).

This week’s parsha begins in a rather unusual manner; while the Torah is about to recount a detailed description of Pharaoh’s dreams, the first verse is really a continuation of the previous story. The two years, that set the backdrop for what is about to take place, are referring to the additional years that Yosef languished in jail after asking the wine steward to hasten his release.

At the end of last week’s parsha, Rashi explains; “Since Yosef relied on the wine steward to remember him (instead of relying solely on Hashem) he was forced to remain imprisoned for two additional years” (40:23). In other words, Yosef is punished for pleading with the wine steward to help him get released.

Many of the commentators wonder as to what exactly was Yosef’s mistake. After all, while we all believe and trust that Hashem ultimately provides our *parnassa* (livelihood), we know that we must actually go to work in order to receive what Hashem provides for us. This process is known as making *hishtadlus* – exerting an effort. In other words, we live in a physical world with its unique built-in natural laws; we therefore must make the effort within the construct of the reality that we live in, and then Hashem directs to us what He desires we receive.

In light of this, the commentators ask; what did Yosef do wrong? Yosef was merely “doing his *hishtadlus*” to improve his situation! This is a fundamental philosophical understanding of how the world operates; Yosef getting punished for this action seems difficult to understand.

The Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel and Targum Yerushalmi (40:23) make a very opaque comment: “Because Yosef abandoned the *chessed* of the One above and relied on the *chessed* of the wine steward, Yosef remained incarcerated until it was the proper time for his release as determined by Hashem.” What *chessed* are these Targumim referring to? A careful reading of the *pesukim* reveals what the Targumim saw in the story: When Yosef first gets incarcerated the Torah says (39:20), “and he was there in the prison. But Hashem was with Joseph, and showed him *chessed*, and gave him favor in the eyes of the keeper of the prison.” This “*chessed*” that Hashem shows to Yosef leads to remarkable circumstances whereby Yosef is actually put in charge of the prison and prisoners. The Torah tells us that everything that happened in the prison was under his supervision and he answered to no one (39:22-23). In fact, as the *posuk* attests – Hashem was actually with him in prison.

Yet, when he successfully interprets the dreams of the baker and wine steward and goes on to correctly predict the events that would come to pass, Yosef begs the wine steward to “think of me when it shall be well with you, and I beg you to do for me a *chessed*...” (40:14).

We can now understand what the Targumim are referring to and also learn an astonishing life lesson regarding the limitations of making *hishtadlus*. Yosef was granted an incredible gift by Hashem. How does a

lowly slave, from a foreign country, convicted of a crime against one of the high-born families of Egypt, come to such a position in jail? Obviously, and as the Torah clearly attests, Hashem was with Yosef and gifted him a miraculous situation.

Yosef’s mistake, it seems, was not recognizing that the very fact that Hashem had granted him such success under the most dire of circumstances, meant that Hashem was telling him: “This is where I want you to be.” Instead, Yosef makes an effort to engage the wine steward, and asks for the wine steward’s *chessed*. Yosef, being the great man that he was, should have recognized that exchanging the *chessed* of Hashem for the *chessed* of the wine steward was a terrible mistake.

Often, we do not internalize the incredible gifts that the Almighty has bestowed upon us. We constantly look to try and change our circumstances. While we must make every effort to improve ourselves and grow in many areas of our lives, we must be cognizant and appreciative of what we have already. Trying to change your life when Hashem has clearly blessed your current life trajectory means that you don’t really appreciate what Hashem has granted you. We must make *hishtadlus* to be worthy of Hashem’s blessings; not to reject those blessings that He already bestowed upon us.

Who Can You Trust?

And Yehuda said to his father, “Send the boy with me [...] I will guarantee his safety; from my hand you can request him; if I do not bring him back to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever” (43:8-9).

When the brothers returned from Egypt with the food they acquired, they informed their father Yaakov that before they would be allowed to return down to Egypt they would have to be accompanied by their youngest brother, Binyamin. In fact, Yosef was holding Shimon hostage until they returned. Yaakov naturally balked at this, seeing as he was losing sons at a horrifying rate.

Reuven makes an effort to persuade his father with a rather strange statement: “I will bring him (Binyamin) back safely to you or you can put my two sons to death” (42:37). The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 90:9) takes Reuven to task: Yaakov responded, “You deranged first born! Are not your children my children as well?” Yaakov refuses to permit Binyamin to go.

Yet a few short *pesukim* later Yehuda says to his father, “Send the boy with me [...] I will guarantee his safety; from my hand you can request him; if I do not bring him back to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” Rashi explains that Yehuda put up his share, in both this world and in the world to come, as collateral for the safety of Binyomin. In other words, Yehuda would be lost for all eternity if he doesn’t bring Binyomin back.

Strangely, Yaakov finds this acceptable and agrees to send Binyomin down with Yehuda. In light of the aforementioned midrash, why is Yaakov okay with Yehuda’s proposed consequences for failure to return Binyomin? In essence, he would be losing a son for all eternity! On the face of it, both Reuven and Yehuda are proposing terrible consequences for their failure to perform. Why does Yaakov accept Yehuda’s proposal?

This story teaches us a remarkable lesson in human behavior. Often, we try to guarantee good behavior by creating deterrents to bad behavior. This almost never works because, come what may, we always rationalize why the punishments won’t occur, or otherwise won’t apply to our situation. The classic example: harsh punishment doesn’t successfully deter crime.

Yehuda makes a very different argument than Reuven: “I will guarantee his safety.” He personally guarantees performance. In other words, he is undertaking as a personal commitment that he will fulfill his word. Of course, giving dire consequences also underscores the level of commitment, but the real guarantee of performance isn’t fear of the punishment for nonperformance, it’s the acceptance of a personal obligation. This is what convinces Yaakov.

Fear of painful consequences rarely works to help one achieve goals. We have to begin by committing to a certain path of performance and only then can we use consequences to keep us on the proper path.

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Miketz

Thinking Deeper

I have mentioned several times in the past that when Yosef, as Viceroy of Egypt, accused his brothers of being meraglim—spies, it was a coded message. Each of the Hebrew letters—Mem-Raish-Gimmel-Lamed-Yud-Mem—stood for a different word, the coded message being: M’Immi Rachel genavtem, l’Midianim Yishmael mechartem—from my mother Rachel you stole me; to Midianites, Arabs you sold me. Not bad, eh?

And the brothers were supposed to figure that out off the bat? They had just gotten down to Egypt and it was the first thing to go wrong. That the man standing before them dressed and acting Egyptian and wielding so much power as Yosef was the last thing they could have imagined at that point. So what was the point of Yosef’s encoded message?

It wasn’t for that moment. It was for later, after they had gone through enough to make them start to question what was really going on, which they began to do once they found their money in their sacks on their way back home. Until that time, they were still in their own world and only asked the questions they wanted to. Freaking them out with weird events forced them to start asking questions they didn’t want to.

After all, “necessity is the mother of invention.” Why invent something new when the old works well enough? It’s only once people suffer for reasons they can’t figure out that they go looking for answers, answers that often lead to other questions and then other answers.

And not just for things that are currently happening, or will in the future, but also retroactively. The brain has a remarkable way of doing that, of taking new information and using it to solve old puzzles, sometimes even unconsciously. When Yosef accused his brothers of being spies, he was planting the seeds of future revelations.

Still, even if the brothers had begun to suspect that the Viceroy was Yosef, a big leap of faith to begin with, breaking the world meraglim down into six separate words that told the tale of his sale and enslavement was an even bigger leap. It would have been like figuring out the winning number of a lottery in advance using mathematics. It might be possible, but the odds are heavily against being right, even for the smartest person in the world.

But you can’t believe how many things you enjoy in life whose discovery had similar odds. Some were just the result of trial and error, lots of trial and error. Others were discovered more quickly because of some “lucky” circumstance. But since we don’t believe in luck at all, because everything is a function of Divine Providence, we have to assume that God decided to give the discoverer a break by speeding up the right result.

It works the same with insights as well. If I had a dollar for every time an insight came to me because of some unplanned circumstance, I could almost retire. I’m talking about getting the idea for a parsha sheet or an entire book because I happened to be thinking about something at a bus stop while a bus went by with an advertisement on the side. The advertisement had nothing to do with the idea I was thinking about, but seeing it at exactly the same time I was thinking about an idea somehow led to a new insight.

Yosef had known that if he got his brothers started, they would ask the questions, maybe even do a little teshuvah and warrant the necessary Divine Providence to work out the puzzle. In fact, one of the best ways to know if you’re going in the right direction in life is how God helps you connect the dots in whatever you’re doing right. Somehow life, history, a book, a person, or even the most unusual thing will make some impression on you to move your thinking in the right direction.

Because knowledge is just light, Divine light. But being holy, it can only flow to people according to their level of holiness. The more fitting a vessel is spiritually speaking, the greater and more insightful the light will be. The higher a person ascends spiritually, the higher the spiritual light they can access will be.

This is what it means that the Ohr HaGanuz, the Primordial Light that God hid on Day One of Creation from the evil history, can be found in the thirty-six Ner Shel Chanukah. Obviously, it is not a physical thing, but a spiritual one, not something seen with the physical eye but the mind’s eye. And the thing about the mind’s eye is that it opens only as wide as a person’s heart does for truth.

Countless times throughout history, people have come to know far more knowledge than they actually learned, more sophisticated knowledge than they should have been able to. We don’t notice it much in our own lives because most people never try to know or understand much more than they need to in order to get by in life. So God says, “If they don’t want to know, why should I tell them?”

Want to know, so God will tell you...and you will be more than amazed by what He has to say. A freileichen Chanukah.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Miketz

A Higher Calling

This week’s parsha follows the miraculous rise of Yosef from the time he is pulled from the pit of an Egyptian jail and transformed to the viceroy of Egypt. The story of this rise is fascinating. And all it took was a Pharaoh and a dream!

Pharaoh wakes up one morning quite disturbed. He just finished dreaming about seven skinny cows that devoured seven succulent ones. He goes back to sleep and a variation of the dream is repeated again featuring a theme of mismatched consumption. In the second dream, seven lean stalks devour seven full-bodied ones. This time Pharaoh cannot go back to bed.

In frenzy, Pharaoh summons his sorcerers, wise men and magicians. Each offers his interpretation. The Torah tells us that, “none of them interpreted the dreams for Pharaoh” (Genesis 41:8). The words “for Pharaoh” beg explanation. After all, to whom else were they trying to explain the dreams Nebuchadnezer? The Torah should have just said, “none of them were able to interpret the dreams.”

Rashi explains that the magic men did in fact interpret the dreams: however, “not for Pharaoh.” They may have had very creative interpretations, but none was fitting for Pharaoh. Pharaoh refused to buy into them as he felt that the interpretations were irrelevant. One magician claimed that the dreams symbolized seven daughters. Seven daughters would be born to Pharaoh, and seven would die. Another sorcerer claimed that the dreams represent both Pharaoh’s military prowess and failure. Pharaoh would capture seven countries and seven countries would revolt. However, Pharaoh rejected those solutions. Rashi says that they did not even enter his ears. None of those dreams was applicable to Pharaoh. But why? Is there nothing more important to Pharaoh than his own family? Is there nothing more relevant to Pharaoh than his military acumen and victories. Why did Pharaoh reject those interpretations out of hand as irrelevant?

Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky had just received wonderful news that his dear colleague and friend, Reb Moshe Feinstein, had come home from the hospital. Reb Yaakov went to call the venerable sage and personally extend his good wishes. Reb Yaakov, who never had an attendant make calls for him, went to the telephone and dialed. The line was busy. A few minutes later, he tried again. The line was still busy. In fact, Reb Yaakov called repeatedly during the course of the next hour, but Rabbi Feinstein’s line was constantly busy. “Perhaps,” thought Reb Yaakov, “many people are calling to wish him well.”

One of his grandchildren who was present during the frustrating scenario asked Reb Yaakov a simple question.

“I don’t understand,” he asked. “Aren’t there times that it is imperative that you speak to Reb Moshe? After all, you sit together on the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (The Council of Torah Sages). What would happen if there were a matter of national significance that required immediate attention? Shouldn’t Reb Moshe get a second telephone line?”

Reb Yaakov smiled. "Of course Reb Moshe has a special private line. And I, in fact, have the telephone number. But that line is to be used solely for matters relating to Klall Yisroel. I now wish to extend my good wishes to Reb Moshe on a personal level. And I can't use his special line for that. So I will dial and wait until his published number becomes available."

The Sifsei Chachomim explains the Rashi. Pharaoh understood that when he dreams, be it about cows or stalks, he dreams not on a personal vein. As ruler of an entire kingdom, his divine inspiration is not intended as a message regarding seven daughters or new military conquests. His dreams ring of messages for his entire nation.

The attitude of a leader is to understand that there are two telephones in his life. Even Pharaoh understood that the ring of a dream must focus on a larger picture the welfare of his people. For when it comes to the message on the Klall phone, a true leader understands that the message does not ring on his personal wall, but rather it rings with a message for the masses.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

[added by CS

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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.

Hanukkah always comes close to the winter solstice – days with the fewest hours of sunlight during the year. We most frequently read Miketz during the week that includes the beginning of Hanukkah. How do the winter solstice and Hanukkah connect with the story of Yosef's release from prison, his being brought before Paro to interpret Paro's dreams, his elevation to chief of agriculture and food for all of Egypt, and his reunions with his brothers?

I have discussed before Rabbi David Fohrman's explanation that Paro's dreams repeat in reverse Yosef's life history over the previous twenty-two years. When Yosef hears Paro's retelling of his dreams, he only needs to make one connection to understand the dreams. The numbers of beautiful and ugly cows, and beautiful and ugly stalks of wheat do not connect with anything in his life, except that the numbers fit with his father's history (working seven years for Rachel, ending up with Leah as his first wife, and then working another seven years for Rachel plus seven more years for the cattle that he earned). Yosef understands that cows and wheat in Paro's dreams mean years – if he replaces years for the wheat and cows, he has the entire meaning of the dreams before him in his own life.

How do the dreams and his life over the previous twenty plus years relate to Yosef's mission going forward? Yosef realizes that the sun and

moon bowing down to him do not represent his father, mother, and brothers. When his brothers come to purchase wheat, he realizes that God sent him to Egypt and put him in charge of the food to save his family during the famine. Yosef works hard to find a way to move away from past disputes, avoid any discussion of fault, and bring all the brothers together with love. Yosef's goal is what we Jews need today, when our brothers (extended Jewish family) spent too much time on disputes and not enough time working for a stronger Judaism and world in which to live.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine and Rabbi Dov Linzer (with author Abigail Pogrebin) also connect Yosef's meeting with his brothers and Hanukkah with machloket (disputes) among Jews. Go to any yeshiva, and the most memorable sight is likely to be two students arguing strongly with each other over the meaning of a few words in the Gemorah (Talmud). These arguments can become very heated and go on for quite a while. Do the disputing students come to blows? No. After a time, they stop the argument and go back to the Gemorah. The classic interpretation of such disputes comes from the Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers). The followers of Hillel and Shammai would argue constantly. The Gemorah explains, "The words of both schools are the words of the living God, but the law follows the rulings of the school of Hillel." Our tradition is that disputes such as those of Hillel and Shammai are disputes for the sake of heaven while other disputes (such as those of Korach) are not for the sake of heaven and will not endure.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer and author Abigail Pogrebin also extend the history of disputes among Jews to Hanukkah and recent history. During the time of the Maccabees, the major dispute was between Orthodox Jews (the Maccabees) and assimilated Jews who followed the Syrian Greeks and abandoned many of the Jewish practices. Should the Jews of the time stick with the traditional mitzvot or blend in with the Greeks? One aspect of this dispute is whether the light from Hanukkah candles should represent fire (death of our enemies) or light (Jews working together for a better world). The winning side of this dispute is light – Jews should work toward a more inclusive and positive Jewish life. We see the distinction in Hassidic tradition. Many secular Jews consider Hanukkah to be a celebration over a military victory. Hassidic Jews, such as Chabad, however, consider Hanukkah to be a very important holiday, one focused on the beauty and joy of traditional Judaism.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander has emphasized many times in recent months that we Jews should move ahead, away from disputes on ritual and politics. We should focus on coming closer to benefit Klal Yisrael, share the burdens of the wars of the past 14 months, and help those of our people who have suffered the most during this period. As Rabbi Marc Angel reminds us, no matter what we Jews do, anti-Semites hate and blame us. The late Nobel laureate Saul Bellow said that Jews have never been able to take the right to live as a natural right. He said that our challenge is to take a long view of history, not to be afraid, and to live proudly as Jews. May we work together to benefit all our people. Shabbat Shalom Hanukkah Samaich, Hannah and Alan]

לע"נ

יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

אנא מלכה בת ישראל

Parshas Miketz: Yosef's Brothers in Egypt

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I.

The story of the encounter between Yosef and his brothers in Egypt is well-known; however, a closer look at the text reveals some seemingly strange behavior on the part of the brothers. I would like to begin by posing two questions. Through a careful look at some of the events which led up to the stand of the brothers in Yosef's quarters, not only will we answer these questions – but we will gain a clearer understanding of the debate between Yosef and his brothers.

QUESTION #1: WHY DID ALL TEN BROTHERS GO DOWN?

In B'resheet (Genesis) 42:1-3, we are told: When Ya'akov learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? I have heard," he said, "that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." So ten of Yosef's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. (B'resheet [Genesis] 40:5-8)

Why did Ya'akov send (nearly) all of his sons down to Egypt? From everything we have ever heard about this family – going back to Avraham's first "Aliyah" – it is a wealthy family. This family (Avraham-Yitzchak-Ya'akov-12 sons) has plenty of cattle, sheep – and slaves. Since Ya'akov was concerned that the way to Egypt was dangerous (which is why he didn't send Binyamin – see B'resheet 42:4), why did he send any of his sons? Why not send some of the servants of the household – or, at least, one or two sons with some slaves to carry back the grain?

QUESTION #2: WHY DID THE BROTHERS BRING BINYAMIN BACK?

When Yosef's brothers came down to Egypt, they were brought to the great viceroy (their brother) – who was reputed to have great powers of clairvoyance. (See B'resheet 44:5,15). The viceroy accused them – three or four times – of being spies (B'resheet 42:9-16). Finally, he agreed to allow them to come back to buy more grain (and to free their brother, Shim'on), only if they would return with the younger brother of whom they spoke. (How the return with Binyamin would prove their honesty is not clear – but that is a matter for another shiur.) [Why Yosef engaged in this apparently heartless behavior towards his brothers and father is also beyond the scope of this shiur. Rav Yo'el Bin-Nun has written a wonderfully insightful – and hotly debated – article on the subject, which appears in Megadim vol. 1]

The brothers knew that the viceroy was wrong about their being spies! As they averred, time and again, they were only interested in purchasing grain. Since the supposedly clairvoyant viceroy was so "off-base" about their motivations – how would he know if the "Binyamin" they brought back was really a younger brother? Why didn't the brothers find some young man, dress him up like a Canaanite (see Yehoshua Ch. 9) and give him enough information to play the role of Binyamin? The viceroy – whose reputed powers of insight were obviously "smoke and mirrors" – would never know the difference between this "shill" and the real Binyamin! Why put their father through the heartbreak of sending Binyamin – and delay their next trip to the Egyptian grain center – when they could have avoided all of it with this ruse?

II. SH'CHEM AND HEVRON

Before addressing these questions, let's look back at the events at the beginning of Parashat Vayeshev. There are two more questions I would like to ask about the brothers and their associations and location.

At the beginning of the Yosef story, we are told that Yosef had a special relationship with the four sons of Ya'akov's concubines. (Remember that Ya'akov's children were born of one of four mothers – Re'uven, Shim'on, Levi, Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun shared Leah as a mother; Yosef and Binyamin were Rachel's sons; Gad and Asher were birthed by Zilpah, Leah's handmaid; Dan and Naphtali were born to Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid.): This is the story of the family of Ya'akov. Yosef, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Yosef brought a bad report of them to their father. (B'resheet 37:2) The third question: Why did Yosef associate with the sons of the concubines? (Rashi explains that the sons of Leah degraded him and so he built an alliance with the "lesser" sons of Zilpah and Bilhah; see, however, Ramban response ad loc.)

The fourth question is one of location – since Ya'akov lived in and around Hevron (see B'resheet 37:1, 14) – why were his

sons shepherding his flock in the vicinity of Sh'chem – approximately 30 miles to the north? (37:12) The mountain range which extends from south of Hevron northwards to Sh'chem includes plenty of good grazing land – why was his flock so far away?

III. A FINAL QUESTION

Although this may seem like a radical departure from the subject – I would like to address a seemingly unrelated question about a verse in D'varim (Deuteronomy). The book of D'varim is presented as Mosheh's farewell address, presented to the B'nei Yisra'el in the plains of Mo'av during the fortieth year after the Exodus. (D'varim 1:1-5). In the second chapter, Mosheh describes the military and political history of the surrounding lands – including that of Se'ir (southwest Jordan):

Moreover, the Horim had formerly inhabited Se'ir, but the descendants of Esav dispossessed them, destroying them and settling in their place, as Yisra'el has done in the land that Hashem gave them as a possession. (D'varim 2:12). It should be clear why this verse challenges our traditional approach to Revelation and to the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. Mosheh is describing what had happened in Se'ir to the B'nei Yisra'el – and is relying on an event they knew well to illustrate it. How could the Yehoshua-led conquest – which was a year in the future – serve as an illustrative model for them?

Not only do the Bible critics have a field day with this verse. Various traditionally oriented solutions – (e.g. Sforno, Hizkuni) usually associated with the conquest of the lands on the East Bank of the Jordan (which had already happened) – have been proposed; but they are all relatively weak since that land was never considered “THE land”. This is a troubling verse that awaits a comfortable and traditional resolution.

IV. YA'AKOV AND B'NEI LE'AH SETTLE THE LAND

A careful reading of the activities of Ya'akov and his children, beginning after the successful reunion with Esav, reveals that this family had already begun realizing the promise given to their great-grandfather (Avraham), grandfather (Yitzchak) and father. Avraham was promised that his descendants – who would return after four generations – would inherit the Land (B'eresheet 15:16). The divine promise to Avraham of the Land was not an immediate gift – rather, it was a commitment that the Land would eventually become the property of his descendants. By virtue of Yitzchak never having left the Land (see B'eresheet 26:1-4), God's promise to him was, similarly, one of potential and not to be actualized in his life. (Note that throughout their lifetimes, both Avraham and Yitzchak are considered “sojourners”, “strangers” – and never settle anywhere within the Land. Note especially Avraham's self-description in his negotiations with Ephron – B'eresheet 23:4) Ya'akov was given a similar promise on his way out of the Land (B'eresheet 28:13) – but from the wording in God's promise to him upon his return (35:12), it seems that the time had come for the promise to be realized. (As I pointed out in a previous shiur in the name of Rav Soloveitchik z"l, **Ya'akov's response to the birth of Yoseph was to ask for a release from Lavan and to return home.** Yoseph is the fourth generation from Avraham and Ya'akov thought that that element of the covenant was ready to “kick in”.)

Excluding Avraham's purchase of a (necessary) burial plot, Ya'akov was the first of our ancestors to actively try to settle the land. Immediately after his successful rapprochement with Esav, he purchased land in Sh'chem (33:19). As a result of the Sh'chem-Dinah episode, Shim'on and Levi, two of B'nei Le'ah, conquered the town of Sh'chem (34:25).

We then come to an anomaly in Chapter 37. When the brothers (how many of them?) debate what to do with Yoseph, Re'uven speaks up and implores them not to kill him (37:22). It is reasonable that Yehudah, who later spoke up about the possible profit to be made from the sale of Yoseph (v. 26), was not present when Re'uven made his plea – else, why didn't Yehudah speak up then? Although the text is not clear about Yehudah's presence, Re'uven certainly “disappeared” while Yoseph was in the pit. (v. 29: “And Re'uven returned to the pit and behold – Yoseph was not in the pit...”) Where did Re'uven go?

In the next chapter, we read about Yehudah's “separate” life away from his brothers. There is a serious chronological problem with this story. If it took place immediately after the sale of Yoseph (which is one way to read 38:1 – see Rashi there), we have seemingly irreconcilable information, as follows:

The text clearly tells us that from the sale of Yoseph until the reunion with his brothers was no more than 22 years. (Yoseph was at least 17 when sold; he was 30 when brought before Phara'oh; there were 7 years of plenty and then, after 2 years of famine, the brothers were reunited.) In Chapter 38, Yehudah began a business relationship with a local K'na'ani man, married a local woman, had three sons with her (and the third son was significantly younger than the second – see

38: 11), the oldest son married Tamar and died, the second son refused to fulfill his obligation to his dead brother and died – and the younger son finally grew up (see 38:14). Tamar had relations with Yehudah and gave birth to Peretz and Zerach. In B'resheet 46:12, we are told that the children of this same Peretz were among the group that came down to Egypt – no more than 22 years after the sale of Yoseph! **It boggles the imagination to suppose that within 22 years, Yehudah would marry and have children, marry those children off – and then have his own children with Tamar within 22 years.** For this reason, Ralbag (among others) concludes that the Yehudah story occurred concurrently with the events in Ch. 37. In other words, while the brothers were still tending their father's flock as young men (early 20's), they (or at least Yehudah) were also entering into independent business relationships.

We know that Shim'on and Levi had already conquered the city of Sh'chem – and that Yehudah's business took him as far north and west as K'ziv (see 38:5; K'ziv is likely near modern day Achziv, near Nahariyah). If Re'uven was able to be away from the brothers (to tend to his own affairs) while they were in Dotan (near Sh'chem) and return to them, he must have also had some land and/or business in the north.

The picture that emerges is quite clear. The children of Le'ah were beginning to settle the Land (in the north). Because of this, they shepherded their father's flock (evidently in rotation) near their own holdings – in Sh'chem. Before going further, we can provide a clear and reasonable explanation to the enigmatic and troubling verse in D'varim (2:12):

Moreover, the Horim had formerly inhabited Se'ir, but the descendants of Esav dispossessed them, destroying them and settling in their place, as Yisra'el has done in the land that Hashem gave them as a possession. (D'varim 2:12). The first conquest of the Land which God gave us was initiated not by Yisra'el the Nation – but by Yisra'el the man (Ya'akov). During the life of Ya'akov, he and his children (B'nei Le'ah) began purchasing and/or conquering land in Eretz K'na'an in order to fulfill the promise given to their family. Mosheh's illustration is indeed one from a familiar past – and is therefore instructive and enlightening.

V. B'NEI ZILPAH AND B'NEI BILHAH

Why, then, is Yoseph described as associating with the children of the concubines? Why aren't they also spreading out, building their families and their estates?

In order to understand this, we have to look at the different visions for the family held by Ya'akov and Yoseph. Ya'akov clearly held that the sons were not to be treated equally or seen as a unit; witness his request to return to K'na'an upon the birth of Yoseph; witness his allowing/encouraging only the children of Le'ah to build their own fortunes and witness the special treatment he accorded to Yoseph and Binyamin.

Ya'akov had every reason to adopt this approach. In his family, only one son (Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov) was the torch-bearer of the tradition, while the other brothers (Nachor, Yishma'el, Esav) were rejected and given other destinies and legacies. Ya'akov reasoned that he would also have to choose one son who would be the next patriarch – and that the other sons would be given separate inheritances. The sons of Le'ah, being the children of a proper wife, were given the opportunity to conquer and settle the Land – as it was promised to their father and his children. The sons of Rachel – who would be the true heirs – would directly inherit Ya'akov's holdings. The children of the concubines, coming from “second-class” wives, would not inherit anything – rather, they would remain workers for the estate of Ya'akov – as he worked for his father-in-law. Ya'akov's vision – based on his family's experience – includes no Am Yisra'el – just B'nei Yisra'el.

This is why Yoseph associated with B'nei Zilpah and B'nei Bilhah; as Ya'akov's workers, they would naturally stay close to home. Yoseph was also close to home as he stood to inherit Ya'akov's holdings.

Yoseph had a different perspective on the destiny of the family. His dream of the sheaves (B'resheet 37:7) carried two messages which were offensive to his brothers – one explicit and the other implicit. Explicitly, the dream indicated that Yoseph would be their ruler. Implicit in this vision is a united family/nation with one king. Following the vision of Ya'akov, there could never be a ruler over the brothers – because they would not comprise a political unit which could be governed. Yoseph's dream implied that they would eventually be united and share a common destiny.

VI. THE BROTHERS IN EGYPT

Returning to our Parashah, let's look at the family's status and fortune. At the beginning of chapter 42, we are told that Ya'akov asked all of his sons (except Binyamin) to go down to Egypt – “that we may live and not die”. Clearly, two major changes had taken place as a result of the famine. First of all, the sons had moved back to their father's house (or

extended household) – such that he could address them all at one time. Second, they were in danger of starvation. Their fortunes must have been lost (since they were shepherds, it stands to reason that the famine hit them especially hard) causing them to move back to the “empty nest” – and they likely had no slaves left to send! This was the first (of many) cycles of conquest and loss of the Land.

When the brothers came before Yoseph, we are told that:

Although Yoseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Yoseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!” (B’resheet 42:8-9). What was it about his dreams that caused him to accuse them of being spies?

When he saw Gad and Asher (Zilpah’s sons) standing side by side with Re’uven and Shim’on, he understood that one of two changes had taken place in his family. Either Ya’akov had been persuaded that the Yosephian vision of Am Yisra’el was correct and had unified his sons and convinced them that they had a common destiny – but, if so, where was Binyamin? He reached the only other reasonable conclusion – that they had lost their fortunes and had been drawn back together.

Here is where Yoseph’s brilliance and insight came into play. A person who has never known wealth is not enraged and made jealous by exposure to opulence. On the other hand, someone who had wealth and power – and lost it – has great difficulty in accepting the other’s fortune with equanimity. He knew that the brothers would feel jealous of his wealth – and that of Egypt – and would at least be contemplating military action, if not as an outright conspiracy, then at least as internal considerations.

When Yoseph accused them of being spies, that charge must have hit a resonant chord inside of their minds and hearts. This Tzaphenat Pa’ane’ach (Yoseph) must really be insightful to read our minds so adroitly! When he then took Shim’on (one of the two “activist” brothers – B’resheet 34:25) from them, they must have been convinced that his “second sight” was legitimate and worthy of consideration. When he demanded that Binyamin be brought down, they had no choice but to fully comply, as this viceroy could see their thoughts, read their minds – and properly identify Binyamin!

Hag Urim Sameach: Happy Hanukkah to all of our Haverim

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PARSHAT MIKETZ

Does Yosef have a plan?

He was certainly planning [a way out of jail] when he interpreted the dream of the "sar ha'Mashkim" (see 40:13-15).

He was definitely planning [his own 'political appointment'] when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams (see 41:33-36!).

Clearly, Yosef was not only a dreamer; he was also a 'master planner'. But what was his plan when he: accused his brothers of being spies, returned their money, and hid his cup in Binyamin's bag, etc.? Was he simply 'teasing' his brothers - in revenge; or did he have a more altruistic motive?

As the Torah never reveals that motive, answering this question requires a lot of detective work.

In the following shiur, we attempt to piece this puzzle together by weaving together some of the theories presented by earlier commentators (then adding a little touch of our own).

INTRODUCTION

Before we begin our study, a point of methodology in regard to what allows us to search for an underlying motive behind Yosef's behavior.

As Chumash is a book of "nevuah" [prophecy], and not simply an historical chronicle, we assume that its stories carry a prophetic message. Certainly, commentators can argue in regard to the precise message that should be derived from each story, and how to arrive [and who can arrive] at any conclusion. Nonetheless, all concur that Chumash should be studied in search for its prophetic lesson(s).

This does not imply that we must assume that every action taken by our forefathers was altruistic. However, it does imply that if the Torah records a certain set of events, that they were written for the purpose that we study its detail in search of a significant message.

With this in mind, we begin our study of the famous story of Yosef and his brothers.

WHY YOSEF DOESN'T WRITE HOME

Considering Yosef's very close relationship with his father [recall how the Torah described him as Yaakov's "ben zkunim" - see 37:3], one would have expected that he make every possible attempt to contact his father. Yet, even after his appointment as head servant of the House of Potiphar, and later as the Commissioner of Egypt, (second only to Pharaoh /see 41:44), Yosef makes no effort to inform his father that he is alive and well.

Does Yosef no longer care for his father who loved him so dearly and now grieves for his lost son? Has he wiped his past from his memory?

To answer this question, Ramban (see his commentary to 42:9) suggests that Yosef's actions were motivated by his aspiration to ensure the fulfillment of his dreams. According to Ramban, Yosef understood that his slavery, and his entire predicament in Egypt, was part of a Divine plan to ensure that his childhood dreams would come true. He also understood (for some reason) that for this to happen, he could not contact his family. And when necessary, he would even 'plan ahead' to help his dreams along.

Ramban's interpretation beautifully explains Yosef's first plan [i.e. accusing his brothers as spies] - as its goal was to force the brothers to bring Binyamin, so that ALL the brothers would bow down to him. This would enable the fulfillment of his first dream - of the sheaves bowing down to him in the field. His second plan [i.e. hiding his cup in Binyamin's bag] was to force them to bring his father as well - to fulfill his second dream - i.e. the sun and moon and stars bowing down - while protecting Binyamin in the

interim (from potential injury by his brothers). In this manner, Ramban explains why Yosef did not write home:

"For had it not been for this (need to fulfill his dreams), Yosef would have committed a terrible sin to cause his father such grief and make him spend so many years in sorrow..."

[See Ramban on 42:9, read carefully.]

According to Ramban, the need to fulfill his dreams 'allowed' Yosef to treat his father and brothers in such a cruel manner.

FULFILLING 'DREAMS' OR KEEPING 'HALACHA'?

In case you found something 'bothersome' about Ramban's approach, don't feel bad. Later commentators take issue with this conclusion that it would be permissible to cause other people terrible grief, just to make sure a 'dream comes true'.

[See Nechama Leibowitz on Sefer Breishit who quotes various sources in this regard and deals with this issue in depth.]

This question leads Avramel to suggest a very different approach. He agrees (like Ramban) that Yosef had a 'master plan', however, he disagrees as to its goal.

Avramel contends that Yosef's goal was to bring his brothers towards repentance for their terrible deeds. Although he planned to ultimately 'reveal' himself; before doing so, he wanted to make sure that they had first performed proper "teshuva".

Avramel's approach neatly explains just about all of Yosef's actions - which certainly caused his brothers to repent (see 42:21 & 44:16). However, it is not so clear why the goal of 'helping' his brothers to perform "teshuva" would allow Yosef to cause his father continued grief. [We'll return to this question later in our shiur.]

Furthermore, Avramel's interpretation only explains Yosef's behavior after his brothers arrived to buy food; but it does not explain why Yosef did not contact his father for some twenty years beforehand!

DREAMS REMEMBERED, OR FORGOTTEN?

One could suggest an approach exactly the opposite of Ramban's - i.e. that Yosef had 'forgotten' his dreams (after he was sold)! It is only after his brothers bowed down some twenty years later (when they came to buy food) - that he suddenly 'remembered' his childhood dreams.

To verify this, simply review 42:9 in its context, noting how it seems to imply that it was at this point when Yosef remembered his dreams, and not earlier! [Note Rashi on 42:9 as well!]

In other words, we posit that Yosef's behavior before his brothers arrived stems from the fact that he had 'given up' on his childhood dreams, while his behavior (and 'master plan') after they arrive stems from his renewed understanding of their significance.

Let's begin by explaining why he didn't contact home, by considering his predicament in Egypt.

In regard to his brothers, why would Yosef want to contact (or ever see) them again? After all, they had thrown him into a pit and then sold him into slavery (or at least he thought they were behind the sale/ see last week's shiur)!

Furthermore, considering how Egyptian society 'looked down' at the "Ivrim" (see 43:32), contacting his brothers could have endangered his reputable position in Egyptian society.

Nonetheless, even though Yosef had ample reason for not contacting his brothers, it remains difficult to understand why he didn't contact his father (and let's not forget his full brother Binyamin). Could it be that his despise for the rest of his family was greater than his love for his father and brother?

One could suggest that by the time that Yosef had reached a position of power, he was quite sure that his father had already died. Recall that Yaakov was about 110 years old when Yosef was sold, so it would only be logical for him to assume that his father had died (or soon would / note 43:7 & 45:3!).

Hence, the slight chance that his father was still alive was simply not worth the price of returning to deal with his brothers. [

YOSEF 'HAD' A DREAM

A more sophisticated approach to explain why Yosef didn't write home, is presented by Rav Yoel Bin Nun [in an article in Megadim Vol. 1 / a publication of the Herzog Teachers Institute].

In that article, Rav Yoel posits that Yosef had no idea that his father believed he was dead. Quite the opposite - Yosef assumed that his father would find out that he was sold (i.e. someone would 'snitch'), and hence expected that his father would demand that the brothers trace his whereabouts and come to his rescue! After all, the Yishmaelim [distant "mishpacha"] were international traders who traveled quite often between Eretz Canaan and Egypt. Surely, Yosef hoped, his family would come to his rescue.

Recall as well that Yosef was unaware of how the brothers tricked their father to believe he was dead (with the blood-stained coat). Therefore, Yosef assumes is sure that everyone knows that he is alive, and that he was sold as a slave in Egypt. During his first year or so of slavery, he is 'sure' that in a short time, someone in his family will come to his rescue.

However, many months pass and no one shows. Yosef's hopes are replaced with feelings of rejection. After several months (or years), he may have reached the conclusion that his family doesn't want him to return; but there had to have been a reason.

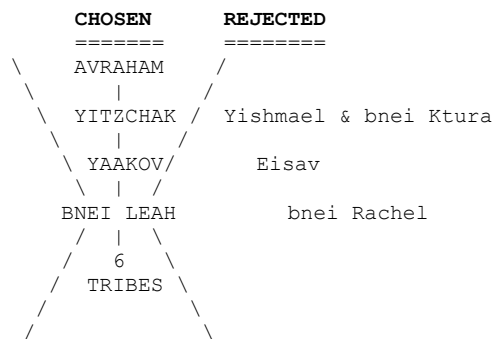
REJECTED FROM THE BECHIRA PROCESS

Rav Yoel posits that Yosef reaches the conclusion that there must have been some divine decree that he was 'rejected' from the family, i.e. from the entire "bechira" process - in manner similar to the rejection of his Uncle Esav or great Uncle Yishmael. It may have appeared to him that only the children of Leah were chosen, while the children of Rachel were rejected, as reflected in Rachel's premature death, and the fact that she was buried on the 'roadside' (while Leah was later to be buried in the Tomb of the Patriarchs).

His childhood dreams are now forgotten, and reluctantly, he accepted his new fate.

Yosef, convinced that his family has abandoned him, accepts this fate and decides to lead his own life. Just as Eisav established himself in Edom, Yosef will make a name for himself in Egypt. He can even bring the name of God into society in his own way, despite not being part of the Chosen Nation.

The following chart reflects what may have been Yosef's perception of the outcome of the "bechira" process (based on this original 'misunderstanding'):



In summary, we posit that Yosef never contacted his family during those twenty years, as he mistakenly assumed that they did not want to contact him, as there had been a divine decision that he was 'rejected' from the 'chosen family'. This tragic misunderstanding can explain why Yosef, even after rising to power, never contacted his father as well.

Now we must consider the second stage, i.e. an explanation for Yosef's behavior after his brothers arrive to buy food.

YOSEF HAS A PLAN

After spending years under the assumption that he has been 'rejected' - everything changes when Yosef sees his brothers among the many who came down to Egypt to buy grain. As they

bow down before him, Yosef suddenly 'remembers' his long forgotten dreams (see 42:9), for they just appeared to come true!

Should Yosef dismiss this as pure coincidence, or should this partial fulfillment of his childhood dreams lead him to reconsider his earlier conclusions?

It is understandable why Yosef doesn't immediately reveal himself. He needs some time. But, if he simply wanted to hide his identity from them, he could have just ignored them. [Surely, Yosef did not entertain every foreigner who came to purchase food.]

But why does Yosef accuse his brothers of being spies? Why does he return their money? Later, when they come back, why does he plant his special cup in Binyamin's bag?

Certainly, we would not expect that Yosef was just 'teasing' his brothers - to 'get back' at them. Rather, it would make more sense to assume that Yosef has a plan - and his actions suggest that he has strategy; but it is not so clear what that master plan is.

In his article, Rav Bin Nun explains Yosef's 'plan' as an attempt to determine what had happened to Binyamin. The fact that Binyamin was not with the brothers the first time they came to Egypt supports his suspicion that Bnei Rachel had been rejected. Therefore, his primary goal is to find out if Binyamin is still alive.

If Binyamin is indeed alive, then Yosef could question him concerning what 'really' happened in the family, and afterward possibly re-unite with his family. On the other hand, if Binyamin never shows (and hence probably not alive), Yosef would remain incognito - preferring never to reunite with his brothers.

[This can explain why Yosef accuses his brothers of being spies. The 'spy accusation' allows Yosef to question them concerning their family roots etc., without raising their suspicion that he may be their brother.]

Although Rav Yoel's explanation flows nicely from the above presentation, it does not explain every detail of Yosef's behavior once Binyamin does arrive. After all, once Binyamin comes, why doesn't Yosef simply take him aside and question him. If Yosef only needs to determine what really happened in the "bechira" process, what point is there in planting his cup in Binyamin's bag?

Surely, one cannot remain oblivious to Yosef's obvious attempt to create a situation that prompts the brothers to repent (as Abravanel explains so beautifully).

On the other hand, one must also explain why Yosef returns their money, and why he seats them in order of their birth, etc. These acts seem to be more of a 'tease' than an impetus for them to do "teshuvah" (repentance). What is Yosef's intention in all of this?

Furthermore, if his goal, as Abravanel explains, is only to cause his brothers to repent, then his 'second' plan seems unnecessary - after all, they had already shown remorse for their sin at the first encounter. Recall their initial remorse, that Yosef himself overheard, when they stated:

"Alas we are GUILTY, for we heard his crying out [when he was thrown in the pit], but we did not listen ... therefore this fate has befallen us..." (See 42:21-23)

And if that was not enough, then Yehuda's plea and admission of guilt (see 44:16) certainly would have sufficed.

Finally, even if Abravanel's contention is correct, who gives Yosef the right to 'test' his brothers to see if they have repented? Is Yosef allowed to play God? Is he permitted to tease, trick, and confuse others - in order to awaken their soul? And even if so, does this justify causing his father further aggravation?

PLAYING 'GOD' OR PLAYING 'LEADER'

One could suggest the following explanation for Yosef's behavior (once the brothers arrived) - which is quite similar to Abravanel's approach, but from a very different angle. Let's explain:

Even though Yosef may have forgotten his dreams for some twenty years, when his brothers arrive in Egypt and bow down to him - everything changes! Totally shocked by what happened, it suddenly dawns upon him that his childhood dreams may actually

be coming true after all. Maybe he wasn't rejected? Maybe, his conclusions regarding his family were all wrong?

On the other hand, Binyamin is not with them. But, if Binyamin is still alive and part of the family (as his brothers now claim), then maybe the children of Rachel are indeed included in the "bechira" process!

But now that Yosef had become an 'expert' at dream interpretation, he not only 'remember his dreams', but he now begins to understand their purpose! These dreams were not merely 'predictions' of future events - but rather could serve as guide - to inspire appropriate behavior!

Because of his dreams, Yosef now understands that his 'brothers bowing down' means that he is not only included in the "bechira" process - but he is destined to assume family leadership.

If so what should he do at this point in time?

First, let's explain what he **cannot** do!

Imagine what would have happened had Yosef revealed his identity immediately, as soon as he recognized his brothers! They would have 'melted' on the spot. How could they have faced him, talk to him? The shame of their relationship would have created an eternal barrier. They would never be able to speak to him, let alone work together as a family.

As family 'leader' - Yosef now recognizes his responsibility to keep the 'chosen' family united and cohesive. Yosef's plan is simple -he must plan a strategy that would reunite the family - to bond them in a manner that could continue to achieve together.

Yosef does not need to play GOD, to ensure that his brothers repent - that would be their own responsibility. Yosef, however, does have a new responsibility to play LEADER.

Hence, Yosef conceives a plan that will rehabilitate the family unity - he needs to enable his brothers with a way by which they can 'redeem themselves'! But, to accomplish this, he must put them through a difficult test:

After procuring the minimal information that he needs by his 'spies' accusation (see 42:7-10 AND 43:7!), he decides to create a situation where the brothers must choose if they are willing to forfeit their own freedom - in order to save Binyamin. Should they 'pass this test', it will be much easier for them to work with Yosef in the future.

Indeed, this plan may cause his father a few extra weeks of suffering. But Yosef must restrain his emotions, for he hopes that it will unfold quickly.

[Yosef probably expected that the brothers would bring Binyamin down immediately. He did not expect that Yaakov would be so reluctant to send Binyamin away.]

Therefore, Yosef's keeps Shimon in jail, to ensure that his brothers will bring Binyamin. Once Binyamin will come, Yosef plans the big 'set up' - where he will plant his cup in Binyamin's bag, thus giving a chance for his brothers to 'prove themselves' (as they so well do).

While doing so, Yosef does many other things to make the brothers wonder and think - to shake them up a bit [what we call "cheshbon ha'nefesh".] But by planting his cup in Binyamin's bag, Yosef provides his brothers with an opportunity to prove to themselves that they have done "teshuva"! Only after they demonstrate their willingness to give up their own lives for Binyamin, will they be able to face themselves, and Yosef - and unite as a cohesive family - to take on the challenges that lay in the future.

Once Yehuda, on behalf of his brothers, admits their guilt and makes his noble offer to become his servants (instead of Binyamin/ see 44:16 & 44:33-34), that might have been enough - but Yosef may have wanted to 'push' his brothers even a bit farther. But when he hears Yehuda's petition concerning the fate of his father (at the beginning of Parshat Vayigash), Yosef can not hold back any more' - he 'breaks down' and reveals himself.

To support our thesis, note how Yosef (after revealing his identity and his instinctive opening question regarding the health of his father) immediately emphasizes his assurance that he is

not angry with his brothers, and implores them to recognize the Hand of God behind these events.

By doing so, Yosef also alludes to his brothers that they too should look to the future, instead of dwelling on the past (see 45:1-8).

MAASE AVOT SIMAN LA'BANIM

By the end of this entire episode, God had created a situation that would guarantee the physical survival of Am Yisrael during the famine, while setting the stage for their future redemption. Yosef, in the meantime, had created a situation that would keep Am Yisrael united during this formative stage in land of Egypt

Throughout the generations, God oversees our history, while creating opportunities for our redemption. However, as we enjoy His providence, it remains OUR OWN responsibility to make sure that we remain united as our destiny unfolds. Although quite difficult, it remains an eternal challenge for Jewish leadership.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

"SINAT ACHIM" & IDEALISM - a 'mini- shiur'

Can there be any excuse for the brothers conspiring to kill Yosef? How are we to understand the behavior of our ancestors? Is their goal simply to teach us of our 'shameful' heritage, or do they carry a message for future generations?

In the following mini-shiur, we attempt to tackle this difficult question by projecting the "bechira process" - the theme that we have been following in Sefer Breishit - onto the story of Yosef and his brothers.

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the brothers' hatred of Yosef appears to stem from a petty sibling rivalry. However, when we consider the Torah's story of Yosef's dreams (see 37:2-12), it is possible to arrive at a deeper understanding of their actions. Therefore, we begin our shiur with a quick review of these two dreams:

- (1) "And behold we were gathering sheaves in the field, and my sheaf stood up and remained upright. Your sheaves then gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf" (37:7);
- (2) "... and behold - the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (37:9)

One doesn't have to be a prophet to interpret these two dreams. Clearly, they point to Yosef's developing sense of superiority over the entire family. However, these dreams also echo an earlier sibling rivalry in Chumash - that between Yaakov and Eisav! Note the similarity between these dreams and Yitzchak's blessing to Yaakov (i.e. the blessing that he intended to give it to Eisav):

"May God bless you with... an abundance of grain...

Be MASTER OVER your brothers, and let your mother's sons BOW DOWN to you." (27:28)

Recall our explanation that this blessing reflected Yitzchak's original understanding that both of his sons were chosen, and hence it became the father's responsibility to appoint a family 'leader'. However, as that story progressed, it became clear to Yitzchak that only Yaakov was chosen. Then, as we advance to the next generation, it appears that ALL of Yaakov's children will be chosen (and not only one). Therefore, it will become necessary for Yaakov to appoint a 'family leader' from among his twelve sons - but it is not yet clear who this 'leader' will be.

With this in mind, it would appear that Yosef's dreams reflect his aspiration to attain this leadership position. [One could also suggest that they may reflect Yosef's understanding that he would be the ONLY 'chosen son,' just as Yaakov himself emerged as Yitzchak's only chosen son!]

This perception is supported not only by Yosef's dreams, but also by several other factors, such as:

- * Yaakov's love and special treatment of Yosef (see 37:3);
- * his "ktonet pasim" (special cloak), a sign of royalty;
- * Yosef is the first son of Rachel, Yaakov's 'primary' wife;
- * Yaakov's silence regarding Yosef's dreams (see 37:11);

manner. The generation of "churban bayit sheni" had repeated the sin of "sinat achim" in a manner similar to Yosef's brothers. Hence they deserved to be punished, as the later generation continues in the same pattern of sin.]

ALL IN THE NAME OF GOD

In the brothers' eyes, it becomes rather clear that Yaakov plans to name Yosef (or possibly Yosef and Binyamin, the son's of Rachel) as his exclusive heir(s). Yosef's dreams simply added 'fuel to the flame!'

This background allows us to suggest an ideological basis for the brothers' decision to kill Yosef, as follows:

Had Yosef acted in a more righteous manner, his brothers may have conceded to his destiny as either the 'leader' or the 'chosen' son. However, their perception of Yosef's character troubled them. In their eyes (as the Parshat Vayeshev testifies), Yosef was a slanderer: "And Yosef brought bad reports ('diba ra'ah') of his brothers to his father." (see 37:2)

The brothers, aware of the challenges facing God's special Nation, recognized the need for exemplary leadership. Could Yosef possibly assume this role? To the brothers, the mere thought of 'Yosef the Slanderer' becoming the leader was horrific. From their perspective, it was simply unthinkable that Yosef could assume the leadership of a nation destined by God to be characterized by "tzedeq u'mishpat" (see 18:19). For the sake of "klal Yisrael," they conclude: Yosef must be weeded out!

Hence, the brothers faced a predicament similar to that of Rivka in the previous generation. Just as Rivka had realized that Yitzchak was mistaken in his favoring of Eisav, so too the brothers conclude that Yaakov is mistaken by favoring Yosef.

However, just as Rivka resorted to 'trickery' to ensure that the proper son would be blessed, so too the brothers decide to use 'trickery' to ensure that Yosef would not be appointed their leader. Considering that the entire fate of "Am Yisrael" was at stake, the brothers allow themselves to 'bend the rules' a bit, so as to secure the nation's future.

An ideal opportunity (for the brothers) arises when Yosef arrives at Dotan to visit them. In order to dispose of this menace, they plot first to kill him. Later they opt to sell him - off to a distant land. In either case, their stated goal is to make sure that Yosef is removed from the Divine family (see 37:20 - "v'nireh mah yihyu chalomotav"). Out of respect and concern for their father, lest he fret and worry about his 'missing' son for the rest of his life, they will dip Yosef's coat in blood so that Yaakov will think that he was truly dead. Hopefully, their father will finally realize that Yosef was "nidcheh" (rejected), and now Am Yisrael can continue to develop in the proper fashion.

Thus, based on the theme of Sefer Breishit, the brothers' plot to dispose of Yosef, though inexcusable, is understandable. It is not simply out of petty jealousy that they want to kill Yosef, but rather out of a 'sincere' concern for the future of Am Yisrael.

MAASE AVOT SIMAN LA'BANIM

If our above assumptions are correct, then the story of Yosef and his brothers leaves us with a poignant message. When making important decisions that may affect the future of our communities we must make sure that lofty spiritual goals do not blind us from the most basic principles of moral behavior..

[Based on this discussion, one could suggest that the "piyut" that we recite on Yom Kippur about the Ten Martyrs (who were killed by the Romans during the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kochba revolt) reflects a similar message. In that piyut, Chazal connect those tragedies to the brothers' selling of Yosef. Even though that event had taken place over a thousand years earlier, Chazal consider the behavior of Am Yisrael during that time period similar to that of Yosef and his brothers.

To understand why, recall that Chazal cite "sinat chinam" [petty hatred of one another] as the primary sin of that generation (even though Torah study was at an all time high - see Mesechet Gittin 55b with regard to the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. See also Yoma 9b). Hence, that piyut is making a similar statement, but in a more 'poetic'

Parshat Miketz: Yehuda

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

What are the Avot made of? To find out, Hashem tests them: "Sacrifice your son for Me." You and I will probably never face that kind of test. But the sons of Ya'akov face tests like those we may encounter in our own lives. Yosef, for example, isolated from his family and surrounded by an alien culture, struggles to resist the powerful sexual temptation of his boss's wife. Modern working life can certainly present the same challenges. If I may sully this forum by presenting one real-life example, the Wall Street Journal recently reported that a former employee of a major brokerage firm sued the firm for dismissing him; the boss's wife had allegedly been pursuing him with all the eagerness of Mrs. Potifar, and he, unlike Yosef, succumbed, partially in fear of losing his job if he offended her. When the boss found out, things got messy, and the philanderer got the axe.

Yehuda, also separated from his family (voluntarily: "va-ye-red Yehuda me-et ehav"), also faces sexual temptation, in the form of his daughter-in-law, disguised as a woman for hire. How Yehuda handles this challenge and the web of complexities it spawns is one of our topics this week.

Re'uvein, as well, becomes enmeshed in sexual impropriety of some sort, whether he sleeps with one of his father's wives (following the plain sense of the Torah) or merely interferes with the balance of intimacy in Ya'akov's relationship with his wives (following some midrashim). Sexuality, a powerful but often hidden force, is ever-present in human relationships and in the religious context. How the Avot handle these matters illustrates the degree of self-mastery we should aspire to, as well as the path of courageous repentance we must take if we stumble. The Torah hides the Avot's mistakes no more than it hides their heroic resistance to sin, and we are meant to learn from both.

Last week, we focused on Yosef. Our analysis actually extended significantly beyond Parashat VaYeshev and into Parashat Mikketz, this week's parasha, as we traced Yosef's replacement of Paro as leader of Egypt and Yosef's personal reformation as a leader and religious-moral figure, climaxing with his standing before Paro and giving Hashem all of the credit for his power to interpret dreams. This week we will take a close look at Yehuda's development as a leader. We will look back at Parashat VaYeshev, where Yehuda first gets serious exposure, and continue into Mikketz, where he begins to take a leadership role within his family. Parashat VaYigash, next week's parasha, presents the clash of these titans, where Yehuda confronts his disguised brother and Yosef, satisfied by his manipulation of his brothers, eventually reveals his identity to them.

PARASHAT MIKKETZ

1. What role does Yehuda play in the sale of Yosef? Rabbi Mayer (Sanhedrin 6b; the coincidence of our names is simply that) sharply criticizes Yehuda for suggesting to his brothers that they sell Yosef instead of leaving him in the pit. Take a careful look at the scene where Yehuda makes this suggestion, and think about whether he deserves this censure. Why or why not?

2. Suddenly, in the midst of the Yosef narrative -- just after Yosef is sold -- the Torah takes a break to talk about Yehuda, his friends, his marriages, his sons, their marriages, the story with Tamar, and so forth -- leaving us hanging, waiting for news of Yosef's adventures in Egypt. **Why is this Yehuda vignette inserted so abruptly into the middle of the dramatic, suspenseful Yosef story?**

3. This must be a familiar question by now, since we have asked it about so many other figures: What are Yehuda's challenges? What lessons does he learn as he develops into a leader, and how does he learn them?

4. What does "Yehuda" mean?

5. How does Yehuda's behavior in Parashat Mikketz compare with his previous behavior? What new roles does he now take on? What changes in his relationship with his father?

6. Yehuda and Re'uvein, Ya'akov's eldest son, are leaders, clearly meant to be compared:

* Both become involved in sexual impropriety, as noted above.

* Both suggest alternate ideas when the other brothers suggest killing Yosef.

* Both attempt to take responsibility for Binyamin on his journey to Egypt.

But how are Yehuda and Re'uvein different? How is this reflected later in Ya'akov's blessings to them at the end of his life (Chap. 49)?

PARASHAT MIKKETZ:

We join the brothers at Dotan, a place somewhere in the general vicinity of the family home at Hevron. They are at Dotan pasturing their flocks; Yosef, dispatched by his father, approaches them to observe and report to his father. But he will not see his father for more than twenty years!

RE'UVEIN'S ATTEMPT:

As Yosef approaches, the brothers hatch a scheme to do away with him. Someone (the Torah does not identify him) suggests killing him, but Re'uvein quickly intervenes and suggests that they throw him into a pit instead: why actively murder him when they can just leave him somewhere to die? The Torah tells us that Re'uvein actually plans to rescue Yosef from the pit and return him to his father, but as we know, he never has that opportunity. Still, we have learned something important about Re'uvein: he is a leader. He is not swept along with the crowd's plan to kill Yosef. He feels responsible to make sure that the tense relationship between the brothers does not lead to murder. This fits with his status as the bechor, the eldest.

Re'uvein also understands that openly challenging his brothers may not work, so he pretends to go along with their intent to murder Yosef as he deflects them from immediate murder. A smart leader knows that he cannot always lead by taking the high moral ground and insisting that the crowd follow him. You can't turn back a lynching mob by preaching; a more subtle approach is necessary. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avot says, "Do not try to appease your friend while he is angry, or comfort him while the body [of a loved one] lies before him . . ." (4:18). There will be other opportunities to teach the brothers how better to handle their anger and jealousy -- right now, Re'uvein must focus on the smartest way to save Yosef's life.

RE'UVEIN IN THE DARK:

Later on, down in Egypt, when the brothers are treated harshly by Yosef (whom they do not recognize), they conclude that they are being punished by Hashem for having ignored Yosef's cries when he begged them for mercy. Re'uvein says to them at that point, "Did I not tell you, saying, 'Do not sin with the boy!' But you did not listen -- and now his blood is being sought (by God)!" (42:22). Strangely, Re'uvein seems convinced that Yosef is dead ("his blood is being sought"). Why is he so sure? And why does he make it sound like the brothers did not heed his advice, when we know that he advised them not to actively kill Yosef, and instead to throw him in a pit -- and that they seem to have listened to him at the time?

We need to look back at the events around the time of the sale of Yosef. Re'uvein suggests throwing Yosef in a pit (37:21-22), and the brothers listen to him. But then Yehuda suggests that they sell Yosef instead. The brothers agree, and Yosef is pulled out of the pit and sold to traders heading for Egypt. Suddenly, it seems, Re'uvein notices that Yosef is gone. He exclaims in surprise, "The boy is gone! What am I going to do?" (37:29-30). Hasn't Re'uvein been paying attention? Doesn't he know that Yosef has been pulled out of the pit by the brothers and sold?

It seems that Re'uvein had been absent when Yehuda suggested selling Yosef, and only returned after he had been sold. At that point, he returned to the pit to save Yosef, as he had planned, and discovered that Yosef was gone! He then returned to the brothers and exclaimed in surprise and dismay that Yosef was gone. He assumed that the brothers had changed their plan and had indeed murdered Yosef and then disposed of him. "What will I do?!" he demands of them mournfully.

Re'uvein, it seems, is never clued in to the fact that Yosef has been sold; later, when the brothers are manipulated by the Egyptian ruler and they conclude that Hashem is punishing them for mistreating Yosef, Re'uvein's admonishment -- "You did not listen [to my advice], and now his blood is being sought (by God)" -- shows that he has never been told the truth! He believes Yosef has been murdered, that the brothers ultimately rejected his warning not to actively spill Yosef's blood, and now "his blood is being sought." But why do the brothers keep Re'uvein in the dark? Why don't they tell him that Yosef was never killed, that they had pulled him from the pit and sold him to traders heading to Egypt?

Perhaps the brothers hide the truth from Re'uvein because when he returned to the pit and did not find Yosef, he came back to the brothers and expressed his horror about Yosef's disappearance. In other words, he revealed to them that he had been planning all along to save Yosef; this is, of course, why he is so horrified by Yosef's disappearance. The brothers realize that they cannot tell Re'uvein what really happened because he is not on their side -- he will simply go and tell Ya'akov that Yosef is not dead so that efforts can be made to find Yosef and buy him out of slavery. The brothers can keep Re'uvein quiet only by letting him think that they changed their minds and decided to kill Yosef after all; he will not tell Ya'akov of the murder because doing so would not save Ya'akov any grief, and, if anything, would only add to it. So Re'uvein now rebukes the brothers for not listening to him and murdering Yosef despite his advice -- "Did I not say to you, saying, 'Do not sin with the boy!' But you did not listen -- and now his *blood* (=murder, which is what he believes occurred, since he and the other brothers still do not recognize Yosef) is being sought (by God)!"

YEHUDA'S IDEA:

The brothers follow Re'uvein's advice and throw Yosef into a pit, then sit down to eat. They notice a caravan of merchants heading for Egypt, and this gives Yehuda an idea:

BERESHIT 37:26 --

Yehuda said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Let us go and sell him to the Yishma'elim, and let us not set our own hands upon him, for he is our brother, our flesh," and his brothers listened.

Rabbi Mayer [Sanhedrin 6b] is sharply critical of Yehuda for making this suggestion and trying to profit from the sale of his own brother:

Rabbi Meir says: "[The word] 'botze'a' ['profiteer'] is used with regard to Yehuda, as it says: 'Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What profit [betza] do we get from killing our brother?' Anyone who blesses Yehuda annoys God, as it says, 'Blessing a profiteer [botze'a] annoys God.'"

If we take a careful look at the Torah's report of Yehuda's words, it seems from the beginning of what he says that he does indeed want to sell Yosef in order to make money; merely killing Yosef would get rid of him, but selling him would also make them some cash! But as he continues, it seems clear that Yehuda feels that killing Yosef is *wrong* -- he is "our brother, our flesh." The reason he suggests selling Yosef is because this will accomplish the goal of getting rid of Yosef without necessitating actually killing him. His statement, "What do we gain . . .", does not mean "What \$money\$ do we gain by killing him," but instead means "Why actually kill him (by letting him starve or die of thirst or snakebite in the pit where we left him) -- we need not murder our brother in order to get rid of him; we can sell him instead." Yehuda is saving Yosef's life!

Taken in this way, Yehuda's action reminds us of Re'uvein's -- he is trying to save Yosef by deflecting the brothers from murder. Certainly, this is a praiseworthy accomplishment. But Re'uvein, the Torah tells us, does what he does in order to "return Yosef to his father"; Yehuda, on the other hand, seems to have no such intention, otherwise the Torah would say so, as it does with regard to Re'uvein. Re'uvein seems concerned with two issues:

- 1) Yosef's safety/not committing murder.
- 2) His father's reaction to Yosef's death.

Yehuda seems concerned about only the first of these issues. He is not deterred by the thought of the pain he will cause his father by arranging Yosef's disappearance (and claiming he is dead!). He is unwilling to murder, but quite willing to get rid of the "dreamer" by selling him into Egyptian oblivion. As the story develops, we will see that Yehuda eventually becomes deeply sensitive to Ya'akov's feelings, willing to sacrifice tremendously in order to protect Ya'akov from further pain.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE:

Seforno points out (38:1) that Yehuda is paid back in *spades* for suggesting that Yosef be sold instead of trying (like Re'uvein) to foil the other brothers' plans and return Yosef to his father. Because he does not consider the effect on his father of the disappearance/"death" of Yosef, Ya'akov's favorite son, two of his own sons -- Er and Onan -- die.

Of course, there are independent reasons for the deaths of Er and Onan, Yehuda's sons: the Torah says that Er dies because he is "evil in the eyes of God," while Onan, who marries Tamar, his brother's widow, dies because he refuses to have children with Tamar (and instead "destroys his seed"), knowing that any children he might have with her would be considered (in some way) his brother's children. As we have seen several times, whenever someone suffers a punishment, there should be a reason why that person himself deserves to be punished. And in this case, Er and Onan deserve punishment for their own misdeeds. But Yehuda, their father, also apparently deserves to suffer the death of his children for his insensitivity to Ya'akov's pain in losing Yosef, his child. By the end of this story, however, we will see that this weakness becomes one of Yehuda's greatest strengths.

[The other brothers, of course, may also suffer punishments for their roles in the sale, but we do not hear about them. The Torah focuses on filling in the sketches of the major figures, such as Yehuda, Yosef, and to a lesser extent, Re'uvein.]

After selling Yosef and dipping his royal cloak (see last week's shiur) in blood, the brothers return to Ya'akov, who concludes that Yosef is dead and slips deep into mourning for his son.

YEHUDA AND TAMAR:

The Torah then takes a sudden turn into the private life of Yehuda and spends a whole perek (chapter) in his world:

BERESHIT 38:1-2 --

It happened, at that time, that Yehuda went down from among his brothers and turned to an Adulamite man, whose name was Hira. Yehuda saw there the daughter of a Cana'ani [traveling merchant(?) -- see mefarshim] whose name was Shu'a; he took her [married her] and came to her.

Bat Shu'a, as she is later called by the Torah, bears three sons to Yehuda: Er, Onan, and Shayla. Yehuda marries off his son Er to a woman named Tamar; when Er dies, Yehuda marries off Onan, his second son, to Tamar. When Onan dies as well, Yehuda balks at offering his last son to her, fearing that he too will die. Yehuda puts Tamar off by telling her to wait until Shayla grows up.

Tamar patiently waits as Shayla grows older, but when Yehuda still does not offer his son to her, she takes matters into her own hands. Dressing as a prostitute (in those days, prostitutes covered their faces -- see mefarshim -- so Yehuda does not recognize her as his daughter-in-law), she positions herself on a road she knows is in Yehuda's path. Yehuda eventually arrives, thinks her a prostitute, arranges to leave collateral with her as guarantee for later payment, avails himself of her services, and goes on his way. Later, when he sends a friend to deliver payment, the "prostitute" is nowhere to be found. [I know some may find the term "prostitute" indelicate, but the words used by the Torah here are "zona" and "kedeisha," translated by the Artscroll Stone Chumash (certainly a modest-minded translation) as "prostitute" and "harlot."]

Three months later, Tamar's pregnancy (the result of her rendezvous with Yehuda) becomes apparent. Yehuda is told of her pregnancy and condemns her to death for adultery (she is technically still "married" to Yehuda's family as the widow of Er and Onan), but when she produces the collateral which is unmistakably his, he admits -- publicly -- that he is the father. Tamar is saved, but everyone finds out that Yehuda was intimate with her thinking she was a prostitute.

What is the lesson of this *very* strange story? Comparing it to a similar story involving a famous direct male-line descendant of Yehuda may illuminate the matter:

NATAN TELLS DAVID HA-MELEKH A STORY:

David, crowned by God, has a friend named Hiram, who is king of a neighboring kingdom (see Shmuel II:5:11 and Melakhim I:5:15); note that the name "Hiram" is curiously similar to the name of Yehuda's friend, "Hira," mentioned above.

One day, David sees a woman named "Bat Sheva" -- a name curiously similar to "Bat Shu'a," the name of Yehuda's wife -- and David desires her and takes her although she is married. David sends her husband Uria off to the front lines of battle to be killed. But then God sends Natan (the prophet) to David to rebuke him for what he has done. Natan traps David into condemning himself:

SHMUEL II:12 --

God sent Natan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a city, one rich and one poor. The rich one had a great number of sheep and cattle, but the poor one had nothing but one little lamb he had bought and kept alive. It grew up with him and his sons together, ate from his bread, drank from his cup, lay in his lap, and was like a daughter to him. A traveler came to [visit] the rich man; [the rich man] pitied his own sheep and cattle too much to make one of them [into a meal] for his visitor, so he took the lamb of the poor man and made it [into a meal] for his guest!"

David became furious at this [rich] man and said to Natan, "By the life of God, the man who did this deserves to die! He shall pay for the lamb four times over, for doing this thing and for not having mercy!"

Natan said to David, "YOU are the [rich] man! So says God, Lord of Yisrael: 'I anointed you king over Yisrael and saved you from Sha'ul. I gave you the house of your master . . . Why have you desecrated the word of God, doing evil in My eyes? You have stricken Uria the Hiti with a sword and taken his wife as your wife; you killed him with the sword of the children of Ammon . . . You acted in secret, but I will [punish you] before all of Israel, before the sun!"

David said, "I have sinned to God."

Natan said to David, "God has forgiven you; you will not die. But . . . the son who is born [from your union with Bat Sheva] will die."

OK. Let us now compare these stories:

YEHUDA

DAVID

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Has a friend named "Hira." | 1) Has a friend named "Hiram." |
| 2) Marries "Bat Shu'a" | 2) Marries a woman named "Bat Sheva." |
| 3) Sexual "irregularity." | 3) Sexual "irregularity." |
| 4) Unknowingly condemns innocent to death. | 4) Unknowingly condemns self to death, while he himself is truly responsible. |
| 5) Commits secret unworthy act. | 5) Commits secret unworthy act. |
| 6) Admits publicly. | 6) Admits publicly. |
| 7) Sons die to punish faked slaughter of favorite son | 7) Son dies to punish slaughter of poor man's only lamb. |

Of course, as mentioned, Yehuda is also David's great grandfather!

[Many like to point out that Rav Shmuel b. Nahmeini -- Shabbat 56a -- 'reinterprets' David's actions and claims that he did not actually sin in taking Bat Sheva and having Uria killed. But if you keep reading the Gemara there, Rav, the Amora, responds that R. Shmuel b. Nahmeini is saying this only because he himself is descended from David! Other views in Hazal go so far as to claim that David not only took a married woman, but that he raped her as well (Ketubot 9a). It is important to keep in mind that there are often multiple opinions on such matters within Hazal, and certainly among later commentators. We attempt in these shiurim to follow "peshat" as closely as possible, as discussed in this forum on several occasions.]

"THE STING":

The central pattern repeated in the stories of both Yehuda and David HaMelekh is the "sting," as it were. In the case of David, the "sting" strategy is clear: Natan is sent by God to arouse David's fury at the "rich man." When his anger is in full bloom, his outrage at the cruel, unfeeling "rich man" at its indignant apex, Natan's mission is to utterly puncture David's righteous anger by telling him that *he* is the "rich man"! This "sting," which draws David in and then makes him the target of his own condemnation, is so psychologically devastating that David Ha-Melekh can respond with only two words: "Hatati LaShem" -- "I have sinned to God." He offers no arguments, excuses, explanations, mitigations -- only a humble, simple admission of guilt before God. Would that we could admit mistakes with such pure contrition!

This admission of sin is the cornerstone of teshuva. This is clear not only from Natan's reaction to David's admission --

that David has been forgiven and will not actually die -- but also from the famous Rambam [Maimonides] in Hilkhot Teshuva [Laws of Repentance] (1:1), where the Rambam says that "when a person repents, he must admit the sin . . . admitting the sin is a positive obligation (mitzvah asei)." Many have pointed out that according to the Rambam's formulation, the mitzvah appears to be the *viduy,* the *admission* of sin, not the repentance itself! Recognizing sin and articulating that recognition are not only halakhically necessary for teshuva, but can also be transforming, psychologically and religiously (but perhaps not if performed in robot-like, emotionless vocalization of the "Al het" prayer in the Yom Kippur tefilot or mindless chest-beating in the daily "Selakh lanu").

Most people intuitively understand this halakha of viduy -- just look at how hard it usually is for people to admit they have done something wrong. Once we can admit it (even privately), it's "out there" psychologically, and repentance can move forward.

Yehuda, too, walks into a "sting." After his intimacy with the unknown prostitute (really Tamar), he goes on his way. But when he tries to send payment to her for her service (and collect the important personal collateral he has left with her), she is nowhere to be found. About three months later, Tamar begins to show signs of pregnancy:

BERESHIT 38:24 –

It happened, after about three months, that it was told to Yehuda, saying, "Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has committed adultery, and is also pregnant from adultery!" Yehuda said, "Take her out and let her be burned [to death]!"

Why is Yehuda involved in passing judgment on Tamar? Most of us assume that Yehuda is consulted either because he is a judge or, as some mefarshim (commentators) explain, because the custom was that the husband of an unfaithful woman [in those times, a widow like Tamar was considered betrothed in potential to the remaining brothers of her deceased husband or to the other men of the family, including Yehuda himself] had the prerogative of deciding whether she should live or die.

But there is one other reason that Yehuda must be consulted: the implicit question the people are asking him when they tell him that Tamar is pregnant is, "Could it be that you are responsible for her pregnancy, and therefore she has not committed adultery and does not deserve to die?" Yehuda's response -- "Take her out and let her be burned!" -- is a clear answer in the negative: "I am not responsible for her pregnancy." Like David, he walks into the "sting" by condemning someone to death, where in truth he himself is responsible.

Before long, the condemned Tamar sends Yehuda the message that the owner of the collateral she holds is also the father of the fetus. Yehuda recognizes the collateral as his own belongings, and he must now "eat his words" -- *he* is the guilty party, not Tamar, whom he had just condemned to death. Like David, his words are few, but in them he recognizes that Tamar is innocent of adultery and that she acted justifiably in response to his cruel refusal to marry her to his son.

Implicit also is the admission that he thought she was a prostitute when he was intimate with her, surely a great embarrassment to him. We can only imagine the depth of Yehuda's mortification when he sees the collateral -- his own signet ring, his staff, and his "petil" [whatever that is, which is not clear] -- and realizes that he must either remain silent and watch the innocent Tamar die, or admit to the entire community what he has done. He could remain silent -- perhaps many people would -- but instead he endures the shame of retracting the confident, terse verdict, "Take her out and let her be burned," and announces that she is right and he is wrong.

"YEHUDA": A DOUBLE MEANING:

Yehuda's power of teshuva, his strength of admitting his mistakes, is actually hinted by his name. Back in Parashat VaYetze, Yehuda's mother, Le'ah, names him "Yehuda" as an expression of thanks to God: the "yud" and "heh" ["yah"] stand for God, and the "heh," "vav," and "dalet" ["hod"] -- mean "glory" or "thanks/praise"; putting the two together ["yah" + "hod" = "Yehuda"] yields "Glory to God!" or "Thanks to God!"

But "hod" also means "to admit." The word "hoda'a," for example, means both "thanks/praise" and "admission." The word "viduy," the process of admitting sin, comes from the same root, as does the word "Toda," meaning "Thanks!" The reason "hod" includes both glorifying/thanking and admitting is because, in a way, thanking is also admitting that someone has done something for us and that we are beholden (or, vice versa, because admitting something gives glory to the recipient of the admission). This is what we mean in Shemoneh Esrei when we say the berakha of "Modim," which also comes from

the same root as "Yehuda," "hod," and "viduy." Yehuda, then, means both "Thanks to God" and also "The one who admits [wrongdoing] before God."

This power of Yehuda's, the strength to admit he has done wrong, is later recognized by Ya'akov in his blessing to Yehuda among the blessings he gives to all of his sons in Parashat VaYehi:

BERESHIT 49:8-9 --

"Yehuda, your brothers shall defer to you/praise you ["yodukha"]; your hand is on the scruff of your enemy's neck, and your father's sons shall bow to you. A young lion is Yehuda; from tearing ["teref"], my son, you arose"

"Yodukha" -- "admit [to] you" -- means that the other brothers will admit that he is their leader, and, as Ya'akov goes on to explain, that they will bow to him. Because Yehuda has the power to recognize the truth of his own misdeed and admit it -- even when the truth is deeply embarrassing or uncomfortable -- his brothers will recognize his leadership and "admit" that he is their leader (see Rashbam and Radak, 49:9).

Ya'akov's blessing also hints one other thing: Ya'akov is recognizing that although Yehuda was involved in "teref," "tearing [prey]," he has "arisen" from that event. Remember that when Ya'akov is tricked into believing that Yosef has been killed by a wild animal, he cries out, "tarof taraf Yosef" -- "Yosef has been torn apart!", using the same word -- "teref" -- as he later uses in this berakha. Yehuda was deeply involved in that "teref" -- the plan to sell Yosef was his -- but Ya'akov's blessing at the end of Sefer Bereshit recognizes that Yehuda "arose" after that event. In other words, the "teref" was a low point in Yehuda's career, but he "arose" from that low point to become the leader of all of the brothers.

Now, we move to Parashat Mikketz to see how Yehuda "arose" from the "teref" to assume leadership of the family.

YEHUDA TAKES RESPONSIBILITY:

As the seven years of plenty come to an end and the seven years of famine begin, Egypt and all of its neighbors begin to starve. Yosef responds by opening Egypt's storehouses and selling food to the people, but the neighboring countries, not blessed with a "Yosef" and his divinely inspired prescience, can only turn to Egypt for relief. Included among the seekers of sustenance is Ya'akov's family. All of the brothers go down to Egypt for food except Binyamin, who is kept home by his father. Ya'akov fears that if he lets Binyamin go, he may never see him again (like Yosef).

When the brothers arrive in Egypt and appear before Yosef, he immediately recognizes them and accuses them of spying (recall that his spying on them was one of the reasons the brothers hated Yosef!). Yosef demands that they prove their story is true by bringing their younger brother down to Egypt. When the brothers return to Ya'akov and tell him the story, he refuses to permit Binyamin to go to Egypt, for fear that he will be somehow harmed, as Yosef was.

Re'uvein attempts to change Ya'akov's mind by guaranteeing Binyamin's safety:

BERESHIT 42:37 --

Re'uvein said to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him [Binyamin] back to you! Give him into my hands, and I will return him to you."

Ya'akov does not accept this offer, and refuses to allow Binyamin to leave. Why?

Some mefarshim (Rashi, Radak, etc.) cite Hazal's explanation: Hazal refer to Re'uvein as a "bekhor shoteh," a "foolish firstborn." Ya'akov does not actually respond to Re'uvein's guarantee, but Hazal say that he is thinking, "You fool! Are your sons not also my GRANDSONS? Your loss would also be my loss!" But the Ramban offers another explanation: Ya'akov does not *trust* Re'uvein because 1) he does not have the respect of the other brothers, as Yehuda does, and 2) Re'uvein has already shown disloyalty to his father by sleeping with Bilha, his father's wife.

We can add that Ya'akov does not trust Re'uvein's guarantee because the guarantee itself shows that his judgment is seriously flawed: how can he guarantee the safety of one person by threatening the safety of two others!? In addition, the extreme consequences Re'uvein agrees to suffer for failing his mission are tremendously overblown -- the death of his two sons! He offers this guarantee to convince Ya'akov how serious he is, but he only succeeds in convincing Ya'akov that he

is either unstable or untrustworthy.

Time passes and the family begins to run out of food. Ya'akov commands his sons to return to Egypt for food, but Yehuda patiently responds that they can return to Egypt only with Binyamin. Of course, Ya'akov has not forgotten that this was the condition that the Egyptian ruler had set for their return. But in his great reluctance to send Binyamin with them, he hides for a moment from reality. He knows his sons will remind him of the necessity of taking Binyamin with them, but for Ya'akov, life has become a nightmare, and for a moment, he tries to ignore one particularly unpleasant aspect of it. Ya'akov may also hope to provoke one of his sons to offer a guarantee of safe passage for Binyamin which he can trust more than the guarantee offered by Re'uvein. In this, he succeeds.

Yehuda is the one who reminds Ya'akov of reality, patiently repeating what he knows his father knows: that they must take Binyamin. Ya'akov protests further, and eventually, Yehuda offers Ya'akov a guarantee:

BERESHIT 43:9 --

"I will take responsibility for him -- seek him from my hands. If I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, I will have sinned to you for all time."

Yehuda offers no fireworks: no "kill my sons" or "cut out my tongue" or anything like that. He simply and reasonably promises to take care of Binyamin: he provides consequences which sound unpleasant enough that Ya'akov believes that Yehuda will make great efforts to avoid failure, but not so unpleasant ("kill my sons") that Ya'akov will either think he is not serious or that his judgment is impaired and that he is incapable of the mission he undertakes.

YEHUDA "BECOMES" YA'AKOV:

Yehuda now begins to take over the role of leadership from his father. He shows leadership in bringing his father back to reality and in taking responsibility for Binyamin. But on a deeper level, he also shows deep concern for Ya'akov's paternal fears and feelings. Instead of guaranteeing Binyamin's safety by putting himself at risk ("I will have sinned to you for all time"), he could easily have said harshly, "Look, we will all die unless you agree to let Binyamin go with us! Don't you realize that we are all now in danger of dying of hunger? How can you talk about what *might* happen to one of your sons when it is clear that unless you let him go with us, *all* of us will die!" Instead, Yehuda puts himself at risk and offers a guarantee -- all in order to ease his father's fears. In next week's parasha, we see that when Yosef insists on imprisoning Binyamin, Yehuda is willing to go to prison for as long as necessary in order to deliver on this commitment -- in order to protect his father from the pain of having Binyamin disappear.

This is not the same Yehuda as the one who suggested selling Yosef to the passing caravan! This is the Yehuda who has "arisen" from the "teref" of Yosef!

Another famous Rambam (based on Yoma 86b):

LAWS OF TESHUVA 2:1 --

"What is COMPLETE TESHUVA? When another opportunity comes to do the same sin, and he is capable of doing it, and he does not do it, because he has repented -- not because of fear or weakness."

In a sense, Yehuda's acquisition of deep sensitivity to Ya'akov's feelings is a process in which he *becomes* Ya'akov himself. Long ago (in Parashat VaYeitzei), Ya'akov took his family and flocks and ran away from Lavan without telling him. Lavan pursued him, and, when he caught up with Ya'akov, accused him of stealing his gods. Ya'akov allowed Lavan to search his belongings, and when Lavan found nothing, Ya'akov became furious:

BERESHIT 31:38-39 --

"It is now twenty years that I have been with you -- your sheep and goats never lost their young ["shikeilu"], and your rams I did not consume. I never brought to you a "tereifa" [torn-up animal] -- I blamed myself for it, and you sought it from my hands, whether stolen from me during day or night."

Let us focus on three elements of Ya'akov's testimony to his great self-sacrifice and honesty as Lavan's shepherd:

1) The lack of "shikul" -- "shikul" means, literally, that a parent suffers the death of one of its children. Ya'akov is claiming that none of the sheep ever had its lamb die under his care (except, as he goes on to say, animals attacked by predators ("tereifa")).

2) He never brought a "tereifa" to Lavan, the owner -- he absorbed the cost himself.

3) "Anokhi ahatena" -- "I would blame myself for it", i.e., I considered the loss to be my responsibility, and "mi-yadi tevakshena" -- "you would seek [payment] from my hands."

A careful look at the Ya'akov of VaYeshev and Mikketz shows that he seems to suffer exactly the things from which he protected Lavan and his flocks:

1) "Tereifa" is indeed brought to him -- "Tarof taraf Yosef!", he concludes in horror when shown Yosef's bloody cloak.

2) He is "shakul" -- when the brothers return from Egypt after their first trip, and Shimon is not with them because Yosef is holding him hostage, Ya'akov complains, "Oti shikaltem!" -- "You have made me 'shakul,' you have made me a parent who has lost his children" -- "Yosef einenu, ve-Shimon einenu, ve-et Binyamin tikahu . . ." -- "Yosef is gone, and Shimon is gone, and [now] you will take Binyamin as well . . ."

But then Yehuda steps in, and by reversing these two tragedies, he rises to greatness and emulates Ya'akov, who so carefully avoided causing "teref" and "shikul" so long ago:

1) In his berakha to Yehuda at the end of Sefer Bereishit, Ya'akov himself acknowledges that Yehuda has arisen from the "teref" -- like Ya'akov himself, Yehuda takes responsibility for his brother (and his father's feelings) the second time around; he now upholds "tereifa lo heiveiti eilekha" -- like Ya'akov, he no longer brings "tereifa" home to show the master. He promises to return Binyamin home safely.

2) Yehuda prevents the "shikul" that Ya'akov fears (the death or disappearance of Binyamin) by guaranteeing Binyamin's safety and offering to be imprisoned instead of Binyamin.

3) When he guarantees Binyamin's safe return to Ya'akov, he uses almost the same words as Ya'akov did when describing how he took personal responsibility for Lavan's sheep!

Yehuda: "Anokhi e'ervenu, mi-yadi te-vakshenu."

Ya'akov: "Anokhi ahatena, mi-yadi te-vakshena."

Additionally, Yehuda promises that if he fails in his mission to return Binyamin, "ve-hatati lekha kol ha-yamim," paralleling Ya'akov's "ahatena" -- both accept blame for failure ["het"] as their personal responsibility.

Next week, as we discuss Yosef's manipulation of the brothers, we will also look at Yehuda's emotional speech to Yosef, which is what finally forces Yosef to reveal himself.

Shabbat shalom