

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

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Rosh Hodesh Tevet Shabbat & Sunday Dec. 20-21

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

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

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of our living hostages and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

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Miketz and the struggles of Yosef and his brothers always come during the darkest time of the year, close to the winter Solstice and some of the coldest days of the year. One interpretation of Sefer Bereshis is that it focuses on generations of conflicts of brothers versus brothers, conflicts that lead to fratricide, expulsion of some unfavored brothers, selling Yosef to be a slave in a foreign land, and conflicts among cousins (especially descendants of Yishmael versus Yitzhak and Esav versus Yaakov). As descendants of brothers evolve into Arabs, Romans, and Jews, the conflicts among these religions dominate long periods of history.

The struggles of Yosef and his brothers really involve Yosef (older son of Rachel) versus Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Yisachar, and Zebulun (the sons of Leah). The sons of the handmaids take a much lesser role in Bereshis (as do Leah's youngest sons, Yisachar and Zebulun, and Yosef's younger brother Benyamin). When Paro orders Yosef brought to him after ten years in prison, Yosef is smart enough to credit Hashem for any insights into dreams or future famines – and to impress upon Paro that he would let Paro take credit for anything that he did to guide the country wisely. (For more on this point, see the pieces below by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer and Rabbi Haim Ovadia.)

One theme of the struggle of Jews versus Arabs and Christians is Anti-Semitism. While an early Paro gave Hagar to Avraham and Sara to be her servant, Hagar resents her role, ridicules Sara for her inability to become pregnant. Hagar also delights in the message from Hashem that Yishmael and his descendants will be warriors, figures for other nations to hate, and villains wherever they settle. Hagar shows the kind of anti-Semitism that Yishmael's descendants later show to many generations of Jews.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings the struggles of brothers and cousins forward to later periods of Jewish history. He focuses on "Maos Tzur," which we sing each evening after lighting the Hanukkah candles. Rabbi Brander reminds us that the various paragraphs cover the Exodus, redemption from the Babylonian exile, Purim, Hanukkah, and spiritual strength to face later struggles. Maos Tzur has become a spiritual promise for numerous generations of Jews, including during the Holocaust and among hostages in Gaza (many of whom the Nazis and Hamas later murdered).

Rav Kook observes that the single container of pure olive oil represents a kernel of pure faith in the depths of the Jewish soul, to guard against the worst of Greek culture. While we can learn from Greek intelligence and philosophy, Jews must reject Greek gluttony and focus on intimate physical features. Rather, we celebrate the miracle of Hanukkah with spiritual

rituals – not with feasts. Even non-Jews can appreciate the miracle of Hanukkah. As the post from World Mizrachi observes, students at the West Point Academy study Yehuda Maccabi alongside ancient kings and military leaders of ancient times.

My Jewish education years ago missed the spiritual insights that these Devrei Torah highlight. When secular Jews think of Hanukkah as celebrating a military victory, they also miss the deeper meaning of the holiday. Hanukkah shows how a small spark can generate deep channels of Jewish faith, and this spiritual foundation continues to inspire Jews today – as it has so frequently in history and in our times. May we ensure that our children and grandchildren learn this message from us and do not miss the key to the holiday by focusing on secular aspects.

Shabbat Shalom. Hanukkah Samaich. Hodesh Tov.

Hannah and Alan

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

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, 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; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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.**

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### **Parshat Miketz/Chanukah: Shabbat Chanukah: Maoz Tzur and Spiritual Resistance – From Gaza to Sydney**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \*  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

*This week's OTS for You has been dedicated in loving memory of צפורה דבורה בת מעשֵׁל on her 7th Yartzheit*

Dedication for Rabbi Brander's Dvar Torah: **Dedicated to the victims of the horrific antisemitic attack on the first night of Chanukah in Bondi Beach, Australia. As reflected in the article below, their deaths tragically connect our generation to the enduring story of faith, resilience, and spiritual resistance expressed in Maoz Tzur. May their memories be a blessing, and may all those wounded merit a refuah shleimah.**

Deep in a dark tunnel under Gaza two years ago, a group of six Israeli hostages lit Chanukah candles and sang Maoz Tzur. Watching this unbelievable scene unfold on a recently released video, recovered in Gaza by the Israeli military, is the strongest example I have seen of how this prayer Maoz Tzur represents the spiritual strength of the Jewish people during times of challenge. Viewed now, knowing that just eight months after this scene was filmed that these six hostages would be murdered in captivity, these scenes are as heartbreaking as they are inspiring. Just three days after these videos moved the Jewish world, at least 15 Jews were gunned down at a Chanukah party on Australia's Bondi Beach, including Chabad shlichim Rabbi Eli Schlanger zt"l and Rabbi Yaakov Levitin zt,l , darkening the world before the sun even set to usher in the first night's candle lighting. Still, millions of Jews went on to light candles around the world and sing Maoz Tzur. These six hostages, Hersh Goldberg Polin, Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Almog Sarusi, Or Danino and Alex

Lubanov, along with the victims of the massacre in Australia – and all of the grief and fear we face as Jews – is likely on all of our minds as we light our Chanukah candles each night.

With its repeated formula of adversity and salvation, Maoz Tzur is more than a Chanukah song; it is an anthem of Jewish resilience throughout history. While the identity of its author remains unknown, the acrostic formed by the first letter of its first five stanzas spells “Mordechai,” presumed to be his name. The sixth and final paragraph is a later addition to the poem, likely composed before 1250, toward the end of the Crusader period. At least twenty-seven tunes have been composed to this hymn of spiritual fortitude, attesting to its centrality in Jewish identity. This song brought the holiday of Chanukah to life throughout the generations. It gave strength to our people in their darkest hours of distress, and it continues to echo in our reality today. The first stanza of Maoz Tzur expresses our trust in God as a savior and anchor in turbulent times. The second recalls the miracle of the Exodus, the third, the redemption of the Jewish people after seventy years of Babylonian exile; and the fourth recounts the drama of Purim. The fifth stanza is the only one centered on Chanukah – detailing the threats and destruction wrought by Antiochus and the Greeks, and the miraculous divine salvation of the weak from the strong, symbolized by the small jar of olive oil. The meta-narrative running through the song is that Chanukah is but one example within a broader arc of crisis and redemption. Our unshaking commitment to God, and the spiritual strength we maintain even in times of trouble, forms a larger Jewish story, symbolized by this holiday, but manifested across centuries and places.

The final stanza of Maoz Tzur takes the form of a prayer for ultimate redemption, but its immediate focus is on the threat posed to the Jews in the Middle Ages by Christian rulers and societies. Some scholars have suggested that the adversary “Admon” mentioned at the song’s close might be a veiled reference to Frederick Barbarossa (i.e., Red-Beard), the Roman Emperor around the time of the poem’s composition. The vision of the “seven shepherds” at the song’s conclusion is a reference to a prophecy of Micha 5:4, interpreted by the Talmud (Sukkah 52b) as describing the great leaders and progenitors of Jewish and human civilization throughout history who stood up for justice and holiness even in the face of adversity and oppression.

The Jewish dynamic of spiritual resistance and faith-based resilience, of course, continued long after the Middle Ages. Dr. Yaffa Eliach, a noted scholar of the Shoah, recounts in *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* about how Jews lit Chanukah “candles” in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp using an inmate’s wooden clog as a menorah, strings pulled from a camp uniform for wicks, and black shoe polish for oil. Even as countless Jews were being murdered every day, the camps’ inmates, living skeletons, nevertheless assembled to perform the mitzvah. So many inmates crowded to witness the lighting that the Bluzhever Rebbe made a point of reciting the celebratory third blessing – shehechiyanu. When questioned how such a blessing could be recited in the concentration camp, he pointed to the spiritual resistance of hundreds of Jews around him choosing faith, even in the midst of unimaginable darkness.

In the same vein, Ralph Melnick, in his article “Our Own Deeper Joy, Spiritual Resistance after the Holocaust,” testifies how thousands of women in Auschwitz defiantly sang Maoz Tzur on Chanukah, affirming their faith that the Almighty, with His outstretched arm, would ultimately redeem his people and avenge their innocent blood. These stories, and many, many others, including the hostages in Gaza, who managed to sing and light candles, show how even thousands of years after the events of Chanukah, Jews continued to engage in amazing acts of faith and spiritual fortitude, continuing to set their sights on redemption and salvation even at the lowest nadirs of human suffering.

We, in our own generation, continue the inspiring Chanukah tradition of channeling spiritual strength to overcome terrible challenges. In the wake of October 7th and the difficult war that followed, we have held fast to our faith in God and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. Communities facing antisemitism in the Diaspora continue to display their lights in public. Our soldiers have held their heads high while lighting candles and reciting Maoz Tzur in the ruins of Gaza, in the brush and mires of Lebanon, at the top of the Hermon ridges overlooking a troubled Syria. Uncertainty and fear will remain part of our reality, but the light of our faith will not flicker or fail. And with God’s help, we will continue to spread the light of Torah and the message of Chanukah throughout a world that, one day, will be stronger, safer, and better.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Ohr Torah Stone is 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@otsny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-chanukah-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

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## **Drasha: Miketz: What You See & What You Get**

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1996

Almost every year on the week of Chanukah, Parshas Miketz is read. It contains the story of Yoseph, the viceroy of Egypt, who greet his brothers and accuses them of spying,. This story is read annually on Chanukah. There must be a connection between the story of Miketz and the Chanukah story. What is it?

This week the Torah relates how a famine plagued the entire Middle East. Yaakov's children elected to go to the only country that was spared from hunger, Egypt. Through the brilliant vision, organization, and planning of a young Hebrew slave known to Egyptians as Tzafnat Paneach, that country fed both itself and the world. The brothers were ushered into the prodigal viceroy's chambers. He acted towards them like a total meshuganah. He accused them of a heinous plot to spy on Egypt. He incarcerated Shimon, and forced them to bring their youngest brother, the orphaned child of an aged father, to him. Yoseph surely wanted to teach a lesson to the brothers who sold him. But if Yoseph wanted to castigate or punish his brothers for selling him, why didn't he do so openly and directly? Why the senseless charade?

Chanukah is symbolized by the Menorah. It represents a miracle. A small amount of oil, enough for one day, lasted for eight. But there were greater miracles. A small army of Kohanim, priests who were previously involved in only spirituality and had very little experience in battle, defeated the Greek army. Why don't we make a parade or a feast to celebrate a major victory? Why is the main commemoration over a little oil?

**In a small village lived a poor groom. Unable to afford a proper tailor to make a wedding suit, he brought material to a second-rate one. The poor boy was shocked to see the results.**

**“But this sleeve is six inches too short,” he cried. “So pull in your arm,” smiled the tailor. “But the other sleeve is a half a foot too long!” “So extend it,” beamed the so-called craftsmen. “And the pants,” screamed the groom, “the left leg is twisted!” “Oh that’s nothing. Just hop down the aisle with your knee slightly bent!”**

**At the wedding, the assembled reeled in horror as the poor groom hobbled down the aisle with his new suit. “What a grotesquely disfigured young man,” gasped one guest. “Oy! Ah rachmunis (pity) on his poor bride,” sighed another. The spectators looked once again at the pathetic sight and noticed how well the suit appeared to fit. In unison they all exclaimed. “But his tailor — what an extraordinary genius!”**

My grandfather, Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky of blessed memory, explained to me that Yoseph had a very important message to send his brothers.

*“More than a decade ago you sat in judgment. You thought you made a brilliant decision and were smarter than anyone else, including your father. You decided to sell me as a slave. Now you meet the most brilliant saviour of the generation, the man who saved the world from starvation, and he is acting like a paranoid maniac. He is accusing you of something that is so hallucinatory that you think he is a madman. Is it not possible to think that perhaps you also made a gross error in judgment? Is it not possible that you saw a situation in a twisted light? Is it the boy or is it the suit that is actually grotesque?”*

Yoseph showed his brothers that even the best and brightest can misinterpret any situation.

Chanukah delivers a very similar message. The sages were not interested in commemorating a battlefield victory. They had a more powerful message for us. Nothing in this world can be judged at face value. A bit of oil that decidedly can only last one day — may last much longer. They want us to remember that outward appearances, as the opinions of pundits, have no bearing on reality. When that message is understood, it is easy to understand that a small army of Kohanim (priests) can topple a mighty force. We can understand that what we view as weak may be strong and what we thought was insufficient is actually plenty. And that a little bit of oil, like a pesky younger brother, both of whom you thought would not amount to anything, can really light the way.

Good Shabbos and a Freilichin Chanukah!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5756-miketz/>

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## Piety and Power – A Combustible Mix

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

The gemara asks, *“What is Chanukah?”* (Tractate Shabbat, 21b). The answer given is well known: the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days. But according to Maharal, this answer makes no sense (*Hidushei Aggadot*, ad loc.). First, since when do we have holidays to celebrate miracles? Holidays celebrate days of national/religious significance – exodus, revelation, salvation – not miracles for their own sake. Moreover, the *Al Ha’nissim* prayer, the single recognition of Chanukah in the liturgy, makes no mention of the miracle of oil. Instead, it focuses on the victory against the Seleucid Greeks and the rededication of the Temple. This leads Maharal to question the very point of the miracle of oil. An examination of parashat Miketz will help to answer his question.

Parashat Miketz presents us with two very different personalities: Yosef and Yehudah. Yosef is known by the Rabbis as *Yosef Ha’Tzaddik*, Yosef the Righteous. He is always thinking and talking about God. He cannot sleep with Potiphar’s wife because it would be a sin to God. When he works for Potiphar, *“his master saw that God was with him, and all that he did, God brought success at his hands”* (Breishit, 39:3). The Rabbis explain that Potiphar saw that Yosef’s success was due to God since *“the name of God was constantly on his lips.”* His master would say, *“Yosef, great job!”* And Yosef would respond, *“Baruch HaShem.”* His master would say, *“Yosef, good work today,”* and Yosef would say, *“Baruch HaShem.”*

Yosef sees God working through him; he sees God in all things. Yosef is captivated by his dreams not because they augur his future greatness, but because they are a message from God. God was communicating; how could he not be enraptured? Yosef tells first the wine steward and the baker, and later Pharaoh himself, that the true interpretation of the dreams belongs not to him, but to God. Tell me your dreams, says Yosef, and God will provide the interpretation through me.

There is tremendous religious power in constantly seeing God in the world and always giving God credit for one’s good fortune and accomplishments. This worldview allows Yosef to console his brothers and to tell them not to blame themselves too much for what has happened: *“Behold you did not send me here, but God”* (45:8). But there is also a danger in this approach. If God is the author of all events, what happens to human responsibility? Were the brothers really blameless for selling Yosef into slavery? However much Yosef’s descent into Egypt was part of the divine plan, this does not exonerate the brothers for their actions and their choices. God must be given credit, but in so doing, one cannot relinquish one’s own – or another’s – responsibility.

Yehudah is the opposite of Yosef. Yehudah never talks about God; he is all about personal responsibility. He had the courage to stand up and say, *“I did it.”* He comes forward at the critical moment and admits that it was he who slept with Tamar. And when the other brothers fail, he alone is able to convince his father to send Binyamin down with them to Egypt. Why? Because he is ready to put himself on the line: *“I will be a surety for him; of my hand shall you require him”* (43:9). Yehudah is saying to his father, if something goes wrong then it will not matter who was at fault or who was to

blame; I will be responsible. *"If I bring him not unto you, and set him before you, then I will bear the blame to you forever."* And Yehudah is as good as his word. At the fateful moment, it is he who steps forward willing to risk all, to give up his own freedom and become a slave to Yosef, to ensure that Binyamin may return safely to his father.

The entire story turns on that fateful encounter at the beginning of next week's parasha: *va'yigash eilav Yehudah*. The man of personal responsibility confronts the man of God. And Yehudah is triumphant. It was up to him to act and he did, and his taking of personal responsibility allowed God's plan to be realized. God works through us when we take responsibility for our own actions.

Yosef is indeed a tzaddik, but I wouldn't want a tzaddik running my business. I would want Yehudah as my CEO. And I would want Yehudah as my political leader. Indeed, it is from Yehudah that the kingly Davidic line descends. Our kings, our leaders, have to be able to say, *"The buck stops here."* But I would not want Yehudah as my spiritual leader. I would want Yosef as my spiritual guide, to remind me that no matter how much effort I expend or which choices I make, it is ultimately not *kochi v'otzem yadi*, my strength and my abilities alone, that have gotten me where I am. I need Yosef to remind me to deeply and sincerely say, *"Baruch HaShem,"* to see God as the ultimate author of all of my success and good fortune, *ki hu ha'noten likha koach la'asot chayil*.

Which takes us back to Maharal's question: Why focus on the oil? Because, says Maharal, if we only spoke about the miracle of the military victory and the dedication of the Temple, we might come to think that it was all our doing. We might fail to see God's hidden hand. **The visible miracle of the oil allowed the people to see the hidden miracle of the war, that the victory was both theirs and God's.** [emphasis added]

At the time of the Maccabees, there were those who clung to Yosef's approach alone. According to Maccabees I, the Pietists refused to take up arms and fight the Greeks, refusing even to defend themselves on Shabbat. One can imagine their reasoning: *"If God wants to save us, then let God bring about a miracle."* The Maccabees rejected this. Their way of thinking would have gone something like this: *"It is up to us. We must do what is necessary, and this is what God wants."* The Maccabees embodied the fusing of Yehudah and Yosef. They were the miracle of the war and the miracle of the oil.

This synthesis is actually part of the Al Ha'nissim prayer. Even though it only speaks of the military victory, the prayer mentions the victory of God and not the victory of the Hasmoneans. *"Ravta et riveinu, danta et dineinu,"* *"You, God, fought our battles, came to our defense."* This was the war that we fought and the miracle that You, God, brought about.

The fusion of Yosef and Yehudah can come in different forms. In one, a religious person, a Yosef, knows that he or she must show initiative and take responsibility for his or her choices, not waiting for God to control events or act through him or her. In another, a leader, a Yehudah, is able to look back on his or her accomplishments and see God's hand in all. But there is one fusion that can be dangerous and potentially destructive. This is when a Yosef is also a Yehudah, when a religious leader is invested with political power. Such a person might not just look back at his choices and thank God; he or she might make choices – choices that affect the lives of thousands if not millions of people – with the absolute and unwavering confidence that those choices are God's will. We have to look no further than Iran and ISIS for object lessons on what happens when a religious leader is also a political leader.

This, says Ramban, was the sin of the Hasmoneans (Breishit, 49:10). The kingship was the sole right of the descendants of Yehudah, but the Hasmoneans were kohanim from the tribe of Levi. Their task was to be religious leaders, not political ones: *"And they should not have reigned, but rather to have devoted themselves to the Divine worship."* Power and piety do not easily mix. True piety requires humility, and power often begets arrogance. Those with power must take personal responsibility for their choices without invoking God to justify their actions, for when the latter happens, many are bound to suffer as a result. Our response to our own choices should not be *"because God has told me so,"* but rather, *"anokhi e'erenu,"* *"I am taking full responsibility, right or wrong."* Our response to our successes, however, must be *"Baruch HaShem."* When we invoke God's name it should be, as we say on Chanukah, *"li'hodot u'lihallel li'shimkha ha'Gadol,"* to give thanks and praise to God's great name.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

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## **Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Mikketz**

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

### **Mikketz: Interpreting the Dreams of the Cupbearer and the Baker**

The Torah narrates the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker in parallel, inviting readers to compare their imagery and outcomes. Both officials "*dreamed a dream on the same night, each according to his own interpretation*" (Genesis 40:5). Yet with all their similarities, subtle distinctions guide the reader toward opposite fates.

The cupbearer sees a vine budding and flowering, its clusters ripening into grapes — a process of vitality and growth. The baker, by contrast, dreams of loaves already baked and ready for consumption. The cupbearer is active in his dream, squeezing the grapes and serving Pharaoh. The baker is entirely passive, watching as birds devour the bread from the baskets on his head. In the first vision, Pharaoh receives wine from his servant's hand; in the second, Pharaoh receives nothing at all. The contrast points toward one dream signifying renewal and restoration, the other loss and destruction.

Commentators such as Radak note that even from the imagery alone, one can infer the positive message for the cupbearer and the negative one for the baker. Yet, as Abarbanel observes, the precision of Joseph's interpretations still requires divine insight. Human observation might discern tone and trajectory, but not the exact outcome or timing. We can never fully know where human wisdom ends and divine assistance begins.

The Torah further deepens the psychological and linguistic unity of these episodes. Both the narrative and the characters present the two dreams almost as one: "*The cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt both dreamed a dream (halom) in one (ehad) night... And they said to him, 'We dreamed a dream (halom), and there is no one to interpret it (oto)*" (40:5–8). Their shared distress arises precisely because they perceive their experiences as a single, fused dream of shared destiny.

When Joseph interprets the cupbearer's vision favorably, the baker immediately follows: "*When the baker saw how tov (well) he had interpreted it, he said to Joseph...*" (40:16). Commentators differ on the meaning of tov. Sforno and Shadal understand that Joseph gave the dream a favorable interpretation; Rashbam and Hizkuni interpret tov as "correctly" — that Joseph had interpreted well. But how could the baker know that Joseph had interpreted correctly before Pharaoh's birthday revealed the result? Rashbam explains with the rabbinic maxim *nikarin divrei ha-emet* — truth is recognizable. Hizkuni adds that Joseph's confidence itself was proof: his prediction concerned an event only three days away. A charlatan would not risk such precision.

If the two officials perceived their dreams as one, they likely assumed their outcomes would be identical — either both would be reinstated or both executed. Joseph, however, recognized that although the two dreams appeared similar, they differed deeply in content and outcome.

In this sense, the story of the cupbearer and the baker mirrors and reverses Pharaoh's later experience. Pharaoh dreams two dreams but knows instinctively that they are one; his interpreters insist on dividing them (see Ramban, Abarbanel). The imprisoned officers, by contrast, experience two separate dreams but assume they are one; Joseph must teach them to distinguish between them. The divine message lies not only in the content of dreams but in the human ability — or inability — to discern unity within diversity, or multiplicity within unity.

\* Yeshiva University and National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3395>

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## **Mental Cataracts: Thoughts for Parashat Mikketz**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

I recently had cataract surgery on both eyes, and the transformation in vision has been amazing. Before the surgery, I thought I was seeing things as they were. After the surgery, I realized that only now am I actually seeing things in their true brightness and color. The cataracts had darkened my lenses so that I became accustomed to seeing things inaccurately. Once clear lenses were implanted, my world brightened considerably.

It occurred to me that we not only have to deal with cataracts on our eyes but also must confront *“mental cataracts.”* We grow accustomed to thinking in certain patterns, making assumptions, having biases...without even realizing it. It is as though our minds are colored with ideas that block us from seeing clearly. We don’t even realize that our intellectual perception may be impaired.

This week’s Parasha tells of Pharaoh’s dreams that caused him great concern. In one dream, seven thin cows ate seven fat cows. In the second dream, seven thin stalks of corn consumed seven healthy stalks. Pharaoh called his wise men and magicians but none could interpret the dreams. Why were they stumped? Although they might not have gotten all the details correctly, they could easily have realized that the dreams portended a disaster of some sort.

Perhaps these wise men and magicians had *“mental cataracts.”* They had entrenched assumptions that blocked them from seeing clearly. They were programmed not to upset Pharaoh. If Pharaoh had a few bad dreams, maybe he’ll have better dreams soon. If indeed the dreams portend a disaster, it’s best not to tell Pharaoh since he will not be pleased and may imprison or execute us if he is unhappy with our words.

Pharaoh then turned to Joseph, an imprisoned Hebrew slave. Joseph interpreted the dreams and offered a practical plan of action. He saw clearly that the dreams forewarned a famine, and he was not afraid to tell the truth to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh was amazed by Joseph’s clear thinking. While all his sages had *“mental cataracts,”* Joseph could see reality clearly. He spoke cogently and fearlessly.

Dr. Silvano Arieti, in his book *The Will to Be Human*, described what he called *“endocratic surplus.”* This refers to ideas, values, and biases that we have internalized from our parents, teachers and society at large. We adopt attitudes and behaviors without evaluating for ourselves if they are valid. We go through life assuming that we see things correctly, but we actually have *“mental cataracts,”* blockages that we don’t realize are preventing us from seeing clearly. If we are aware of the problem, we can adjust our attitudes and behaviors accordingly.

It is easier to have cataracts removed from our eyes than to eliminate *“mental cataracts”* from our minds. But proper vision — physical and intellectual — demands both operations.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. This article by Rabbi Marc D. Angel was first published in the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles, December 9, 2025.

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## Chanuka: Do You See ME?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

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

The mitzva of menorah is remarkable. Unlike the Shabbos lights which are meant to enjoy, we are forbidden to make use of the lights of the menorah. As we declare in *"Haneiros Halolu,"* the declaration associated with the menorah: We have no permission to make use of these lights. They are only to be seen.

A flame is a fascinating thing. We can use it to cook; we can benefit from its warmth; we can read and do things by its light. But a flame can also be simply observed. When we slow down and just see it, we notice that it is intrinsically beautiful.

This is true of Torah as well. We can study Torah in many functional ways. We can study Torah to observe its mitzvos, to understand Torah values, and to become greater people. But we can also study Torah because it is beautiful. When we appreciate the beauty of Torah, we come closer to Hashem.

Not long ago, I was sitting next to a young man who was learning in an advanced yeshiva and was enthusiastically describing to me what he was learning. He described how he had seven distinct approaches of how to understand the aspect of muktza known as *"Kliy Shemelachto L'Isur,"* a utensil that is typically used for a use forbidden on Shabbos (such as a hammer) but is sometimes allowed to be used on Shabbos for a permitted use (e.g. to open a coconut). I told him that I was very impressed that he had discovered seven distinct approaches to this aspect of the mitzva. I was tempted to ask him what the difference would be if we understood this mitzva one way or the other. But I realized that such a question was out of place. Right now, he was basking in the light of Torah. Torah is functional too. But right now, he was deeply immersed in Torah, and he was simply filled with joy and admiration for it.

I think this idea is true in relationships as well. People fill certain roles in our lives. There are parents, children, teachers, friends, mentors, and community helpers. Each contributes in some way to fulfil our needs. But in addition to the functional role that they fill for us, an introspective question they can all ask is, *"Do you notice me?"* Meaning, do you see me personally as a person, or do you just view me in the functional role that I fill?

A fascinating study was done in which clerks at a hotel check-in counter changed places in the middle of check-in. One clerk would start servicing the customer. Then, after getting started with the customer, the clerk would drop out of view for a moment, ostensibly to get another pen or the printout of the reservation. A different clerk would then pop up from the area behind the counter and seamlessly continue servicing the customer. Remarkably, the customers rarely noticed the change. This was true even when the clerks dressed differently, were of dramatically different heights or build, or even of different gender. It was as if, in the mind of the customers, these were not people. They were clerks, recognized only by

the role they filled. In their functional role they were all clerks; in the minds of most customers there was no noticeable switch.

In a similar observation, a teacher once placed a question on a test: *“What is the name of the janitor?”* What was interesting is that he did not put the question on the test as extra credit. The question was included for earning points towards 100%. The students objected that the question had nothing to do with the course material. But the teacher held his ground. He said, *“This is a real-life question, and you need to learn that the answer is important. The janitor is not just serving a function in this school. He is a person, with a name and with a life.”*

It seems to me that in many of our relationships we can slip into functionality and forget the beauty of the relationship itself. Parents can focus on test grades and play dates, and spouses can focus on paying bills on time and carpools. But beyond that functionality lies a person.

The lights of the menorah remind us that just as the flame can be very functional, but on Chanuka we just appreciate its beauty, so Torah is very functional but sometimes we must just enjoy its beauty. Similarly, people often serve functional roles in our lives. But they have names, likes and dislikes, and personalities that are for us to get to know. They serve their functions loyally, but sometimes they might ask: *“Did you take the time to notice ME?”*

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

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[RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

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## Mikeitz -- Audacious Audition

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2023

Parshas Mikeitz is usually read on Shabbos Chanukah, and there are many connections with Chanukah found in this parsha. Perhaps one connection could be Yosef's miraculous salvation. On Chanukah, we were under the Syrian Greek oppression. The Maccabees miraculously won their freedom and gained a certain level of independence under the Syrian Greek empire. Yosef's slavery in Egypt had gone from bad to worse when he was thrown in the royal dungeons for a crime that never occurred. One morning, he saw miraculous salvation when Pharaoh's officers came charging in, hurriedly washed and cleaned him and suddenly brought him before Pharaoh. In the span of a few hours, he went from being locked in the dungeon to being the second in command of one of the most powerful kingdoms in the world.

One of the most basic elements of Torah Judaism is that we do not rely on miracles and are responsible to put in the necessary human efforts to achieve the results we want. We see this in the story of Chanukah when the Maccabees stepped forward and began the fight to overthrow the Syrian Greek oppressors. Despite the challenges, they took action to achieve their freedom. So, too, when they regained the Beis Hamikdash and wanted to light the Menorah, they searched high and low for pure oil. They did not expect oil to miraculously appear. The miracle of the oil only took place after they had done all that was humanly possible.

We find this concept even more clearly in the story of Yosef. When Yosef was brought before Pharaoh, he must have realized that G-d was orchestrating something significant. He had been in a dungeon for ten years without seeing the light of day. Without warning, he now finds himself in audience with one of the most powerful men in the entire world. If this

alone was not enough, the Egyptians were anti-Semitic and deeply despised the Hebrew people. )See Ramba"n Bereishis 41:38( Clearly G-d was orchestrating events in Yosef's favor.

Yet, the Ramba"n tells us that Yosef seemingly ignored this clear miracle unfolding before his eyes. As he is interpreting the dreams to Pharaoh, he makes a very daring move. After explaining the dreams' message, Yosef -- the Hebrew slave from the royal dungeons -- has the audacity to offer advice to the royal court. He tells Pharaoh that he must appoint a wise and understanding individual to oversee the food collection and storage, and to appoint many officers under this individual. Why does Yosef consider it appropriate to tell Pharaoh how to go about preparing for the upcoming famine?

The Ramba"n )Bereishis 41:33( explains that Yosef was taking this risk in the hope that they would choose him for the position. Yosef was a uniquely wise and understanding individual. If he could manage to show some of the depth of his wisdom and his unique ability to oversee the collection and storage, perhaps they would consider him. He realized that this moment was his chance. Once the interpretation was done, the advisors and ministers would step in and discuss the matter. No one would care to hear Yosef's thoughts on the matter. He, therefore, seized the opportunity and spoke up while he still had the floor.

Yosef had seen G-d's Providence throughout his experience in Egypt. When he was a slave under Potifar, he was soon placed as the head of all of Potifar's staff. When he was thrown in jail, he again soon found himself running the prison. He now finds himself in the impossible reality of being a convicted slave speaking directly to Pharaoh. Yet, Yosef understood that we must still take action ourselves, even as the miracle is unfolding.

G-d obviously does not need us to do anything. He made the world, recreates it at every moment, and could recreate it however He wants. He created us for our own sake and creates an incomplete world to give us the opportunity to partner with him in moving His world forward. Every opportunity is also a responsibility. We must always do our part to move life forward. Even when miracles are unfolding around us.

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**Yosef: The Ultimate Sales Pitch  
Reading Between the Lines in Miketz**  
By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

**Questions for discussion:**

1. In verse 41:14 we read that Yosef "shaved and changed clothes." Whose initiative was it? Can it be proven from the grammar?
2. How does Pharaoh echo Yosef's language?
3. How are Yaakov and Pharaoh similar in their treatment of Yosef?
4. Why did Yosef create local and not regional granaries?
5. Why did the people turn first to Pharaoh and not to Yosef?

**MIKETZ**

Two years after Yosef correctly interpreted the dreams of the royal cupbearer and baker, Pharaoh had two disturbing dreams. He summoned all his advisors and sages but none of them provided a satisfying interpretation. The cupbearer, seeing an opportunity for reward, broke the silence regarding his criminal past and told Pharaoh of Yosef, describing him unflatteringly as a Hebrew lad, a slave of the chief executioner. By framing the information in that manner, the cupbearer hoped to be the true hero of the day and cast Yosef as nothing more than a vehicle for divine knowledge, to be used and cast aside... our story starts here:

Genesis 41:

14: Pharaoh sent personal messengers to call Yosef. They came to the pit and rushed him out, but Yosef, who has already been betrayed three times by his brothers, Potiphar's wife, and the cupbearer, knew that from now on he is on his own. He knew that if he appears in front of Pharaoh dressed in rags, the cupbearer's scheme to cast him aside will succeed, since the king will not want that moment, in which he was saved by an imprisoned slave, to be remembered. Yosef therefore made the messengers, and all of the royal court, wait while he shaved and changed his clothes. Not only he had to look sharp and presentable to the king but stripping himself of prison garb to wear decent clothes was his own closure for the time when his brothers stripped him of the garment which was the symbol of his father's love.

15: Pharaoh said to Yosef, I had a dream, but no one can offer me an interpretation. Now there is a rumor, which may not be true, that you hear a dream and are able to interpret it. 16: Yosef, sensing Pharaoh's unease in requesting his help, and the cautious phrasing of the request, and knowing that this is his only chance to redeem himself and realize his dreams, answers with a subliminal message: I am not needed here, since God Himself is taking care of Pharaoh's well-being. After Yosef neutralized the unease of the king's reliance on a lowly slave, Pharaoh tells him his dreams... ]verses 17-24[

]Ed. note: Rabbi David Fohrman, alephbeta.org, explains clearly how Yosef understood Paro's dream -- because the dream essentially repeats key information from Yosef's life in reverse order with a few key but obvious changes. See alephbeta.org for the full story.[

25: Yosef told Pharaoh; your two dreams are one. God has foretold Pharaoh what He is about to do. 26: Yosef merges the two dreams to explain that the seven good cows are seven years and the seven good stalks are seven years, they are one dream. 27: And the seven thin, bad cows which rose after them are seven years, and the seven empty, wind-beaten stalks. They will be seven years of famine. 28: This proves my point in my words to Pharaoh. God, who is concerned about Pharaoh, is showing Pharaoh what He is about to do. After establishing the idea of a close relationship between God and Pharaoh, and framing himself as a tool in God's hands, Yosef continues to offer unsolicited advice. But he wisely phrases it as a prediction, more than advice:

33: I assume that Pharaoh will now look for an intelligent and wise man, to be appointed over the Land of Egypt. 34: Pharaoh will surely appoint officials over the land, and he himself will secure provisions for Egypt during the seven years of abundance. 35: Those officials could gather all the excessive of the seven good years, which will come soon. They will guard the wheat under the supreme rule of Pharaoh. Food for the cities, the power centers of the kingdom, and thus will protect both the cities and the stability of Pharaoh's empire. 36: That food will serve as a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine which will befall Egypt and so the land will not be annihilated by the famine.

37: The presentation was well received by Pharaoh, and his servants had to follow suit. 38: Pharaoh understood very well Yosef's subliminal message. In a system full of power players and cronies, Yosef positioned himself as the best candidate for the job of top administrator. He demonstrated his intelligence and his ability to make long term plans, but at the same time hinted that he will never take credit for his actions and will always project the image of a tool in the hands of God, who is concerned with Pharaoh's well-being. Yosef was suggesting being the perfect employee, who takes care of everything but lets his boss take credit for it. He also insinuated that Pharaoh has nothing to lose since he could always blame Yosef, the lowly slave, for possible failures.

38: Pharaoh answers, echoing Yosef's priming, of course we will have to search for a candidate, but we surely will not be able to find someone like that man, a man imbued with the spirit of God, my friend and protector. 39: Turning to Yosef, Pharaoh says, now that God [my friend, protector etc. etc. etc.] has informed you all of that, there is none intelligent and wise such as you, and God knew that I will choose someone intelligent and wise. 40: You will be in charge of my palace and the sustenance for the people will be decreed by you, but remember, I sit on the throne, and I am the king.

41: Pharaoh told Yosef, see, I have appointed you ruler of Egypt. 42: Pharaoh removed his seal-ring off his hand and put it on Yosef's hand. He then personally dressed him with fine linen garments and put a golden choker on his neck. 43: He made Yosef ride in the chariot of the second-in-command, which so far has been idling as the position was unmanned. As he traveled the streets, announcers called people to bow down before him and show that he is the ruler of Egypt. 44: Pharaoh told Yosef, I am Pharaoh, but without you no one can raise as much as a foot or arm in all of the land of Egypt. In using the word word – בְּלֹעֵד – without you, Pharaoh echoed Yosef's first word to him – בְּלֹעֵד, without me. Pharaoh thus tells Yosef that he recognized his willingness to serve obediently and selflessly under the king and that this loyalty is now rewarded.

45: Pharaoh, who started taking Yaakov's place and becoming Yosef's new father figure by dressing him with precious garments and favoring him over all his other servants, completed his role as an adoptive father by naming Yosef Zafenat Paanea'h and creating for him a new family. That family is Asenat, the daughter of Potifera', the priest of On. Yosef now got out to Egypt as a ruler. This coming out is in sharp contrast to his previous ones, the time he went out of his father's house to be kidnapped, the time he came out of the pit to be sold into slavery, the time he ran out of Potiphar's house to be accused and imprisoned later, and the time he came out of prison uncertain of his future. This time he was free and independent, no longer trapped in a pit or threatened by others' jealousy. 46: Yosef was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh. He left Pharaoh's palace and traveled through Egypt, knowing that a good administrator must be hands-on, gathering data and talking to people in the field. 47: All the crops produced in the land during the seven years of abundant were consumed sparingly.

48: Yosef gathered all that was possible to spare during those seven years in Egypt, and he stored it in the cities. Yosef avoided the pitfall of communism, in which the equal distribution of resources stifles productivity and ambition, Yosef created local storage facilities. He conveyed the message that each city will rely on its local supplies, and so encouraged the citizens and farmers to save as much food as possible. 49: Yosef gathered grains as the sand on the shore. He stopped counting because it was impossible to count. 50: Two sons were born to Yosef before the first year of famine arrived, they were born to him by Asenat, the daughter of Potifera', the priest of On. 51: When Yosef's first son was born, his longing for his family and his deep pain for their betrayal came out. He called his son Menashe, saying, God has paid me for all my toil and for all the suffering I had at my father's house. 52: He called the second one Ephraim, saying, God has made me fertile in the land of my misery.

53: The seven years of abundance in the land of Egypt have ended. 54: The seven years of famine started coming as Yosef said. There was famine in all the lands, but in the land of Egypt there was bread. The Torah replaces the terms "food" and "grains," used before, with the word "bread." This is because bread for the Egyptians was associated with the temple service and so the presence of bread represented God's concern with them. 55: Yosef, however, did not start distribution right away, because he wanted to cement his position as indispensable. He waited for people to run out of provisions and clamor for food, but even at that point he did not open the granaries. Rather, he directed people to Pharaoh. He did so to ostensibly show that he is subservient to the king, but also to make Pharaoh realize what it means to deal with hungry mobs at the palace's doors [cakes, anyone?]. And indeed, Pharaoh had to reiterate his reliance on Yosef. He told the people of Egypt, go to Yosef, and do whatever Yosef tells you.

With that last statement, and with it the final and unshakeable installment of Yosef as Egypt's viceroy, the stage was set for the arrival of his brothers and the eventual family reunion.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

**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.**

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## **A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community**

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation \*

We are deeply saddened by the horrific events at the Bondi Beach Chanukah celebration and our thoughts are with all *those impacted*. We extend heartfelt condolences to their bereaved families and to all those injured. Their memory shall remain a blessing and a source of enduring strength to our people.

From Rabbi Kaszovitz )selections(: Following the devastating and heinous terrorist attack on Bondi Beach, we were deeply honored to have our Prime Minister join us in solidarity for the first time, along with other ministers who have stood with us many times before. . . When darkness comes, we do not hide - because hiding only allows it to spread. Instead, we light our candles, just as generations before us have done. We stand strong. We stand proud. We show who we are. . . . We show other Jews who may be afraid that they are not alone. We are here with them. We show them they do not need to hide in the darkness, stand by us in the light. We show up more for our community, especially this Shabbat, to strengthen one another.

## **Miketz**

There is something I have always struggled with in this week's parsha. When Yosef sees his brothers again - after many years since they sold him - he puts them through a whole charade. He speaks harshly to them, accuses them, imprisons Shimon, demands they bring Binyamin, and later sets them up with the goblet.

What exactly is Yosef trying to test?

He has the power to punish them, yet he does not. He also does not seem eager to reveal his identity. Instead, he carefully orchestrates a series of tests.

What is Yosef's goal? Is he seeking justice, repentance, reassurance, or something deeper about who his brothers have become?

Shabbat Shalom and Chanukah Sameach B'Ahavat Yisrael.

Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

]Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation? [

**AHC and the New Zealand Jewish Council are holding a peaceful march against Anti-Semitism and a vigil for the victims of the Bondi Beach attack on Sunday afternoon, December 21.**

**Bridging the Generations: The Holocaust and Its Legacy:** The Holocaust Centre of New Zealand is hosting the annual International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration on January 25, 2026, in Auckland. Created in 2005 by the United Nations, 27 January -the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau - is International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which honours and remembers the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. This year's commemoration is dedicated to strengthening the crucial link between the past and the future, empowering younger generations to carry the torch of remembrance and responsibility.

**B'Nai Akiva:** AHC has an active chapter of B'Nai Akiva and is looking for a venue for this year for its 20 active members.

\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

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### **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Chanukah: The Hellenist Challenge**

*"When the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all of the oils. After the Hasmoneans defeated them, they searched and found but one cruse of oil, untouched and sealed with the seal of the High Priest. The cruse had only enough oil for one day, but a miracle occurred and they were able to light from it for eight days. The following year they established these days as a holiday for praise and thanksgiving." )Shabbat 21b(*

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

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

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

]3[ Why is there no mitzvah to celebrate Chanukah with a festive meal, unlike other holidays? Why only 'a holiday of praise and thanksgiving'?

]4[ What is the significance of the miracle of the undefiled cruse of oil?

#### **Culture Clash**

The military victories of the Greek empire brought about the spread of Greek culture and philosophy, and the superficial charm of Hellenism captured the hearts of many Jews. These new ideas undermined fundamental teachings of the Torah

and central mitzvot. The danger was so great that this clash of cultures could have caused permanent damage to the spiritual state of the Jewish people.

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

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

### **The Contribution of Hellenism**

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

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

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

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

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### **Mikketz: Sibling Rivalry (5771, 5774)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi\*

Listen to these words that are among the most fateful and reverberating in all of Jewish history:

*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, Hezbollah 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 Hezbollah agree that Jews have a right to their land within any boundaries whatsoever, all other debate is mere distraction.

#### **AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE: Questions to Ponder**

]1[ What other impactful examples of sibling rivalry can you think of in Tanach?

]2[ Think of a time when you were not recognised or acknowledged for who you truly are. How did that make you feel, and what was the outcome?

]3[ What do you believe are some key steps towards achieving lasting peace and mutual recognition among differing nations and cultures?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayeshev/the-heroism-of-tamar/> Footnotes have not been preserved for this Dvar Torah. Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar.

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#### **The Light of Chanukah and the Courage to Defend It** A Statement by World Mizrachi \*

Incredibly, the figure of Yehuda Maccabi – the hero of the Chanukah story – stands immortalized at West Point, America's most prestigious military academy, as part of the "Nine Worthies." He is studied alongside kings and military leaders of antiquity, the lone non-royal among them. And yet, within our own Chanukah observance, Yehuda Maccabi and the astonishing military victories of the Chashmona'im are strikingly understated. We light candles, we thank Hashem for miracles – but the battlefield triumphs of the few against the many are deliberately downplayed.

Why? Rav Reuven Margaliot explains that the Mishna and Gemara were shaped in an era of exile and statelessness. After the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and the failed Bar Kochba revolt, Jewish sovereignty was no longer possible. The Sages understood that the survival of Am Yisrael would now depend not on armies, but on wisdom, diplomacy, Torah, and community-building. Chanukah was therefore reframed – not as a celebration of military power, but as a festival of spiritual light.

But history has turned another page. We are living once again in an era of Jewish sovereignty, responsibility, and self-defense. We have returned from the yellow star of powerlessness to the blue star of a Jewish state – hated once for having no power, and now for having it. Chanukah today calls on us to reclaim both legacies: the light of Torah and the courage of Yehuda Maccabi; the wisdom of the Sages and the bravery of those who defend our people. *Safra v'sayfa* – the book and the sword – together.

May the lights of Chanukah strengthen our spirit and our resolve. May Hashem protect the soldiers of Israel, safeguard Jewish communities everywhere, and allow light to triumph over darkness, courage over fear, and life over death.

\* World Mizrachi >info@mizrachi.org< )Dec. 18, 2025(. Thanks to Morris Glassman for forwarding this material to me.

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## **Osnat: A Woman Who Shows Us How to Be a Victor, Not a Victim**

By Katia Bolotin \* © Chabad

Life is experienced in the moment. We live life going forward, yet only understand it looking backwards. The chain of events leading to the present comes into sharper focus. Finally, we recognize that the challenge or crisis we endured was really the springboard to actualize a greater good.

Many unsung heroes and heroines have made an indelible mark of positive difference. One such woman's name is mentioned briefly in the Torah portion of Mikeitz. *"Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paneach, and he gave him Osnat, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of On, as a wife."*<sup>1</sup>

There is a tradition in the Midrash that Osnat was the daughter born to Joseph's sister, Dina, as the result of her having been raped by Shechem. From that violent incident came forth the holy soul of Osnat, who was destined to be the future wife of the righteous Joseph.<sup>2</sup>

The Midrash states: *"What did Jacob[ do? He wrote the Holy Name upon a golden plate, and suspended it about ]Osnat's[ neck and sent her away. She went her way. Everything is revealed before the Holy One, blessed be He, and Michael the angel descended and took her, and brought her down to Egypt to the house of Potiphar; because Osnat was destined to become the wife of Joseph. Now the wife of Potiphar was barren, and ]Osnat[ grew up with her as a daughter."*

When Joseph became an Egyptian ruler, young women would gaze upon him because he was very handsome.<sup>3</sup> They would toss gifts at Joseph, hoping that he would notice them. Osnat joined these women, removed the amulet from her neck, and tossed it to him.<sup>4</sup> This is how Joseph became aware that Osnat was the granddaughter of Jacob (and Joseph's niece). They eventually married one another, as it said: *"And he gave him to wife Osnat, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of On."*<sup>5</sup>

Now we are at the midpoint in their life's narratives. Neither Osnat (a daughter conceived through a heinous act of rape and sent away in shame) nor Joseph (betrayed, sold into slavery and unjustly jailed) could have imagined their future ascent. Who would foresee characters like these being capable of overcoming formidable *"emotional baggage,"* let alone assuming such illustrious positions? As improbable as it would seem, their inner fortitude and resolve propelled them forward to exalted heights of spiritual achievement.

We admire Joseph and Osnat for not allowing themselves to stay "stuck" in the traumas of their pasts. Instead, they transcended them. From where did this inner strength come? Joseph recognized G d's providence in all that had transpired and, therefore, regarded the perpetrators who maligned him as carrying out their Divinely assigned roles.

Joseph was not embittered by his negative circumstances; rather, he saw them through a wider lens. Each experience contributed to a chain of events, eventually positioning Joseph to become the Egyptian leader — second in command to Pharaoh. Subsequently, Joseph fulfilled his purpose in preventing a famine. He forgave his brothers for executing their parts in his descent to Egypt while testing them to ascertain their sincere remorse.

Furthermore, Joseph's marriage to Osnat vindicated him regarding the false accusations of Osnat's adoptive mother against his virtue.<sup>6</sup> In allowing their marriage, her adoptive father, Potiphar, conceded to Joseph's proclaimed innocence. Osnat's birth and subsequent relocation to Egypt all led to her eventual union with Joseph. Their marriage produced two exemplary sons: Ephraim and Menasheh. Both were raised in exile, outside the pale of Jewish culture. Nevertheless, their parents imbued them with a deep belief in the one G d of Israel. Although born and bred in Egypt, the effects of that

pagan, immoral culture did not permeate their values. Many people bless their sons on Friday night that they should grow up to be as Ephraim and Menasheh — staunch in their identification as proud, practicing Jews. Even while living in a host culture whose values oppose those of our Torah heritage, we can be empowered by their examples.

Like many of us, Osnat was raised in an environment not conducive to Torah values. Her adoptive mother mirrored and modeled the immoral values of Egyptian society. Her father was a pagan priest. Yet despite her upbringing, Osnat revealed and maintained her inner purity. Through her own efforts, she became the suitable life partner for Joseph, who is extolled for his ability to overcome overwhelming temptation.<sup>7</sup>

*Ma'aseh Avot siman labanim*<sup>8</sup> —the deeds of our patriarchs and matriarchs are a sign for their children. These are not just stories from a distant past; they provide timeless lessons for us today. The narrative of Joseph and Osnat must empower us now. For we, too, are not merely the products of our pasts nor our families. Neither a positive nor a negative background guarantees the type of future one will have.

The choices we make concerning how to think about and regard our experiences are the strongest indicators of our future achievements. Success and fulfillment are predicated upon how we learn to think. Developing and maintaining a belief in one's own Divine purpose is paramount to recognizing that Divine providence guides our lives, emboldening us to work purposefully towards revealing and actualizing our own unique inner light.

### **Making It Relevant**

1. Regardless of your background or upbringing, you have a full claim to the Torah's teachings. Embrace your birthright.
2. Using the examples of Osnat and Joseph, how can you strengthen your inner fortitude and resilience to actualize your inner potential?
3. Rid yourself of past emotional baggage to make room for new blessings. They cannot share your mind's space.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Genesis 41:45.
2. *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, ch. 38.
3. Genesis 49:22.
4. Bereshit 37:4, 37:13-14, *Midrash Tanchuma* 14:1; Chizkuni, Gen. 41:45
5. Genesis 41:45.
6. Miketz. *Pirkei d' Rebbe Eliezer*, ch. 38.
7. Genesis 49:19.
8. *Midrash Tanchuma*, Lech Lecha 9 )on Genesis 14:1(.

\* Pianist, songwriter, and composer of contemporary classical music. Author of *Making it Relevant*, a book on parsha essays.

## **Chanukah: When Seven Is not Enough**

By Rabbi Baruch Shalom Davidson \*\*

*"Throughout the eight days of Chanukah, these lights are sacred."*  )Text of "Haneirot Halalu" Hymn(

Although the Chanukah lights recall the kindling of the Menorah in the holy Temple in Jerusalem, they differ in a number of ways. Whereas the Menorah in the Temple was lit during the day, the mitzvah of Chanukah is to light "when the sun sets." While the Menorah stood inside the Temple, the Chanukah lights are ideally lit outside the doorway. And most significantly, although the Menorah in the Temple had seven branches, on Chanukah the mitzvah is to light eight.

The number seven reflects the realm of time, like the weekly cycle — a set of seven. Like time itself — a cornerstone of the limitations of the created world — the number seven represents the Divine energy that radiates in a defined and limited fashion, animating the existence of a defined and limited world. The symbolism of eight, i.e. beyond seven, is thus the Divine light that transcends definition and limitation.

The Menorah in the Temple faced no conflict; it stood in its sacred space and was lit in the daytime, a metaphor for a spiritually illuminated environment. In such agreeable surroundings, even the light of seven — the Divine light of limitation — was sufficient.

The lights of Chanukah, however, radiate even when we are in exile, when the Temple no longer stands. They are lit after dark and face the unfriendly trends that roam outside, a metaphor for the forces beyond the pale of holiness. To illuminate this dark space with Divine light, a light that transcends all definition, the light of eight candles is necessary.

This is the great celebration of Chanukah. It is the holiday when the unlimited light of "eight" radiates throughout the world, enabling us to dispel even the darkest darkness.

\* — from *Lightpoints -- Chanukah* \*\*

## **Mikeitz: Changing Clothes**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

Pharaoh tells his advisors of his dreams. When Pharaoh's cupbearer mentioned that Joseph correctly interpreted his dream, Pharaoh summoned him.

*Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurried out of the dungeon. He had his hair cut, changed his clothes, and then appeared before Pharaoh.*  )Gen. 41:14(.

Joseph sensed that G-d was about to elevate him to a position of leadership, and understood that managing a vast empire would require him to immerse himself in mundane matters. Acutely aware of how this could threaten his ability to remain spiritually focused,

Joseph planned to remain detached from the culture and values of Egypt in order not to disrupt his attachment to G-d. As a preparation, he changed his clothes not only physically but spiritually. He made it clear that he considered his new role as a "garment," something that would remain external to him, just as a garment remains external to a person. His new role

would only affect him outwardly; it would not change his inner self.

Similarly, we can remain impervious to any potential spiritual damage that might result from involvement in the mundane world by viewing this involvement as a mere “garment” than can be set aside as easily as it is donned.

\* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

\*\* The source for Shabbat Chanukah is *Lightpoints*, " an insight by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Chanukah, adapted by Rabbi Baruch Shalom Davidson.

\* — from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gut Shabbos,

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### Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

#### The Author of Our Lives

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

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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.

### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

#### Why Joseph Did Not 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! 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" (Gen. 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

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down to Egypt and would have negated the possibility of his dreams being fulfilled (Nahmanides on Gen. 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...." (Gen 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..." (Gen. 41:42).

The second change is a new name which Pharaoh gives him, Tzofnat Panach, 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" (Gen. 41:51), the verb *nashreh* 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" (Gen. 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 '(Gen. 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

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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" (Gen. 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" (Gen. 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

##### Do Clothes Make the Man?

It is only in recent years that individuals in important public roles wore special garments. Kings and queens wore royal garb, important government figures wore top hats, and judges wore black robes and wigs. In those now bygone days, the adage "clothes make the man" may have had some truth. Things are different nowadays.

But what about in biblical days? Was there any special significance to the clothing that one wore? Did a specific uniform have any bearing upon one's role in family or society? Did a new position in life require a new set of clothing? More to the point, did a change of garb portend a change in personal character?

To deal with these questions, let us consider some of the verses in this week's Torah portion, Miketz (Genesis 41:1-44:17), along with some verses in earlier and subsequent parshiot, beginning with last week's Torah portion, Vayeshev.

There we find perhaps the most well-known wardrobe item in the entire Tanach, Yosef's multicolored robe: And Yisrael [Yaakov] loved Yosef more than all of his sons and made for him a ketonet pasim, a magnificent robe (Genesis 37:3)."

For the brothers, of course, this was an unbearable insult, indisputable evidence of Yaakov's favoritism. Their hatred for Yosef ensued and the rest is history. Our Sages warn all parents against favoring one child over another and point to Yaakov's special

treatment of Yosef as an example of the dangerous consequences of parental favoritism.

Soon enough, the brothers strip Yosef of his gorgeous robe, dip it into goat's blood, and send it to Yaakov as evidence that Yosef met his death in the jaws of some wild beast. What effect did this have upon poor Yosef? Surely, he was emotionally impacted by the loss of the symbol of his father's special favor, and surely, he was panicked by his brother's actions—throwing him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions and then removing him from the pit to sell him to a passing caravan heading to Egypt. However, we have no record in the biblical text of his reaction to his predicament.

The next thing we know is that Yosef is sold into slavery under a prominent Egyptian, Potiphar, whom he impresses favorably and is thus appointed the chief butler of Potiphar's household. Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Yosef, but he refuses to submit to her and flees the premises. As he struggles to extricate himself from her pleas, she grasps his beget, presumably his outer garment, and he escapes but abandons his garment in her hands.

And so, we learn of another of Yosef's garments. But we are left wondering whether this garment had any special significance for Yosef, nor do we know his reaction to its confiscation. We soon do learn, however, that Mrs. Potiphar uses her possession of Yosef's garment as evidence to demonstrate to her husband that Yosef tried to seduce her.

This unnamed, and probably very ordinary, garment now becomes quite important. It is the item that condemns him to lengthy imprisonment in the royal dungeon. Here he certainly wears special garments, namely those of an imprisoned criminal.

I'll leave for you, dear reader, to read the dramatic narrative which takes place in the prison, and which eventuates in Yosef's freedom and invitation to meet the Pharaoh and interpret his dreams. At this point, we can only assume that Yosef is still in his prison uniform.

Pharaoh responds immediately and orders that Yosef be brought to him posthaste. He rushed him out of the dungeon; he shaved, changed his garments, and came to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:14)." Note, garments are mentioned here again.

Yosef more than meets Pharaoh's expectations. His dreams are interpreted, a detailed plan is provided him by Yosef which will cope successfully with the dire predictions of the dreams, and Pharaoh exclaims, There is no

one as sagacious and as wise as you." Pharaoh appoints Yosef as his viceroy, places his ring on Yosef's hand, and dresses him in linen garments before gifting him with a gold necklace and a befitting chariot. Note well, garments again!

What lessons do our commentators find in this series of articles of clothing and their role in Yosef's development from spoiled adolescent to, in his many transitions, slave boy to a young man who can withstand seduction to a jailed criminal to a well-groomed guest of the mightiest king of his time, and ultimately to the second in command of a mighty empire.

I will share but two such commentators, one from the modern period and one from very early medieval times. I begin with the words of Rabbi Avraham Bornstein, the Chassidic leader of Sochachov and brilliant author of *Avnei Nezer*. He comments on the verse in which Yosef is first freed and immediately shaves and changes his clothing:

It can be said that Yosef was in no way changed, heaven forbid, by this episode. He remained the same principled and committed person that he always was. His new garb left no trace of arrogance in him. One would think that 'shaving' and 'changing his garments' would have altered his character, but that did not occur. Thus, Rashi comments that he groomed himself because of *kavod malchut*, proper courtesy to royalty."

His new garb did not affect his ego at all. It was merely the right thing to do." And so, the Sochachover Rebbe concludes:

This a lesson for us all. Even when we are promoted to positions of greatness, we must remain who we were. We must remain committed to our previous values. As the great Chassidic master of Pesishcha (mentor of the Sochachover) would teach on the verse (Deuteronomy 28:2), 'All these blessings will be delivered unto you and reach you; that is, you will be granted blessings if they reach the authentic you, but not if you artificially play the part of another.' (This passage from the Sochachover can be found in the collection known as *Neot HaDesheh*, volume 2, p. 319).

Long before the Sochachover, we find a comment by Rashi with a very similar message. It appears in his commentary to *Shemos* (Exodus 1:5). The verse lists the sons of Yakov who emigrated to Egypt and concludes, and Yosef was in Egypt". Rashi asks, Do we not already know that Yosef was in Egypt?" He responds, This is so that we shall know of Yosef's righteous character. The same Yosef who tended his father's sheep as a youngster was the mature Yosef who was a

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king's proxy in Egypt, steadfastly adhering to his principles."

Do clothes make the man?" It seems that the Torah teaches us otherwise. Clothes are only pieces of cloth. One's authentic identity gives clothes either glory or ignominy: the man makes the clothes, not the other way around.

## Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

### The Real Chanuka Miracle

#### Rabbani Shavna Goldberg

*Our hearts are with the community in Bondi Beach, with reports of a terror attack.*

Settling into my seat in synagogue one morning earlier this week, I suddenly noticed a rifle propped up against the wall. The scene was jarring. Though this summer will mark 15 years since we made Aliya, there are still some sights that can give me pause. While it is not uncommon to see guns in synagogues in Israel, the contrast between the image of the gun and the image of its owner – wrapped in a tallit and deeply immersed in prayer – hit me hard.

To the outside observer, our soldiers, modern-day Maccabees, are armed warriors ready at a moment's notice to defend their people and head out to battle. But those in the know understand that these young men (and women) are just as much at home in the synagogue, at work, in a university classroom, hiking the country, traveling the world, or spending time with their families. Indeed, that is where they prefer to be. They will answer the call to duty and put everything else aside to be the fighters they are trained to be. But the army in Israel is a people's army, and for the majority of our soldiers this is not their career.

As I watched the gun's owner sway back and forth in prayer, I imagined what he had likely seen and experienced over the last two years and marveled at the seeming simplicity with which he continued to turn to and call out to God. I wondered what gave him the strength to put his gun aside and focus his attention on his relationship with the Almighty.

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Settling into my seat in synagogue this past Friday night, my friend motioned and whispered to me, I think that's Mike Huckabee." I looked toward the front of our synagogue where she was pointing and quickly realized that she was correct. With no advance notice to the congregation (due to security considerations), we were astonished to find that the current United States ambassador and his wife had joined us for the Friday night service. Without any fanfare, he quietly slipped into the front row behind the rabbi and observed as the members of our community welcomed Shabbat with beautiful singing and lively dancing. Throughout the night, various congregants approached him to shake his hand,

including a father of a young man killed in Gaza at the beginning of the war. After our rabbi warmly greeted our distinguished guests, he shared that the ambassador would address the congregation briefly at the end of the evening.

As the service came to a close, Ambassador Huckabee stepped up to the podium. With years of experience as a Baptist minister, he had everyone's rapt attention as he delivered a moving, succinct, and engaging sermon about the story of Joseph, his favorite in all of Scripture."

In his retelling, he shared the pain of Joseph as his brothers threw him into a pit and then sold him into captivity in Egypt. He spoke about the accusation of Potiphar's wife, the time Joseph spent in prison, and the way in which he ultimately rose to become second in command of the world's most powerful country, saving it – and the entire region – from devastating famine.

When the brothers make their way down to Egypt to stock up on food, Joseph does not seek revenge. While he wants to know that they have grown and repented from their ways, he is not interested in exacting punishment. When the brothers come to him, afraid that he will treat them harshly, he responds that while they intended to cause him harm, God looked after him and made sure everything turned out for the good.

At that point, Ambassador Huckabee turned toward the crowd and said: Joseph never turned his back on God because God never turned His back on Joseph. Even what could be interpreted as awful events were really God watching out for him all along."

So too, the Jewish people have faced exceedingly difficult circumstances over the past few years and have responded with incredible resilience. They have not turned their back on God because God has not turned His back on the Jewish people. He has never stopped looking out for their best interests."

Tears filled my eyes as I thought about the soldier from earlier in the week. Why had I so marveled at the sincerity of his prayer? Was it not a given that he felt God's presence? Had I allowed myself to forget, even for just a moment, all that we have to be grateful for?

Sometimes, though, it takes someone on the outside to remind you of what you knew deep inside all along.

Tonight, Jews around the world will light Chanuka candles. We will light them in our front windows or outside our homes to remind ourselves – and those outside – of the miracles

that happened to us in those days at this time." The miracle of a small band of Jewish soldiers who managed to push back the mighty Greek army, and the miracle of the small, pure jug of oil that burned in the Temple's menorah for eight days instead of one. These are the official miracles we commemorate on this holiday and publicize to the world.

But the real miracle – the one that continues to stand behind all others – is that the Jewish people have not turned their back on God because God has not turned His back on the Jewish people. As time marches on, the frame widens and we gain more insight into the bigger picture and the larger story.

In the midst of all the real pain, angst, sadness, fear, and mourning of the past two years, a religious awakening is taking place in the hearts and minds of Jews in Israel and abroad. To the outside observer, it may be difficult to understand. They wonder what would make Jews turn to God given everything we have endured. But those with historical perspective are not completely surprised.

As Jews, we pick up our guns when we need to. We do our part to defend our people and our land. We continue to fight for our survival. We are resilient. We are in this for the long run.

This Chanuka, our candles declare to the world that we are here to stay. We are not afraid.

We know God has our back.

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### Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How did King Pharaoh of Egypt know Yosef was giving him the correct interpretations of his dreams?

At the beginning of Parshat Miketz, the Torah tells us all the details of the two dreams of the king. Then we're told how Yosef was suddenly elevated to stand in the presence of the king. The Torah could have easily just said Pharaoh then told Yosef all about the content of the dreams. But no, we find that Pharaoh goes into all the details, and we hear about the dreams a second time.

Intriguingly, however, there are some small differences in terms of how Pharaoh explained his dreams as opposed to what really happened in the dreams. For example, in the original dreams, we're told Pharaoh was standing 'Al-hayye' or (on the river), and then Pharaoh says to Joseph, "I was standing Al-sefat hayye' or" (on the banks of the river).

Now, the Midrash Tanchuma tells us that on every occasion on which Pharaoh deviated slightly from what he had originally seen,

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Yosef corrected him and said, "No, it's not on the river; it's on the banks of the river." At one point, says the Midrash, Pharaoh cried out to Joseph, "Were you eavesdropping on my dreams?"

It was this that convinced Pharaoh that Yosef was not only somebody who knew the interpretation, but someone who knew the dreams. And this extraordinary fact convinced him that what Yosef was saying was the word of Hashem.

Now, I believe that there is such an important message for us all, which goes well beyond Pharaoh, Yosef, and Egypt at the time, and anything to do with dreams. It's all about interpreting a situation and problem-solving.

If you want to know how to understand a situation in order to provide a solution for it, if some of your facts are wrong, then your capacity to provide a solution will be impeded.

For example, right now, we continue tragically to witness an ongoing war in the Middle East. It's now more than 14 months, and we're finding continuously that there are people right around the world who have all the solutions.

They are pronouncing, "This is what must be done in order to guarantee ongoing peace and security." Sadly, however, a lot of the information they have is simply not correct. And sometimes, they are basing their own interpretations on the feelings that they have as a result of the images they have seen.

From Joseph, we learn that if you want to provide a solution, the facts need to be correct.

No wonder, therefore, that our tradition tells us: Knowing the question properly is half the answer.

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### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger: Ma'oz Tzur

Whereas the momentary act of lighting realizes our excitement to publicize the miracles[1] that our people have come to expect and the attendant gratitude for them, the singing of Ma'oz Tzur guides the subsequent reflection on those lights. Indeed, the 17th century world-renowned Rov of Worms and Mainz, known as the "Chavos Yair" writes[2] that those moments of contemplation are an essential part of the mitzvah[3]. He understands that the Chashmonaim celebrated their miracles with lights beyond the actual Beis Hamikdosh, demonstrating great joy, as is to be expected. The lighting of our menorahs should connect us to those lights and be accompanied with simcha as well.

For over seven centuries the Ma'oz Tzur has guided the joy and the deliberation with which

Jews light the menorah. Interestingly, we sing about the Egyptian and Babylonian exiles as well as our redemption from Egypt and rescue from the decree of Haman before we dedicate a paragraph to the miracles of the victory of the Chashmonaim.

It would seem that the author was guided by the Rambam's mandate "The mitzvah of kindling Chanukah lamps is very dear. A person should be very careful in its observance to publicize the miracle and thus increase our praise of God and our expression of thanks for the miracles which He wrought on our behalf."<sup>[4]</sup> Based on this text and the language of the second beracha ("in these times") it has been suggested<sup>[5]</sup> that we reflect on the miracles of our times and our lives and include them in the uplift that these days generate for us.

Yet this Chanuka our hearts find expression as well in the prayer of the last paragraph of the Ma'oz Tzur, a text some four centuries junior the balance of the song. Painfully, this year there will be lights - too many to count - that will evoke a happiness that is elusive and out of reach, and many painful moments that bring to life memories of families that were once complete and whose joy seemed so deep and promising. Scores of families will have the menorah and fresh yahrzeit flames side by side. With them very much in mind, we conclude our deliberation turning to the Almighty praying, "Bare Your holy arm / and hasten the end for salvation / Avenge the vengeance of Your servants' blood / from the wicked nation / For the rescue and respite is so long in coming."

This too is part of everyone's Ma'oz Tzur. We pray that Hashem reveals Himself as the "Ma'oz Tzur" who brings comfort, strength, rescue and reprieve to all His children, so long in coming, speedily and mightily.

[1] Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 675

[2] See Mekor Chayim, quoted in Teshuvos Vehanhagos, Chanuka, 37 note 39

[3] See Piskei Teshuvos 676:5

[4] Hilchos Chanuka 4:12

[5] Teshuvos Vehanhagos, Chanuka, Avodas Chanuka 8

## Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

### Just the Beginning

Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah" – The Rema in Shulchan Aruch – Orach Chaim 671:6

Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah" therefore if the candle went out before the requisite time had passed (one half hour) we are not responsible to rekindle it. – The Bais Yosef in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 673:2

The Shulchan Oruch is speaking here about a situation where one lit the Menorah in a place that was too high up to have fulfilled the Mitzvah but then he lowered it after it was lit. The Rema comments that placing an already lit Menorah into a zone where it is now appropriate to light is not the fulfillment of the Mitzvah because Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah". That is the context of that phrase!

We also learn in Hallachah that if a candle failed to burn the requisite amount of time, about a half hour, then we have still fulfilled our duty and we are not required to rekindle the light because Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah".

We learn our Hashkafa from the Hallacha and not the other way around. Our philosophical outlook on life does not shape the Hallacha but rather our worldview is shaped by the Hallacha. There are many implications in life that can be gleaned from this principle Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah".

When educating children and students, we cannot micromanage results. We can only honor the process. We might do the best we can to impart knowledge, to inspire, and model the messages we are hoping to impart, but then hope for the best. Why? Because we are dealing with free willed beings and therefore Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah".

That's how it goes in the universe of education. Chanukah is an expression of -Chinuch- education. So far, that is all in reference to educating others. Yet, there is an entirely other expansive realm where we have much more control".

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?!" After Chanukah is concluded a burning question remains. We might wonder, "what have the candles ignited in us?!" What remains, that's Chanukah!

The Ramchal writes about and presents in the Mesilas Yesharim a powerful and effective psychological tool. Tenuas HaChitzonius Meorerus es ha Penimius" – "The outer actions awaken the internality.". The Sefer HaChinuch often states the same notion as a reason or a benefit of a given Mitzvah in other words, HaAdam Nifal Achar Peulosav" – "A Person is affected by what he does". One psychologist pithily and similarly noted, "It is easier to act yourself into a better way of feeling than to

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feel your way into a better way of acting." By doing we are becoming.

Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men writes in Mishlei, "Ner Elochim Nishmas Adam" – "The Candle of HASHEM is the Neshama of Man". He also says, "Ki Ner Mitzvah V'Torah Ohr" – "A Mitzvah is a Candle and Torah is Light". Lighting makes the Mitzvah". Here we can plug in and apply Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah". The lighting of the Chanukah lights, night after night for eight straight days is meant to not only light the external candles that we meet at the window of our homes and send a faint light into the street and the world immediately beyond.

No! They are meant to ignite an ever growing and continuous flame of inspiration within our souls. We are lighting our hearts and becoming thirsty searchers and hungry seekers of the light of HASHEM which is embedded in every detail of creation.

We start with one candle but when we reach eight then – that is forever. Chanukah never ends! It only begins! Hadlaka Oseh Mitzvah" – "Lighting makes the Mitzvah". We are lighting ourselves. This is the just the beginning!

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

#### The Progressive Candles: A Commentary on Jewish Life

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the most important feature of Hanukkah — the Hanukkah candles — is the increase in the number of candles from day to day. The lighting of the candles is progressive; that is, we proceed from least to most. The first night we light one candle, the second night two candles, the third night three candles, and so until the eighth night, when the candelabrum is ablaze with all eight candles. What we have is growth and increase and progress. It was the House of Hillel which gave this order its legal form when it said that *mossif ve holekh*, the number of candles is to be increased each night, because *ma'alin be kodesh*, because one must rise, increase, or progress in holiness.

In a sense, this idea of increase, of addition, of the progressive candles, is a very deep and incisive commentary on Jewish life and what it should be. The Hanukkah candles represent more than merely the military victory of the Jewish Maccabees over the Greek Antiochus. They symbolize as well the clash of cultures, the war of world-views. There was the Greek world, steeped in its oriental idolatry, pitted against a Jewish minority stubbornly proud of its pure belief in one God.

One should not dismiss the Greek world lightly. The world's greatest philosophers were nursed in the cradle of Greek culture. But the great difference between Hellenism, as the Greek culture is known, and Judaism, lies in this: The Greek world glorified contemplation, the Jewish world glorified behavior, mitzvot. The Greeks stressed creed, while we insisted upon deed. The Greeks were inclined to inactivity — the perfection of form, while the Jew insisted upon activity. The Greeks had many philosophers but few saints; many thinkers but few doers. With the Jew this was reversed. Our world was not one of cold thought, but one of warm action. And this Jewish attitude is best represented by the progressive candles — increase, growth, action, progress. I have no doubt that if the Greeks had won the war, and decided to celebrate it by the lighting of candles, they would have constructed one gigantic, beautiful candle in front of the statue of Zeus, or a thousand smaller ones all around him — but it would have remained that way. With us Jews, however, Hanukkah is celebrated by progressive candles - *Ma'alin be'kodesh*.

In human terms, we could call the Greeks sitters or standers; that is, in their cold inactivity they confined themselves, insofar as ethics and good deeds are concerned, to one place and there stagnated. They were sitters or standers who rarely chose to help a fellow man. And if the Greeks were sitters and standers, we Jews were walkers and goers. And when one of us decided to "sit it out," and not participate actively in the good life, then our Rabbis were merciless in their criticism.

The Torah states (according to the usual translation), and Jacob dwelt "in the land of his father's residence," but which literally means, and Jacob *sat* in the land of his father's residence." Even Jacob — who was all his life a great and dynamic "doer" and "goer" — was at times a "sitter." And listen to the Rabbis' biting remarks: "Wherever man sits, Satan jumps; wherever man becomes inactive, Satan raises his ugly head and becomes active." Here was Jacob, an old man who was tired and weary of a life of wandering and running away. He felt that his energies were spent in wrestling with angels, in warding off Laban, and in protecting himself from Esau. He now had twelve children and he was ready to retire. Enough done in one lifetime," he thought. Now is the time to get a little *nahat*, the time to sit back and relax." And so Jacob sat back and relaxed where his father had once lived. And what happens?

Satan becomes active. Once a Jacob sits, jealousy invades his home, and his sons begin a struggle with each other over a mere colored shirt. Once a Jacob sits, then one son speaks

evil of another. Once a Jacob sits, then he finds that his son Joseph, as the Rabbis relate, spends more time combing his hair in front of a mirror than in poring over his schoolbooks, and he soon begins to dream high-handed dreams of conquest and royalty. Indeed, once a Jacob sits, then his family is torn apart and some sons sell other sons down the river and into slavery.

And sitting, in this sense of inactivity, leads not only to family dissension, but also to downright immorality. Here was Israel, a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), wandering in the desert, and suddenly Israel "sat in the plains of Moab." And what happens when a nation and the children of Israel entered into immoral relationships with the daughters of Moab. So sitting leads to immorality as well. Indeed, once stagnation sets in, once there is only sitting or standing but no going or progress, then Satan jumps and becomes ferociously hyperactive. What is the Jewish way? Certainly not sitting or standing, but going and walking. In the great vision that Abraham beheld, God's command was clear and to the walk before me and be perfect." When a man walks, not sits, then he has a chance of becoming perfect. When Joshua the high priest stands before Almighty God, and Satan is at his right hand, and after God promises Joshua the ultimate redemption of Israel, he tells him If you will walk in my ways," "I will give you places to walk among those that stand." Yes, the world is full of sitters and standers, those who in their inactivity and stagnation invite the company of Satan. But the Abrahams and the Joshuas are committed to a policy of walking and going, of constant activity and positive, helpful deeds. For such is the active policy of Jews in all ages, an activation symbolized by the progressive candles of the Hanukkah menorah. *Ma'alin be'kodesh*.

How unfortunate, therefore, that so many of our modern Jews, while lighting the candles, forget their meaning. How often a rabbi hears the following remarks: You see, Rabbi, it's true I am not an Orthodox Jew, I don't put on *tefillin*, I don't observe Shabbat, I don't observe the dietary laws; but, Rabbi, let me tell you that I have a good heart; it's all in here." And this is followed by a thumping of his chest.

Of course, that is precisely what Rabbis are afraid of — that it's all in here, that the good heart is something which lies buried between the ribs and behind the diaphragm, and whose warm heartbeats cannot be heard without the aid of artificial instruments. The "good heart" is the excuse of the sitter or the stander. The "good heart" excuse is in the tradition of Greece, and not Israel. I am very wary, indeed,

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when all a person has to offer is a good heart; whose good intentions cannot be reflected in good limbs and good pockets and good deeds. Imagine what would happen if we would translate that "good heart" idea into actual medical terms. If all the blood were to be drained from your body, from the fingertips to the tips of your toes, and concentrated in your heart, it would certainly be a good heart because it would contain all the blood in your body. But such a situation can only lead to death, because a good heart is not enough; we must have a heart which can circulate this goodness all over the body. Good intentions without good deeds and good actions are characteristic of the Greeks and not of the Jews. I feel sure, for example, that our synagogues were not built by good intentions or good hearts alone, but by good deeds and good actions. The UJA and Yeshiva University were not built by good hearts alone. They required sturdy hands and sharp heads and noble actions. With this in mind, we can understand part of the special *Al Hanissim* prayer. In the course of that prayer we praise God and thank Him for assuring us of victory over the Greeks, who, we say, wanted to cause us to forget the Torah and to "transgress" God's commandments. This statement is, seemingly, not true from a historical point of view. We know that Antiochus promulgated only three harsh laws against the Jews, and those were he forbade the observance of Shabbat, the festival of Rosh Hodesh, and the rite of circumcision. But nowhere do we find that this mad emperor prohibited the study of Torah.

The answer, however, lies in the idea we have been trying to convey; and that is, that if the Jew is forbidden to observe the practical commandments, the *chukei retzonecha*, so that the study of the Torah can lead to no action, then it is the same as if he were prohibited from even thinking about the Torah; it is the Of whst use is Torah if it does not lead to concrete action and noble deeds? If Antiochus did not allow the Jews to observe their commandments, then he stands accused in the eyes of history of destroying their study of the Torah. For the Jew, study without implementation is of slight value. Creed must give birth to deed; contemplation must result in behavior; thought must end in action. *Ma'alin be'kodesh*. The light of the progressive candles is, therefore, for us, an enlightening commentary on what Jewish life should be. They inspire us to better behavior, challenge us to greater deeds, and urge us on to new and broader horizons, with that ever-valid commandment, "Rise in holiness."



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**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**

### Compound Miracles: Then and Now

I. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) asks, "What is Chanukah?", which Rashi explains to mean, "for which miracle was it established?"

The Gemara records the miracle of oil which was enough to last only one day being lit for eight days. The military victory is mentioned only as it enabled the finding of the jug of oil.

By contrast, in Al Hanissim we focus exclusively on the military victory. The lighting of the candles is mentioned only as part of the purification of the Beis Hamikdash, and the miracle of eight days is not mentioned at all. Similarly, Haneiros Hallalu, recited when we light the candles, a text (Maseches Sofrim 20:4), whose thirty-six words correspond to the thirty-six candles (Mishna Berurah 676:8), refers to the salvations and wars, and omits the miracle of the oil completely.

The Gemara (ibid) concludes that Chanukah was established with hallel and hoda'ah. Rashi explains that hoda'ah refers to Al Hanisim, which is recited in the beracha of hoda'ah in Shemone Esrei and in Birchas Hamazon. Why isn't the miracle of eight days, the basis of Chanukah focused on in the Gemara, mentioned at all?

The Gemara indicates that Hallel celebrates the miracle of the oil. Tosafos (Ta'anis 28b) explains that we say Hallel for eight days because the miracle of the oil increased every day.

However, the Gemara (Pesachim 117a) states that whenever we are saved from a tzarah, such as the story of Chanukah (Rashi), we say Hallel on our salvation. This remark contradicts the Gemara (Shabbos 21b) which links Hallel to the miracle of the oil.

II. Harav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel zt"l (Mo'adim p. 302-309) answers that all these questions and contradictions assume that two distinct miracles took place: the miracle of the oil lasting eight days, and the miracle of the military victory. In reality, there was only one compound miracle. The military battle was fought to save us from the Greeks' attempt to make us forget the Torah and to violate its laws, the first sentence in Al Hanisim. They breached the walls of the azara (Middos 2:3) and made all of the oil impure (Maoz Tzur: Yevanim).

The military victory enabled us to sanctify the Beis Hamikdash and light the menorah. We thank Hashem in Al Hanisim for the victory by which we remembered the Torah and its laws, culminating in the restoration of avoda, especially the lighting of the candles, in the Beis Hamikdash.

This is the miracle of Chanuka, for which we say Al Hanisim and Hallel. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) merely explains why Chanukah lasts for eight days, rather than one. The miracle of the oil lasting for eight days is the conclusion of the victory over the Greeks, as the Gemara mentions. This miracle increased every day and obligates us to light the menorah and recite Hallel on all eight days of Chanukah.

III. The Rambam (Chanukah 3:1) recounts the Greeks' preventing us from observing our religion of Torah and mitzvos. They breached the walls of the heichal and defiled all that was pure. Hashem saved us, the Chashmonaim appointed a king, and the kingdom lasted for over two hundred years until the churban.

He continues (ibid 3:2) by describing the miracle of the oil lasting eight days and concludes (ibid 3:3) that we celebrate eight days of simcha and Hallel, and we light candles to publicize the miracle.

Most commentators, cited in the Frankel edition, write that simcha and Hallel relate to the military victory, and the candles commemorate the miracle of the oil. However, the Shalmei Simcha (Elberg) (5:41) writes that both rituals relate to both miracles. According to Rav E. B. Finkel there is only one compound miracle which obligates both mitzvos. If so, the word "miracle" in 3:3 refers to both 3:1 and 3:2.

IV. The Rambam, in stark contrast to the Ramban (Bereishis 49:10), writes positively about the kingdom of the Chashmonaim, as a continuation of the Chanukah miracle, notwithstanding the glaring spiritual deficiencies, serious military casualties, and infighting which led to the churban. It would not be until 1948 that an independent state of Israel would exist. This is a positive milestone in Jewish history, as Rav Soloveitchik taught nearly seventy years ago in his speech and article "Kol Dodi Dofeik". We thank Hashem for the military victories and the exponential resurgence of Torah, comparable to the compound miracle of Chanukah, notwithstanding the problems which exist now as they did then. Specifically, spiritual deficiencies, significant casualties and infighting still exist in the State of Israel.

Today, as then, the Temple Mount is the most significant location of the spiritual battle, the jihad, which animates our enemies. Sadly, the site is still defiled by mosques, and we must wait patiently for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

In the interim, especially in the last two plus years, we must defend ourselves from mortal foes. Our soldiers are heroes, and one IDF brigade is even called Chashmonaim. We mourn the losses, of soldiers and citizens alike, in Eretz Yisroel. The rise of anti-Semitism has worldwide consequences, as recently as the horrific murder of innocent Jews in Sydney, Australia on the first night of Chanukah.

As we commemorate the compound miracle of the military victory and spiritual recovery of Chanukah and thank Hashem for the events of then and now, bayamim haheim ubazman hazze (Levush 682:2), we hope and pray for the ultimate chanukas ha'mizbeach, ha'menorah, and the Beis Hamikdash.

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----- from: Torah Musings

<[newsletter@torahmusings.com](mailto:newsletter@torahmusings.com)>

date: Dec 17, 2025, 10:01 AM

subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 12/17/2025

Israel National News

### Sometimes it's hard to see the light

**Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph**

It is all too easy to look around us and feel hopeless...

We were all shaken this week with the horrific news of the antisemitic attack at a Chabad Menorah lighting in Sydney, Australia. This only adds to the already existent gloom and fear that so many Jews are experiencing. An ever-deepening political divide in the US, never-ending conflict in Israel, infighting among our fellow Jews in the Holy Land, growing antisemitism on

both the left and right, and in our OU community we still feel the weight of the tremendous loss of Rabbi Moshe Hauer, zt”l.

It is all too easy to look around us and feel hopeless.

Three weeks ago, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations hosted five released hostages and their family members, before they traveled to meet with President Donald Trump. Each one shared their remarkable and moving story, but one comment stood out. When it was his turn to speak, Segev Kalfon described the horrific ordeals he overcame and specifically, the lack of clean water, devoid of dirt and bugs and even worms, severely impacting his hygiene and health. He then picked up the bottle of water before him and said, “All I want to say is that I am grateful for clean water.”

If there is anyone who would be justified in having what to complain about, it was Segev, and yet he taught me how a change of perspective can fill us with gratitude.

Our tradition teaches us (Avodah Zara 8a) about the pre-history of the holiday of Hanukkah. During the very first winter, Adam watched as the days got shorter and shorter, the dark nights getting ever longer. He was filled with fear and despair that the waning light signified his coming death; he prayed and fasted for eight days. And then, one day, he noticed that the days suddenly started getting longer. He celebrated the winter solstice, reminding him and his offspring that “there is no room for hopelessness,” and that the dark nights, with patience and the right perspective, can transform into glorious mornings.

There is a famous debate between Shammai and Hillel as to how we light the candles on Hanukkah. Shammai suggests that we begin with eight candles and each day we remove one candle. Hillel argues that we begin with one and add an additional candle each night.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook explains that Shammai and Hillel are not arguing, they are focusing on competing phenomena. Shammai is describing what is known as yeridat hadorot, the decline in spirituality and greatness that grows with every generation. Hillel acknowledges such a decline but argues that with the decline of the great lights of every generation, there is concurrently an aliyat hadorot, an ever-increasing light that can be found among the masses.

Despite the heartbreaking news from Sydney, we are heartened by the heroic actions of Ahmed al-Ahmed in disarming one of the attackers and the outpouring of love, unity, and support from the entire Jewish world. Despite the new adversaries that continue to crop up, we have received words of encouragement from faith leaders and the actions of complete strangers who support the Jewish People. Despite the political divide, we at the OU have experienced bi-partisan support for many of the values we fight for daily. And despite the terrible loss of Rabbi Hauer, zt”l, we have witnessed our team at the Orthodox Union step up and move forward with a newfound determination.

Jewish law accords with the ruling of Hillel. During this holiday of Hanukkah, as we proudly and fearlessly light our Menorahs, we are enjoined to focus our attention on the increasing light around us, how the dark nights of exile will give way to the brilliant light of redemption, and how fortunate we are to receive the incredible blessings of life, like a clean glass of water. Wishing you and yours an illuminated, glowing, and thankful Hanukkah. Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph is OU Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

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from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

date: Dec 18, 2025, 7:38 PM

subject: Tidbits • Parashas Miketz - Shabbos Chanukah 5786

On Erev Shabbos Chanukah, many daven Minchah early so that Minchah will precede the lighting of the Menorah (to avoid the appearance of a tartei d’sasrei - an inherent contradiction - of lighting Shabbos’ Chanukah lights and then davening Friday’s Minchah). Menorah lighting may not occur before plag hamincha (approximately 1 hour before shekiah), and should be performed just before lighting Shabbos candles. The Menorah should contain

enough oil to burn at least until a half hour after tzeis hakochavim (approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes after Candle Lighting; note that many shorter 'colored candles' do not meet this criterion).

Rosh Chodesh Teves is Shabbos and Sunday, December 20th-21st. On Shabbos morning following [full] Hallel, three Sifrei Torah are taken out. Parashas Miketz is leined in six Aliyos (with shishi continuing until the end of the Parasha). The keriah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh (beginning with the mussaf of Shabbos - Bamidbar 28:9-15) is leined from the second Sefer as the seventh aliyah. The keriah for the 6th day of Chanukah (Bamidbar 7:42-47) is leined as maftir from the third Sefer Torah. The haftarah of Chanukah follows. Av Harachamim is omitted. Ata Yatzarta is said in Mussaf Shemoneh Esrei. Borchi Nafshi is added at the end of davening (some add Psalm 30 as well). Tzidkas’cha is omitted at Mincha. On Motzaei Shabbos, one should return home without delay and light as soon as possible. The Shulchan Aruch notes that there is good reason to first make Havdalah, followed by Menorah lighting, or to first light one’s Menorah, followed by Havdalah. If one is away for Shabbos Chanukah, it may be preferable to light Menorah at his host on Motzaei Shabbos (and preferably eat a small meal there as well) before departing, especially if one will be returning home late. Consult your Rav.

On Sunday, the second day of Rosh Chodesh Teves, the full Hallel is recited. Kieras Hatorah includes two Sifrei Torah. From the first sefer, the keriah of Rosh Chodesh (Bamidbar 28:1-15) is leined in three aliyos (instead of four; the usual first two aliyos are combined) from the first Sefer, followed by one aliyah for the 7th day Chanukah (Bamidbar 7:48-53) from the second sefer Torah. Mussaf of Rosh Chodesh follows. Davening ends with Borchi Nafshi after the Shir shel Yom (some add Psalm 30 as well).

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

After Chanukah, used wicks, cups and oil should be disposed of in a respectful manner (e.g. by placing them in a plastic bag before disposing of them). Some have the minhag to burn them on the last day of Chanukah; others do so during Bi’ur Chametz before Pesach.

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

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 97

Summary of Mikeitz

Miketz: Pharaoh’s dreams • The Sar Hamashkim refers Pharaoh to Yosef • Yosef interprets Pharaoh’s dreams as predicting 7 years each of plenty and hunger • Yosef is appointed viceroy over Mitzrayim • Yosef marries Osnas • Menashe and Efraim are born • The famine begins • Yaakov sends the brothers to Mitzrayim for food • Yosef accuses the brothers of spying • After jailing Shimon, Yosef commands them to bring Binyamin • Yosef has their monies returned to their sacks; the brothers fear this is a ploy to harm them • Yaakov resists sending Binyamin • The famine worsens • Yehudah accepts responsibility for Binyamin • The brothers set out with gifts and the returned monies • Yosef is overwhelmed upon seeing Binyamin • The brothers are treated royally and sent home with abundant provisions • Binyamin is framed as stealing the royal goblet and the Shevatim are returned to Mitzrayim. The keriah for Rosh Chodesh pertains to the korbanos brought on Rosh Chodesh. The keriah of Chanukah corresponds to the Korbanos Ha’nesiim and the corresponding day of the Chanukas Hamizbeach.

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

Dvar Torah

מסתור גבורים ביד חלשים, ורבים ביד מעטים, ותמים ביד טהורים

“You placed the mighty in the hand of the weak, the many in the hand of the few, the impure in the hand of the pure” (Al HaNissim - Chanukah) While we understand that, generally, the more powerful army and the larger numbers of fighters would win the battle, righteousness and purity are not necessarily a weakness in battle. Why then do we recount “**טומאתם ביד טהורים**”, which indicates that the pure defeating the impure is miraculous in nature?

Rav Yitzchak Feigelstock zt”l explains that aside from being far outnumbered by the nations of the world, Klal Yisrael faced another seemingly insurmountable problem in that essentially the art of war belongs to the nations of Eisav (see Bereishis 49:5 with Rashi). When Klal Yisrael engaged in war, such as in the time of Yehoshua at the City of Ai, they were eventually victorious only through miraculous means which came about when the battle was fought according to the dictates of Hashem and with complete emunah and bitachon in Him. Am Yisrael does not have the means to succeed when they employ standard strategies. It is only when the battle is ‘fought’ with the proper spiritual structure that we can defeat our enemies. Therefore, we thank Hashem for enabling our victories by giving us the spiritual means and ability to supernaturally conquer our enemies.

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from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <[riets@substack.com](mailto:riets@substack.com)> date: Dec 16, 2025, 3:27 PM subject: Of Miketz, Menorahs, and Majesty

**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

**Miketz, Menorahs, and Majesty**

RIETS Kollel Elyon Dec 16

The release of Joseph from prison, a moment of great drama and emotion, has also been the subject of unexpected halakhic inquiry. Some commentaries note, in light of the fact that his release took place on Rosh HaShanah, it is surprising that Joseph shaved at that time. Rashi comments that the shaving was done because of kevod ha-malkhut; honor for the king. Nonetheless, working under the assumption that the Avot (and, apparently Joseph included) observed the entire Torah before it was given, it would be expected that he would refrain from shaving on Rosh Hashanah. This question prompted an extensive literature in later generations, analyzing the halakhic considerations from every angle - is shaving a violation mi-d'orayta of Hilkhot Yom Tov; perhaps the action is to be considered a melakhah she'einh tzrichah li-gufah; can it be excused under his unique circumstances; what role does kevod ha-malkhut play in the question; perhaps the situation is considered pikuach nefesh; perhaps it is relevant that Joseph was presumably shaved by someone else, etc.

The Chatam Sofer, for one, seemed bothered by the very question itself. The notion of the Avot keeping the Torah, he argued, was a fine and important idea, but not an actual obligation. Kevod Ha-Malkhut, by contrast, is a genuine din, one that had to be observed even before the giving of the Torah, by force of law. Thus, kevod ha-malkhut, which was commanded, certainly overrides Yom Tov, which was “eino metzuveh vi-oseh”.

The Chatam Sofer's comment is itself difficult to understand. Kevod ha-malkhut is also a law of the Torah, derived from verses. By what logic is this law separated from the other mitzvot of the Torah, that they are voluntary in the Pre-Sinaitic era, and this one is not?

In considering the obligation of kevod ha-malkhut, R. Simcha Zissel Broide, the late Rosh Yeshivah of the Chevron Yeshivah, posits a number of theories explaining its importance. Among the five points that he makes is what he considers a fundamental principle of the human personality: It is crucial for

one's spiritual development that he posses the ability to appreciate great things. One who is jaded and cynical, who views all things with disinterest, is unable to attain any kind of meaningful spiritual maturity. Thus, it is critical to hone one's awareness of the extraordinary, and the attitude one brings toward royalty is certainly reflective of this vital attribute.

It is interesting to note that there is another (seasonally appropriate) comment of the Chatam Sofer (Responsa, OC 204) that is also somewhat surprising. We are in the midst of celebrating Chanukah. We generally assume that Chanukah and Purim, clearly post-Biblical in origin, are observed as chiyuvim mi-de-rabanan. Nonetheless, maintains the Chatam Sofer, if one would let the occasions of Chanukah or Purim pass by without any acknowledgement, this would be the wrong thing on a level mi-d'orayta. Perhaps the common element between the two statements of the Chatam Sofer - his comment regarding Joseph, and his assertion regarding Chanukah - is the fundamental necessity of cultivating an appreciation for greatness and majesty. One who is unreceptive to the miraculous and the majestic is incapable of approaching the Torah with any potential for success. If one is unmoved by the extraordinary, then the greatest gift of all eternity can fail to move and inspire; not for any internal deficiency in the item, but because of the closed “eye of the beholder”.

This issue is indicated as well by the comments of Nachmanides on the verse following the giving of the aseret ha-dibrot, when Moses tells the Jewish people not to be afraid, because God has come “ba-avur nasot etchem”. Nachmanides understands this in the sense of nisayon, to test the Jewish people, to see if they are capable of feeling an appreciation for the awe-inspiring display that accompanied Matan Torah.

As R. Yitzchak Hutner explains, this “test” was a crucial part of the process of the bestowing of the Torah upon the Jewish people. If the Jews failed to be moved by such a display, then they cannot fulfill their roles as the guardians of the Torah; they will be unreceptive to the infinite treasures of its content, and thus immune to its influence.

In this sense, R. Hutner notes the Maharal of Prague's interpretation of the Talmud's statement that the churban ha-bayit took place because the Jews failed to recite Birkhot HaTorah. This passage has long challenged commentators, both because of the apparently disproportional nature of the punishment, and the well-known fact that the Jews of that era were guilty of several other egregious offenses. The Maharal explained that the Talmud is not claiming that the lack of Birkhot HaTorah is the punishable offense; indeed, the churban was provoked by the other offenses committed at that time. Rather, the Talmud's question was this: since we know that the Jews of that time were involved in the study of Torah, how is it also possible that they were guilty of such transgressions? Should not their Talmud Torah have influenced them toward a more righteous path?

To this, explains the Talmud, it is commented that the Jews of that time did not recite a berakhah on the Torah. They were not awestruck by the experience; they were not moved by the privilege to express gratitude to He who bestowed this great gift. If that was their attitude, they were not in a position to be influenced by the Torah's content.

The Chatam Sofer is reminding us, in his two comments, that no relationship with Torah can be complete without a sense of the majestic and the miraculous. Before the giving of the Torah, the avot were not technically obligated in mitzvot; but if they were lacking an awe of majesty, they would not have been the avot. Before the events of Chanukah, there was no obligation to light candles or recite hallel; but in the generations after, one who can casually fail to do so is shown to be flawed in his relationship with Torah at a fundamental level. The convergence of Miketz and Chanukah provides us with a reminder that allowing the magnificent to become mundane is a danger to the very definition of the Jewish personality. It can also be added that Joseph, by choosing to focus on honoring the king, was actually going to the essence of Rosh HaShanah, a reasonable approach especially before there was an actual commandment to observe its requirements technically. One of the central themes of Rosh HaShanah is malchiyut, recognizing the majesty of God. One reason that kevod ha-

malkhut is such a crucial concept is “Malka d’ara k’ein Malka d’rakia”, Earthly royalty is an illustration that allows humanity to picture the true royalty of the King of Kings. Joseph’s perceptive prioritization laid the groundwork for much of the spiritual growth that would lie ahead. RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack is free today. But if you enjoyed this post, you can tell RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack that their writing is valuable by pledging a future subscription.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> ravfrand@torah.org  
date: Dec 18, 2025, 7:11 PM

### Rav Frand - A Bunch of Yeshiva Bochrim Defeated the Greatest Army of Their Time Through Mesiras Nefesh

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1361 – Can Women Make Latkes While The Chanukah Candles Are Still Burning and other issues? Good Shabbos!

The Shulchan Aruch paskens (Orach Chaim 187:4) that Al Hanissim is added to Birkas Hamazon before the bracha of “Al hakol” but if someone forgets to mention it, he does not need to repeat bentsching. (The same applies if someone forgets to say it in Shemoneh Esrei.) The Rama adds that if he forgets to say it in its proper place in bentsching, he may still insert it together with the other “Harachaman” statements by saying “The Merciful One should perform miracles for us like He did in those days at this time, etc.” And this, says the Rama, is our practice.

I heard a schmooze from Rav Yerucham Olshin, in which, he asks two interesting questions: First, he asks that we do not usually ask the Ribono shel Olam to perform nissim (miracles) for us. Why, then, do we ask, “Harachaman...should do nissim for us”?

How does Rav Olshin know that we don’t daven for nissim? He cites a very famous Gemara (Berachos 54a): If someone’s wife is pregnant and the person prays “May it be His will that my wife gives birth to a boy” this is a tefillas shav (a prayer in vain). From the moment of conception, the gender of the baby is already determined. Once someone’s wife is already carrying a boy or a girl, davening that the child be of a certain gender is a wasted prayer. Nothing is going to miraculously change after the gender has been determined.

However, the Gemara asks from the Medrash that Leah’s daughter Dena was originally supposed to be a male child and only “afterwards” did she turn out to be female. (At the time, Leah already had six sons and the two handmaidens each had two sons. Leah knew prophetically that Yaakov would father twelve sons and she didn’t want her sister Rochel to have fewer sons than the handmaidens so she prayed that the child she was carrying be a girl.) Leah prayed that her ‘son’ should be a daughter. The Ribono shel Olam made a nes (miracle) and He switched the embryos in utero. The embryo that Leah was carrying (Yosef) wound up in Rochel, and the girl with which Rochel was pregnant (Dena) wound up with Leah.

Nevertheless, the Gemara says this is not normal practice, and normative prayer protocol is not to ask the Ribono shel Olam to perform nissim for us. The Matriarchs have a different standard of tefilla, but the rest of us are not allowed to pray for changes to the natural order. If that is the case, asks Rav Olshin, why on Chanukah do we say “He should make miracles for us as He did in those days”?

Rav Olshin quotes his second question in the name of his grandfather, Rav Aharon Kotler, zt”l. The Mishna (Avos 5:7) says that ten nissim were done for our fathers in the Beis Hamikdash. Among them was that no woman ever miscarried from the smell of the sacrificial meats, the sacrificial meats never spoiled, no fly was ever seen in the house of meat cutting, the Kohen Gadol never had a seminal emission on Yom Kippur, the rains never extinguished the fire on the Mizbayach, and so on. The point is there were nissim there on a regular basis. If so, why is such a big deal made about this nes with the minute amount of pure oil for the Menorah lasting for eight days? No holidays were proclaimed to commemorate the ten nissim mentioned in Pirkei Avos. What was so special about the nes of the oil?

Rav Olshin suggests that there are two kinds of nissim. He quotes a Ramchal that the nissim we are familiar with that happened throughout Tanach (whether it be the splitting of the sea or the war with Og king of Bashan or the Mann, and so forth) were pre-programmed into creation. The Ribono shel Olam set up the world in such a way that these miraculous events were (for lack of better terminology) already “baked into the cake.”

There is, however, a different type of nes. That is a nes that the Ribono shel Olam does for someone who is moser nefesh (exhibits self-sacrifice) for a particular mitzva. If a person is moser nefesh for a specific mitzva, the Ribono shel Olam responds on a personal level and makes a nes for that particular person as a reward for the mesiras nefesh that he exhibited. This is the nature of the nes of Chanuka.

The nissim that took place on a regular basis in the Beis Hamikdash were part of creation. They were pre-programmed into His world and we don’t make a special Yom Tov for those kinds of nissim. But, as the Bach explains at the beginning of Hilchos Chanuka, Ner Chanuka is different. The Greeks knew that if they could extinguish the light of the Menorah, the Jews would be lost. They sensed intuitively that the light of the Menorah gave spiritual and physical strength to the Kohanim and the rest of the Jewish nation. Therefore, they went out of their way to defile the oils. Likewise, the Kohanim made exceptional efforts to find and procure pure olive oil. When the Kohanim exerted extreme mesiras nefesh for the mitzva, they brought out kochos that they didn’t even realize they possessed. The Ribono shel Olam will, in fact, perform nissim in response to such devotion. That is why we can ask “May the All Merciful One perform miracles for us as He did in those days at this time.”

This means that in response to our mesiras nefesh and devotion, the Ribono shel Olam will, in fact, perform nissim. The nes of Chanuka embodies this capacity that many people possess – to be able to reach beyond their means. The nes of Chanuka represents people who were not realistically capable of defeating such a mighty army, and yet found the inner strength to reach beyond their means and be moser nefesh, such that they achieved such a military victory.

One of the takeaway lessons of Chanuka is that we all have such strengths that are hidden inside of us. We always need to ask ourselves: Am I doing as much as I can do?

There is an interesting Medrash (in Sefer Shemos): When Moshe Rabbeinu went out to see the suffering of his brethren in Mitzrayim and he saw how tortured they were, he saw that the Egyptian taskmasters assigned jobs appropriate for big and strong people to small and weak people, and jobs appropriate for small and weak people to big and strong people. Men’s jobs were assigned to women and women’s jobs were assigned to men.

Rav Efraim Wachsman recently said at the Agudah convention that it is understandable why it would be considered torture to have a woman do a man’s work and a weak person do a strong person’s work. But why was the reverse considered torture – for strong people to do work that was appropriate for weaker individuals? How is that to be understood as “and they embittered their lives” (Shemos 1:14)? It would seem like these strong men had a lucky day. They were only asked to schlep five pounds of bricks when, in reality, they could have schlepped twenty five pounds of bricks!

Rav Wachsman answered that when a person knows he is capable of doing more and he doesn’t have the opportunity to do what he is capable of, that is a bitter experience. Everyone wants to feel satisfied and fulfilled with their accomplishments in life. When a person feels that he is wasting his time and potential, the experience can indeed be called “va’yemareru es chayeihem.” The nes of Chanuka proves that the Chashmonaim were moser nefesh and went beyond their means and beyond their apparent capabilities. That is one of the lessons we need to take away. The Chashmonaim were like a bunch of yeshiva bochrim and they were nonetheless successful in defeating the greatest army of their time. They saw that they had kochos that they couldn’t imagine. Therefore, the nes of Chanukah includes the prayer “May the Ribono shel Olam perform nissim for us.” If we will be moser nefesh like they were moser nefesh, the Ribono shel Olam will perform nissim for us as he did “in those days at this time.”

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Miketz is provided below:

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## Massacre in Australia: Hanukkah in the Shadow of Terror

by Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

December 14, 2025

How do we light candles, gather with family, sing songs of gratitude, spin the dreidel, and eat latkes in the shadow of such devastating loss and tragedy?

The light of Hanukkah this year is dimmed and diminished even before it is lit. The news of a horrific terror attack at a Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach in Australia has shaken us to the core. Eleven innocent people were murdered at the time of this writing, among them the Chabad Rabbi, Rabbi Eli Schlanger. Australia has become a hotbed of antisemitism, met far too often with a grossly insufficient response by government and authorities. Hanukkah begins with a painful reminder that when our enemies march to the chant of “globalize the intifada,” they mean it. And they must be confronted.

It is far too soon to truly process or respond to such a heinous crime, but anyone with a sensitive soul cannot avoid the question that rises unbidden in the heart. How do we light candles, gather with family, sing songs of gratitude, spin the dreidel, and eat latkes in the shadow of such devastating loss and tragedy?

Two years ago, six holy hostages held captive by the evil Hamas terrorists gathered around a makeshift menorah fashioned from paper cups to light Hanukkah candles. In an act of cruelty meant to compound the suffering of the hostage families, their wicked captors recorded the moment on video. That footage was later discovered by the IDF in Gaza, shared privately with the families, and only recently released in time for Hanukkah this year. The video shows each of the hostages thin, weakened, but still alive. Some even smile at the camera. Among them is Hersh Goldberg Polin, missing the lower half of his left arm, blown off by a grenade on October 7.

In the video, almost impossible to comprehend, the hostages can be heard singing the blessing of Shehechiyanu, thanking God for enabling them to reach that moment. Ultimately, all six, Hersh Goldberg Polin, Eden Yerushalmi, Ori Danino, Alex Lobanov, Carmel Gat, and Almog Sarusi, were brutally murdered by their captors in a tunnel in Rafah on August 29, 2024. Their bodies were discovered by Israeli troops two days later.

Released hostages later shared that when they encountered Hersh in captivity, he strengthened them with words of encouragement. He would quote the teaching made famous by Viktor Frankl, that those who have a why to live can bear almost any how. That belief empowered Frankl to survive the Holocaust. Though Hersh was ultimately murdered, it gave him the courage to live each day in captivity, and through it, he helped others survive and return home.

On that recently released video, as Hersh and the others light the menorah, he can be heard likening their circumstance to the Holocaust, saying, “There’s that picture of the Hanukkah with a Nazi flag above it.”

If six hostages held captive by the evil enemies of our time, tortured and starved, could nevertheless push back the darkness with the light of the menorah, then we too can find the will and the way to respond to darkness with light. If they could smile and sing Shehechiyanu in that moment, then we can not only say Shehechiyanu, but sing it and mean it, more grateful than ever to be alive and present in this moment.

**Light in the Darkest of Places** The Jews of Australia, and Jews around the world, are not the first to confront the challenge of lighting Hanukkah candles against a backdrop of darkness. One year ago, six hostages found a way to light in the darkest of places. Over eighty years before them, in the depths of Bergen Belsen, Jews also found a way to light and to sing Shehechiyanu.

In her Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust, Professor Yaffa Eliach shared the extraordinary story of Hanukkah in Bergen Belsen:

Hanukkah came to Bergen Belsen. It was time to kindle the Hanukkah lights. A jug of oil was not to be found. No candle was in sight. A menorah belonged to the distant past. Instead, a wooden clog, the shoe of one of the inmates, became a menorah. Strings pulled from a concentration camp uniform became wicks, and black camp shoe polish became oil.

Not far from heaps of bodies, living skeletons assembled to participate in the kindling of the Hanukkah lights. The Rabbi of Bluzhov lit the first light and chanted the first two blessings in his pleasant voice, the melody filled with sorrow and pain. When he was about to recite the third blessing, he stopped. He turned his head and looked around as if searching for something. Then he turned back to the quivering lights and, in a strong, reassuring, comforting voice, recited the third blessing. “Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.”

Among those present was Mr. Zamietchkowski, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Bund, a sincere and thoughtful man with a passion for discussing faith and truth. When the ceremony concluded, he pushed his way to the Rabbi and said, “Spira, I understand your need to light Hanukkah candles in these wretched times. I can even understand the second blessing, ‘Who performed miracles for our fathers in days of old at this season.’ But the third blessing I cannot understand. How could you thank God for keeping us alive when hundreds of Jewish bodies lie in the shadows of the Hanukkah lights, when thousands of living skeletons walk this camp, and millions more are being massacred? For this you are thankful? This you call keeping us alive?” “Zamietchkowski, you are one hundred percent right,” the Rabbi answered. “When I reached the third blessing, I too hesitated. I asked myself what to do. I turned my head to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and other distinguished rabbis standing near me whether I could recite it. But as I turned, I saw behind me a large throng of living Jews. Their faces were filled with faith, devotion, and focus as they listened to the kindling of the Hanukkah lights.

“I said to myself that if God has such a nation, a people who at a time like this, when they see before them the bodies of their beloved fathers, brothers, and sons, when death lurks in every corner, still stand together listening with devotion to the blessing ‘Who performed miracles for our fathers in days of old at this season,’ then I am obligated to recite the third blessing.”

That night in Bergen Belsen, Mr. Zamietchkowski saw only what lay before him, death and unbearable suffering. The Rebbe saw that as well. But he also saw another layer of truth that was just as real. He saw a people who clung to faith and refused to surrender their spiritual dignity even in the most horrific circumstances.

Sadly, we have a long history of Hanukkah overlapping with tragedy and loss. But we also have a sacred tradition of finding faith despite circumstance, and of stubbornly insisting on bringing light even when surrounded by darkness

from: Ben Olam Haba <ben@halachafortoday.com>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 6:15 PM

subject: Halacha For Today: Erev Shabbos Kodesh, Erev Rosh Chodesh

Teves 5786, December 19, 2025

Halachos for **Erev Shabbos Kodesh**

1) When Rosh Chodesh Teves falls out on **Shabbos Chanukah** (as it does this year, 5786) the Birchaz Hamazon is very lengthy, as "Retzei", "Ya'aleh V'Yavo" and " Al HaNisim" are added.

It's especially important to use a Bentcher or a Siddur, and stay focused, so you remember all the additions.

If Al Hanisim is inadvertently omitted from Birchaz Hamazon, it isn't repeated.

If "Retzei" or "Yaaleh V'yavo" [in certain cases on Shabbos] is omitted, the Birchaz Hamazon is repeated.

2) There is a dispute among the Poskim regarding one who omitted Al Hanisim (which doesn't necessitate repeating the Birchaz hamazon) and also omitted Retzei (which does necessitate repeating the Birchaz Hamazon).

Some Poskim maintain that when you repeat the Birchaz Hamazon you do not say Al Hanisim (Magen Avraham 188:13, Elya Rabbah, Shulchan Aruch Harav 188:4 and others)

Others maintain that once you are repeating the Birchaz Hamazon already, you need to also include the Al Hanisim (Pri Megadim, Chaye Adam Klal 154:39, Sha'ar HaTzion 188:21 and others)

It is best to try and not to forget, as it isn't clear which of the above opinions the Halacha follows. (See also Shu"t Har Tzvi Orach Chaim Vol.1 Siman 54 HalachosShabbos Kodesh

1) On Motzaei Shabbos Chanukah, there is a question as to what comes first, Havdalah or the lighting of the Menorah

2) This question is the subject of great debate and there are many of Poskim on each side of this issue, and thus both opinions are halachically acceptable.

Indeed, the Mishna Berura (Siman 681 S"K 3 ) writes that each individual can choose which opinion to follow.

Of course, if one has an established family minhag or a kehila minhag, they should stick to that.

<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-chanukah-rabbi-brander-5786/>

### **Shabbat Chanukah: Maoz Tzur and Spiritual Resistance – From Gaza to Sydney**

**Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander** is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated to the victims of the horrific antisemitic attack on the first night of Chanukah in Bondi Beach, Australia. As reflected in the article below, their deaths tragically connect our generation to the enduring story of faith, resilience, and spiritual resistance expressed in Maoz Tzur. May their memories be a blessing, and may all those wounded merit a refuah shleimah. Deep in a dark tunnel under Gaza two years ago, a group of six Israeli hostages lit Chanukah candles and sang Maoz Tzur. Watching this unbelievable scene unfold on a recently released video, recovered in Gaza by the Israeli military, is the strongest example I have seen of how this prayer Maoz Tzur represents the spiritual strength of the Jewish people during times of challenge. Viewed now, knowing that just eight months after this scene was filmed that these six hostages would be murdered in captivity, these scenes are as heartbreaking as they are inspiring. Just three days after these videos moved the Jewish world, at least 15 Jews were gunned down at a Chanukah party on Australia's Bondi Beach, including Chabad shlichim Rabbi Eli Schlanger zt"l and Rabbi Yaakov Levitin zt,l , darkening the world before the sun even set to usher in the first night's candle lighting. Still, millions of Jews went on to light candles around the world and sing Maoz Tzur. These six hostages, Hersh Goldberg Polin, Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Almog Sarusi, Or Danino and Alex Lubanov, along with the victims of the massacre in Australia – and all of the grief and fear we face as Jews – is likely on all of our minds as we light our Chanukah candles each night.

With its repeated formula of adversity and salvation, Maoz Tzur is more than a Chanukah song; it is an anthem of Jewish resilience throughout history. While the identity of its author remains unknown, the acrostic formed by the first letter of its first five stanzas spells "Mordechai", presumed to be his name. The sixth and final paragraph is a later addition to the poem, likely

composed before 1250, toward the end of the Crusader period. At least twenty-seven tunes have been composed to this hymn of spiritual fortitude, attesting to its centrality in Jewish identity. This song brought the holiday of Chanukah to life throughout the generations. It gave strength to our people in their darkest hours of distress, and it continues to echo in our reality today. The first stanza of Maoz Tzur expresses our trust in God as a savior and anchor in turbulent times. The second recalls the miracle of the Exodus, the third, the redemption of the Jewish people after seventy years of Babylonian exile; and the fourth recounts the drama of Purim. The fifth stanza is the only one centered on Chanukah – detailing the threats and destruction wrought by Antiochus and the Greeks, and the miraculous divine salvation of the weak from the strong, symbolized by the small jar of olive oil. The meta-narrative running through the song is that Chanukah is but one example within a broader arc of crisis and redemption. Our unshaking commitment to God, and the spiritual strength we maintain even in times of trouble, forms a larger Jewish story, symbolized by this holiday, but manifested across centuries and places.

The final stanza of Maoz Tzur takes the form of a prayer for ultimate redemption, but its immediate focus is on the threat posed to the Jews in the Middle Ages by Christian rulers and societies. Some scholars have suggested that the adversary "Admon" mentioned at the song's close might be a veiled reference to Frederick Barbarossa (i.e., Red-Beard), the Roman Emperor around the time of the poem's composition. The vision of the "seven shepherds" at the song's conclusion is a reference to a prophecy of Micha (5:4), interpreted by the Talmud (Sukkah 52b) as describing the great leaders and progenitors of Jewish and human civilization throughout history who stood up for justice and holiness even in the face of adversity and oppression. The Jewish dynamic of spiritual resistance and faith-based resilience, of course, continued long after the Middle Ages. Dr. Yaffa Eliach, a noted scholar of the Shoah, recounts in Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust about how Jews lit Chanukah "candles" in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp using an inmate's wooden clog as a menorah, strings pulled from a camp uniform for wicks, and black shoe polish for oil. Even as countless Jews were being murdered every day, the camps' inmates, living skeletons, nevertheless assembled to perform the mitzvah. So many inmates crowded to witness the lighting that the Bluzhever Rebbe made a point of reciting the celebratory third blessing – shehechyanu. When questioned how such a blessing could be recited in the concentration camp, he pointed to the spiritual resistance of hundreds of Jews around him choosing faith, even in the midst of unimaginable darkness.

In the same vein, Ralph Melnick, in his article "Our Own Deeper Joy, Spiritual Resistance after the Holocaust," testifies how thousands of women in Auschwitz defiantly sang Maoz Tzur on Chanukah, affirming their faith that the Almighty, with His outstretched arm, would ultimately redeem his people and avenge their innocent blood. These stories, and many, many others, including the hostages in Gaza, who managed to sing and light candles, show how even thousands of years after the events of Chanukah, Jews continued to engage in amazing acts of faith and spiritual fortitude, continuing to set their sights on redemption and salvation even at the lowest nadirs of human suffering.

We, in our own generation, continue the inspiring Chanukah tradition of channeling spiritual strength to overcome terrible challenges. In the wake of October 7th and the difficult war that followed, we have held fast to our faith in God and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. Communities facing antisemitism in the Diaspora continue to display their lights in public. Our soldiers have held their heads high while lighting candles and reciting Maoz Tzur in the ruins of Gaza, in the brush and mires of Lebanon, at the top of the Hermon ridges overlooking a troubled Syria. Uncertainty and fear will remain part of our reality, but the light of our faith will not flicker or fail. And with God's help, we will continue to spread the light of Torah and the message of Chanukah throughout a world that, one day, will be stronger, safer, and better.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

date: Dec 18, 2025, 2:33 AM

subject: **Rav Kook** on Mikeitz: Interpreting Dreams

Mikeitz: Interpreting Dreams

The Sages made a remarkable claim regarding dreams and their interpretation: "Dreams are fulfilled according to the interpretation" (Berachot 55b). The interpreter has a key function in the realization of a dream: his analysis can determine how the dream will come to pass.

The Talmud substantiated this statement with the words of the chief wine-butler: "Just as he interpreted, so [my dream] came to be" (Gen. 41:13).

Do dreams foretell the future? Does the interpreter really have the power to determine the meaning of a dream and alter the future accordingly?

The Purpose of Dreams Clearly, not all of our dreams are prophetic.

Originally, in humanity's pristine state, every dream was a true dream. But with the fall of Adam, mankind left the path of integrity. Our minds became filled with wanton desires and pointless thoughts, and our dreams became more chaff than truth.

Why did God give us the ability to dream? A true dream is a wake-up call, warning us to correct our life's direction. Our eyes are opened to a vivid vision of our future, should we not take heed to mend our ways.

To properly understand the function of dreams, we must first delve into the inner workings of divine providence in the world. How are we punished or rewarded in accordance to our actions?

The Zohar (Bo 33a) gives the following explanation for the mechanics of providence. The soul has an inner quality that naturally brings about those situations and events that correspond to our moral level. Should we change our ways, this inner quality will reflect that change, and will lead us towards a different set of circumstances.

Dreams are part of this system of providence. They are one of the methods utilized by the soul's inner quality to bring about the appropriate outcome. The Function of the Interpreter But the true power of a dream is only realized once it has been interpreted. The interpretation intensifies the dream's impact. As the Sages taught, "A dream not interpreted is like a letter left unread" (Berachot 55b). When a dream is explained, its images become more intense and vivid. The impact on the soul is stronger, and the dreamer is more primed for the consequential outcome.

Of course, the interpreter must be insightful and perceptive. He needs to penetrate the inner message of the dream and detect the potential influences of the soul's inner qualities that are reflected in the dream.

Multiple Messages All souls contain a mixture of good and bad traits. A dream is the nascent development of the soul's hidden traits, as they are beginning to be realized. A single dream may contain multiple meanings, since it reflects contradictory qualities within the soul.

When the interpreter gives a positive interpretation to a dream, he helps develop and realize positive traits hidden in the soul of the dreamer. A negative interpretation, on the other hand, will promote negative traits. As the Zohar (Mikeitz 199b) admonishes:

"A good dream should be kept in mind and not forgotten, so that it will be fulfilled.... Therefore Joseph mentioned his dream [to his family], so that it would come to pass. He would always anticipate its fulfillment."

It is even possible to interpret multiple aspects of a dream, all of which are potentially true. Even if they are contradictory, all may still be realized.

Rabbi Bena'ah related that, in his days, there were 24 dream-interpreters in Jerusalem. "Once I had a dream," he said, "and I went to all of them. No two interpretations were the same, but they all came to pass" (Berachot 55b).

Dreams of the Nation These concepts are also valid on the national level.

Deliverance of the Jewish people often takes place through the medium of dreams. Both Joseph and Daniel achieved power and influence through the dreams of gentile rulers. The Jewish people have a hidden inner potential for greatness and leadership. As long as this quality is unrealized, it naturally tries to bring about its own fulfillment — sometimes, by way of dreams.

When a person is brought before the Heavenly court, he is questioned, "Did you yearn for redemption?" (Shabbat 31a). Why is this important?

By anticipating and praying for the redemption, we help develop the inner quality of the nation's soul, thus furthering its advance and the actualization of its destined mission.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 222- 227)

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from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 11:28 PM

subject: Parashat Mikeitz and Chanukah

**Havdalah or Chanukah Lights – Which Comes First?**

By **Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

Rishonim and Acharonim have debated which should be done first on Motza'ei Shabbat, Havdalah, or Nerot Chanukah. This debate is recorded as early as the Meiri (Shabbat 23), who lived during the thirteenth century. This is a situation of competing Halachic principles, and Poskim have endlessly debated which one has priority.

Tadir VeSheAino Tadir, Tadir Kodem

On the one hand, one could argue that Havdalah should be performed first because of the principle of Tadir VeSheAino Tadir, Kodem, which states that the activity performed more often should be performed first (Zevachim 89a). This principle has firm Torah roots, as BeMidbar chapter 28 teaches that the Korban Tamid (the daily communal sacrifice) should be offered before the Korban Mussaf (special sacrificial offering for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and Yamim Tovim). The Torah (BeMidbar 28:23) even states why the Tamid sacrifice is offered before the Mussaf: because we offer the Korban Tamid more frequently (and see Zevachim 89a).

We suggest a reason for this Halachah based on an idea I heard from Rav Aharon Lichtenstein. We tend to cherish events that occur infrequently, because they constitute a break from the daily routine. The Gemara (Megillah 21b) states that people find reading Megillah and reciting Hallel more "beloved" than Kri'at HaTorah. We tend to be more excited about a once-a-year visit to a beloved aunt or uncle than seeing our immediate family every day. However, the people and events that are part of our daily existence are often more important than those that we encounter infrequently. The man who spends a considerable amount of time every day with his children but does not take them on a spectacular vacation is a far superior father than one who spends little time with his children almost all year but takes them on a fancy vacation one week a year. Similarly, the activity that we perform more often has priority over the less frequently performed Mitzvah.

There are numerous applications of the Tadir principle. Men put on Tallit before Tefillin in part because of this principle (see Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 25 s.v. VeAchar). In Kiddush, we recite the Brachah of Borei Pri HaGafen before the Brachah on the Kedushat HaYom in part because of this principle (Pesachim 114a). It is partly because of this principle that we read the portion of Rosh Chodesh before the portion of Chanukah during Kriat Hatorah on Rosh Chodesh Tevet (Tosafot Shabbat 23b s.v. Hadar). The Mishnah Berurah (52:5), citing the Chayei Adam, rules that if one arrives late to Shul on Shabbat morning, he should skip the added sections of Pesukei DeZimrah for Shabbat in favor of the portions of Pesukei Dezimra that we recite daily. However, this rule is not universally applied. For example, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 643:1) rules that the Brachah of Leishev BaSukkah precedes the Brachah of Shehechiyanu on Sukkot. Moreover, Tosafot (Shabbat 23b s.v. Hadar) note that the Tadir only rule decides which Mitzvah should be performed first. However, the Tadir rule does not decide which of two Mitzvot should be performed when only one of the two Mitzvot can be performed.

Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan

On the other hand, Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan, we seek to prolong our observance of Shabbat. For example, when Yom Tov occurs on Motza'ei Shabbat, we recite Kiddush before Havdalah because of this principle (Pesachim 102b-103a, Rashbam 102b s.v. Rav Amar Yaknah). The Terumat Hadeshen (number 60) rules that Sefirat HaOmer should be recited before Havdalah because of this principle. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 489:9) codifies the Terumat HaDeshen, and the Mishnah Berurah does not record a

dissenting opinion. The Rama (O.C. 693:1) rules, based on this principle (see Mishna Berura 693:3), that we should first read Megillat Esther and only later recite Havdalah. The Mishnah Berurah also does not record dissenting opinions to this ruling.

#### Pirsumei Nissah

One might argue that Havdalah should precede Nerot Chanukah because Havdalah is a Torah-level obligation (at least according to the Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 29:1), and Nerot Chanukah is merely a rabbinical obligation. This argument, however, might not be valid, as the Gemara (Shabbat 23b) states that Nerot Chanukah take precedence over Kiddush (which is also a Torah obligation, according to the Rambam, *ibid.*). The Gemara speaks of a poor individual who has sufficient funds to purchase either Nerot Chanukah or wine for Kiddush. The Gemara states that he should buy Chanukah candles because they publicize the Chanukah miracle. On the other hand, the Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 29:6) believes that wine for Kiddush is only a rabbinical obligation. Nonetheless, the Gemara does indicate Nerot Chanukah's elevated status because it "publicizes the miracle." Indeed, the Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 4:12) writes, "the Mitzvah of Nerot Chanukah is exceedingly beloved, and one must exercise care about it, to inform people of the miracle and contribute to the offering of praise and thanks to Hashem for the miracles he has made on our behalf."

The Opinions – Rishonim and the Shulchan Aruch with its Commentaries The Meiri (Shabbat 23) records the debate among the Rishonim as to whether Nerot Chanukah should be lit before or after Havdalah. The Meiri writes that the custom in his locale is to light Nerot Chanukah first. He explains that on Motza'ei Shabbat, we light Nerot Chanukah after the optimal time. The Meiri explains that we wish to light the Chanukah lights as early as possible, to minimize the amount of time we must light the Nerot Chanukah after its ideal time. On the other hand, the Terumat HaDeshen (number 60) and other Rishonim rule that in the synagogue, one should light Nerot Chanukah first because of the rule of Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan. Another reason offered is the priority accorded to Ner Chanukah because of its role in publicizing the miracle. On the other hand, the Raavad (Temim Deim 174) and several other Rishonim rule that Havdalah should be recited first. Among the reasons these Rishonim offer is the Tadir principle, and that it is inappropriate to light Nerot Chanukah before reciting the blessing on light within the framework of Havdalah.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 681:2) rules that Chanukah lights should be kindled in the Shul before Havdalah. The Rama (*ibid.*) adds that one should also light Nerot Chanukah before reciting Havdalah at home. The Taz (O.C. 681:1) argues vigorously and at great length that one should first say Havdalah when lighting at home. The Taz emphasizes the importance of the Tadir rule, noting its Torah origin.

The Taz seeks to prove from various Talmudic passages that the Tadir rule enjoys precedence over the principle of Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan. Moreover, the Taz argues that one does not extend Shabbat by lighting Chanukah candles first, because kindling Nerot Chanukah is forbidden on Shabbat. The reason for Afukei Yoma is that we do not want to treat Shabbat as a burden that we are eager to shed. However, when one lights Ner Chanukah, he has, by definition, completed Shabbat. Thus, one does not accomplish the goal of Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan by lighting Nerot Chanukah before Havdalah. This point, explains the Taz, is what distinguishes Nerot Chanukah from Sefirat Ha'omer and Megillah reading. The latter two activities are not forbidden to perform on Shabbat, and thus one can legitimately delay Shabbat's termination by performing them first.

#### Acharonim and Later Codes

The accepted practice for Shul is to light Chanukah lights and subsequently perform Havdalah (Biur Halacha 681 s.v. Madlikin and Ben Ish Chai Parshat VaYeshev 21). In Shul, only one person kindles the Chanukah candles. Thus, when we light Chanukah candles first in Shul, Shabbat is prolonged for everyone except for the one who lit the Chanukah lights. Moreover, the Aruch HaShulchan (O.C. 681:2) explains that since great "publicity of the Chanukah miracle" occurs when lighting Chanukah lights in Shul, there is more reason to light Nerot Chanukah first in Shul than there is at home.

Thus, the consensus accepts that Shul Chanukah lighting enjoys priority over Havdalah. The debate, however, about what to do at home continued to rage during the period of the Acharonim. The Vilna Gaon, Eliyahu Rabba, Chamad Moshe, Beit Meir, and Chaye Adam codify the Rama. The Maharal of Prague, Pri Chadash, and Tosafot Yom Tov side with the Taz.

The later Acharonim encountered difficulty in resolving this debate. The Mishna Berura (681:3) concludes that this dispute remains unresolved; therefore, one may follow either opinion. Sephardic Jews (Ben Ish Chai, Parshat VaYeshev 21 and Rav Ovadia Yosef, Teshuvot Yechaveh Da'at 1:75) at home recite Havdalah and subsequently kindle Chanukah lights. Various communities had established practices for resolving this debate. Rav David Zvi Hoffman (Teshuvot Melamed Lehoil 1:122) records that the Minhag in Germany was to follow the Taz and perform Havdalah first. The Aruch HaShulchan (O.C. 681:2) writes that the practice in Lithuania was to perform Havdalah first, unless he heard Havdalah in Shul.

#### Conclusion

The debate over whether to light Chanukah candles or recite Havdalah has been partially resolved. The accepted practice in the Shul is to light the Chanukah candles first. The question regarding what to do at home has not been determined for Ashkenazim, but Sephardim customarily recite Havdalah first. In my experience, the custom to recite Havdalah first has become accepted by most Ashkenazim at this point, as it seems the more intuitive option.

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 6:25 PM

subject: Torah Weekly - Parashat Miketz

#### PARSHA INSIGHTS

##### In the Heart of a child

"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon..." (41:14)

Little children find it difficult to do things alone. They need constant help and encouragement. They can be bold when a parent is near, but when out of sight, tears replace bravado until, once again, the child feels the parental hand that comforts.

Our first steps as babies are greeted by parental glee; hands reach out and guide our every step. When we falter, Mom and Dad are there to stop the fall.

A day comes, however, when we stumble and fall. Tears fill our eyes, dismay fills our hearts. We look around: "Mommy? Daddy? Are you there?" Only when our parents let us fall can we learn to walk. Only when our parents let us become adults can we stop being children. If, as parents, we never let our children fall, they will never learn to stand by themselves. Everything has its season, of course, and a child challenged beyond his capabilities may lose hope in himself, but a challenge at the right time is an opportunity to grow and discover who we really are.

Chanukah celebrates two events: The defeat of the vast Seleucid Greek army by a handful of Jews and the miracle of the one flask of pure oil that burned for eight days. At first glance, the defeat of our oppressors seems the greater cause for celebration; yet our focus rests on the miracle of the lights. Why? Chanukah occurred after the last of the Prophets - Chagai, Zecharia and Malachi - passed away. Hashem no longer communicated directly with humans. We were suddenly like children alone in the dark. From the darkness, we would need to forge our connection with Hashem in the furnace of our own hearts. We needed to grow up.

But growing up is difficult. "Mommy, Daddy...Are you still there?" The heart can grow a little cold with longing. We needed a little help.

The joy of Chanukah is not so much because we got what we prayed for - the defeat of our oppressors - but that our prayers were answered...with a miracle. From the center of a world where spiritual decay had tainted the holiest places, light burst forth; Hashem was still there.

That little flask would burn and burn, not just for eight days but for millennia. We would take those lights with us into the long dark night of

exile and we would know that Hashem is there with us, even in the darkest of nights.

More Jews observe Chanukah than any other Jewish festival. Those lights burned for more than just eight days. They've been burning for over two thousand years. However far one may be from their Jewish roots, a menorah still burns in their window. A little spark lingers on; a holy spark hidden in the heart of a child.

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from: Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org>

to: hamaayan@torah.org

date: Dec 17, 2025, 10:05 PM

subject: Hamaayan - Two More Years

Parshas Miketz - Two More Years

BS"D Volume 40, No. 10 30 Kislev 5786 December 20, 2025

Sponsored by 1) Faith Ginsburg on the yahrzeit of her sister Ann Rita Schwartz (Chana Rut bat Naftali Hertz a"b); 2) Milton Cahn in memory of his mother, Abby Cahn (Bracha bat Moshe a"b) and his wife Felice Cahn (Fayyah Sarah bat Naftoli Zev a"b); 3) aron & Rona Lerner in memory of Mrs. Arline Katz (Chana Surah bat Moshe Aharon a"b); 4) The Vogel family on the yahrzeit of grandmother Miriam bat Yehuda Leib Kalkstein a"b

This week's Parashah opens, "It happened at the end of two years to the day—Pharaoh is dreaming that behold!—he is standing over the Nile." Why does the verse say, "at the end of two years," rather than "after two years"? Also, why does the verse say "is dreaming," in present tense? Lastly, what does "behold!" add, compared to saying simply that Pharaoh "was standing over the Nile"?

R' Tuvya Ha'levi z"l (Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael; 16th century) writes: Perhaps the phrase "at the end of two years" alludes to the two extra years that Yosef was required to remain in prison because he sought the help of Pharaoh's cupbearer. (See inside.) However, he writes, there is another explanation that will answer all of these questions.

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile because they were confident that it had the power to save them from any famine. The rest of the world needs rain, and G-d can withhold rain when He is angry. The Nile, however, never stops flowing, they reasoned.

The famine that Pharaoh's dream foretold was meant as a wake-up call to the Egyptians. But, the Torah is foretelling, the Egyptians would not get the message. "At the end of two years," i.e., when Yaakov will come to Egypt after two years of famine (see 45:6), Yaakov will bless Pharaoh that the Nile's tide should always rise to meet him (see Rashi z"l to 47:10). This will end the famine early. As a result, Pharaoh will still be "dreaming" that, "behold," even then, "he is standing over the Nile" with nothing to fear.

(Chein Tov)

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"It happened at the end of two years to the day . . ." (41:1)

Midrash Rabbah applies to Yosef the verse (Tehilim 40:5), "Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust, and did not turn to the arrogant and to strayers after falsehood." Says the Midrash: Because Yosef said, "If only you would think of me . . . and mention me," he had to remain in prison two more years. [Until here from the Midrash]

Many commentaries ask: The Midrash seems, at first, to be praising Yosef for his Bitachon ("Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust") and it further says that he "did not turn to the arrogant." Then the Midrash seems to do an about face and criticize Yosef for turning to Pharaoh's cupbearer for help in getting out of prison.

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) offers a novel explanation (a different novel explanation by R' Kluger was presented last week): Our verses in fact demonstrate Yosef's great trust in Hashem. The Mishnah (beginning of Avodah Zarah) teaches that one must avoid engaging in certain transactions with idol-worshipers within three days before their holidays—including the king's birthday—so that they do not give thanks to their idols. When Yosef interpreted Pharaoh's cupbearer's dream, Yosef was concerned that the Egyptian might give thanks to his idol for the good interpretation he received. Therefore, Yosef said to him: Do not think that

the good interpretation of the dream is a reason for you to be thankful. To the contrary, you had that dream and are being released from prison "only [so that] you will think of me . . . and mention me." Yosef was not afraid to tell the cupbearer that the latter was merely a pawn in the process.

Why, then, was Yosef condemned to remain in prison two additional years? Because, though Yosef understood that Hashem has many agents and Pharaoh's cupbearer was just a tool, the latter did not share Yosef's complete trust in Hashem and he might give thanks to his idol that he was chosen to be the instrument for Yosef's release. For this slight miscalculation, Yosef had to remain in prison another two years. (Avodat Avodah: Introduction) R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l (1878- 1953; Bnei Brak, Israel; the "Chazon Ish") explains the above Midrash as follows: On the one hand, Yosef was a person of very strong Bitachon. Yosef knew that his release from prison was not dependent on any initiative of his own, but he also knew that the way of the world is that a person must engage in some Hishtadlut / making efforts to help himself. Therefore, he asked the cupbearer for help. In this case, that was wrong because the Egyptian—referred to by the Midrash as "arrogant" and a "strayer after falsehood"—was not the type of person who would remember to feel gratitude to Yosef and remember to help him. As such, Yosef's request was not proper Hishtadlut; it looked like an act of desperation, and that is prohibited. (Emunah U'bitachon 2:6)

R' Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains the Midrash's indictment of Yosef as follows: Hashem created a world in which a person must engage in Hishtadlut; not only is it necessary, it is what Hashem wants. Just as wheat must be planted, watered, weeded, etc.—it will not grow if one merely has Bitachon—and just as food requires cooking and other preparation, so nearly all aspects of life require some effort on a person's part in order for them to succeed.

However, R' Mintzberg continues, the degree of Hishtadlut that is appropriate varies from person-to-person and from time-to-time. Everyone is required to examine their own life experience to determine how much Hishtadlut is expected of them. When people do that, some will find that nothing comes easily to them—a sign that Hashem expects significant Hishtadlut on their part. Others will find that they are successful with minimal effort—an indication that significant Hishtadlut on their part is wrong; instead they should rely on their Bitachon. (Of course, we don't know how Hashem determines in which group a person will be.)

We read about Yosef in last week's Parashah (39:2-3), "Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man . . . whatever he did Hashem made succeed through him." We read further (39:23), "Whatever he did Hashem made successful." As such, Yosef should have realized that he was a person who should minimize his Hishtadlut and have greater Bitachon. For Yosef, in his personal circumstances, even the little bit of Hishtadlut he did by asking the Egyptian for help was too much. (Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah: Vayeishev)

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"Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt." (41:33)

Why did Yosef believe that it was part of his role as a dream interpreter to offer advice to Pharaoh?

R' Aharon Friedman shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh in Israel) writes: Perhaps another reason Yosef had to remain in prison for an additional two years is that if he had been released merely because he correctly interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's baker and cup-bearer, he would have become just one more member of Pharaoh's existing staff of dream interpreters, spending the rest of his life interpreting nonsensical dreams for anyone and everyone in the palace. During those two more years that Yosef sat in prison, he reflected on why he was left to languish there, and he concluded that he was meant to interpret a very important dream and to make a big impression. That is why he offered the suggestion recorded in our verse.

R' Friedman adds: There is a lesson for us in this episode. One can choose, for example, to offer commentary about the economy or society's ills, or one can choose to make a difference. Likewise, a person can be someone who

theorizes about the future Geulah / redemption, or he can choose to be someone who helps to bring that Geulah closer. (Parashat Milchamah)  
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Shabbat “Barchuni l’shalom / Bless me for peace, angels of peace . . .”  
(From the poem Shalom Aleichem)

R’ Gedaliah Aharon Konig z”l (1921-1980; leader of the Breslov community in Tzefat, Israel) writes: Someone asked me how we can request of the angels to bless us, as if it is in their power to do so. Should we not be directing our prayers to G-d alone? The person who asked me this question noted that some people do not recite Shalom Aleichem because of this difficulty.

I answered him, R’ Konig records, that we have no right to refrain from reciting any of our liturgy just because we do not understand it, after generations of the Jewish People have accepted to recite that liturgy with awe and love for Hashem. As R’ Nachman of Breslov z”l (1772-1810; Ukraine) wrote: When a person starts to rely on his own intellect and wisdom, he falls into many deep traps and makes many mistakes. The essence of Judaism is to walk in the way of faith, without calculations. If we start editing our liturgy based on our own understanding, R’ Konig continues, where will we draw the line? How many Mitzvot and holy customs of our ancestors will we “edit” as well, based on our own understanding? Of course, we should try to understand what we are doing, but we have no right to stop any accepted practice just because we do not understand it. (Quoted in Otzrot Geonei Ha’dorot: Shabbat Kodesh II p.293)

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<https://aish.com/why-the-first-day-of-hanukkah-is-a-miracle/>

## Why the First Day of Hanukkah Is a Miracle by Peter Himmelman \*

December 10, 2025

What Hanukkah teaches us about wonder in the age of AI.

There are at least a thousand things in the Torah that people don’t think of as “real.” The splitting of the Red Sea. A talking donkey. Manna falling from the firmament. Angels who look and act like human beings. A ladder to heaven. Babies born to elderly couples. An entire universe created in six days, with a weary God resting on the seventh.

I know what reality is, they say. It’s me sitting here, typing out words on my computer, looking out the window where I can see our lawn, now as verdant as an Irish meadow. Last week it was nothing but brown, dead grass. Then came a massive rainfall, almost five straight days, and the grass seeds that our gardener spread across the yard suddenly took hold. Everything sprang into life. Three straight days of sunshine helped too. All of that is normal, undeniably so. Nothing like the stuff in the Torah.

Could it be that our perception of grass as “real” comes from the way repetition has inured us to its sheer prevalence, creating a dulling of my imagination?

What if we had never seen grass growing before? What if there had only been pebbles? Would we be shocked at seeing this magical green carpet we call grass? I think I would. I think we all would.

What if one morning the sky went from jet-black to a blaze of gold just that single time, would our casual appraisal of the sun rising turn to radical amazement?

How about the sun? A ball of fire that rises only in the east, hangs above us each day to brighten and warm the world, and sets only in the west. What if this had happened only once? If one morning the sky went from jet-black to a blaze of gold just that single time, would our casual appraisal turn to radical amazement?

It would also bring with it a great sense of fear, of excitement, and, with its intense beauty, untold pleasure.

Reclaiming Astonishment Is the sun real? Is our sentience real? Is grass truly nothing to be excited about? Would we dismiss their supposed normalcy, their unquestioned reality, so easily if we were seeing and feeling them for the first time?

How about the idea that a fully formed human being exists a human body after a predictable nine months in the womb? How do we so easily compartmentalize the birth and life of human beings into the category of known, understood, normal—and then, off we go? How did birth, of all things, end up in nearly the same mental file as “traffic” and “Sunday morning bagels”?

Have we lost something essential in having seen these things so many times that we have failed to see the obvious? Have we trained ourselves out of wonder?

Maybe the real problem isn’t that the Torah is full of unreal stories and the lawn is full of real grass. Maybe it’s that once something repeats often enough, we exile it from the realm of the miraculous and demote it to “just the way things are.” Grass, having appeared once, would shatter our minds. The sky, lit once, would blow our minds. The first birth would draw us to our knees. But seen a thousand times, or even a half dozen, they become scenery. Hanukkah and the Miracle of the Ordinary There aren’t eight days of Hanukkah because the miracle lasted eight days—it only lasted seven. Once oil burns, that first day is already taken for granted. We expect flame when we light something. But the rabbis insisted that the very first day was miraculous too. Not the extension of the oil, not the spectacle, but the ordinary itself—fire responding to wick, sustaining light, obeying laws that are themselves miraculous. The miracle begins even before it stretches into the unexpected; it begins the moment flame appears at all.

The natural world itself is the miracle, albeit one we are used to.

In that light, the Torah begins to look a little different. Maybe it is not trying to provide a journalist’s account of physics-defying events. Maybe it is attempting to describe the world as it actually is: inexplicable at its core. The larger point isn’t so much about miracles. It’s understanding that the natural world itself is the miracle.

Science, physics, mathematics, artificial intelligence, as useful and astonishing as they are, have not come close to explaining the nature of reality, the fundamentals of consciousness, or the state of being. They have given us powerful names and models, precise measurements, and dazzling predictions. They have shown us how certain processes unfold. But they have not told us, with any finality, what existence is, why it matters, or what it asks of us.

If we see grass only as a product of biology and chemistry—things which give us hints about its properties, its growth, its reproductive abilities—we may have missed something profound: a sense of wonder about the world. We may not be able to escape from a purely rote apprehension of the vast forms and phenomena of the universe, and in our own inner-universe: the mind. By narrowing the frame to what can be measured, we risk cutting ourselves off from what can only be marveled at. By insisting that “real” means “fully explained,” we shrink reality to fit the size of our explanations. AI and the Triumph of the Predictable We are building machines whose entire purpose is to make everything far more accessible, and therefore, more commonplace.

And just as we are forgetting how to be astonished, we are building machines whose entire purpose is to make everything far more accessible, and therefore, more commonplace. Artificial intelligence systems that can predict what we will say, what we will buy, what we will fear, what and who we will trust—before we are even conscious of deciding. They scan our words, our patterns, our hesitations. They answer our questions. They finish our sentences.

In one sense, they are miracles of a kind. In another sense, they are the final triumph of mystery-reducing repetition. If grass is “just biology,” the sun is “just astrophysics,” and a human life is “just chemistry plus time,” then AI becomes “just computation.” The world grows more manageable and less enigmatic at the same time. Everything can be modeled, forecast, optimized—and nothing is quite allowed to be holy.

Striving for Truth The Torah has a word for truth—emet—that I’ve begun to hear differently. It isn’t a narrow fact-check, a little green badge announcing “accurate.” It suggests something more like the reliability of an entire story, from beginning to end: aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, to mem,

the middle, to taf, the last letter. Emet is not simply, “Did this happen?” It is, “What kind of world are we living in? Can it be trusted? Is there a deep coherence beneath all this seeming chaos?” And if so, might we go so far as to think of God as that coherence?

Our sciences and our machines will go on naming things. They will get better and better at telling us how. Emet, truth, asks why. Why this grass? Why this sun? Why this child, this life, this love, this death? Why this brief, flickering consciousness that is uniquely mine—and not yours? Having been born, what then, is our role?

Imagine, for a moment, that we succeed at some of the things our age keeps promising. We cure many of the dread diseases. We feed far more people. We house them. We keep them safer than any generation before. Our machines help us coordinate all of this. The bluntest edges of existence are softened.

If, in such a world, we still walk past the grass without seeing it, still watch the sunrise without feeling anything, still treat our daily affairs as items on a calendar, then all our explanations and successes will indeed have accomplished a great deal. They will ease suffering, feed the hungry, cure illness, and shelter those who need shelter. But they will not, by themselves, bring us any closer to a more profound sense of life, a feeling of meaning and purpose that makes living worthwhile. Without that, even our greatest achievements may ring hollow. We will have information without emet. We are standing at a threshold. The changes coming toward us—through medicine, through technology, through AI—are far beyond what even just a few years ago we could have imagined. They are not decades away; in historical terms, they are moments away. We may soon live in a world that is, paradoxically and by many measures, more controlled, more predictable, more “ordinary” than any that came before it.

The question is what we will bring with us across that threshold: a further numbing of our sense of mystery, a reflex to call the Torah fiction and the lawn reality and leave it at that—or a willingness to see that everything we have ever called ordinary is, in fact, extraordinary.

Curing disease, ending hunger, providing shelter and safety, building astonishing machines—these may be the prelude. Emet is something else. It has to do with the quality of our insight, with whether we allow ourselves to recognize that grass and Red Seas and newborns and algorithms all hang on a thread we did not create. If we can recover even a homeopathic dose of that awareness, then perhaps the world we are hurtling toward will not only function better, it might also feel as if we had reclaimed some of the mystery and beauty that surrounded us when we were young.

And in that mystery, in that beauty, lies everything.

\* Peter Himmelman is a Grammy- and Emmy-nominated songwriter, composer and author [and a baal teshuva]. His latest book, *Let Me Out (Unlock Your Creative Mind and Bring Your Ideas to Life)*, was released in fall 2016 by Random House.

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

date: Dec 18, 2025, 7:00 AM

subject: Morals and Meanings in Miketz  
Miketz

#### Two Extra Years – Understanding Bitachon

After having interpreted the chief butler’s dream as saying that he would be released from prison in three days’ time and restored to his former position, Yosef asks that he remember him to Pharaoh. However, as our parsha concludes, the butler did not remember Yosef. Indeed, as we are told in the beginning of the following parsha, it would be two years before he did so.<sup>[1]</sup> As is well known, the Midrash<sup>[1]</sup> states that these two years were a punishment for Yosef’s words at that time, for they represented a breach of bitachon (trust in Hashem) on Yosef’s part. However, we need to understand why this request was looked upon in such a negative light. By that stage, Yosef had been in jail for ten years and the butler’s release presented an opportunity for him to secure his own release. Is it not acceptable to engage in hishtadlus (effort) alongside bitachon? Was he expected to do nothing? Additionally, why did this infraction lead to two extra years?

Bitachon is typically referred to as a “trait”. However, a more meaningful understanding of bitachon is that it is a mood. After all, when one trusts in someone else and relies on him, one’s mood is free from the anxiety that would exist if he had to deal with the situation by himself. Indeed, this is the description of bitachon as found in the classic work Chovos Halevavos:<sup>[2]</sup> “Trust” is the peace of mind that one has as he relies on someone else. In other words, bitachon is not defined by what one does or does not do. Those actions are expressions of bitachon; bitachon itself is a mood and a state of being.

In this light, let us consider the following fascinating and profound approach as to where Yosef was found wanting, provided by R’ Shlomo Kluger. It may well have been acceptable for Yosef to ask the butler to remember him, as that represents basic hishtadlus. However, even if the request itself was legitimate, the question remains — when is the right time to ask? Yosef has just established, through his own interpretation of the dream, that the butler will be released from jail in three days’ time. This means that until day three, he is not going anywhere. But Yosef asked him immediately, even though he does not need to mention this to the butler for another two days. Why does he ask now? In terms of the exceedingly high standard of bitachon expected of Yosef, making this request two days early was a symptom of unease and anxiety. It was as if he couldn’t afford to wait another two days. For the level of reliance expected from Yosef, this was a breach of the mood of bitachon, for which he spent another two years in jail. Moreover, we now understand why the extension was for two years specifically, one for each day that preceded his request.

As always, we are not expected to conduct ourselves in accordance with the level expected of the greats of the Chumash. We are, however, fully expected to learn the relevant lessons from them, to be applied at our own level. Every application of the mood of bitachon into our own experience will serve to give more meaning to those two extra years through which the Torah taught it.

[1] Cited in Rashi to Bereishis 40:23 s.v. vayishkacheiyu. [2] Shaar Habitachon chap. 4

from: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>  
date: Dec 17, 2025, 9:44 AM

#### Chanukah Lights

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

##### Introduction

A peculiarity of the Mishnah is that there is no maseches devoted to discussing the laws of Chanukah, as opposed to other mitzvos derabbanan, such as Purim and Eruvin. There are several mishnayos that mention Chanukah, all tangentially, and in only one of these does it refer to the Chanukah lamp. A Mishnah in Bikkurim (1:6) states that the last time for bringing bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash every year is on Chanukah. A Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (1:3) states that beis din sent out messengers to advise people which day was Rosh Chodesh so that they could observe the holidays on the correct day. The Mishnah teaches that these messengers informed people when Rosh Chodesh Kislev was so that they could observe Chanukah on the correct day.

Another instance is a Mishnah in Bava Kama (6:6) that states that someone who placed a lamp outside his house is obligated to pay damages should an animal knock over the lamp and start a fire. However, Rabbi Yehudah states that if the lamp was someone’s neir Chanukah, he is exempt from paying damages since he had permission to place the lamp this low. It should be noted that only this last Mishnah is making any reference to the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) discusses whether this latter Mishnah proves that it is a mitzvah to place the Chanukah light near the ground. A subsequent passage of Gemara (Shabbos 22a) concludes that the neir Chanukah cannot be placed more than 20 amos above street level. If the menorah is placed more than 20 amos above street level, people will not notice the neir Chanukah, and publicizing the miracle will not be achieved.

Massesches Shabbos Notwithstanding the lack of a massesches devoted to the laws of Chanukah, there is extensive discussion about it in the Gemara. The second chapter of Massesches Shabbos, Bameh Madlikin, which discusses the kindling of the Shabbos lights, discusses the laws of Chanukah. The Mishnah there explains which wicks and oils may be used for the Shabbos lights, and the Gemara states that the same wicks and oils may be used to kindle the Chanukah lights. Interestingly, when the Rif begins discussing the laws of Chanukah in his halachos to Massesches Shabbos, he has a subheading about neir Chanukah, something very unusual for him.

Using the Chanukah lights Although sometimes the laws governing the Shabbos lights and those regarding the Chanukah lights are identical, there are many applications for which the laws are very different. For example, halacha requires that we use the Shabbos lights and that there should be light everywhere in the house that someone walks on Shabbos. However, the amora'im dispute whether one may use the Chanukah lights. Rav Huna and Rav Chisda permit using the neir Chanukah, whereas Rav prohibits it. Rava (Shabbos 21b) adds, that according to Rav's opinion, one is required to have a lamp near the Chanukah lights, which we call the shamash. Rava rules that if a significant fire, such as an active fireplace, is near the Chanukah lights, there is no need to also have a shamash since the light of the fire is sufficient. Even so, for a prominent person, who would not use a bonfire or fireplace as his source of light, a shamash should be lit, notwithstanding that there is a bonfire.

Among the rishonim we find several opinions as to why it is forbidden to use the Chanukah lights. Some explain that this is because of a concept called *bizuy mitzvah*, treating a mitzvah object in a contemptuous manner. The source from a pasuk teaches that it is forbidden to perform the mitzvah of *kisuy hadam* by pushing the earth with your foot. The mitzvah should be done by picking up the earth with your hand and placing it atop the blood. Another situation that violates this rule is to dispose of an object that was used for a mitzvah, such as worn-out *sechach* or *tzitzis*, by putting them in the regular trash. There is no requirement to place these items in *sheimot* (*genizah*), because they have no sanctity, but they should not be treated with disdain (Shabbos 21a-b); placing them in the regular garbage is demeaning for an object that was once used to perform a mitzvah. Returning to the laws of neir Chanukah, the Ba'al Hamaor explains that it is prohibited to use them because of the law of *bizuy mitzvah*, and then explains that this is true only if one uses them for his own benefit. In his opinion, it is permitted to perform a mitzvah using the light of the neir Chanukah.

The Rosh seems to hold an approach similar to that of the Ba'al Hamaor. He rules that one may not use the light of the menorah to perform a permanent job or other work that he considers inappropriate. It is permitted to do something temporary when does not give the impression that he is treating the mitzvah disdainfully.

All halachic authorities agree that (1) there is a concept called *bizuy mitzvah* and (2) that it is probably prohibited *min haTorah*. However other rishonim do not consider this an adequate reason to explain why someone cannot benefit from the *neiros Chanukah*. Covering the blood of *shechitah* by kicking the soil rather than using your hand to perform the mitzvah demonstrates disdain for a mitzvah. But why is it disdainful to use the Chanukah lamp light to read or to perform a mitzvah? Even using this light to eat dinner does not seem to be treating these lamps with scorn! Thus, it is understandable that other rishonim propose other reasons to explain the prohibition against using the Chanukah lights.

Rashi (Shabbos 21b) explains that the reason we cannot use the Chanukah lamp is so that it is obvious that it was kindled to fulfill a mitzvah. Yet another approach is that, since the *neiros Chanukah* are kindled to represent the lights kindled in the Beis Hamikdash, just as those lights may not be used for personal benefit, so, too, the lights of the menorah should not be used (Ran).

Differences in halacha Are there any halachic differences among these various opinions? The Beis Halevi (commentary to the Torah, page 56) explains that there are. In his opinion, Rashi holds that the prohibition not to use the Chanukah lights is limited to the members of the household who

kindled them for the mitzvah, whereas according to the Ran (and certainly those who prohibit its use because of *bizuy mitzvah*) no one may use the light of the Chanukah lamps.

Rav Ya'akov Molcho (*Shu't Ya'akov Molcho* #49, quoted by *Birkei Yosef* 673:5) permits using the light of the *neiros Chanukah* to look up a halachic question about the *neiros Chanukah* themselves. Since this is a Chanukah need, it is permitted. It would seem that this opinion could hold like Rashi that we want it demonstrated that these lamps are designated for a mitzvah -- using them to research a question about their observance does not take away from that acknowledgement. Alternatively, Rav Molcho could hold like those rishonim who prohibit using the lights because of *bizuy mitzvah*, and using them to research a Chanukah question is not a *bizuy mitzvah*.

However, according to the approach of the Ran that it is because the Chanukah lights should be treated like the lights of the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash, one would not be allowed to use the Chanukah lights to research a halachic inquiry just as it is forbidden to use the Beis Hamikdash menorah lights for this purpose.

If they went out The Gemara (Shabbos 21a-b) discusses the following question: If the Chanukah lights were all set up properly with the correct wicks and oil such that they should burn just fine, but for some reason they went out anyway before the required time that they should be lit, is one halachically required to rekindle the lights? This is referred to as *kavvah zakuk la*, if it becomes extinguished, he is obligated to rekindle it (Rav Huna) or *kavvah ein zakuk la*, if it becomes extinguished, he is not obligated to rekindle it (Rav and Rav Chisda). The halacha is *kavvah ein zakuk la* (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 673:2). In a responsa related to this issue, the Rashba was asked: After reciting his berachos and kindling his Chanukah light, someone was trying to have it burn clearer. While doing this, he extinguished his lamp. Is he required to rekindle it, and, if he does, does he recite the berachos again? The Rashba rules that he is not required to rekindle his lamps, and, should he choose to rekindle them, he should not recite any berachos (*Shu't Harashba* 1:539, quoted by Ran).

When to light? The Gemara (21b) also states that the mitzvah is to kindle the lights from "sunset" until people are no longer walking in the marketplace. In earlier days, after it got dark, people basically remained home -- there were no street lights. The Gemara states that there was an ethnic group, called the Tarmudai, who would remain in the streets selling people kindling wood. Someone who discovered that he was short of kindling wood to start his home hearth would go out in the street to purchase kindling wood from the Tarmudai. The Tarmudai were the last people on the unlit streets; when they disappeared, there was no longer any mitzvah to kindle the Chanukah lights, since no one was outdoors for whom to publicize the miracle. Thus, someone who neglected to kindle the Chanukah lights after the Tarmudai went home did not fulfill any mitzvah; if they recited a beracha, it would be a beracha in vain.

The halachic authorities note that since today people do go outdoors much later at night, there is a mitzvah to kindle Chanukah lights later in the evening, should one be unable to kindle them as it gets dark.

How many? The Gemara presents a lengthy discussion regarding how many lights one should kindle oneach night of Chanukah. In halachic conclusion, the rule is that the mitzvah requires that one kindle only one light each night. However, the Gemara also presents mehadrin methods of fulfilling the mitzvah. In practice, there are two approaches: Ashkenazim -- each individual kindles the number of lights corresponding to the night of Chanukah. Sephardim -- the household as a whole kindles only one menorah, again with the number of lights corresponding to the night of the festival. Public kindling The Gemara (21b) states that it is a mitzvah to kindle the Chanukah lights outside. In general, this approach is observed today only in Eretz Yisrael, whereas in *chutz la'aretz* the accepted practice is to kindle the Chanukah lights in a window that can be seen from the public area. The poskim explain that, at the time of the Gemara the primary *pirsumei nisa* was for those outside. In *chutz la'aretz* today, the primary *pirsumei nisa* is for the members of one's household (see *Rema, Orach Chayim* 672:2 and commentaries thereon). A consequence of this is that, in our generation,

should one return home late at night, when no one is in the street but his household members are awake, he may kindle his Chanukah lights then. What berachos? What berachos does one recite prior to kindling neir Chanukah? The Gemara (23a) states that, on the first night of Chanukah, one recites three berachos, Lehadlik neir shel Chanukah, She'asah Nissim and Shehecheyanu. On the other nights, we recite only the first two. The Gemara teaches that someone who is not kindling the lights and is not fulfilling the mitzvah by having someone kindle the lights for him, recites the second and third beracha (on the first night) upon seeing the lights in someone else's home. After the first night of Chanukah, someone who is not kindling his own menorah recites the beracha of She'asah Nissim upon seeing someone else's lights burning.

The Gemara proceeds to ask how we can recite a beracha on neiros Chanukah that states that You Hashem commanded us concerning this mitzvah, when the mitzvah to kindle neiros Chanukah is a rabbinic requirement, not a Torah mitzvah. How can we say vetzivanu when Hashem did not command us? The Gemara concludes that, since the Torah commanded us to observe what Chazal teach us, when they command us to keep a

5 mitzvah this is equivalent to the Torah commanding us – hence the wording vetzivanu is fully appropriate. I saw an interesting question raised by Rav Meir Mazuz, the late rosh yeshiva and posek of the Tunisian community in Eretz Yisrael. As we learned at the very beginning of our article, the entire discussion of the laws of neir Chanukah is a tangential discussion in the second chapter of maseches Shabbos, whose focus is on the details of the mitzvah of lighting lamps for Shabbos. Since kindling Shabbos lights is also a mitzvah miderabbanan, Rav Mazuz asked: why does the Gemara (Shabbos 23a) discuss the wording of the beracha on a mitzvah derabbanan when discussing the mitzvah of kindling neir Chanukah? Why not ask the identical question about the beracha recited when kindling the Shabbos lights? This question should be asked first, since the entire chapter of mishnayos discusses kindling Shabbos lights, whereas kindling Chanukah lights is a side point discussed in the Gemara that is not mentioned in the Mishnah? Rav Mazuz suggests that, at the time of the Gemara, no beracha at all was recited on kindling Shabbos lights – this practice developed later, during the era of the geonim. House and two courtyards The Gemara discusses a case of a house that opens onto two different courtyards, each of which has a separate entrance to the street. This passage of Gemara is based on what is called mar'is ayin, raising suspicion that one violated halacha. Another way of describing this is: "Oh, my goodness, what will the neighbors say?" As mentioned above, in the time of the Gemara, kindling Chanukah lights was primarily to publicize the miracle of Chanukah to those outside the house. Every house and every courtyard had a lamp kindled that could be seen from the street. The Gemara rules that someone whose house opened on two different courtyards is required to kindle a menorah in both places. If he kindled only one, the people in the street that passes the other courtyard might think that he neglected to observe the mitzvah of kindling Chanukah lights, which is a violation of mar'is ayin. Based on this passage, the Beis Halevi questions a ruling that we quoted above, in which it was concluded that kavah ein zakuk lah – if the lamp went out after being properly prepared, halacha does not require you to rekindle it. The Beis Halevi questions why he is not required to kindle it because of mar'is ayin, the neighbors will think that he did not kindle a light? Actually, this question is recorded earlier (Sha'arei Teshuvah 673:7, quoting Shu't Shevus Yaakov 3:48) who answers that should the lamp go out early, he must leave the oil and the wick in place until the required time is passed. This way, those who see that no lamp is burning will also, upon inspection, see that there was a lamp set up, and realize that this was a case of kavah, and that he indeed fulfilled his halachic requirement. (The Beis Halevi himself provides a different answer to this question, requiring that you rekindle the lamp because of mar'is ayin, notwithstanding that kavah ein zakuk lah. He notes that his position is at odds with what is written in the halachic authorities, all of

6 whom imply that, since we paskin kavah ein zakuk lah, there is no obligation to rekindle a lamp if it was burning properly and then subsequently went out before a half hour transpired.) Mixing lights Some authorities contend that you should not kindle some of your lights from wax and others from oil on the same night, because people will think that this is two different people lighting (Shu't Shaar Efrayim #39). However, the Birkei Yosef (673:2) disagrees, noting that there is no mar'is ayin since you are not required to kindle more than one light. Women and neir Chanukah The Gemara rules that women are obligated in neir Chanukah, because of the reason that they were also included in the miracle. Nevertheless, several prominent authorities rule that a married woman should not light if her husband is home and kindles the menorah (Mishnah Berurah 671:9); others contend that even single women should not kindle the menorah if there are men kindling in the house (Chasam Sofer, commentary to Masseches Shabbos 21b s. v. Vehamehadrin; however, cf. Shu't Sha'ar Efrayim #42). Conclusion The Gemara (Shabbos 23b) states that someone ragil beneir will merit sons who are Torah scholars. Rashi explains that this refers both to the lights of Shabbos and those of Chanukah, whereas the Rosh mentions only those of Chanukah. The Gra says that the Rosh also meant the Shabbos lights, whereas the Maharitz Chajes disagrees. Some authorities contend that ragil beneir includes having a nice menorah (Birkei Yosef 673:7, quoting earlier poskim).

## 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 Miketz, this week's parsha, 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 parsha, 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 Miketz 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 bekhor, 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'uven.]

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 Uriah 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 Uriah 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

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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 Uriah 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 (mitzvat 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 VaYetzei), 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

## Parshas Miketz: Yosef's Brothers in Egypt

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### I.

The story of the encounter between Yoseph 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 Yoseph's quarters, not only will we answer these questions – but we will gain a clearer understanding of the debate between Yoseph 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 Yoseph'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 Yoseph'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 Yoseph 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 Yoseph story, we are told that Yoseph 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; Yoseph 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. Yoseph, 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 Yoseph brought a bad report of them to their father. (B'resheet 37:2) The third question: Why did Yoseph 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'resheet 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'resheet 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'resheet 23:4) Ya'akov was given a similar promise on his way out of the Land (B'resheet 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 Abravanel to suggest a very different approach. He agrees (like Ramban) that Yosef had a 'master plan', however, he disagrees as to its goal.

Abravanel 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".

Abravanel'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, Abravanel'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. I / 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 BECHIRAH 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 Esav 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 "teshuva" (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 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 "teshuvah"! 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 identify 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 attempts 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);

## 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'h') 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 "tzedek 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'

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.]