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ON VAYEISHEV - 5769

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYeishev These divrei Torah were adapted
from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter
Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #616 – Chanukah – Women
Lighting for Husbands. Good Shabbos!

"Mah Tevakesh": Keeping Focused On One's Goal In Life

Yaakov told Yosef to go check on the welfare of his brothers and the
welfare of the sheep and to bring back a report. [Bereshis 37:14] This was a
mission that changed more than just the life of Yosef and his brothers.
Indeed, it changed the entire history of the Jewish people.

The pasukim [verses] say: "A man found him and he was wandering in
the field and the man asked him what he was seeking (Mah Tevakesh?).
Yosef responded 'It is my brothers that I seek, please tell me where they are
pasturing.'" [Bereshis 37:15-16] The man gave Yosef directions to his
brothers, Yosef went to find them, and the rest is history.

This all constitutes the "p'shuto shel mikra" [simple reading of the verses].
What follows is not the "p'shuto shel mikra" but rather is the "drush"
[homiletic interpretation] that the Kotzker Rebbe (Rav Menachem Mendel
of Kotzk) saw in these pasukim.

First the pasuk says, "A man found him." The Medrash Tanchuma states
that the "man" is the Angel Gavriel as we find the Angel Gavriel referred to
as "the man" in the book of Daniel [9:21].

Next the pasuk says, "And he was wandering in the field." This is a
metaphor for man and his life on earth. People often do nothing more in
their lives than wandering and searching. They are seemingly lost and don't
know in which direction to go.

Finally, the pasuk says, "And the man asked him what he was seeking."
The Angel Gavriel told Yosef: "Listen well, Yosef. You are about to
embark on one of the greatest odysseys in the history of mankind. You are
going to be thrown into a pit. You are going to be taken down to Egypt.
You are going to be sold into slavery. You are going to be falsely accused.
You are going to spend time in a dungeon. Then you are going to be taken
out of the dungeon and become the viceroy in Egypt. In your lifetime, you

are going to experience the greatest heights and the greatest depths. What is
the key to success under those circumstances? The key is to remember one
thing: 'Mah Tevakesh?' You always have to be focused on what you want
to accomplish in life (what is it you seek?)."

If a person focuses on what he wants, then no matter what happens to him
in his lifetime – whether be it the greatest troubles or the greatest success –
nothing will ever spoil him. Nothing will ever corrupt him.

Yosef the righteous, despite all that happened to him, did stay focused. He
was never corrupted. When people endure terrible troubles and ask
themselves "Why is this happening to me?" they are many times tempted to
throw in the towel. One's natural inclination might be to give up and
forsake his religion under those circumstances. "Why do I need this?"

On the other hand, when people meet with undreamed of success, they
also tend to forget where they came from.

"Yosef", the Angel said, "I am telling you two words. Remember these
two words: 'Mah Tevakesh.' Keep what you are seeking in focus. If you
hold to that goal, nothing will ever corrupt you."

Many times, we meet people who are very successful. We ask ourselves
what made them so successful. Why are some people successful and others
not so successful? We tend to say that the key to success is brains, talent,
luck or some combination of them. This insight of the Kotzker Rebbe is
teaching that the main ingredient to success in life is FOCUS. A person will
usually be successful if he has a goal and he keeps to that goal and never
loses sight of that goal.

Rabbi Yaakov Luban once illustrated this idea by referencing the physical
phenomenon of laser beams. Lasers have revolutionized the world. They
have revolutionized medicine, technology, and defense.

A laser is basically a beam of light that is focused to a high degree that
increases its power to such an extent that it can even cut through a
diamond. Such a laser might use about 15 watts of electricity. The
distinction between laser light and ordinary light is that laser light is focused
and regular light is diffused. This metaphor is a metaphor for success in life
as well. This applies not only to material and monetary success; it applies to
spiritual success as well.

If a person knows what he wants, is committed to what he wants and can
always maintain the focus to achieve what he wants then he can undergo
the trials and tribulations of a Yosef and can still come out on top.

This is the message that the Angel Gavriel gave Yosef. All of us wander
on this world. We do not know where to turn and what to do. The basic
solution to this uncertainty is to focus on "Mah Tevakesh" – that which we
want to achieve in life.

The Drasha Addressed to Napoleon

Yosef found himself in the dungeon together with Pharaoh's wine butler
(Sar HaMashkim). He interpreted for him his dream: "The three clusters are
three days. In another three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and will
restore you to your post and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as was
the former practice when you were his cupbearer." [Bereshis 40: 12-13]

Yosef then added the following words: "If only you would think of me (ki
im zechartani) with yourself when he benefits you, and you will do me a
kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me
out of this building." [Bereshis 40:14].

The words "ki im zechartani" give the impression that Yosef is giving this
dream interpretation SO THAT the Sar HaMashkim should remember
Yosef to Pharaoh. This additional statement, introduced by the words "ki
im zechartani," seems like a somewhat inappropriate insertion by Yosef.
They are not part of the dream.

We would understand if Yosef appended a personal request for a favor to
his interpretation of the dream and would have said, "By the way, I would
appreciate it if..." However, this is not the way Yosef expressed it. Yosef
makes it sound like the Wine Butler is getting out of jail SO THAT he will
be able to intervene with Pharaoh in gaining Yosef's release from prison.

Rav Yaakov Moshe Kalefsky, zt"l, once told me the following incident.
When Napoleon had achieved one of his major military victories, he threw

a party and asked all the assembled to say a toast. Everyone got up and said a few words but they left Napoleon unsatisfied. Napoleon had a close connection with the Jews. He knew that in this town there was a Rabbi. He told his servant to go summon the Rabbi to the party to say a few words on the occasion of his victory.

The Rabbi was awakened in the middle of the night by Napoleon's servant and was brought in the chariot of the king to the banquet. Napoleon requested that he give a speech -- on the spot -- in honor of the occasion.

What does a Rabbi know from politics? What does a Rabbi know from military campaigns? But a Rabbi knows the Parsha of the week. It happened to be Parshas Vayeshev. The Rabbi explained to Napoleon "pshat" (the simple interpretation) of the above-cited pasuk.

The Rabbi said that when a simple person commits a crime and is indicted, prosecuted, and convicted of the crime, he can always appeal. But when an important person commits a crime and is indicted and prosecuted then his chances of appeal are far less. Why is that? In those corrupt times, the only people prosecuted were the downtrodden in society. The legal system did not start up with the elite of society. They only started up with those who could not defend themselves.

If they are already indicting and prosecuting and convicting an important person, they must have the goods on him so badly that it was simply impossible to look the other way. The person must be as guilty as sin. Appeals will be worthless. If he were not guilty, they would not have started up with him in the first place. But sometimes, even for an important person, an appeal can help.

But what happens if a minister in the government is indicted and convicted? What are his chances that he can appeal and be successful? Slim to none. Governments are hesitant to uncover their own corruption. If they are already prosecuting and convicting him he must be so guilty that appeals will have virtually no chance of success.

For a minister who was convicted to be returned to the same position of power that he previously held is literally impossible. This never happens.

Yosef spelled this out to the Sar HaMashkim. "Listen, you were guilty. You were convicted and you served time. But you are going to be restored to your original position and serve wine to the king again. That is miraculous. It can only be happening for one reason -- so that you will be able to remember me to the king. The Almighty wants to use you as the instrument for my release from prison."

In other words the "ki im zechartani" [so that you mention me...] is indeed part of the explanation of the dream. This is the only reason that such a thing can happen.

The Rabbi then turned to Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France, and said: "Napoleon you have met military success the likes of which have not been seen since Alexander the Great. Why did you merit such success? You have merited it because you have been good to the Jews. You have extended freedoms to them that they never had in Europe. That is why all these successes have come your way. Whenever you are blessed with success, now and in the future, you should remember: 'ki im zechartani' -- it is only because you have been good to the Jews in the past and so that you can be good to the Jews in the future."

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayeishev are provided below:

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Parshas Vayeishev: Joseph Rises Twice from Windows to the Soul - Bereishis and Shemos A psychiatrist finds a wealth of ideas in the weekly parashah

By **Rabbi Michael Bernstein M.D.**

Other Available Chapters Parshas Shemos: Crushing Labor

Parshas Vayeishev: Joseph Rises Twice

Joseph has two dreams. In the first, he dreams about sheaves of wheat, and he tells his brothers (37:7), "And behold, my sheaf arose and it even stood erect, and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

Two things happened with Joseph's sheaf -- it arose and it stood erect. This seems to allude to two distinct stages, one in which the sheaf arose but was still somewhat wobbly, and the second when the sheaf found its balance and was able to stand erect. What is the significance of these two stages?

A short while later, Joseph has another dream, and he relates this one as well to his brothers (37:9), "Behold, have had another dream, and behold, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." Unlike the first dream, this time there is no uncertainty, no hesitation, no need to find balance. Why is this so?

The Beis HaLevi comments that the first dream, which related to things of the earth, suggested that Joseph would have some sort of physical dominion over his brothers. The second dream, of heavenly bodies, predicted Joseph's eventual spiritual elevation and leadership.

This distinction between the first and second dreams may hold the answer to our questions. True to the prediction of the dream, Jacob had designated Joseph to be a leader in his family in the physical realm. But it was a leadership that teetered. His brothers did not want him, and they deposed him. Years later, however, Joseph's leadership in the physical realm reasserted itself in a very real way when he became viceroy of Egypt.

In the spiritual realm, Joseph attained leadership only once -- after the reunion in Egypt. In the beginning, he never became their spiritual leader, although Jacob would have wanted him to be. Since the brothers did not acknowledge his spiritual superiority, Joseph was by definition not a leader. There can be no spiritual leader without followers. The dream mentions only one rising in the spiritual realm.

Alternatively, if we were to contend that Joseph did indeed become the spiritual leader of his brothers while still in Hebron, we can offer another explanation for there being only one rising in the spiritual realm. Shortly after he arrived in Egypt, Joseph was put in charge of the entire estate of an important royal minister (39:5). In that position, he would have had ample opportunity to send a message to his father that he was still alive. Joseph declined; he felt the divine hand directing him toward his destiny. He willingly endured twenty-two years of separation and self-imposed silence in order to fulfill God's will for his family. Even in exile, Joseph displayed uninterrupted spiritual leadership.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From several years ago]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Vayeishev A Tale of Two Women

Who was she? We know little about her except her name, Tamar. Judah, fourth son of Jacob, had "gone down" from his brothers - a spiritual as well as physical decline. It was he who had proposed selling Joseph as a slave. Now he has left the family and married a Canaanite woman. He has three sons by her - Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er grows up, Judah finds him a wife. That is how Tamar enters the story.

Tragedy strikes. Er dies. He "was wicked in the Lord's sight." How so, we are not told. Judah - practising a pre-mosaic form of levirate marriage - tells his second son Onan that he must marry his late brother's widow so that she can bear a child. Onan resents the fact that a child of his would be regarded as perpetuating his brother's memory, and he "spills his seed." For this he is punished, and he too dies.

Judah tells Tamar that she must "live like a widow" until Shelah is old enough to marry her. But he delays, fearing that his third son too may die. This places Tamar in a situation of "living widowhood," unable to marry anyone else because she is bound to her remaining brother-in-law, unable to marry him because of Judah's fear.

Taking destiny into her own hands, she seizes the opportunity that presents itself when she hears that Judah is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep. Covering her face with a veil, she dresses herself as a prostitute and positions herself on the route she knows Judah will take. Judah approaches her and sleeps with her. She returns home and removes the disguise. She becomes pregnant. Three months later, her condition is apparent. People inform Judah, who is indignant. She must, he reasons, be guilty of adultery since she is bound to Shelah, whom Judah has kept from her. "Bring her out and have her burned," he orders.

Only then do we realise the significance of one detail in the earlier episode. During the course of her deception, she had negotiated a price with Judah, but first insisted on a pledge: his seal, cord and staff. By the time Judah sent a messenger to pay her and reclaim the pledge, she had disappeared. Now she produces the three items and sends them to Judah with the words, "I am pregnant by the man who owns these." It is a masterly stroke. She has established her innocence without shaming Judah - for he alone now understood exactly what had happened. From this, the sages derived the principle that "One should be willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than shame another person in public."

What was Tamar doing? According to the Midrash, Nahmanides and Hizkuni, she was acting according to the custom of that time, by which levirate marriage could be practised not only by a brother of the deceased husband, but also by another close relative - in this case, Judah, Tamar's father-in-law. Her act was one of piety, ensuring that her husband's family line would be continued.

Tamar's conduct bears an uncanny resemblance to another biblical personality - Ruth. Both stories begin with an act of descent on the part of fathers-in-law: Judah to the Canaanites, Elimelech to the Moabites. In both, two sons die: Judah's sons Er and Onan, Elimelech's sons Machlon and Chilyon. In each case, the woman concerned has been left a childless widow. In both, the denouement is brought about by a bold act on the part of the woman, Tamar dressing as a prostitute, Ruth lying at night at Boaz' feet. Both times, the man involved (Judah, Boaz) is not the closest in line - for Tamar, that was Shelah, for Ruth the anonymous Peloni-Almoni whose claim Boaz has to ask him to forego.

In both cases the heroine is an outsider. Ruth is a Moabite. We are not told Tamar's family background. The sages say she was descended from Shem; Philo says that she was the child of idolaters. Yet it is they who give birth to children "to maintain the name of the dead . . . so that his name will not disappear," as Boaz says of Ruth. And it is they who are sensitive to the living, Tamar by not shaming Judah, Ruth by not letting Naomi return home alone.

The connection between the two women is stated explicitly at the end of the Book of Ruth. When the elders give permission to Boaz to buy Naomi's field and marry Ruth, they pronounce this blessing: "May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who

together built up the house of Israel . . . May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah." Why this reference to Tamar and Judah?

The answer lies in the genealogy with which the Book of Ruth ends. It lists the ten generations from Perez to King David. The beginning of David's family tree is the son, Perez, born to Judah and Tamar. The seventh generation is the son, Obed, born to Ruth and Boaz. The family tree of Israel's great and future king includes Tamar and Ruth, two women whose virtue and loyalty, kindness and discretion, surely contributed to David's greatness.

I find it exceptionally moving that the Bible should cast in these heroic roles two figures at the extreme margins of Israelite society: women, childless widows, outsiders. Tamar and Ruth, powerless except for their moral courage, wrote their names into Jewish history as role models who gave birth to royalty - to remind us, in case we ever forget, that true royalty lies in love and faithfulness, and that greatness often exists where we expect it least.

<http://www.anshe.org/parsha.htm#parsha> Parsha Page by Fred Toczek - A Service of Anshe Emes Synagogue (Los Angeles)

Parsha Page by Fred Toczek A survey of parsha thoughts from Gedolei Yisroel compiled by Fred Toczek. Perfect for printing and use at your Shabbos tisch.

CHANUKKAH THOUGHTS !

VAYEISHEV 5757 & 5762

I. Summary

A. Yoseph (Joseph) Arouses His Brothers' Jealousy. Yaakov made his favorite son, Yoseph, a multi-colored silk coat as a sign of distinction and lordship. This further aroused his brothers' jealousy to the point that they hated Yoseph, and couldn't even speak with him congenially. Yoseph dreamt two dreams with the same obvious message. His brothers' hate intensified as they heard these two dreams. In the first dream, the brothers' sheafs bowed down to Yoseph's sheaf which was standing upright in their midst. In the second, the sun, moon & eleven stars (representing the rest of Yoseph's family) bowed down to him. The implication of these dreams was that all of Yoseph's family would become subservient to him. Yaakov rebuked Yoseph for arousing his brothers' hatred, though he personally noted and awaited fulfilment of the dreams.

B. Yoseph Is Sold Into Slavery. When Yoseph's brothers were away tending their father's flock in Shechem, Yaakov sent Yoseph to see how they were doing. Yoseph was on his way when his brothers noticed him from a distance. They decided that this was their chance to conspire to kill him, throw his body in a pit and then conceal their act by saying that he had been killed by a wild beast. Reuven, however, knew that this was wrong. He wanted to save Yoseph, but saw that the other brothers wouldn't heed his word; he was, however, able to convince them not to kill him but rather to cast him alive into a nearby pit. "Let it not be your hands that directly injure Yoseph," argued Reuven. Reuven reasoned silently that he would return later after the brothers had left and free Yoseph. When Yoseph finally arrived, the brothers stripped him of his coat and, as Reuven had suggested, threw him alive into the pit. A caravan of Yishmaelites bearing spices to Egypt approached, and the idea came to Yehudah to sell Yoseph as a slave. The brothers accepted this new plan and sold Yoseph to the traveling Yishmaelites. Reuven, away while this happened, returned to find no trace of Yoseph, much to his dismay. The brothers then dipped Yoseph's coat into goat's blood and brought it to Yaakov, who concluded that Yoseph had been killed by a wild beast. Yaakov mourned Yoseph's loss for many days.

C. Yehudah & Tamar. Yehudah married the daughter of Shooa, a merchant, and they had 3 sons, the oldest of whom married Tamar and died soon thereafter. As was customary in the case of a childless widow, the second son married Tamar, but he also soon died. Attempting to protect his third son, Yehudah asked Tamar to wait in her father's house until his son was old enough for marriage (although he didn't actually intend to allow the marriage to take place). Realizing through a prophecy that the Kings of Israel would descend from Yehudah, Tamar disguised herself and deceived Yehudah so that she should bear his child. When Yehudah found out that she was pregnant, he (not realizing that he was the father) condemned her to death. However, she was saved when she proved that Yehudah was the father.

D. Yoseph In Potiphar's House. Meanwhile, Yoseph was being sold and re-sold many times. The Yishmaelites sold him to the Midianite merchants, who sold him to Potiphar (an official of Pharaoh) in Egypt. With Hashem's help, Yoseph became very successful, eventually being appointed overseer of Potiphar's household. However, when Yoseph rejected the advances of Potiphar's wife, she became angry and falsely accused him of molesting her, for which he was imprisoned.

E. Yoseph Interprets The Butler's and Baker's Dreams. With Hashem's help, Yoseph found favor in the prison warden's eyes, who placed him in charge of the other prisoners. While in prison, Yoseph interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh's butler and baker, who had offended Pharaoh and were in prison awaiting word of their fate. One night, each of them had a dream which they revealed to Yoseph. Yoseph interpreted the dreams to mean that butler would be released, but the baker would be executed. The events happened exactly as Yoseph had foretold. Yoseph asked the butler to intercede with Pharaoh on his behalf, but the butler forgot his request as soon as he was released.

II. Divrei Torah

A. Lilmode U'lilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

1. "Hashgochah Perotis" (Divine Supervision). Whatever happens in this world is planned and controlled by Hashem. People often question "why, if Hashem controls everything, do bad things happen?" Often, we can't perceive the reason for certain events; however, this doesn't mean that there is no explanation. What we lack is the ability to see events in total perspective from the vantage point of hindsight. What might seem tragic today might prove to be a blessing tomorrow. Life is like a puzzle with all the pieces scattered about, and we seem unable to fit them together into a logical form. However, Hashem designed the puzzle and it is He who will eventually link together all the pieces into a perfectly comprehensible whole. The truth of this can be seen from Yoseph's story. While the ups-and-downs of his life seemed hard to explain at the time, they eventually led to his ascent in Egypt, which in turn led to B'nai Yisroel's immigration to Egypt where they were able to stay alive amidst the famine. The Divine Hand had been in command of the situation throughout, and His Divine plan became clear in retrospect.

2. Avoiding Temptation/Using Role Models. The wicked are summoned before the Court of Hashem and asked why they didn't adhere to the laws of the Torah. If they reply that they were exposed to temptations and therefore succumbed to wickedness, they are told "were you really more tempted than Yoseph?" Yoseph was able to avoid the temptation and persistent advances of Potiphar's wife, conjuring up the image of his father, Yaakov, for inspiration. We, too, should keep the image of someone important in mind as an inspiration during difficult moments.

3. Judging Your Fellow Man Favorably. Yoseph was not careful enough in judging his brothers, mistakenly accusing them of transgressions. We must learn to judge other favorably -- "Judge not your fellowman until you have put yourself in his place" (Hillel). One who did all he could to find the good in others was Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. Once he was surprised to find a Jewish neighbor smoking a cigarette on Shabbos. He came over to his neighbor and said "You probably began smoking because you didn't realize it was Shabbos." "Oh, I know that today is Shabbos," replied the man. "Then you probably don't know that one is not allowed to smoke on Shabbos," Rav Levi Yitzchak continued. "I know that too," said the man. "Then I suppose you are smoking since it is necessary for your health," the Rav stated. "No, not at all," the man responded. At this point, Rav Levi Yitzchak lifted up his eyes to heaven and speaking directing to Hashem said, "See how honest your people are. Even when they commit a sin, they don't compound it by lying about it!"

B. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Focus on Growth, Not Serenity. "And Yaakov sat . . ." Yaakov wanted peace and serenity, yet he was forced to endure trials with Yoseph. Hashem said "Is it not sufficient that the righteous receive their reward in the World-To-Come; why do they need to live in serenity in this world?" The question arises: why is it wrong to want to live in serenity, particularly as in Yaakov's case when he wanted use such serenity to free himself for spiritual pursuits? Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz explained that the purpose of this world is for a person to elevate himself by passing the numerous tests that come to him. The goal is spiritual growth from every life situation. Therefore, it was considered improper for Yaakov to place this focus on serenity. This, said Rav Yeruchem, is an attitude which we must internalize. Every occurrence in this world can make us a better person.

2. When Angry, Talk Things Over. "And they [Yoseph's brothers] hated him and they were unable to speak to him for peace". Rabbi Yonoson Eibeshutz commented that it is possible that if the brothers would have spoken the matter over with Yoseph, they would have been able to make peace. The problem was that they were not talking to each other. This is what frequently happens when two people are in the middle of a feud. One doesn't listen to the other. If they will talk things over calmly, they will often see that they have nothing to argue about. Even if they still disagree in the end, the heavy emotionalism will be greatly diminished.

3. Avoid Boasting. Sforno comments that it was a mistake on Yoseph's part to tell his brothers about the dream; even worse was his interpreting the dreams to them to mean that he would rule over them. When you boast to others, your intention might be to gain honor and respect from them, but envy is a very powerful emotion which easily leads to hatred. Be careful about boasting to others, for your boasting may lead to hatred. Furthermore, refraining from causing others these painful feelings is an act of kindness. Sharing your successes with a close friend is very different than boasting; your goal is not to show off, but to have someone share your joy.

4. Accept Positive Occurrences In Your Life As Messages From Hashem. Rashi comments on why the Torah needs to tell us that the Yishmaelites were transporting spices. This seems to be little consolation for Yoseph; he had been sold into slavery by his brothers. How could something as minor as pleasant smelling merchandise on the caravan taking him to Egypt make a difference? The answer is that was a subtle hint from Hashem that all was not lost. We must appreciate that Hashem's Hand is guiding our life and supplies us with minor pleasures to enhance your life. This is an important lesson for one undergoing a difficult situation. When facing difficult moments, one is apt to become lost in self-pity and despair. It's easy to focus solely on what is wrong. But, remain aware of any positive aspects, for these minor pleasures are messages from Hashem.

5. Recognize That You Can Never Tell How Things Will Turn Out In The End. Yoseph's ups-and-downs highlight that one must not despair when things are bleak nor gloat when things are good, since we don't have the omniscience to know what the final consequences of a situation will be. Therefore, when a situation seems extremely negative, don't despair for it could lead to wonderful things for you. Conversely, when things seem to be going extremely well, don't become overly complacent or arrogant. One can never tell what the future has in store.

C. Kol Dodi on the Torah (Rabbi David Feinstein)

One Must Not Show Favoritism To One Child Over Another. Even in cases such as this -- when Yaakov assumed that his other sons would understand his favoritism as being the result of Yoseph being born in Yaakov's old age -- one can never predict what other factors will come into play. In this case, Yaakov didn't predict that Yoseph would bring evil reports about the brothers to him, thus arousing their hatred. For this reason, our Sages teach (Shabbos 10b) that one must never show favoritism to one child over another.

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The Geirut Controversy - Part 1 by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Introduction In the past year there has been much rancorous debate in the Jewish media regarding standards for Orthodox conversion (Geirut) both in Israel and North America. Some of the debate was generated by the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) and Beth Din of America issuing its Geirus Policies and Standards (GPS) which accept a conversion only if it is clear to the Beit Din (rabbinic court) that the convert will fully observe the laws of the Torah. In the next two essays we demonstrate that the RCA guidelines represent the mainstream Halachic viewpoint.

A Bizarre Question Some time ago an acquaintance approached me with a highly unusual question. This young man sadly was dating a non-Jewish woman but she had expressed willingness to convert to Judaism. She was even willing to observe the Mitzvot of the Torah as she found the observant Jewish lifestyle highly appealing. However, a serious impediment was the fact that she, Rachama LeTzlan (heaven forbid), unabashedly denied the existence of a Creator. The acquaintance asked if she would be eligible for conversion. I responded that such a conversion is patently absurd. The essence of Geirut is expressed by the quintessential convert, the Biblical Rut, who declared her commitment to Torah so magnificently and succinctly, "Ameich Ami VeElokaiyich Elokai," "Your nation is my nation and your G-d is my God" (Rut 1:16). Indeed, Boaz (Rut 2:12) so beautifully describes Rut as "having come to seek shelter under the wings" of Hashem the G-d of Israel. Rambam (Hilchot Issurei Biah 13:4) employs similar terminology. He describes a convert as one who "wishes to enter the covenant, seek shelter beneath the wings of the Shechinah (the divine presence) and accept the yoke of Torah." Rambam continues that such as individual requires immersion (Tevilah) in a Mikveh and Berit Milah for a male (and a Korban, sacrifice, when the Mikdash functions). Accordingly, an individual who harbors no ambition to establish a close bond with Hashem is not a viable candidate for conversion. Certainly, one who is entrenched in their denial of Hashem cannot be admitted by a Beit Din for conversion. Even if such an individual

undergoes the process of conversion with all the necessary trappings, including immersion and acceptance of Mitzvot before a Beit Din consisting of Orthodox rabbis, the conversion is invalid. There is a fundamental distinction between Geirut and other Jewish procedures such as Kiddushin (Jewish marriage) and a Get (Jewish divorce). A Jewish marriage ceremony or divorce proceeding that is conducted in full conformity with Halachic standards is completely valid even if either the man or woman is not committed to Torah observance and belief. Conversion rituals, on the other hand, are processes which must express a deep commitment to Hashem and His people in order for it to be a meaningful act. An example from another area of Halachah would be helpful in clarifying this matter. One who recites every word of Tefillah (prayer) perfectly and precisely but lacks Kavanah (feeling or intention to connect with Hashem) does not fulfill the Mitzvah of Tefillah (Rambam Hilchot Tefillah 4:1 and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 101:1). Tefillah is the external manifestation of an internal worship of the heart. Similarly, Milah and Tevilah are meaningless unless they are external expressions of a desire "to enter the covenant, seek shelter under the wings of the Shechinah and accept the yoke of Mitzvot."

A Delicate Balance A Beit Din that assumes the awesome responsibility to accept Geirim (converts) is charged with the difficult mission of striking a very delicate balance between competing principles. On one hand, the Gemara (Yevamot 109b) makes a remarkable statement that "evil after evil will befall those who accept converts." Tosafot (ad. loc. s.v. Ra'ah) limit the Gemara's declaration to a Beit Din that either seeks to convince Nochrin to convert or converts individuals indiscriminately or impulsively. If, Tosafot continue, the candidate is persistent in his desire to convert (Tosafot allude to Rut 1:18) we should accept them. Indeed, I heard Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik declare that a non-Jew who is sincerely committed to Torah enjoys the right to be converted. Tosafot support their assertion by citing examples of outstanding Batei Din and converts such as Rut, Yehoshua, who, according to the Midrash, accepted Rachav as a convert, and the colorful Geirim accepted by Hillel (Shabbat 31a). Although the individuals who came to him were hardly viable candidates for conversion at first, Hillel was confident that with patience and wisdom he would be able to shepherd them to full acceptance of Torah, an expectation that was fulfilled. Moreover, Tosafot cite the example of Timnah (Breishit 36:12) who according to Chazal (Sanhedrin 99b) was unjustifiably denied conversion by our Avot (forefathers) and out of bitterness agreed to be a concubine to Eisav's son Eliphaz and bore Amaleik, who perpetually inflicts great pain upon Israel. Accordingly, Beit Din must exercise caution and not hastily or indiscriminately convert candidates for Geirut, but must not reject those with genuine commitment to become successful Geirim who will lead fully observant lives.

Hillel's non-Believing Convert – Rashi and Maharsha Accepting the yoke of Torah is an essential component of Geirut. The Gemara (Bechorot 30b) in fact states that even if a convert is willing to accept all of the Torah except for one rabbinic precept we do not accept him as a candidate for conversion. A Giyoret Tzedek (righteous female convert) who is a passionate vegan related to me that the Beit Din that converted her inquired as to her willingness to partake of the Korban Pesach (Pesach sacrifice) when the Beit HaMikdash will be rebuilt, in light of her vegan convictions. She responded without hesitation that she would consume a Kezayit (the minimum amount required) of the Korban Pesach. This answer reflected well on her candidacy as she verbalized her recognition that divine commands take priority over one's ethical intuitions (manifested in Biblical examples such as by Akeidat Yitzchak, Isaac's binding). Accordingly, by what right did Hillel have to convert the gentleman who stated that he believed only in the divine authority of the Written Law and not of the Oral Law? After all, by rejecting the Oral Law, this candidate expressed his lack of acceptance of the vast majority of Mitzvot, such as lighting Chanukah lights or the proper placement of Tefillin. Rashi (ad. loc. s.v. Gayarei) explains that since the candidate "did not deny the authority of the Oral

Law, he merely did not believe in its divine origin; Hillel was convinced that after he will teach him that he will rely on him" and grow to believe in the authority of the Oral Law as well. Maharsha (ad. loc. s.v. Amar Lei) clarifies that Hillel did not convert this gentleman at the time that he did not yet believe in the Oral Law. Hillel merely accepted him as a viable candidate for conversion. Had Hillel not accepted him as a feasible candidate it would be forbidden to teach him Torah as it is forbidden to teach Torah to a Nochri (Chagigah 13b) unless he is doing so in contemplation of conversion. Maharsha explains that Hillel converted the gentleman only after he came to believe that even the Oral Law is from Hashem.

Hoda'at Mitzvot and Kabbalat Mitzvot – Rambam and Chemdat Shlomo Rambam (ad. loc. 14:17) and Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 268:12) rule that if a convert is not informed of the Mitzvot the conversion is nonetheless valid BeDiEved (after the fact). This is based on the Gemara (Shabbat 68a) that discusses one who converted, is unaware of the obligation to observe Shabbat, but is recognized as a full-fledged Jew. Tosafot (ad. loc. s.v. Geir) clarify that this individual certainly converted before a Beit Din since the Gemara (Yevamot 47b) states a conversion is invalid if it is not conducted in the presence of a Beit Din. Tosafot explain that the Beit Din, however, erred and did not inform the convert of the Mitzvot and he therefore did not know about Shabbat. This ruling of Rambam appears to contradict his aforementioned assertion that acceptance of the yoke of Torah represents the essence of the Geirut. If Hoda'at Mitzvot (informing the convert about the Mitzvot) is not essential, how can Kabbalat Mitzvot constitute the most important component of a conversion? Teshuvot Chemdat Shlomo (Y.D. 29-30, referenced in the Pitchei Teshuvah 268:9) draws a fundamental distinction between Hoda'at Mitzvot and Kabbalat Mitzvot. Chemdat Shlomo argues that although Hoda'at Mitzvot is not essential, Kabbalat Mitzvot is crucial. The convert's commitment to observe Mitzvot signifies the core of the conversion. If in a peculiar case the Beit Din mistakenly failed to inform the convert of the Torah's obligations, the Geirut is acceptable BeDiEved. However, if the convert is not committed to accept the Torah's rules when he finds out what they are, the conversion is invalid. The Chemdat Shlomo's distinction has been accepted by the overwhelming majority of Poskim. These authorities include Rav Yitzchak Shmelkes (Teshuvot Beit Yitzchak Y.D. 2:100), Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (Teshuvot Da'at Kohen 147), Teshuvot Devar Avraham (3:28), Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky (Teshuvot Achiezer 3:26 and 28), Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Y.D. 1:157), Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (citing his father in footnote 22 to Kol Dodi Dofeik), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:35) and Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv (Kovetz Teshuvot 1:104). These authorities rule that if a convert did not commit to observing the Torah, the conversion is invalid. In accordance with the consensus opinion, the RCA's GPS document (available at www.rabbis.org) sets forth systems and standards in which Batei Din can be reasonably assured that individuals approved for conversion are sincerely committed to Torah observance and belief.

Conclusion Next week we shall present three lenient approaches to conversion articulated by twentieth century Poskim and show how the consensus opinion of Halachic authorities rejects these leniencies.

The Geirut Controversy - Part 2 by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Introduction Last week we presented classic sources that discuss Geirut (conversion) and concluded that the consensus Halachic opinion views a convert's sincere commitment to Torah observance and belief (Kabbalat Mitzvot) as an absolutely indispensable component of the conversion process. We noted that the consensus approach forms the basis of the Rabbinical Council of America and Beth Din of America's Geirus Policies and Standards (GPS) document (available at www.rabbis.org). This week we shall present three lenient approaches to the issue of Kabbalat

Mitzvot that have been articulated in the twentieth century and demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of Halachic authorities have rejected these very lenient rulings.

Rav Uzziel vs. Rav Auerbach The primary advocate for leniency in regard to Kabbalat Mitzvot is Rav Ben Tzion Uzziel, the highly respected Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel during the early to middle twentieth century. A summary of his approach is presented in Piskei Uzziel number 65: "A non-Jew who has been circumcised and has immersed in a Mikvah for the purpose of conversion...we do not require that he observe the Mitzvot, and the Beit Din does not even need to know that he will observe Mitzvot, for otherwise converts will not be accepted in Israel, because who can guarantee that the Nochri will be loyal to all of the Mitzvot of the Torah...the requirement to fulfill Mitzvot is not an indispensable component of the conversion even LeChatchilah (ideally)...it is permissible to accept male and female converts, even if it is known to us that they will not fulfill all of the Mitzvot, because eventually they will come to fulfill Mitzvot, and we are obligated to open this door for them. And if they do not fulfill Mitzvot, they will bear their sins and we are free from responsibility for this." Rav Uzziel bases himself on Hillel's accepting converts that were not yet committed to all of the Torah's Mitzvot and beliefs (as we discussed last week). Rav Uzziel understands that Hillel actually converted the gentlemen who came to him before they fully embraced Torah life (recall from last week that Maharsha to Shabbat 31a clearly disagrees but Rashi might agree). Rav Uzziel felt compelled to adopt such a lenient stance due to the specter of intermarriage which would occur had lenient standards for conversion not been offered. We noted last week, though, that the overwhelming majority of other great Poskim of the twentieth century view Kabbalat Mitzvot as the essence of Geirut whose absence invalidates a conversion. These authorities include Rav Yitzchak Schmelkes, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, the "Devar Avraham," Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv. Rav Auerbach's words (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:35) contrast sharply with those of Rav Uzziel: "The class of converts...regarding whom we are almost certain that they are not committed at all to fulfill and observe the Mitzvot of Hashem, in such a situation in my humble opinion anyone who facilitates such a conversion, even if they mistakenly think that they are full fledged converts, nonetheless even according to their approach those who convert them violate the prohibition of Lifnei Iveir (the prohibition to cause another to sin), since now the convert will violate prohibitions such as Shabbat and Kashrut which before the conversion did not constitute a violation of God's word."

Rav David Zvi Hoffman vs. Rav Herzog, Rav Feinstein and Rav Yosef Rav David Zvi Hoffman (Teshuvot Melamed Leho'il 3:8), the leading Rav in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany, was faced with the following difficult issue. A Kohen married a non-Jewish woman in a civil ceremony and they had a son who received a Brit Milah. The son subsequently died and the wife was distraught over what she perceived was the fact that she was not of the same religion as her deceased child. In addition to the concern over the intermarriage, there was fear that the wife would be driven to insanity if she was not allowed to convert and that a Chillul Hashem would be created as people would say that Jews had no concern for the wellbeing of the wife. However, among the Halachic impediments to sanctioning such a conversion was the fact that the wife expected to remain married to her husband, but a Giyoret is forbidden to a Kohen (Yechezkeil 44:22). Accordingly, the conversion is cast in grave doubt in light of the Gemara (Bechorot 30b, cited last week) that forbids admitting a convert who accepts all of the Torah except for even one rabbinic precept. In this situation the wife implicitly does not accept the prohibition for a convert to a Kohen. Rav Hoffman writes that the conversion should be discouraged by informing the wife that her son was not Jewish since he was not converted. If she persisted in her desire to convert and believed in the G-d of Israel, though, he permitted the Geirut.

Rav Hoffman suggests two approaches to overcome the obstacle of her lack of acceptance of her prohibition to a Kohen. First, he argues that the Gemara forbids accepting a Ger only if he explicitly states his rejection of a particular Mitzvah and in this instance she is not making such a declaration.

Second, he argues that only when one is conducting the conversion only for the sake of the convert does the Gemara apply. In such an instance it is better that the convert not become Jewish than become Jewish and violate any part of Jewish law. However, if the Geirut is performed for the sake of the Jewish mate, to avoid the severe sin for him to be with a Nochrit, then the Gemara's concern is not relevant since the Beit Din acts in the interest of the convert's partner. Rav Hoffman concludes that his permission applies only if the couple will observe Niddah laws because otherwise, the conversion does not serve the spiritual interest of the husband. Most Poskim, however, do not accept Rav Hoffman's ruling. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe E.H. 2:4) writes "in my humble opinion I do not see any room to permit" such a conversion due to her unwillingness to accept her prohibition to a Kohen. Rav Yitzchak Herzog (Teshuvot Heichal Yitzchak E.H. 1:19) and Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yabia Omer Y.D. 2:3) also do not accept Rav Hoffman's ruling. Among their concerns are that an impression would be created that rabbis have permitted a Kohen to marry a convert. When Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Rav Shlomo Goren of Israel relied upon Rav Hoffman's ruling in a widely publicized case in 1970 (Techumin 23:180-184), Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik sharply criticized Rav Goren (see Nora'ot HaRav 5:56-58).

Rav Moshe Feinstein's "Bit of Limmud Zechut" Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Y.D. 1:157) clearly states that if a convert did not intend to observe Mitzvot his conversion is invalid. Rav Moshe, however, offers "a bit of a Limmud Zechut" (defense) for those Orthodox rabbis who convert individuals who clearly have no intention of observing Mitzvot. Rav Moshe suggests that in today's circumstances when regrettably a majority of Jews do not observe the Torah (a situation that is changing in the decades after Rav Feinstein made this observation), many converts perceive non-observance of Halacha to constitute mainstream Jewish practice. They perceive observance of Mitzvot as a preferred manner of living as a Jew, but think that non-observance is also an acceptable Jewish lifestyle. In such a situation, the convert may be compared to the Gemara's case (Shabbat 68a, mentioned in last week's essay) where one converted amongst non-Jews and was not informed about the Mitzvot and yet is considered to be a full-fledged Jew. In today's environment it is as if the convert was not informed of the Mitzvot, since many converts do not accept the rabbis teaching about the obligation of Mitzvot based on their observation of the behavior of most Jews. Rav Moshe Feinstein does not endorse such conversions. Rather he presents this "bit of a Limmud Zechut" "so that they (the rabbis involved in such conversions) should not be considered worse than Hedyodot" (uneducated individuals). Interestingly, Rav Moshe Feinstein does not disqualify these rabbis from serving as Dayanim (rabbinic judges) due to their lenient approach to conversion. On the other hand, he does not endorse or recognize such lenient conversions. Similarly, I recall Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik present (in a Shiur at Yeshiva University) a bit of a Limmud Zechut for those who adopt the lenient approach to Geirut, based on the aforementioned Rashi to Shabbat 31a. Rav Soloveitchik, however, did not validate such conversions, as we noted last week. This contrasts sharply with the approach of Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvot Vehanhagot 4:230) who classifies rabbis who adopt the lenient approach to conversion as disqualified from Dayanut. Rav Shternbuch goes as far to suggest that even if such rabbis conduct a conversion where the convert sincerely commits to Torah observance and belief, the conversion is invalid due to the disqualification of the rabbis to serve as Dayanim. This approach, though, seems difficult since those who follow the lenient approach do have a few authorities to rely upon for their actions.

Conclusion The consensus opinion amongst Poskim is that Kabbalat Mitzvot is an indispensable component of Geirut. Hence, the GPS

document introduced by the RCA should not be considered as a "new stringency" but rather reflecting the mainstream Halachic approach endorsed by the consensus of Poskim of the past hundred years. GPS simply creates a system which supports converts who are sincerely committed to Torah life in their quest to have their conversions recognized by mainstream Orthodox rabbis throughout the world. Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik do not recognize the conversions of those rabbis who convert individuals who clearly will not observe Torah, on the one hand. However, on the other hand they do not condemn these rabbis as flagrant sinners since they have some basis in Halachah for their actions.

The Ger Katan Controversy - by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Introduction This week we shall continue our discussion of the current Geirut (conversion) controversies and outline the intense debate concerning converting non-Jewish children whose adoptive parents do not observe Jewish Law. There has been much discussion about this issue in the Jewish media recently and we shall seek as to shed more light and less heat on this emotionally charged issue. This question has emerged as particularly relevant in an age when Jewish children are rarely available for adoption and almost all adoptions involve non-Jewish children.

Gemara Background The Gemara (Ketubot 11a) presents the rule that a minor child can be converted by a Beit Din. Rashi (ad. loc. s.v. Al Da'at) explains that "the Beit Din becomes like a father to the child and the child converts by means of them." One may ask on what basis can a Beit Din convert a child if the child does not consent to the conversion (even if the child expresses his or her consent, the consent is not meaningful due to the child's immaturity; see, for example, Mishnah Machshirin 6:1). The Gemara explains that the Beit Din is empowered to convert the child since it is conferring a benefit to the child. In such circumstances consent is not required. This is an expression of the Halachic principle "Zachin LeAdam SheLo BeFanav," one may bestow a benefit to another even not in the latter's presence (and even without receiving their explicit consent). The Gemara limits Beit Din's authority to convert someone in this manner, to a child. An adult cannot be converted against his will as it is not considered a benefit (Zechut) to him. The Gemara explains that it is a hardship for an adult to convert and become accustomed to a life of Torah observance since he has been accustomed to non-observance. A child is not disadvantaged in this regard and thus conferring Jewish status upon him is considered a benefit. The Gemara notes that when the child reaches the age of Bar or Bat Mitzvah they have the opportunity to renounce their Jewish identity. The Gemara concludes, though, that once the child has reached the age of majority and has not renounced his conversion as a minor, he no longer enjoys the right to undo his status as a Jew. For details on how this is implemented in practice, see the Geirut Policies and Standards (GPS) recently issued by the Rabbinical Council of America together with its affiliated Beth Din of America (available at the RCA's website, www.rabbis.org). In short, the RCA document asserts that a formal acceptance of Mitzvot before a Beit Din is not required when the child reaches Bar/Bat Mitzvah age "in accordance with time honored practice." Rather as long as the child knows he was converted and that he has the right to renounce, his continued observance of Jewish law suffices. For further discussion and alternate classic opinions see the Encyclopedia Talmudit (6:448-449) and Rav Gedalia Felder's Nachalt Tzvi (1:25-28).

Tosafot's Question Tosafot (ad. loc. s.v. Matbilin) pose a very basic question based on their assumption (disputed by the Ketzot HaChoshen 243:8) that the principle of Zachin operates based on viewing the one conferring the benefit as the presumptive Sheliach (agent) of the beneficiary. Tosafot accordingly ask how Beit Din can confer a Zechut on a child if the institution of Shelichut (agency) does not apply to a minor (Bava Metzia 71b). Tosafot's final answer (also see Tosafot Sanhedrin 68b s.v. Katan for further discussion) is that Shelichut does not apply to a minor regarding a matter where it is somewhat questionable as to whether

one is truly conferring a benefit. However, bestowing Jewish identity is a pure and unadulterated benefit, Zechut Gamur (in the words of Tosafot). Indeed, attaining Kedushat Yisrael (the status as one endowed with the holy standing of a Jew) is the ultimate human achievement and the highest level a human being can accomplish.

Adoption by Non-Observant Parents – The Strict View A major debate emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries whether the Halachah authorizes a Beit Din to convert a child that is adopted by non-observant couple. The question is whether Beit Din is considered to be conferring a benefit to a child in such a situation since the child will be raised in an environment where Jewish law is not honored and will therefore most likely emerge as an adult who will routinely violate Jewish law. Rav Itzeleh Ponivitzher (Teshuvot Zeicher Yitzchak number 2) rules that conversion of a minor in such circumstances is invalid since the Beit Din is harming the child and not acting in his interests. He writes "since we know that he will certainly violate all the Torah's laws when he will be raised in such a home, it is not a benefit." Teshuvot Chavatzelet Hasharon (Y.D. 1:75) similarly rules "since it is clear that he will violate all of the Torah based on the way his adoptive parents will raise him, it is not a benefit." Rav Kook (Teshuvot Da'at Kohen 147) adopts the strictest stand and argues that Beit Din is considered to be conferring a benefit "only if we know that the child will observe the Torah as an adult." Indeed, a non-Jew who observes the seven Noahide Mitzvot (the seven basic laws of human decency such as not murdering or committing adultery) is rewarded with a share in the world to come but if a non-Jew converts and fails to observe the Torah, Hashem will hold him accountable for his failing to observe the 613 Mitzvot (Rambam Hilchot Issurei Biah 14:2 and Rambam Hilchot Melachim 8:11). We should note that there seems to be a significant difference between Rav Kook's approach and that of the Zeicher Yitzchak and Chavatzelet HaSharon. The latter seem to disqualify a conversion only if it seems clear that the child will most likely violate all of the Torah's laws whereas Rav Kook requires that it be clear that the child will most likely observe Torah law.

Adoption by Non-Observant Parents – the Lenient View On the other hand, other authorities believe it is preferable to be even a non-observant Jew than a Nochrī. Teshuvot Beit Yitzchak (Y.D. 2:100:11 and also see Even HaEzer number 69) writes "nonetheless it is preferable to join the Jewish people even though he will be punished [for violating Torah law], since all Jews have a share in the world to come and it is a great Zechut for him even though he will violate a few Torah laws." Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky (Teshuvot Achiezer 3:28), considered the leading Torah authority among Eastern European Jews in the first half of the twentieth century, subscribes to this view as well. We should note, however, that there does not seem to be such a wide gap between Teshuvot Zeicher Yitzchak and the Chavatzelet HaSharon on one hand and Teshuvot Beit Yitzchak on the other, as the former disqualify a conversion in a case where it is clear that the child will violate all of the Torah's rules and Teshuvot Beit Yitzchak seems to be lenient only when it appears that the child will violate a few of the Torah's laws.

Rav Moshe Feinstein – A Compromise View Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe E. H. 4:26 and Dibrot Moshe Shabbat 84 comment 11) adopts a compromise approach to this issue. He is inclined to the lenient view since "even wicked Jews have Kedushat Yisrael and the Mitzvot he performs he will receive reward even if he did not intend to act for the sake of a Mitzvah and the sins they perform are for them like Shogeg" (done as a result of negligence and not deliberate, since they are simply following in the path in which they were raised, see Rambam Hilchot Mamrim 3:3 and Ramban BeMidbar 15:22; see, however, Kovetz Teshuvot 1:103 for Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv's critique of Rav Moshe's point). However, he concludes that in practice this question is unresolved. Thus, Rav Moshe would appear to regard a child whose adoptive parents were non-observant and was converted by a Beit Din, to be a Safeik Jew, possibly Jewish and possibly non-Jewish. Rav Yonah Reiss, former

director of the Beth Din of America, reported at the 2007 convention of the RCA that the Israeli Chief Rabbinate adopts this approach as well in practice. Rav Moshe, though, does allow a conversion in a situation where it is "Matzui" (possible) that the child will emerge as an observant adult. He specifically permits converting a child if the child will receive a Torah education from fully observant teachers even if the adoptive parents are non-observant. He reasons that since in such circumstances it is possible that the child will grow up to be a Torah observant adult "it is certainly a Zechut" to be brought into such a situation. Rav Yosef Adler and Rav Haskel Lookstein (as well as many others) report that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik also considered it a Zechut if the non-observant parents commit to providing the child with a Yeshiva education. Rav Yisrael Rozen (Techumin 20:249-250) suggests this compromise as well, but insists that Jewish education does not suffice when the child will be raised by a non-Jewish parent. We should note that the aforementioned Zeicher Yitzchak and Chavatzelet Hasharon would also appear to accept this approach since in such circumstances it is not clear that the child will grow up to violate all of the Torah. Rav Kook, however, would not appear to accept this compromise as he requires that it be clear that the child will fulfill Mitzvot when he reaches adulthood.

Conclusion In 2007 the RCA in conjunction with the Israeli Chief Rabbinate established a set of guidelines for converting a child, set forth in the aforementioned GPS document. The standard is that the child must be raised in circumstances where it is "likely" that he will observe Mitzvot when he reaches adulthood. The requirements include that the child receive twelve years of Orthodox Jewish education, that the adoptive parents fully observe Kashrut, have a positive attitude to full observance of Mitzvot and that, at minimum, there be "significant observance of Shabbat." The RCA and Beth Din of America consider the wide variety of opinions that exist among the Poskim, as we have outlined, and seek to insure that Geirut of a child can be conducted at a standard that can be accepted by all.

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From: nragen@netvision.net.il

I've been reading with growing horror about Bernie Madoff (pronounced "made-off" - like with all his friends' money!), the prominent Jewish billionaire financier who has managed to destroy the lives of all who trusted him, as well as wiping out millions of dollars earned and donated to Jewish charitable and educational institutions. As David Callaway, editor-in-chief of MarketWatch, wrote: "This is the opposite of Santa Claus - the anti-Claus - going from house to house over the past few days blowing enormous holes in the life savings and dreams of people who had trusted the guy, not the strategy."

In the aftermath, the rise of anti-Semitic chatter on the internet has reached new, ominous levels. But I read one talkback -- on a Madoff site full of vicious anti-Semitic remarks by seemingly educated and 'liberal' people -- which made sense. The writer said that it wasn't fair to blame all Jews, but it was certainly true that there were many, many Jews who were talented in business and finance, and therefore disproportionately represented in those fields. What a shame, therefore, he wrote, that the Jewish community had not made more of an effort to instill the values of

the Torah in its members, which would have meant decency and honesty and absolute integrity would have guided the worlds of business and finance, saving the world so much misery.

I thought that was an intelligent and telling comment. My book *The Saturday Wife*, which I wrote as a satire, is turning out to be shockingly prophetic. If you haven't read it, you really should. The following is an excerpt where Rabbi Chaim prepares to confront his congregation over their desire to build a huge, extravagant new synagogue. It's a speech the congregation never gets to hear:

"We should not be concentrating on walls and floors. We should be concentrating on how to fill the shells that are our homes and places of worship with richness of meaning, values, generosity towards our wives and children and neighbors and friends and employees that is expressed in the expenditure of time, and words, and caring personal acts, not the purchase of more things. Enough with the sub-zero refrigerators! The three hundred dollar rubber beach sandals for three year olds! The eternity pools! The Japanese dwarf trees! The au pairs day and night! The ten thousand dollar koi fish! The army of servants you treat like slaves! Enough!!! Learn to find pleasure in your relationships, with your family, your God. Learn to cherish what you have, not pile on more crap you'd need to unload, stuff that clogs our basements and attics and homes, like cholesterol, choking off the flow of life blood to our hearts by blocking the things that really matter in life!" *The Saturday Wife*, St. Martin's Press, 2007

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Dreaming by **Rabbi Eliyahu Wolf**

Dreaming is something we all experience (ideally while sleeping at night, but at times during the day - albeit never during class!). Dreams can be vividly animated, yet when we are jarred from our reveries and forced to reenter the atmosphere of reality, the details often become hazy and obscure. The Jewish Nobel laureate, Shai Agnon, eloquently articulated this sentiment upon his acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966. He remarked (in translation), "As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But I always regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem. In a dream, in a vision of the night, I saw myself standing with my brother Levites in the Holy Temple, singing with them the songs of David, King of Israel, melodies such as no ear has heard since the day our city was destroyed and its people went into exile. I suspect that the angels in charge of the Shrine of Music, fearful lest I sing in wakefulness what I had sung in dream, made me forget by day what I had sung at night; for if my brethren, the sons of my people, were to hear, they would be unable to bear their grief over the happiness they have lost. To console me for having prevented me from singing with my mouth, they enable me to compose songs in writing." Parashat VaYeishev is framed by two sets of dreams, Yosef's dreams and the butler and baker's dreams. While it is apparent that dreams play a pivotal role in the lives of Yaakov and Yosef, the importance of these biblical dreams to us is not as obvious. One simple, yet profound, message is the value of vision, the need to dream. The dreams the Torah records are more than prognostications of the future. The Torah's dreams open a window to the vision and perspective that shaped the destiny of our people. Revisiting Yaakov Avinu's first dream at the beginning of Parshat VaYeitzei, we see that after fourteen sleepless years in the study hall of Shem and Aver, Yaakov deliberately sleeps at the holiest place in the world, the site of Yitzchak's Akeidah and future home of the Beit HaMikdash. What compelled Yaakov to sleep there; the accommodations were far from luxurious? Rav Mayer Twersky shlita explained ("Continuing to Grow While Facing Adult Priorities and Pressures," Torahweb.org) that Yaakov consciously went to

sleep in order to dream about his future. Embarking on a new stage in life and aware that new terrain would test his mettle, Yaakov Avinu seized this opportunity to chart his destiny. Without proper planning and strategy and without his dreams, Yaakov realized that he could easily fall prey to Lavan's influence. The dream of a terrestrial ladder that reached heavenward portrayed Yaakov's yearning for spiritual ascent in all of the earthly challenges he would encounter. Expounding on Rav Twersky's poignant analysis, the vision and perspective linked to the dreams of our forefathers have particular significance as a preface to the hostile environment of Galut. This idea is evident in Parshas VaYigash (BeReishit 46:2) as Yaakov and family descended to Egypt and Hashem addressed Yaakov, "BaMa'arot HaLailah," in visions of the night. Rav Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk explains in his Meshech Chochmah that Yaakov's dream of Hashem's protective promise was a prelude to the night of the Egyptian exile. Both of Yaakov's dreams provide a vision for the future and cast a ray of light to penetrate the impending darkness of exile. Yosef's dreams in this week's Parashah can be understood in the same vein. Yosef's life in general, and specifically the challenges he faced in Egypt, paralleled Yaakov's life and the challenges Yaakov endured in Charan (see Rashi 37:2 citing BeReishit Rabbah 84:6). For this reason, Yosef was the primary heir of the unique teachings, the "survival skills," Yaakov had been taught at the academy of Shem and Aver (see Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l's Emet LeYaakov beginning of this week's Parashah, 37:3 and beginning of Parshat VaYeitzei 28:11). Just as Yaakov's dreams fortified him and enabled him to rise to the challenges that faced him, Yosef's dreams were his blueprint of survival in the foreign, hostile and immoral environment of Egypt. Fast-forwarding over three and a half millennia, for us, a critical message of these patriarchal dreams is the importance of vision and future aspirations as individuals and as members of Am Yisrael. The magnitude of this message is underscored by its link to the nighttime of exile through which we continue to grope. As individuals, we must fortify ourselves by dreaming about our future, formulating spiritual goals to develop as Bnei Torah and create families that will uphold, uplift, and perpetuate the beauty and traditions of Torah. As a community we must dream, yearning for the dawn of our redemption and the complete, peaceful, and harmonious restoration of Eretz Yisrael and our Beit HaMikdash. The upcoming holiday of Chanukah, a holiday associated with the power of Torah (see HaAmeik Davar beginning of Parshat Tetzaveh, Shemot 27:20) and the relics of our Beit HaMikdash (see Ramban beginning of Parshat BeHa'alotecha, BeMidbar 8:2 and Ran, Shabbat comments to 21b) is a perfect time to reawaken our nationalistic dreams and inspire our personal aspirations. The Torah's dreams and the festival of lights challenge us to continue dreaming and formulating plans and strategies to be better people and a stronger nation. Together we yearn for the day when all Jews will become dreamers, and all of our dreams will be realized; evoking the rays of our redemption will illuminate the entire world with the knowledge of Hashem and the resplendent repertoire of Am Yisrael.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum –
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PARSHAS VAYEISHEV Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning. (37:1) Bikeish Yaakov leishev b'shalvah, kafatz alav rogzol shel Yosef. Chazal teach us that Yaakov Avinu sought to dwell in tranquility, but then, he had to cope with the ordeal of Yosef. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility, but Hashem says, "The righteous do not consider that which is prepared for them in the World to Come to be enough for them, but they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world as well!" The lesson that Chazal are teaching is that this world is not a place in which the righteous can hope to have tranquility. This is a world of action where there is much to accomplish. Furthermore, we derive from here that this world is not what it seems.

Yaakov's life was filled with challenge. He suffered one vicissitude after another. These challenges and ordeals became the foundation stones for the future nation of Klal Yisrael. What seems to be so is not always an accurate perception of the reality. On the contrary, it quite possibly might be the opposite.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates an anecdote which expresses this idea quite succinctly. Apparently, his mother had a subscription to the Agudath Israel newspaper in Poland, which was called the Tagblatt. It took some time until the paper reached their home. Indeed, by the time it arrived, whatever was in the paper was no longer news, but history. Nonetheless, it was a Jewish newspaper with a Torah-oriented slant on the news, so it was well worth the wait. His mother was the only woman in her immediate area who could read Polish and these women were starved to hear "news." Therefore, every evening a group of women would gather at the Galinsky home, so that Mrs. Galinsky could read the "news" to them.

One evening, one of the "regulars" arrived a bit early, while Mrs. Galinsky was still in the kitchen. With nothing to do, she picked up the newspaper and began to look at it. Since she could not read, she was unable to determine where the paper's headline began. She happened to be staring at an article about an English shipbuilding company which had just commissioned a new ocean liner. As she was staring at the paper, she suddenly gave a scream, "Devorah (Mrs. Galinsky), how can you stand there peeling potatoes when the paper is filled with an article about an ocean liner that sank?"

Mrs. Galinsky had not yet read the paper, and this bit of news came as a shock to her. She came running in from the kitchen, quite upset. She took one look at the paper which her friend was holding and began to laugh. "My dear friend," she said, "you are holding the paper upside down, making the ocean liner appear to be capsizing. It is about the launching of a new ocean liner. You looked at the right picture, but from the wrong angle."

Rav Galinsky explains that this story is an analogy to life. We often read the circumstances from an upside down or backwards angle, which causes us to develop an inaccurate impression of what is occurring. How often do we "think" we see a boat capsizing when actually it is being launched? We have no clue concerning the greatness of the Avos ha'kedoshim, holy Patriarchs. Thus, when we read about them, we often form our own impressions based upon the perspective from which we are viewing them. We are like the woman who saw, but could not read. The Avos were very capable of reading and perceiving, far beyond the ken of those who are making conjectures about them today.

Yaakov Avinu's tzaros, troubles, were the foundation stones of our glorious nation. His idea of tranquility and ours are very disparate from one another. When he was told that the righteous do not have it "easy" in this world, he accepted this with equanimity and faith, because he knew how to read. He understood. In contemporary times, we must learn to trust and keep our faith. The ship is not capsizing. Indeed, we are in the process of building the "vehicle" that will take us "home," with the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

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

Yehudah did not just "go down." Rashi explains that Yehudah, who had until that time retained a position of leadership over his brothers, was deposed, because they blamed him for suggesting that Yosef be sold into slavery, rather than encouraging them to return Yosef to their father. Regrettably, Yehudah's punishment did not end with his descent from leadership. He eventually lost his wife and two sons. Chazal derive from here that one who commences performing a mitzvah, but does not complete it, will ultimately bury his wife and children, as Yehudah did. He began the rescue of Yosef, but did not complete it. Thus, he was punished. This is a punishment that is difficult to understand. Why should one who starts a mitzvah be judged more harshly than one who does not even begin it? The brothers, who had planned to kill Yosef, were not punished as harshly as Yehudah, who, at least, spared his life by suggesting that he be sold as a slave.

Horav Avrohom Pam, zl, explains this based upon an incident recorded in the Talmud Taanis 21A. Two great Torah scholars, Ilfa and Rabbi Yochanan, both struggled to study Torah amidst abject poverty. They made every attempt to keep their heads above water, to no avail. Finally, they decided to seek an opportunity to achieve financial stability. They were going to earn some serious money. They set out one day in search of their golden dream. Stopping along the way to eat their meager meal, they sat next to an old wall which, unbeknownst to them, was at the point of collapse. While they ate, two malochim, angels, came by and conversed. Rabbi Yochanan was privy to what they were saying. He heard the following: "Let us topple this wall on these people, because they are forsaking eternal life in the World to Come and exchanging it for temporary opportunities in a transitory world." Obviously, the venture these two scholars were attempting was raising concern in Heaven. The other angel replied, "Leave them alone, because there is one among them whose hour to achieve distinction is at hand."

Rabbi Yochanan proceeded to ask Ilfa if he had heard anything. When Ilfa responded that he had not, Rabbi Yochanan assumed that the angels were probably speaking about him. He decided to abandon his plan for striking it rich and return to

the yeshivah. Shortly after his return, Rabbi Yochanan was appointed Rosh Yeshivah, and-- in accordance with the accepted tradition-- he was bestowed with gifts that greatly enhanced his financial status, much similar to the Kohen Gadol whose fellow Kohanim would give him great wealth when he was elevated to his exalted post. The Talmud concludes that when Ilfa returned after concluding his business venture, he was told that had he not left, it would have been he who would have been selected as Rosh Yeshivah, since he was a greater scholar than Rabbi Yochanan.

Rav Pam derives a number of lessons from this Chazal, one of them being the significance of responding positively to a shelichus, mission. Rabbi Yochanan heard the angel's conversation. He understood that he was being entrusted with a mission which he must carry out. Likewise, when one is inspired to do a mitzvah, this inspiration is a message for him: You have a mission to perform. See it through to fruition. Do not waste time. Do not do part of it. You must do the entire mission. This is why Yehudah was so severely punished for initiating Yosef's rescue, but not completing it.

An inspiration is more than a personal good feeling, a compulsion to act, to perform, to assist. The inspiration is something that has been planted in our minds. It is our mission from Heaven. When we carry out our inspirations, it should be with a feeling that we are performing Hashem's Will. This emotion catalyzes us to act tirelessly, demonstrating self-sacrifice and alacrity. We must leave no stone unturned in our quest to complete our mission.

Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl, was known as the shelucha d'Rachmana, agent of Hashem, to build Torah in this country. Indeed, he was the architect of Torah in America, planting the seeds of yeshivos and day schools, seeds that have flourished and grown into entire communities throughout the United States - which continue to grow. It was all the result of his inspiration. He understood the challenges: he factored in the toil and self-sacrifice; he built an army of soldiers prepared to go out and disseminate Torah to the masses; he infused them with courage and inspired them with hope; he sent them out on their mission - a mission that continues to produce results to this very day.

Not everyone is endowed with the ability and sensitivity to inspire others, to rally with him to reach out to the spiritually devoid and complacent, to illuminate their lives with the light of Torah. Nevertheless, each and every one of us has his own individual mission to complete. It is a mission that only he can accomplish. If he does not complete his own mission, it will be difficult if someone else does it. Rav Pam cites the Chida in his Shem HaGedolim that Horav Moshe Alshich, zl, sought to join a select inner circle of students who were privileged to study the innermost secrets of the Torah with the Arizal, the master of Kabbalah. The Arizal did not permit the Alshich to join the group, despite the Alshich's incredible distinction in Torah knowledge and shelemus ha'middos, perfection of character traits. The Alshich was so upset with his rejection that he asked the Arizal for an explanation. The Arizal explained, "Your soul descended to this world l'tzorech Toras ha'derush, to produce profound homiletic discourses and interpretations of the Torah. This is your calling in life (not studying nistar, esoteric wisdom). Devote yourself to revealing the precious jewels of the Torah. That will bring ultimate fulfillment to your soul."

This vignette should give us all something to consider. How often do we get involved in various endeavors that just do not seem to go our way? This applies to a profession, a temporary undertaking or permanent vocation. We wonder why it just does not seem to work. Perhaps it is not part of our Heavenly script for life. Could it be that Hashem wants something else of us? Perhaps He views our talents differently than we and others view them. No one wants to return to Hashem with a mission "unaccomplished." What is worse is the individual who--due to complacency or stubbornness-- refuses to define what his mission in life really is.

He entered the house to do his work. (39:11)

In the Midrash HaGadol, Chazal maintain that "the house" was no ordinary house. The Torah is alluding to a very special house, a house that had a long history, a house that, due to its significance, played a critical role in Yosef's ability to triumph over Potifar's wife's blandishments. This was the same house to which Avimelech took Sarah Imeinu many years earlier. It was in this house that our Matriarch shed many bitter tears, fearing for her life and her morals. The Midrash Rabbah in Parashas Lech Lecha 41:2 relates that the entire night that Sarah was left alone, waiting for Avimelech, she prayed to Hashem: "Master of the world, Avraham left with Your assurance that he would not be hurt. I left with my faith and trust in You intact - even though You did not promise me anything. Avraham was able to leave the prison, and I am in the prison. Why?" Hashem replied, "Everything that I do is done for you."

What is the meaning of this ambiguous dialogue? Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that the house in which Sarah was held captive by Avimelech was a house that was filled with our Matriarch's groans, her tears, her heartfelt prayers, when she was alone, separated from her husband. To whom could she turn? Hashem was her mighty rock, her hope, her Source of Salvation. Her tears suffused the "airspace" of

the house and hung there, permeating the entire edifice. Years went by, and her great-grandson Yosef was also a captive in that house. He needed support and help. He needed something to help him in his time of need. Yosef "wrapped himself" in his grandmother's tears. These tears now ascended on high and stormed the Heavens, entreating Hashem to spare Yosef, to encourage him during his time of need. This house was no ordinary house. It was Sarah's house, a house of prayer, a house of tears.

No prayer is left behind. No tears are wasted. It may seem that the prayers did not achieve their goal; the tears did not accomplish their purpose. Actually, they did. Hashem stored the tears and prayers for a time when they would be needed by someone who either could not pray-- or just needed more prayer. How little we know; how little we are aware. We must trust and believe that no sincere expression that emanates from us is wasted. It will be used - perhaps not now-or for us personally - but it will be used one day.

The following is a moving letter of consolation that was sent to a bereaved family. It expresses the idea that we mentioned above. We say in the Selichos on Yom Kippur during the closing moments of the Neilah Service: "Yehi ratzon - May it be the will of the One Who listens to the sound of our cries, that You collect our tears so they are not lost, save us from all cruel decrees, for our eyes are turned to You alone." (Apparently, the father/husband had succumbed after a dreadful illness. Many people had prayed; many had contributed, but it "seemed" to no avail. The letter responds to this feeling of "rejection.")

"We all feel like soldiers who have returned from the battlefield, a battlefield where many of our people - men, women and children - all joined together to entreat the Almighty to revoke the decree. Regrettably, we did not succeed. I cannot recall a personality that merited such an outpouring of attention from gedolei ha'dor, Torah luminaries, teachers, and children, entire families, all committed, all concerned for the welfare of the choleh, terminally ill patient. Everyone shared in the prayer that he be granted a speedy recovery.

"But it was not to be. We prayed and we hoped, but Hashem had other plans. Have we returned from the battlefield in defeat? No! On the contrary, all those who cried out gained great merit for themselves; yet, even greater merit was gained by the one for whom we prayed. Our dear, departed friend had the merit of inspiring the community to draw closer to Hashem, to repent, to achieve a greater semblance of unity. The closeness they achieved with Hashem through the recitation of Tehillim and increased intensity in prayer has surely served as a merit both for them and the departed. The public fasts and increase in Torah study surely left an indelible impression on High. Who knows how much forgiveness has been granted to the world, and how many decrees have been averted and annulled in his behalf?

"All of the above are an indication of the triumph of good over evil. Faith has increased, and Hashem's Name has been sanctified. We can say with firm belief that if it was decreed upon him - and upon you - whatever it was decreed, fortunate is he for whom these merits paved the way for him to enter the gates of Gan Eden, to reach the place reserved for those who are mezakeh es ha' rabim and mekadash Shem Shomayim, contribute to the public good and publicly sanctify Hashem's Name.

"It is quite possible that my words do not provide sufficient solace for your broken hearts. Let me add another important point. You wonder: What happened to all of the tears? Where are the heartfelt prayers? Did they disappear - just as the departed? The hot tears evaporated and became clouds of glory which joined together with his many merits. Together they will rise before the Kisei Ha'Kavod, Throne of Glory, to praise our unforgettable loved one, accompanying him to his final resting place in Gan Eden."

The tears are not wasted. In fact, nothing good is ever wasted. Hashem puts it away and stores it for a time when they will be put to use.

And he placed him in the prison. (39:20)

Yosef was alone, incarcerated, and held in a dreary dungeon. He was literally the lowest that one could be. How could he perceive anything positive about his predicament? For that matter, can one derive a positive note from his captivity to cope with being in prison, being in a hospital bed, or suffering an affliction which takes over his life? Horav Mordechai Mann, zl, cites Horav Leib Fine, zl, who clarifies this question, giving encouragement and sustenance to those who are alone, who are in need, who think that nobody cares.

He cites the pasuk in Yeshayah 63:9, B'chol tzarosom lo tzar, "In all these troubles, He was troubled." The kri-- the way the word lo is read-- and the ksiv-- the way it is actually spelled-- are contrastingly different. The Torah writes lo tzar with an aleph, which is thus translated as "not" troubled, but it is read lo tzar, with a vav, which is now translated as "His troubles." How are we to reconcile these two opposing meanings? On the one hand, we are saying that Hashem is not "troubled" with us, while it is actually written that He is troubled with us.

Horav Fine explained, citing a story that had occurred over a century earlier in the city of Brisk. One Friday night, a group of Orthodox Jews decided to protest the lack of Shabbos observance perpetrated by a number of secular-minded Jews. The police became enraged over this illegal protest and decided to arrest and incarcerate the rish

ha'kahal, lay head of the community. The jails in those days were certainly dreary, miserable places, but on Shabbos, without Kiddush and the Shabbos meal, the atmosphere certainly left much to be desired. The rosh ha'khal was extremely depressed.

Two hours of misery and loneliness went by and, suddenly, a guard opened the door to his cell and brought in another prisoner. It was none other than Horav Yehoshua Leib, zl, the Maharil Diskin, Rav of Brisk and later Yerushalayim. Apparently, the police felt it was not sufficient to arrest the president; they must also bring in the rabbi to suffer a little bit.

All of a sudden, the eyes of the rosh ha'khal began to shine, as his face became aglow with excitement and deep satisfaction. Everything was worth it. It was well worth being thrown into jail, so that he could have quality time with the distinguished Maharil Diskin. He was no longer alone; he was no longer incarcerated. This was heaven! What joy! What satisfaction! He could not ask for anything "better." It was all worth it to be able to spend a Shabbos alone with the Maharil Diskin.

This is the meaning of the pasuk, b'chol tzarosam lo tzar. "In all their/our troubles, He is with them," the lo is spelled with a vav. Thus, since Hashem is with the individual, he is no longer alone. When he acknowledges this, he realizes that what he is experiencing is not a tzar, with lo spelled with an aleph, connoting a negative. The troubles change and disappear, because he is with Hashem.

I remember a number of years ago; I visited a woman in the hospital who was going through the ravages of the end stages of a terminal illness. I had been visiting her for awhile. Every time I met with her, I would somehow attempt to convey some form of optimism and hope. This time it would be difficult, and she knew it. "What are you going to say now, Rabbi?" she asked me. I thought for a few moments before saying, "You know that this illness is from Hashem, and that alone should serve as some form of comfort. He is doing this for a reason that is beyond us, but the mere fact that it is from Him and that He is with you in your time of need should alleviate some of your distress and fear. You are not alone - ever." I do not think that this thought decreased her pain, but it did give her the fortitude to withstand her ordeal.

Va'ani Tefillah Tzadik Hashem b'chol derachav, v'chasisid b'chol maasav. Righteous is Hashem in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds.

Hashem acts with us as He feels necessary. Thus, if the circumstances call for an expression of Din, strict Justice, He does so out of His boundless love for us, so that we will correct our ways. In other words, while it may appear that Hashem is dealing harshly with us, He is actually carrying out an act of love which ultimately is merciful and compassionate. Horav Avraham Figu, zl, distinguishes between derech, way, which is a reference to the medium one takes towards realizing a goal and maaseh, deed, which is the goal that he seeks to achieve.

This is the meaning of the pasuk, Tzaddik Hashem b'chol derachav, "Righteous is Hashem in all His ways," concerning the derech, vehicle, for applying His judgment. Hashem appears as a tzaddik, strict, pious, looking for the correct and just way. When we see what Hashem wants of us and the approach He wants us to take, we are overwhelmed with fear. When we see, however, the actual maaseh, the purpose, then we understand the goal of His demands; Hashem now appears as a chasid, benevolent and kind, filled with compassion. We follow His derech, because we believe in His maaseh.

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