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Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Longing for the Best

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger Longing for the Best

It is with the lingering image of the inconsolable father, Yaakov, resolved to leave this world mourning the tragic loss of Yosef, that we read of Yehuda's suffering and that he buries his wife and two children. What a most striking and understudied contrast. Yehuda is distant from his family both emotionally and geographically, and the loss of children and wife are fresh, and yet we read (38:12) "and Yehuda finds comfort" and goes back to business. Indeed it is within this frame of mind that Yehuda reaches one of his greatest personal triumphs in his dealings with Tamar and begins his national Davidic dynasty.

And how different is the picture back at home. Yaakov is surrounded (37:35) by children, daughter in laws, and grandchildren, all trying to assuage a heart full of pain, perhaps still very sorely missing his beloved Rachel as well. According to Ohr Hachayim they would remind him of his blessings, that he is encircled by children and grandchildren, all who practice his legacy dearly and devotedly. Truth be told, many of us, after but a few moments of thought about the enormous hole in Yaakov's heart, can more easily identify with the wounded and crushed father and husband than the seemingly indomitable spirit of Yehuda.

Yet a careful reading of the text guides us away from viewing Yaakov as simply succumbing to the despair and hopelessness of a person lesser than him. "Vayema'ain l'hinachem - he refuses to be comforted." This is not a person whose uncontrollable pessimism dismisses any words of hope and any images of a future albeit a severely scarred one. Nor does it seem to exclusively speak to pervasive pangs of guilt that would not give Yaakov rest, as has been forwarded by some of our greatest commentators (Tur, Seforno). Certainly Yaakov had the deep faith and bold strength of people that we all know who have triumphed in face of life's greatest suffering and who have decided that they will put back together lives that will accommodate, and perhaps welcome, moments of joy and celebration. Yet something drove Yaakov to decide that he will not allow himself to conclude his mourning and that with all the flowing

wellsprings of faith that he has showed us, his life now calls for pain and focus that knows no closure.

This deliberate decision, which would deny any natural distraction or any innate interest to let go, seems dissonant with a life of optimistic, altruistic giving, belief and humility; lives that we all try to emulate.

Harav Aryeh Leib Shteinman (in his sefer Ayelet Hashachar), the pious sage of Bnai Brak, frames the same concern through the prism of halocha. After all, the halochos of mourning recognize and discourage any tendency to dwell on one's pain and mourning in a prolonged unproductive fashion. Many laws and customs of mourning have been interpreted to give expression to loss, all the while guiding the return to an active social and religious framework, hopefully more nuanced, wiser and deeper. Rav Shteinman points to a phrase penned by Rav Chaim soloveitchik in a letter of consolation reminding the mourner "as we are commanded to be comforted". Rav Shteinman himself suggests that the Talmud always refers to "receiving comfort" rather than "to give comfort" in order to articulate that receiving comfort is one of responsibilities of a mourner.

In addressing these observations, Harav Moshe Shternbuch of Yerushalayim (in his sefer Tuv Ta'am) suggests that the loss of Yosef with the attendant diminution of Yaakov's legacy and the reduced G-dliness that Yaakov could now impart, gave him no rest. Yaakov refused to let himself become comfortable with the idea that he may not achieve what he was destined to accomplish for Hashem. He would have no peace if Yosef's insights into his father's heritage would forever be diminished. If the opportunities of reaching spiritual heights in this world were expanded with each and every child, then Yaakov would not accept that the world he was destined to bequeath was one limited in the Divine light that could have been.

Why is this so important? Yirmiyahu Hanavi, in his inspiring vignette of Rachel praying for her children, which is the image that should be instructive to every Jew and inform many of our prayers, describes that she too is "mei'ana l'hinacheim - refusing to accept consolation." She too could find respite in the triumphs of her children from time to time, but she maintained the teachings of her Yaakov, and implores us to do the same, refusing to accept a people, a world and a life where faith, spiritual awareness and Divine destiny are anything but complete.

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From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org
To ravfrand@torah.org Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha
**Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas VaYeishev
G-d's Plans Will Happen**

The following story may be apocryphal, but it is indicative of a point I would like to make: A Jew in Europe walked into a shtetl [little village] and saw another Jew walking by. He stopped him and said, "Reb Yid, let me ask you a question." The Jew responded, "I can't answer you now. I'm late for shul." And he ran off. The question the first Jew in fact wanted to ask him is "Where is the shul?" This second Jew said he was on his way to shul, so the first Jew followed him. When he got to shul, he approached the second Jew who was too busy to listen to his question and said "I have a question for you. In our parsha, it states that Yaakov told Yosef 'Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word.' A man found Yosef blundering in the field and asked him what he was looking for. Yosef told him he was looking for his brothers and asked the man where he might find them. The man responded that he heard them saying they were going to Dosan, so Yosef went after his brothers and found them at Dosan. [Bereshis 37:14-17] Our Rabbis tell us that this was not a simple man, but it was the Angel Gavriel. In other words, when the Torah said 'A man found him,' it was actually the Angel Gavriel out to save him. Now let me ask you a question: In last week's parsha, when the pasuk

said, 'A man wrestled with him (Yaakov)' our Rabbis tell us that this 'man' was Saro shel Eisav – Eisav's guardian angel, Sa-mael, an evil Angel. When the Torah uses the word 'ish' [man], how do Chazal know whether it refers to a good angel or a bad angel? The second Jew had no answer. The first Jew responded with an insight attributed to the Sanzer Rav, the Divrei Chaim. After his epic battle with the Angel, Yaakov asked the Angel for a blessing. The Angel responded "I do not have time to give you a blessing. It is Alos HaShachar, time for the Angels to sing Divine Praises to G-d. Leave me alone! Get out of here so I can get back to shul." [Rashi on Bereshis 32:27] If that is the answer a person receives from a stranger, rest assured that he is speaking to a bad angel. But when someone sees that you are lost and he says "Can I help you?" [Bereshis 27:15], then he is speaking to a good angel – the Angel Gavriel." This apocryphal story serves as an introduction to a Ramban I would like to share with you. The Ramban on the pasuk "A man found him and behold he was blundering in the field..." [Bereshis 37:15] says four very important words. It would be worthwhile to look up these words, write them down, and remember them. The Ramban writes: HaGezeira Emes v'haCharitzus Sheker (to be translated soon). Based on natural occurrences, the Ramban writes, Yosef would never have found his brothers. There was no Mapquest or GPS in those days. He was not looking for a specific address. He was out in the field in the middle of nowhere. He did not know right from left, north from south. Yosef should have gone back to Yaakov and told him "I tried to find them but I was not successful. They were nowhere to be found." But the Almighty wanted Yosef to find his brothers. This is Jewish history. This is the whole story of the exile to Egypt. It was all hanging on Yosef finding his brothers. The story of the Jewish people is in this parsha. When G-d wants something to happen, He makes it happen! HaGezeira Emes (what G-d has DECREED is TRUE – it will happen) v'haCharitzus Sheker (AND THE DILIGENCE of man is FALSE). Man can plan and do this and that but in the final analysis, if G-d wants something to happen, it will happen and if He does not want it to happen, it will not happen. The Ramban sums it up by quoting the pasuk from Mishlei [19:21]: Many are the thoughts in man's heart, but G-d's plan will prevail. This has been condensed into the pithy Yiddish saying "A mensch tracht un Gut lacht." (Man makes plans and the Almighty laughs.) This is the meaning of HaGezeira Emes v'haCharitzus Sheker. If G-d needs to send an Angel from Heaven to take Yosef by the hand and say "Your brothers are over there" to carry out His plan, that is what will happen because He wants it to happen. This is the lesson of the end of the parsha as well. Yosef is brought down to Egypt. He experiences the incident with Potiphar's wife. He is thrown into the dungeon. He meets the Butler and the Baker of the King of Egypt there. They have their dreams. Yosef tells the Butler he will get his position back and he tells the baker that he will be hung. Look closely at the following pasuk: "In another three days, Pharaoh will count you and will restore you to your post, and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand AS WAS THE FORMER PRACTICE (k'mishpat haRishon) when you were his cupbearer." [Bereshis 40:13] Have you ever wondered about those words – k'mishpat haRishon? They seem to be superfluous! What do they add? What do they teach us? There is also a difficulty in the next pasuk, which Rashi himself is bothered by: "SO THAT (ki im), if you would think of me with yourself when you will have benefited, and you will please do me a kindness, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building." Rashi here says that "ki im" does not have its usual meaning – so that (which would imply some type of causal relationship between the dream and Yosef's freedom), but it means in this context AT WHICH TIME (asher). Rabbi Akiva Eiger sent a letter to his son, in which he suggests a novel and insightful interpretation of these pasukim. Yosef tells the butler that he will be returned to his position and once again be Pharaoh's butler. When the butler heard those words – what went through his mind? Was there a great sigh of relief: "I got my job back! I'm on easy street."? No. He

thought to himself: "I am going to be a nervous wreck for the rest of my life. I came very close to being hung because there was a fly in the cup. What will be if something will fly into the cup again? My hand will be shaking so much that I will never be able to pour a cup of wine for the king again! Good, I got my job back, but how will I cope? I will become neurotic! To address that fear, Yosef responded: You will have your job back AND you are not going to have to worry because it is going to be K'Mishpat haRishon – exactly like it was before. Why is that? It is because the whole incident of the fly falling into the cup was not your fault. It will never happen again. The only reason the fly fell into the cup is SO THAT you should be here in the dungeon with me SO THAT you will be able to tell Pharaoh what a great interpreter of dreams I am and SO THAT I will be able to get out of jail because of the good words you put in for me with Pharaoh. This is another example of HaGezeira Emes v'haCharitzus Sheker. Many are the thoughts in the hearts of man, and G-d's plan is what always finally emerges. This is the story of the Jewish people throughout history. The Almighty manipulates the strings. The Steipler Rav points out the irony: Pharaoh wanted to get rid of the Jewish boys, so he decreed that all male children be thrown into the Nile. Moshe Rabbeinu himself was thrown into the Nile as an infant. But Pharaoh's own daughter comes down just then to bathe, saves Moshe, and he is raised in Pharaoh's own palace. It was as a result of his own plan that the future Jewish leader was raised not as a slave, but as a prince who learned the protocols of leadership. This too is because HaGezeira Emes v'haCharitzus Sheker. Haman devised the great idea of getting rid of the rebellious Vashti. Who came into the palace in Vashti's place? It was Esther who saved the Jews and was responsible for Haman's execution. How ironic! It is not irony. It is HaGezeira Emes v'haCharitzus Sheker. That is the lesson of this parsha: Many are the thoughts in the hearts of man, and G-d's plan is what emerges. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org to: date: Thu, Dec 6, 2012 at 11:47 PM subject: Chanukah Generation, Secret of Success, Hurricane Heroes - Parshat Vayeishev - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

Parshat Vayeishev- **Man's Plans; God's Plans**
Excerpted from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text: An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha- Bereishit'

Context

Yosef's wrenching descent into Egyptian bondage begins innocuously as his father, Yaakov, sends him to inquire after the welfare of his brothers in Shechem: "And he (Yaakov) sent him (Yosef) from the valley of Hevron and he arrived at Shechem..."

Strangely enough, at this critical turning point, Rashi focuses on a seemingly minor, ancillary problem in the text: "Was not Hevron on a mountain?"

The answer that Rashi proposes, however, moves far beyond geography and touches upon a powerful issue, central to the story of Yosef and his brothers.

Rashi cites a Talmudic passage which explains that by referring to the "Valley of Hevron," the Torah allegorically alludes to the "deep plan" which had been revealed, decades earlier, to Yosef's great-grandfather, Avraham, who is buried in Hevron.

During the Covenant between the Pieces, God told Avraham: "Know full well...your children will be strangers in a land not their own, where they will be enslaved and persecuted for four hundred years." (See Lech Lecha 4.)

Avraham's prophetic vision is now about to unfold, generations later. The sale of Yosef is the mechanism which will set the initial events of the prophecy in motion. The Torah, therefore, introduces the story of

Yosef's sale with a reference to the "Valley of Hevron" – the deep plan rooted in Hevron.

With his short, seemingly technical observation, therefore, Rashi alerts us to a fundamental truth concerning the story that we are about to read. The tale of Yosef and his brothers overlays deeper currents. This is not only the painful, personal story of a family in crisis. Yosef's first steps towards Shechem are also the first steps in another journey, which will ultimately transform the patriarchal family into an eternal people.

We are about to experience the divinely guided transition from the patriarchal era to the national era of Jewish history.

Questions

While God's providence is forever present in our lives, rarely is his silent guidance as evident as in the story of Yosef and his brothers. As Yosef himself maintains, their personal saga serves the higher purpose of effectuating God's overall plans.

God's "behind the scenes" involvement, however, raises serious questions about the personal free will of the players in the story.

Considering that the descent of the Jewish nation into Egypt was preordained generations earlier, how much choice did Yosef and his brothers really have in the unfolding events? Were they simply acting out a predetermined script or can they be justifiably held accountable for their actions?

How does this narrative reflect upon the delicate balance between prescience (God's foreknowledge of events), free will and predestination; a balance which normally defines our lives? (See Bereishit 4, Approaches a).

Approaches

While a full discussion of these complex issues remains beyond the scope of this study, viewing the story of Yosef as a microcosm of a larger, more familiar paradigm may prove instructive.

The Jewish view of history, on a global level, mirrors the issues found in the story of Yosef and his brothers.

A

On the one hand, Jews certainly believe in a measure of preordination on a national level. A belief in such preordination is, in fact, critical to our worldview. The best known of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith emphatically states: "I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Mashiach (Messiah), and even though he may delay, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come."

To believe in a Messiah is to believe in a predetermined, inevitable end point to history. Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik, in fact, maintains that our introduction of the idea of Mashiach signaled a major revolution in the way man thought about his historical journey. We brought to the world the concept of a destiny-driven history. Where others saw history governed only by causality, with each era simply the product of what came before, we saw a march towards a specific destination. Where others saw civilization only propelled by the past, we claimed to be pulled, as well, by the future.

Suddenly, the world stage contained a nation which believed that there was rhyme, reason and goal to the currents of history; a nation which saw itself traveling towards a predetermined, inevitable end point: the messianic era.

On the other hand, our belief in the inevitability of the messianic era does not diminish our acceptance of the role and responsibility that individuals and communities bear in any given generation. While our nation's destination may be clear, the parameters of the journey towards that destination are not. Within the broad brushstrokes of national preordination we each freely choose the role we will play in our people's unfolding story.

B

The rabbis, however, go even further. In order to preserve the all-important concept of free will within our national journey, they presume flexibility even concerning the preordained elements of our history.

That the Mashiach will arrive, they agree, is clear. When he will arrive, however, how he will arrive, and, most importantly, who among us or among our children will be there to greet him upon his arrival – all these variables are in our hands.

Much of our people's story remains unwritten. We are the authors of that portion of the story.

C

We can now begin to understand the interplay between free will and predestination as it unfolds in the Yosef story. For while the descent of Avraham's progeny into a foreign land was predicted by God decades before it occurred, the prophecy granted to the patriarch was general in scope. Egypt was never mentioned as the place of exile. The mode by which Avraham's descendants would be exiled was never detailed nor was the exact quality of the servitude they would experience.

Even the minimal details that were clearly preordained were also potentially flexible. God predicted to Avraham, for example, that the period of servitude would last for four hundred years. Our ancestors were actually slaves in Egypt, however, for only two hundred ten years. The rabbis explain the discrepancy by maintaining that the period mentioned in Avraham's prophetic vision began with the birth of Yitzchak (who was, in a sense, an exile, never fully comfortable in his own land). By beginning the count with Yitzchak's birth, God, in his mercy, diminished the pain that his people would endure.

We must accept that, one way the other, our ancestors were destined to spend a period of time as strangers persecuted in a strange land. The story, however, did not have to play out exactly as it did. If sibling hatred and jealousy had not been the catalysts for our exile, perhaps the exile itself would have been less painful.

Far from acting out a predetermined script, Yosef and his brothers wrote their own story, of their own free will, within the context of a larger tale. The story they wrote then reverberated across the years, affecting the lives of all the generations that followed. So too, we, in each era, write our own stories, as we freely determine the roles we will play in the unfolding journey of our nation. The stories

from: Rabbi Berel Wein <genesis@torah.org> via capalon-newmail.capalon.com reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Thu, Nov 21, 2013 at 11:36 AM subject: Rabbi Wein - Parshas Vayeishev

Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshas Vayeishev Yaakov and the Land of Canaan The Torah parsha begins with the simple narrative statement that Yaakov settled and "dwelled in the land of the sojourn of his forefathers, the Land of Canaan." That last clause in that sentence – the Land of Canaan – seems to be superfluous. We are already well aware from the previous parshiyot of Bereshith that Avraham and Yitzchak dwelt in the Land of Canaan. Since every word and phrase in the Torah demands our attention and study, the commentators to Torah throughout the ages examined this issue and proposed a number of different lessons and insights.

I believe that the lessons for our time from these words that open our parsha are eerily relevant. Yaakov is forced to live in a hostile environment. The story of the assault on Dina and the subsequent violence and bloodshed between Yaakov's family and the Canaanites serves as the backdrop to this type of life that living in the Land of Canaan entails.

Yaakov is living in a bad neighborhood, amongst many who wish him and his family ill. He is forced to rely on the sword of Shimon and Levi to survive but that is not to his liking or ultimate life purpose. The Land of Canaan is not hospitable to him and his worldview.

The Philistine kings who wished to kidnap and enslave his mother and grandmother are still around or at least their cloned successors are. At the funeral of his father at the Cave of Machpela he must have ruefully

mused as to how his grandfather was forced to pay such an exorbitant price for a burial plot.

The Land of Canaan had many unpleasant associations connected to it for Yaakov to contemplate: a king's ransom to Eisav, a rock for a pillow, and crippling encounters with an anonymous foe. All of this and more was his lot in the Land of Canaan.

So what is Yaakov's stubborn attachment to living in the Land of Canaan? Why does he believe that he will be able to eventually dwell there in serenity and security? The answer to these issues is that he realized that this was the land of his ancestors and that the Lord had entered into a covenant with them to grant them that land.

Now it could be that it is called the Land of Canaan but eternally it would be called after his name, the Land of Israel. The land would know many populations and rulers but that would never change its eternal nature of being the Land of Israel. The land is home for Yaakov – the land of his past and his future. It is what binds him to his great ancestral heritage and mission - and he will demand to be buried there as well.

Yaakov overlooks the difficulties and challenges inherent in the Land of Canaan because he lives not only in its geographic confines but rather in the ideal land of his forefathers – in a land of Godly revelation and holy purpose. Yaakov will undergo much more pain and suffering in the Land of Canaan before he returns there in final tranquility. But his descendants, the Jewish people will always know it to be the land of their fathers, the Land of Israel.

Shabat shalom

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by **Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**

PARSHAT VA'YESHEV - Who Sold Yosef?

Could it be that the brothers DID NOT sell Yosef! As shocking as this statement may sound to anyone familiar with the story of Yosef & his brothers; a careful reading of that narrative in Chumash may actually support this possibility!

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

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

Believe it or not, this tiny detail affects our understanding of almost every aspect of the story that ensues. Our shiur will entertain each possibility - showing how this 'missing detail' may be what leads several commentators to conclude that the brothers may never have sold Yosef after all! However, before we discuss that detail, we must first review the Torah's description of these events, making sure that we understand not only what everyone is doing and planning, but more important - what everyone is thinking! [We should also point out, that the distance between Hebron, where Yaakov is living, and Dotan, where the brothers are grazing their sheep, is about 100 kilometers. Therefore, the brothers are probably gone for at least several weeks. Certainly, they don't come home to Hebron to sleep at night, rather, they have set up a 'campsite' in the Dotan area.]

PLAN A - THE BROTHERS / FIRST DEGREE MURDER Recall that as soon as Yosef arrives at Dotan, the brothers conspire to kill him (see 37:18-20). However, their plan concerning HOW to kill him is revised several times. To show how, let's begin with the brothers' original plan to kill Yosef, as soon as they saw him [PLAN A]: "They (the brothers) saw him from afar, and before he came close... they conspired to kill him. And they said to one another, behold the 'dreamer' is coming. Now, let's KILL him and throw his body into one of the pits..." (see 37:18- 20).

Note how the brothers originally plan to kill Yosef immediately (on the spot) and then 'bury him' in a pit - most likely to 'hide the evidence' (should their father later accuse them). Although Reuven opposes Yosef's murder, he realizes that the brothers would not accept his opinion. Therefore, instead of arguing with his brothers, he devises a shrewd plan that will first postpone Yosef's execution, and enable him at a later time to secretly bring Yosef back home. [See further *iyun* for an explanation of why specifically Reuven wants to save Yosef.]

PLAN B - REUVEN'S PLAN / SECOND DEGREE MURDER As you read Reuven's plan, be sure to differentiate between what Reuven SAYS (to his brothers) and what Reuven THINKS (to himself): "... And Reuven said... 'Do not shed blood, cast him into a pit [in order that he die] OUT IN THE 'MIDBAR' (wilderness), but do not touch him yourselves --' [End of quote! Then, the narrative continues by informing the reader of Reuven's true intentions...] 'in order to save him [Yosef] from them and return him to his father.'" (37:22).

Reuven's 'official' plan (that the brothers accept) is to let Yosef die in a less violent manner, i.e. to throw him alive into a deep pit to die, instead of murdering him in cold blood. However, Reuven's secretly plans to later return to that pit and free him. Note how Reuven even suggests the specific 'pit' into which to throw Yosef - "ha-bor HA-ZEH asher ba-midbar"! Most probably so that he can later sneak away to that pit and save him. [Compare this to the brothers' original plan to throw him into "one of the pits" (37:20) - possibly a pit closer by.]

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

WHERE ARE THEY EATING? Until this point, the plot is clear. Now, two important details are missing which affect our understanding of the rest of the story. 1) WHERE did they sit down to eat, i.e. close by or far away? 2) WHERE is REUVEN, eating with them, or off on his own?

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

(1) Where are the brothers eating? Recall that the brothers are grazing their sheep in the Dotan area [see 37:17/ today the area of Jenin, between Shechem and Afula], which is on the northern slopes of central mountain range of Israel. The midbar [wilderness], that Reuven is talking about, is found some 5-10 kilometer to the east of Dotan (that "midbar" is found along the eastern slopes of the entire central mountain range). Considering that the brothers throw Yosef into a pit 'out in the MIDBAR', it would definitely make sense for them to return afterward to their campsite in the Dotan area to eat (see 37:16-17). Besides, it would not be very appetizing to eat lunch while listening to your little brother screaming for his life from a pit nearby - see 42:21 for proof that he was indeed screaming.] And even should one conclude that it would have been just as logical for them to have sat down to eat near the pit, when we consider the whereabouts of Reuven, it becomes quite clear that they must have sat down to eat farther away. [Later in the shiur, we will bring textual proof for this assumption as well. 2) Where is Reuven? Considering that Reuven's real plan is to later save Yosef from the pit, it would only be logical from him to either stay near the pit, or at least remain with his brothers (wherever they may be). Certainly it would not make sense, according to his real plan, for him to go far away, and to leave his brothers by the pit! However, from the continuation of the story we know for sure that Reuven did not stay near the pit, because he RETURNS to the pit only AFTER Yosef is sold! Therefore, if Reuven left the pit area, then certainly the brothers also must have left that area. Hence, it would only be logical to conclude that the brothers are indeed eating away from the pit, and Reuven must be eating with them! After all, not joining them for lunch could raise their suspicion. Furthermore, the Torah never tells us that he left his brothers.

In summary, by taking the logic of Reuven's plan into consideration, we conclude that Reuven remains with his brothers, as they all sit down to eat AWAY from the pit. [Obviously, this interpretation does not follow Rashi's explanation that Reuven had left his brothers, as it was his turn to take of his father. See further *iyun* section for a discussion of how and why our shiur disagrees with that approach, and prefers the approach of Rashbam and Chizkuni.] **PLAN C - YEHUDA'S PLAN / A 'QUICK BUCK'** Now that we have established that Reuven and the brothers are sitting down to eat at a distance far away from the pit, we can continue our study of the narrative, to see if this conclusion fits with its continuation: "And the brothers sat down to eat, and they lifted up their eyes and saw a caravan of Yishmaelim coming from the Gilad carrying [spices]... to Egypt. Then Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What do we gain by killing our brother ... let us SELL him [instead] to the Yishmaelim; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh, and his brothers agreed" (37:25-27). [From Yehuda's

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

If indeed Reuven is still sitting with his brothers, then this new plan (to sell Yosef) puts him in quite a predicament, for if the brothers would sell Yosef, his own plan to rescue him would be ruined. Reuven has only one alternative - he must 'volunteer' to fetch Yosef from the pit, in order to free him - before his brothers may sell him. What happens when Reuven returns to the pit? We'll soon see. But before we continue, we must provide a little background on Israel's geography, which is essential towards understanding the psukim that follow.

THE ANCIENT TRADE ROUTE Recall that Yosef met his brothers while they were grazing their sheep in the hilly area of Dotan (see 37:17), north of Shechem. Recall as well that during their meal, the brothers 'lifted up their eyes' and noticed a caravan of YISHMAELIM traveling down from the GILAD (today, the northern mountain range in Jordan), on its way to Egypt (see 37:25). Now, when we read this story in Chumash, most everyone assumes that this convoy will soon pass nearby the spot where the brothers are eating. However, when we consider the geography involved, it is more probable to arrive at a very different conclusion! This CARAVAN of Yishmaelim (camels et al.) most likely should be traveling along the ancient trade route (better known as the Via Maris), which crosses through Emek Yizrael (the Jezreel Valley) on its way toward the Mediterranean coast. Therefore, this convoy, now sighted by the brothers as it descends from the Gilad Mountains in Transjordan, must first pass through the Bet She'an valley, continuing on towards Afula and Megiddo in Emek Yizrael, on its way towards the coast. Certainly, it would NOT pass the hilly area of Dotan, for it would make no sense for the caravan to climb the Gilboa mountain range to cross through the Dotan area to reach the coast. Let's explain why. Dotan, today the area of Jenin (about 20 kilometers north of Shechem) lies about 10 kilometers SOUTH of this main highway (the Via Maris) as it crosses Emek Yizrael. In altitude, Dotan sits about 300-400 meters above Emek Yizrael. Hence, from the hills of the Dotan/Gilboa area (where the brothers are eating lunch), one has a nice view of both the Gilad and parts of the Jezreel valley. However, the trade route itself follows through valley that cuts between the mountains. This explains why the brothers are able to see a Ishmaelite caravan (convoy) as it was descending from the Gilad towards Bet She'an on its way to Emek Yizrael. Even though it was in sight, it was still far enough away to allow the brothers at least several hours to meet it, when it would pass some ten kilometers to the north. Therefore, in order to sell Yosef to that caravan, the brothers would have to first fetch Yosef from the pit, and carry him on a short trip till they meet the caravan in Emek Yizrael. They have ample time to first 'finish their meal', go fetch Yosef from the pit in the 'midbar' (on their way to the Emek), and then meet the convoy to sell Yosef.

SOMEBODY GOT THERE FIRST With this background, we now return to the story of 'mechirat Yosef' in Chumash. Let's take a careful look at the next pasuk, noting its grammar: "And a group of Midyanite TRADERS passed by, and THEY pulled, and they lifted Yosef out of the pit, and THEY sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim for twenty pieces of silver, and brought Yosef to Egypt." (37:28) [Carefully read this pasuk again, noting the difference between the Midyanim and Yishmaelim and the startling fact that the brothers are never mentioned!]

Based on the wording of this pasuk, it's quite clear that the Midyanim and the Yishmaelim are two DIFFERENT groups of people! To support this, note how the Torah describes the Midyanim as local 'traders' ("socharim"), while the Yishmaelim are described as international 'movers' ("orchat Yishmaelim - a transport caravan). Hence, a simple reading of this pasuk implies that a group of Midyanite traders happened to pass by the pit (they most probably heard Yosef screaming), and pulled him out. As these Midyanim are 'traders', they were probably on their way to sell their wares (now including Yosef) to the Ishmaelite caravan. If this explanation is correct, then the MIDYANIM themselves pulled Yosef out of the pit and sold him. [After all, the brothers are never mentioned in this pasuk.] [This interpretation also explains why the Torah needs to tell us about both MIDYANIM and YISHMAELIM, for understanding that these are two DIFFERENT groups is a critical factor in the story.]

So where were the brothers during all of this? Most probably, still eating! Recall our explanation above: the brothers had thrown Yosef into a pit out in the 'midbar' and returned to their grazing area to eat. They are far enough away that they do not see or hear what transpired between Yosef and the Midyanim! And WHERE was Reuven? Again, as we explained above, he must have been eating WITH his brothers. However, as soon as he heard Yehuda's new plan (and the brothers' agreement) to sell Yosef, he would have to get back to the pit (before his brothers) to save Yosef - and that's exactly what he does! [But it's too late.] Note how this explanation fits perfectly into the next pasuk: "And Reuven

RETURNED ("va-yashov") to the pit, and behold, Yosef was no longer in the pit!; Then, he tore his clothes." (37:29)

Reuven is not the LAST brother to find out that Yosef was sold (as commonly assumed). Rather, he is the FIRST brother to recognize that Yosef is missing! What can Reuven do? Shocked, he immediately returns to his brothers [probably by now eating dessert] with the terrible news: "And he RETURNED ['va-yashov'] to his brothers and said, 'The boy is gone! And for myself, what am I going to do?'" (37:30).

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

WHAT DO THE BROTHERS THINK? At this point in the story the brothers must be totally baffled, for they have no idea what happened to Yosef. Assuming themselves that most probably was eaten by an animal, they don't want their father to think that he may be missing, nor would they want their father to accuse them of killing him - so they plot once again. They will trick their father into thinking that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal on his way to visit them. They dip Yosef's coat in blood and have it sent to their father (see 37:31-32). This plan works, as when Yaakov sees the coat: "And he recognized it and said, 'My son's "ktonet", 'CHAYA RA'A ACHALATU; tarof, taraf Yosef' - he was surely devoured by a wild beast (37:33).

Ironically, the end result of this final plan echoes the brothers' original plan (see "ve-amarnu - chaya ra'a achalatu" 37:20 -compare 37:33). Yaakov reaches the same conclusion that the brothers themselves may have reached, but for a very different reason! Even more ironic is how the brothers final plan 'to sell Yosef' came true, even though they never sold him; and how (they thought that) their original - for Yosef to die - came true, even though they never killed him. In retrospect, one could even suggest that the brothers may have never been able to 'gather the courage' to either kill or sell Yosef. Despite their various plans and intense hatred of Yosef, just as they had quickly retracted from their first two plans to kill Yosef (see 37:22 & 26), they most probably would have retracted from their plan to sell him as well. Nevertheless: they talked; they planned; they plotted - and in God's eyes - are considered guilty, even though they never actually killed or sold Yosef.

WHAT DOES YOSEF THINK? So far, our explanation has followed Rashbam and Chizkuni. [I recommend that you read their commentaries and note how they reach the same conclusion regarding who sold Yosef, even though they don't explain the events in the manner that we did.] Even though this interpretation seems to explain the psukim quite well, there is a pasuk in Parshat Vayigash that seems to 'ruin' this entire approach. When Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, he states explicitly: "I am Yosef your brother, whom you SOLD to Egypt"(45:4)

Based on this statement, it's quite clear that Yosef himself thinks that his brothers SOLD him! But if our above interpretation is correct, Yosef should have thought that the Midyanim had sold him, and not his brothers! In fact, this pasuk is most probably the primary basis for the more popular interpretation (advanced by Rashi and Radak - see Further Iyun section) that the brothers indeed did sell Yosef. The Chizkuni, bothered by this pasuk, explains that Yosef knows that the Midyanites sold him, but since the brothers threw him in the pit, it was the brothers "who CAUSED me to be sold to Egypt". Alternately, one could explain, based on the above shiur that Yosef truly did think that his brothers had sold him, even though the brothers themselves had no idea concerning what really happened. To explain why, let's consider these events from Yosef's perspective. Yosef was not aware of any of the brothers' conversations. All that he knew was that, as soon as he arrived, his brothers took off his coat and threw him into the pit. A short time later, some Midyanim passed by, took him out of the pit, and sold him to the Yishmaelim who, later, sold him to the Egyptians. Yosef, trying to piece together what had happened, probably assumed that his brothers had set it all up beforehand. In other words, he thought that the brothers told the Midyanim that they had thrown Yosef in a certain pit, and that they should take him from there to sell to the Yishmaelim. If so, then Yosef was totally unaware that it was only 'by chance' that the Midyanim were passing by, nor did he think that the brothers originally wanted him to die in the pit. Rather, he thought all along that his brothers had sold him, even though they had no idea what had happened. In next week's shiur, we will see how this understanding helps explain Yosef's behavior during his many years in Egypt. It will also explain why the brothers assume that Yosef is either missing (see 42:13)

or dead (see 42:22 -"hineh gam damo nidrash"), even though Yosef thinks that his brothers sold him (see 45:4). [Furthermore, this can also explain why Yosef why Yosef tells his cellmates (in prison) that he was 'stolen' from the Land of Ivrin (see 40:15) HASHEM'S PLAN Even though the brothers had three different plans for 'getting rid' of Yosef, God had a different plan. The Hand of Providence led the brothers to believe that THEIR 'dream' [to rid themselves of Yosef] had come true. In reality, it was their plotting that eventually led to the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams to come true. Finally, as will be seen in the story that follows, this was all part of God's long-term plan for the people of Israel to become a nation in the Land of Egypt, as the forecasts of "brit bein ha'bitarim" now begin to unfold. shabbat shalom, menachem

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date: Thu, Nov 21, 2013 at 6:42 PM subject: **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Vayeishev**

PARSHAS VAYEISHEV And he made him a fine woolen tunic... so they hated him. (37:3,4) When we recite the supplication during the Bircas Kohanim service on Yom Tov, Festivals, we say to Hashem, V'sitneinu l'ahavah, "And may You grant that we find love, favor, kindness and mercy, in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who behold us... Just as You granted Yosef, Your righteous one - at the time that his father garbed him in a fine woolen tunic." It seems strange that we would ask for such favor, when, in fact, the kesones pasim, woolen tunic, triggered Yosef's brother's hatred toward him. What favor did he find as a result of this tunic?

In his Kedushas Tzion, The Bobover Rebbe, zl, employs a Midrash to explain this. David Hamelech says, Lechu u'reu - "Go and see the works of G-d, He is awesome indeed toward man." This is immediately followed by, "He changed the sea into the land" (Tehillim 61:5,6). The Midrash asks, "Why did the brothers hate Yosef? It was so that the sea would one day split for their descendants." Chazal are teaching us a lesson concerning the wonders of G-d. He causes things to happen which, over time, are transformed into wonders for His people. In the beginning, however, they appear as awesome, almost fearful occurrences - something definitely not to look forward to, suggesting the inevitable question: "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?" In the end, however, we observe a transition to the good - "almost" as if this was Hashem's original intention. In other words, those alilos, awesome deeds, which, at first, had appeared fearful were really there for our good, to catalyze salvation for us.

Likewise, the kesones pasim originally appeared to be the source of the hatred the brothers harbored towards Yosef. In the end, all the troubles which resulted from that distinctive tunic led to the Splitting of the Red Sea. Actually, when Yaakov Avinu garbed Yosef with the kesones pasim, it was the immediate catalyst for Krias Yam Suf - but we had to undergo a number of alilos on the way. Thus, explains the Kedushas Tzion, we ask Hashem to grant us the result of Yosef's kesones pasim - only we really could do without the alilos that accompany it. Could we just experience the miracles - right away?

Yehudah said to his brothers, "What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" (37:26)

Yehudah's idea for preventing Yosef's death comes across as preposterous. Once they had convened a bais din, court of law, and adjudicated Yosef's guilt, they had no more patience for counterclaims, especially one that asserted that no monetary gain would be achieved. Is this a reason to spare someone's life? Were they killing him for money - or because he was a rodef, pursuer, who was endangering the spiritual lives of each of them? Horav Yerachmiel Chasid, Shlita, quotes an explanation from Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, that illuminates this query, teaching us a significant principle in avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty.

In his commentary to the words v'chisinu es damo, "And cover up his blood," Rashi writes, V'naalim es misaso, "And conceal his death." This teaches that Yehudah was addressing the surreptitious nature of eliminating Yosef. Yehudah was the melech, king, over the brothers. He symbolizes the attribute of malchus, monarchy. The middah, attribute, of malchus is the same as the middah of achrayos, responsibility. As the reigning leader of a country, a king must take responsibility for his subjects. He cannot hide behind the crown. The king must be definitive in his decisions, with the welfare of his nation remaining foremost on his mind.

An aspect of taking responsibility is owning up to one's actions and standing behind one's decisions. A king does not make covert decisions. He stands in front of his resolution. A king who condemns a subject does not hide and blame it on someone else.

This is what Yehudah was telling his brothers: "We made a decision. We must be proud of our decision, because we think it is the right thing to do. If we are going to

conceal his death, this indicates that we are ashamed, that we do not really support our decision to kill Yosef." One may not undertake an action if he is unprepared to stand behind it. According to halachah, Yosef was a rodef, but if the brothers felt that his execution as a rodef must be concealed, then the execution must be called off. It was not right.

Klal Yisrael are viewed as bnei melachim, sons of kings. We must take responsibility for our actions. We must also feel a sense of achrayos for our people, especially for those who are unable to fend for themselves. We are called Yehudim after Yehudah for a number of reasons. Included among them is the fact that when Yosef demanded Binyamin as a prisoner, it was Yehudah who stood up to him: Ki avdecha arav es ha'naar me'im avi; "For your servant took responsibility for the youth from my father" (Bereishis 44:32). Yehudah had taken responsibility. Therefore, he was the one who stood up to the Egyptian viceroy and demanded Binyamin's immediate release. To be a Yehudi means that one maintains a sense of responsibility. He stands up for what he believes and supports those who need his loyalty and encouragement - even if they are not among the community's popular elite.

The concept goes even deeper than this. The Ponevezher Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, once asked Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, "Tell me, which Shevet, Tribe, devoted itself most to Torah?" "What is the question?" Rav Galinsky countered. "It is either Shevet Levi or Shevet Yissachar. These tribes produced the nation's preeminent scholars." "If so," asked the Rav, "why did Yaakov Avinu send Yehudah to establish the first yeshiva in Egypt? Why not Levi or Yissachar?" "The truth of the matter is," acknowledged Rav Galinsky, "that when it came to Torah dialectic, lomdus, an analytical study, Yehudah was called the mechokek, prince." The Rav then quoted the Rambam in Hilchos Avodas Zarah 1:3, which clearly states that Yaakov had designated Levi to be the Rosh Yeshiva at home. We revert back to our original question: "Why Yehudah?"

The Ponevezher Rav explained, "When Yosef demanded that Binyamin remain his prisoner, it was Yehudah who said, This has gone far enough. I gave my father my word that Binyamin was returning. There is no room for negotiation concerning Binyamin's safe return home.' Yehudah was prepared to take on all of Egypt, because he had given his word to his father. How does one make such a guarantee? Did Yehudah know up front what would transpire in Egypt? Did he know for certain that he would be able to return Binyamin home? Clearly, he did not. Yet, he had taken responsibility for his younger brother. He had given his word. There was no longer any room for any form of discussion. An individual who is willing and prepared to obligate himself and guarantee results that, for the most part, are beyond his powers, such a person is worthy and suitable to open up a yeshiva!"

The Rav believed in what he said and was indeed the embodiment of that genre of Rosh Yeshiva. He built Ponevez without funds, assuming loans every step of the way. He borrowed and paid back - and then borrowed again! There had to be a yeshiva, and if this was the only way - then it would be the way the yeshiva would be built and maintained. He undertook a number of daring projects without the wherewithal. If he believed the project was a necessity for Torah development, he tackled it with a zest and vision that paralleled the strength of a much younger man. He succeeded beyond anyone's dreams, because he felt it was his responsibility to rebuild Torah after the Holocaust.

Yehudah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I." (38:26)

With his confession, Yehudah demonstrated his moral integrity, his willingness to stand behind his actions, even if they were later deemed inappropriate. He was wrong; Tamar was right. She was prepared to die, thereby shattering the very goal of becoming the progenitress of the Davidic dynasty and Moshiach Tzidkeinu. Rashi quotes a Midrash which teaches that Yehudah had no culpability whatsoever with regard to the entire incident; "Hashem said, 'Mimeni, it is from Me.' Yehudah did not advance toward Tamar by his own volition. Hashem orchestrated the entire scenario. He greatly approved of Tamar's tznius, modesty, while in her father-in-law's home: 'It is from someone of such moral character that I want to build the future of Klal Yisrael.'"

According to the natural cycle of events, Yehudah had no reason to ever dream of consorting with a woman of questionable repute. Chazal continue, "Rabbi Yochanan says that Yehudah (saw the woman at the crossroads and) wanted to pass by her. Hashem sent the Angel who is appointed over (the character trait of taavah, desire, and had the Angel confront Yehudah). He said to Yehudah, 'Where are you going? From where do kings stand? From where do the great and mighty stand?' And Yehudah turned toward Tamar - against his will." Chazal state with utmost clarity that Yehudah acted at the behest of the Almighty. Bearing this in mind, we are confronted with a powerful question. Tamar was an astute woman who would not undertake an endeavor that had absolutely no chance of succeeding. We have just proved that, under normal circumstances, the great Yehudah would

never liaison with a woman of ill repute. Why, then, did Tamar dress herself up as such a woman and plan to ensnare Yehudah? She certainly was not aware of any Heavenly Voice directing Yehudah to advance toward her.

Horav Chaim Shmuelewitz, zl, derives an important principle from here. When a person wants something; when he desires it with all of his heart; when he feels that he absolutely must have it - he will do anything to obtain it, regardless of how unusual his actions may be. Tamar did not act sensibly. Her actions were irrational, but the nonsensical and irrational become normal procedure when someone is driven to obtain something. Tamar wanted to be the mother of Yehudah's children. It was her ardent desire to be the mother of kings. She would establish Malchus Bais David, the monarchy of the House of David. Would she refrain from acting because, on the surface, she appeared to be acting without rationale? This is how a person who wants something badly enough acts.

The Rosh Yeshivah observes that this idea applies equally in the area of growth in ruchniyos, spirituality. One who really seeks to grow will do anything and everything in order to achieve his goals. In the eyes of spectators, he might appear strange, but when one wants something badly enough - nothing seems strange.

With this thought in mind, the Rosh Yeshivah explains a fascinating Chazal concerning the pasuk in Mishlei 6:6 Lech el nemalah atzeil, "Go to the ant, you sluggard;" Re'eh deracheha vachacham; "See its ways and grow wise." Shlomo Hamelech admonishes the lazy fellow to take a lesson from the ant. Chazal explain that the ant is very industrious and does not stop gathering food - despite the fact that its total lifespan is a mere six months, and the amount of food it needs to survive an entire lifetime is but one and a half kernels of wheat. It gathers much, much more than it will ever need. Chazal explain its reason for doing so. The ant conjectures that, just in case Hashem decrees it to live more than its normal allotted time, it should have sufficient food to sustain itself. Likewise, man should prepare himself in this world with an abundance of mitzvos, for he never knows what he will need in Olam Habba, the World to Come.

We see from this, explains Rav Chaim, that when it comes to life, when one is in dire need of something, he will act far above and beyond his normal abilities. After all, his life depends upon it. Whoever does not go above and beyond is nothing more than an atzeil, an indolent, lazy human being. His slothful nature will bring him down, unless he is willing to change and rise above it. Laziness does not mean doing nothing. One can be assiduous and work hard, but, if he does not go that extra mile, he does not care enough about success. The individual who does not care enough about success - if one is not willing to go that extra mile, to do whatever it takes to achieve his goal - he is just plain lazy.

It came to pass, after these events, that his master's wife cast her eyes on Yosef. (39:7)

Two women who went out on a limb, so to speak, were actually moseir nefesh, willing to sacrifice themselves, for a role in the eternity of the Jewish People: Tamar and the wife of Potifar. They both resorted to methods that were unseemly: Tamar dressed herself as a woman of ill repute in an attempt to entice Yehudah; the wife of Potifar practically forced herself on Yosef in an attempt to convince him to consort with her. Tamar went down in history as a righteous woman who acted l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, while Potifar's wife, although originally acting l'shem Shomayim, did not maintain this standard. Thus, she is considered to be wicked.

Let us examine the apparent differences between the two women. First, Tamar neither forced herself on Yehudah, nor was she married to anyone. It was not a malicious act of infidelity. It was perhaps unseemly, but one cannot term it as blatantly evil. Potifar's wife, however, forced herself on Yosef. When he did not fall prey to her allure, refusing to commit an act of disloyalty with her, she lost her temper and slandered him. She figured if she could not have him, then nobody else would either.

When we think about it, Potifar's wife really was devoted to her cause. Chazal teach that Potifar was sterile and could not have children. Thus, if she were to cohabit with Yosef and conceive, she would have to share this bit of news with everyone - especially her husband, who would know for certain that his wife had cheated on him. Potifar would not take kindly to his wife's illicit affair and would probably have her executed. Yet, despite the shame and even fear of death, she was willing to do anything in order to have Yosef's child. When she was spurned, she showed her true colors and the l'shem Shomayim went out the window.

What happened? How does someone who was willing to endure humiliation, to suffer execution, change her stripes so quickly? If she was a believer and, unquestionably, at first she was, what made her change? I think the answer lies in one word: rejection. Potifar's wife could handle it all - humiliation, fear of death, suffering. She could not, however, deal with the thought of being rejected. Being told "no" - confronting the knowledge that one is not good enough, not acceptable,

just does not make the grade: "We are looking for someone 'younger' or 'older'." All of these snide comments are put down that can destroy a person. Fear of rejection is very real, and it takes its toll on many. We must always remember, especially upon undertaking an endeavor: that a person who cannot handle rejection has no business getting involved at the onset. Rejection is part of growth, and one who is unable to deal with it will not be able to handle the hurdles of life. Potifar's wife fell apart when she was rejected, thereby indicating that she was not ready to be the mother of Yosef's child.

Rav Chaim taught that the humiliation of rejection is the worst pain and hurt that a person can experience. The awareness that one is not wanted by his fellow man can be devastating. The Rosh Yeshivah emphasized this idea time and again. A classic story demonstrates the Rosh Yeshivah's sense of caring for others. There was an agunah, abandoned wife whose recalcitrant husband refused to give her a get, bill of divorce. (Thus, she had no husband to speak of, and she could not remarry.) Her plight in life lay not in her meager earnings as a laundress; or even in her responsibility of raising her children all by herself; or even in having to give up hope of ever finding happiness with another partner in life. Rather, it was in the overpowering awareness of having been rejected by the one person who had originally chosen her to be his partner in life. She was one bitter and tormented person. Indeed, it was her miserable plight that granted her an incredible z'chus, merit, which was used to save hundreds of fellow Jews.

During the Six-Day War, hundreds of people had crowded into the Mirrer Yeshivah dining room, which served as a neighborhood bomb shelter. The shells were whistling overhead, striking dangerously close to the yeshivah. Everyone huddled in fear for their lives. Finally, there was a direct hit; the building shook, and the silence filled with fear. The people thought it was the end, and they all began to say Shema Yisrael. At that moment, the agunah's voice was heard above them all. She cried out to Hashem, "My husband abandoned me twenty years ago. I have suffered so much - yet, I forgive him! You, too, Ribbono Shel Olam, forgive the Jewish People from all we have done wrong!"

When Rav Chaim related this story, he would pause for a moment and weep. Then he would say, "Her prayer saved us!" This is the power that the impact of rejection has on a person. If a person who has experienced such humiliation is able to forgive, it is truly an incredible z'chus.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Nov 21, 2013 at 6:46 PM subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

A Contentious Coat Rabbi Ari Kahn « previous

Share: Facebook Twitter Print this page Email More Sharing Services Share To some it seems to be a story about a coat, a dazzling coat of many colors, but in truth, it was never about the coat; the coat was merely a symbol. It symbolized love, it symbolized hatred, and it symbolized jealousy. Funny how an inanimate object can generate so much emotion and passion, how it can tear a family apart, and lead to the very brink of murder.

The coat was striking, regal; it made whoever wore it look royal, like a sovereign. Yaakov gave the coat to Yosef because he loved him, but that striped symbol of favoritism meant many things to many people. His brothers hated the coat and its implication of subservience, and they hated Yosef. And even though they may have denied it, they had no respect for their father who gave the coat and determined that Yosef alone should wear it. Though they may not have seen it that way, the brothers' perfidy was not only toward Yosef, it was also toward their father.

We can imagine that Yosef wore his coat of many colors with pride, strutting about like a peacock. When his brothers ripped it off of him in a fit of murderous rage, they added one more color: stark red, the color of blood.

Yosef survived, humiliated and humbled but alive: What could easily have deteriorated into a murderous lynching was tamed, and murder averted. Yosef was "only" sold off as a slave. His airs of importance were tempered, but only temporarily: Later, Yosef would once again be dressed in royal garb, and his leadership and superiority would be recognized and celebrated far and wide. Whether or not his brothers were willing to acknowledge it, Yosef looked good in royal clothing.

Of all the brothers, it was Yehuda who suggested that they sell Yosef rather than kill him, despite the fact that, of all the brothers, Yehuda may have had the most to lose from Yosef's preferred status. It was Yehuda who was destined to rule, Yehuda's descendants who would establish the unending chain of Jewish monarchy. The Davidic line would emerge from his family. Perhaps he, more than the others, realized that Yosef wearing the clothes of royalty was an historic error. If anyone was to be anointed, dressed in royal garb and set above the others, it should have been he. The coat of many colors should have been his, and Yosef was usurping his rightful place, staging a sort of coup. Yehuda could have been the first

to justify putting his younger brother to death. However, in a gesture of benevolence befitting a king, Yehuda suggested that it would be sufficient punishment to sell Yosef as a lowly slave and remove his undeserved trappings of royalty, the coat. This was Yehuda's attempt to restore order. Far from feeling that he had perpetrated an act of horrific cruelty on an undeserving younger brother, Yehuda must have felt like a benevolent monarch.

History has a way of evening the score. Centuries later, a descendant of Yehuda named David would be anointed as king of Israel. He would wear the royal clothing. In one of the Torah's great ironies, the only other biblical characters who wear coats of many colors are King David's children, Yehuda's descendants – most notably, Tamar. But in tragic, haunting irony, the beautiful coat did not bring her any more joy or dignity than it brought to Yosef.

At face value, Tamar suffered from a problem that was the opposite of Yosef's: Her brothers did not hate her, they loved her. Her half-brother, Amnon, loved her in a way that a brother should not love a sister; in reality, the love he professed for his half-sister was no more than carnal lust. In a fit of violence, Amnon ripped off Tamar's clothing and raped her. After he had his way with her, Amnon discarded and humiliated her, and came to hate her, as she was now a constant reminder of his own weakness. Tamar tore her colorful coat as a sign of mourning, her royal clothing desecrated to reflect her own desecration.

Soon enough, her other brother Avshalom, who loved her in a more normal, fraternal way, exacted vengeance and killed Amnon. In time, Avshalom mounted a full-scale rebellion against his father David; the cycle of jealousy, treason and betrayal comes to its tragic close only with the death of Avshalom.

The story of Amnon, Tamar and Avshalom is intricately bound up with the story of Yosef and his brothers. Both stories revolve around a beautiful, favored child who is loved – and hated, a coat of many colors denoting royalty, and rebellion against the father. The family of the perpetrator in the first story becomes the victim in the second episode. Karma can be cruel: Sometimes the very same crimes we perpetrate on others have a way of coming back to punish us. Such was the story of the coat of many colors, the coat of love, hate, jealousy, rebellion and murder.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.com/2013/11/audio-and-essays-parashat-vayeshev.html>

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Volume 9 Issue 11 - Happy Birthday
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Attached is a new issue of **Halachically Speaking** entitled "**Happy Birthday**" (link is below). Please forward.

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Have a good day,

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Birthdays

The Jewish people have always focused on birthdays. On Pesach, we celebrate the birth of the Jewish nation. We say in Mussaf that the world was created on Rosh Hashana. Many question whether making a birthday party is a Jewish custom. Indeed, there are customs for the day of a birthday which are not well known. In this issue we will discuss these issues and many others.1 Early Sources on non-Jewish Birthdays The only birthday party which is recorded in the Torah is that of Pharaoh. 2 The posuk says, "It was on the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a party for all his servants..." Based on this, some poskim maintain that the custom to have a birthday party is in fact an issue of "following in the ways of the non-Jews"3 and is not the practice of Jews.4 The Yerushalmi5 says that when Amalek attacked klal yisroel, they used warriors whose birthday was the same day.6 The Mishnah in Avodah Zarah7 says that non-Jews would celebrate the birthdays of their kings. This has ramifications regarding Jewish people making birthday parties.

Early Sources Regarding Birthdays The posuk in Hoshea8 says, "The day our king..." The Metzudas Dovid9 says that the custom of Jewish kings was to make a simcha and Yom Tov on their birthdays. The Gemorah10 says that when Rav Yosef reached sixty years old he made a party since he had avoided kares. 11 The posuk in Tehillim12 says that the life expectancy of a person is seventy years and if he is stronger it is eighty years. Therefore, some celebrated their 70th birthday. Others did not necessarily like the day they were born, as was expressed

in Yirmiyahu, "Cursed should be the day I was born." 13 In Koheles14 it says, "The day of death (is better) than the day of birth." However, the Medrash Sechel Tov15 says, "Most people are happy and make a seuda on the day they were born." Growing at Certain Stages The Mishnah16 lists the following regarding stages of growth:17 A five year old begins learning Chumash; a ten year-old begins Mishnah; a thirteen year old begins mitzvos; a fifteen year old begins studying Gemorah; an eighteen year old gets married; a twenty year old begins running after (parnasa); a thirty year old attains full strength; a forty year old receives understanding; a fifty year old can give advice; a sixty year old is considered old; a seventy year old attains ripe old age; an eighty year old shows strength; a ninety year old become hunch-back; a hundred year old is considered as if he is not alive and has gone from the world. Relevance of a Birth Date Among Early Jewish Luminaries We find early sources regarding the benefits of the day one was born. Yitzchok was born on the fifteenth day of Nissan, and that is the day we left Mitzrayim. 18 Moshe Rabbeinu was born in Adar, and this protected us during the miracle of Purim. 19 On Shavuot we focus on the birthday of Dovid Hamelech. 20 On Lag B'omer we celebrate the birth of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai21(all of the above three individuals died on the day they were born).22 Moshiah was born on Tisha B'av. 23 Mazal The Gemorah24 says that the mazal of the day and hour he is born has an impact on his mazal. We know that "ein mazal l'yisroel,"25 which means that the Jewish people have the ability to overcome any ill effects that a mazal may have.26 We wish a person mazal tov when he reaches a milestone in his life, such as a bris milah, bar or bas mitzvah, or an engagement telling them there mazal should continue to be good.27 Those In Favor of Birthday Parties Throughout the ages, birthdays were celebrated by Jewish people, even Gedolim. Their views will now be detailed below: Some seforim say that the Tiferes Yisroel instructed in his will that his children should write letters to each other on their birthdays.28 The Leket Yosher29 records that the Terumas Hadeshen made a siyum on the day he turned sixty years old. The Ben Ish Chai30 says, "Some have the custom to make every year on their birthday a Yom Tov and it is a good simon, and we do so in our house." In addition, he says that when one reaches sixty or seventy it is proper to wear a new garment or eat a new fruit and make a shehechyanu and have in mind his age as well (see below).31 The Ben Yehoyada32 says that one should make his birthday like a Yom Tov. The Ba'al Shem Tov zt"l was known for making a seuda on the eighteenth day of Elul which was the day he was born.33 Many Chassidim make as seuda on this day as well to commemorate his birth.34 The author of the Sdei Chemed made a birthday party when he reached seventy years old.35 The Chasam Sofer36 says that Avraham Ovinu made a party each year on the day that he had a bris milah. 37 The Ben Ish Chai38 says the custom in his house was not to make a party on the day that his bris was performed.39 It is stated in the Ginzei Yosef40 that "anshei ma'ase" recite a shehechyanu on a new fruit or garment each year when they reach their birthday (which brings them joy, see below).41 It is definitely proper to give thanks to Hashem on the day of your birthday. The Kesav Sofer42 made a siyum every year on his birthday, and when he turned fifty he made a shehechyanu and made a siyum on Meseches Pesachim. 43 When the Chofetz Chaim zt"l reached the age of ninety he finished the kuntres "Bais Yisroel" and invited some close friends and made a seuda. 44 The opinion of Harav Ovadia Yosef zt"l;45 is that a birthday party made with divrei Torah and shevach to Hashem would turn the party into a seudas mitzvah. There were many Chassidishe Rebbes who celebrated their birthdays as well.46 Those Opposing Birthdays Although many opinions maintain that there is nothing wrong with celebrating a birthday, there are some who take issue with this. These opinions will be brought below. The Gemorah47 says that it is preferable not to be born. This would support the argument that celebrating a birthday is not advisable, since it is not a good thing that one was born. Based on this, the Divrei Torah48 maintains that we have no tradition of our holy Rabbis or fathers to make a birthday party. In addition, some bring a proof from the fact that Pharaoh made a birthday party that it is a non-Jewish custom. Indeed, the Gemorah49 says that one of the holidays of a non-Jew is their birthday. Some poskim note that there is no mention in the Gemorah, Geonim, Rishonim or Achronim about a party on the day one was born. The only mention regards Pharaoh. 50 The friends of Harav Spector zt"l wished to make him a 50th anniversary of his job in Rabbonus, but he declined.51 The Otzer Kol Minhagei Yeshurun52 says that people make these parties because they want to be like their neighbors, but what is the purpose of the joy? What is the Joy of a Birthday? A birthday is a good time to give thanks to those who have contributed to your very existence, Hashem and your parents. Birth is a great miracle. Just as we recite a beracha when we experience a miracle, we should give thanks for being born.53 We rejoice over a birth and mourn a death. Logically, the opposite should be true, since a newborn faces uncertainty, while a dead person has fulfilled his mission.

Regarding this, Koheles says, “The day of death (is better) than the day of birth.”⁵⁴ However, each Jewish person has a *chazaka* that he will do well (chezas kashrus)⁵⁵ therefore, we are happy when a person is born. This is the joy of a birthday as well, as we celebrate the opportunity to fulfill mitzvos and improve ourselves each year.⁵⁶ Shehechyanu When Turning Seventy Some poskim are of the opinion that when one reaches seventy he should make a shehechyanu, ⁵⁷ while others disagree.⁵⁸ One should make the beracha without the *shem* or *malchus*. ⁵⁹ Practices on a Birthday On one’s birthday, it is proper to: ⁶⁰ Give thanks to Hashem. ⁶¹ Give *berochos* to Others. ⁶² Give extra money to *tzedaka*. ⁶³ Make a *siyum*. ⁶⁴ Receive an *aliyah* to the Torah. ⁶⁵ Set aside extra time to learn Torah. ⁶⁶ Daven for the *amud*. ⁶⁷ Go to a *tzaddik* and receive a beracha (common in many Chassidische circles).⁶⁸ Engage in introspection and seek ways to improve himself.⁶⁹ Visit the *Kosel Hama’aravi*. ⁷⁰ Which *Tefillos* to say on Specific Birthdays From age seventy and on one should say *Tehillim* chapter 103 on every birthday.⁷¹

“Live Until 120” A common beracha we give to people is that they should live until 120 years old. *Moshe Rabbeinu* lived to 120. Blowing out Candles on a Cake The practice of putting candles on a birthday cake corresponding to the celebrant’s age does not stem from a Jewish custom and should not be done.⁷² Candles in the Jewish religion represent the soul. When extinguishing the candles, one should not blow it out with his mouth. The *poskim* say it is a danger to do so,⁷³ especially since this custom stems from the non-Jews.⁷⁴ The custom seems to be lenient with this, but one should avoid it if possible.⁷⁵ Conclusion Although some *poskim* say that making a birthday party is not a Jewish practice, the custom is nevertheless to make birthday parties. However, these parties should not be turned into jokes and levity.⁷⁶

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks The Power of Praise

Reuben is the leader who might have been but never was. He was Jacob's firstborn. Jacob says of him on his deathbed, “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power” (Gen. 49: 3). This is an impressive tribute, suggesting physical presence and commanding demeanor.

More significantly, in their early years Reuben consistently appears to be the most morally sensitive of Jacob's children. He was Leah's son, and keenly felt his mother's disappointment that she was not Jacob's favourite. Here is the first description of him as a child:

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. (Gen. 30: 14)

Mandrakes were thought to be an aphrodisiac. Reuben knew this and immediately thought of his mother. It was a touching gesture but it misfired because he presented them to Leah in the presence of Rachel and unintentionally caused an argument between them.

The next episode in which we see Reuben is far more tragic:

Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem) ... While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father’s concubine Bilhah ... (Gen. 35: 22)

If understood literally this would amount to a major sin. Sleeping with your father’s concubine was not only a sexual crime; it was an unforgivable act of treason and betrayal, as we discover later in Tanakh. Absalom decides to rebel against his father David and replace him as king. Ahitophel gives him the following advice:

“Sleep with your father’s concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute.” (2 Samuel 16:21)

According to the sages (Shabbat 55a-b), the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally. After Rachel died, Jacob had moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid. This, felt Reuben, was an intolerable humiliation for his mother. It was hard for Leah to bear the fact that Jacob loved her sister more. It would have been altogether unbearable for her to discover that he even preferred Rachel’s handmaid. So Reuben moved Jacob’s bed from Bilhah’s tent to Leah’s. The verb *vayishkav* should therefore be translated not as “slept with” but

“changed the sleeping arrangement.”

At this point, however, the text does a strange thing. It says, “Reuben went in and slept with (or changed the sleeping arrangement of) his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it ...” and then signals a paragraph break in the middle of the sentence. The sentence ends: “Jacob had twelve sons.” This is very rare indeed. What it suggests is an audible silence. Communication had completely broken down between Jacob and Reuben. If the sages are correct in their interpretation, then this is one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of Genesis. Jacob clearly believed that Reuben had slept with his concubine Bilhah. He cursed him for it on his deathbed:

Unstable as water, you will not excel, for you went up onto your father’s bed, onto my couch and defiled it. (Gen. 49: 4)

Yet according to the sages this did not happen. Had Jacob been willing to speak to Reuben he would have discovered the truth, but Jacob grew up in a family that lacked open, candid communication (see *Covenant and Conversation Toledot*). Thus for years Reuben was suspected by his father of a sin he had not committed – all because he cared about the feelings of his mother.

Which brings us to the third episode, the most tragic of all. Jacob favoured Joseph, son of his beloved Rachel, and the other brothers knew it. When he gave Joseph a visible sign of favouritism, the richly embroidered cloak, the brothers resented it yet more. When Joseph began to have dreams of the rest of the family bowing down to them, the brothers’ animosity reached boiling point. When they were far from home, tending the flocks, and Joseph appeared in the distance, their hatred made them decide, there and then, to kill him. Reuben alone resisted:

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. (Gen. 37: 21-22)

Reuben’s plan was simple. He persuaded the brothers not to kill Joseph but rather to let him die by leaving him in a pit to starve. He intended to return later, when the brothers have moved on, to rescue him. When he returned, however, Joseph was no longer there. He had been sold as a slave. Reuben was devastated.

Three times Reuben tried to help but despite his best intentions, his efforts failed. He was responsible for the one recorded quarrel between Leah and Rachel. His father wrongly suspected him of a major sin and cursed him on his deathbed. He failed to save Joseph. Reuben knew what is the right thing to do, but somehow lacked the confidence or courage to carry it through to completion. He should have waited to give Leah the mandrakes when she was alone. He should have remonstrated with his father about his sleeping arrangements. He should have physically taken Joseph safely back home.

What happened to Reuben to make him lack confidence? The Torah gives a poignant and unmistakable hint. Listen to these verses describing the birth of Leah’s (and Jacob’s) first three children:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, “It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.” She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon. (Gen. 29: 32-33)

Both times, it was Leah not Jacob who names the child – and both names were a cry to Jacob to notice her and love her – if not for herself then at least because she has given him children. Jacob evidently did not notice.

Reuben became what he became because – so the text seems to imply – his father’s attention was elsewhere; he did not care for either Leah or

her sons (the text itself says, "the Lord saw that Leah was not loved"). Reuben knew this and felt intensely his mother's shame and his father's apparent indifference.

People need encouragement if they are to lead. It is fascinating to contrast the hesitant Reuben with the confident, even over-confident Joseph, loved and favoured by his father. If we want our children to have the confidence to act when action is needed, then we have to empower, encourage and praise them.

There is a fascinating Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers (Avot 2: 10-11): Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh. He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.

Why does the Mishnah, whose aim is to teach us lasting truths, give us this apparently trivial account of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's pupils and what he used to call them? The answer, I believe, is that the Mishnah is telling us how to raise disciples, how to be a coach, mentor and guide: by focused praise.

The Mishnah does not simply say that Yochanan ben Zakkai said good things about his students. It uses an unusual locution: "He used to count [moneh] their praise," meaning, his positive remarks were precise and accurately targeted. He told each of his disciples what their specific strength was.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus had an outstanding memory. At a time when the oral law was not yet written down, he could recall the teachings of the tradition better than anyone else. Elazar ben Arakh was creative, able to come up with an endless stream of fresh interpretations. When we follow our particular passions and gifts, we contribute to the world what only we can give.

However, the fact that we may have an exceptional gift may also mean that we have conspicuous deficiencies. No one has all the strengths. Sufficient if we have one. But we must also know what we lack.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus became so fixated on the past that he resisted change even when it was decided on by the majority of his colleagues. Eventually he was excommunicated for failing to accept his colleagues' ruling (Baba Metziah 59b).

Elazar ben Arakh's fate was even sadder. After the death of Yochanan ben Zakkai, he separated from his colleagues. They went to Yavneh; he went to Hamat (Emmaus). It was a pleasant place to live and it was where his wife's family lived. Apparently he was so confident of his intellectual gifts that he believed he could maintain his scholarship by himself. Eventually he forgot everything he had ever learned (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 14: 6). The man more gifted than his contemporaries eventually died while making almost no lasting contribution to the tradition.

There is a delicate balance between the neglect that leads to someone to lack the confidence to do the necessary deed, and the excessive praise or favoritism that creates overconfidence and the belief that you are better than others. That balance is necessary if we are to be the sunlight that helps others grow.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Drasha Parshas Vayeishev
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Tainted Intent

The story of Yoseph's discord with his brothers' waxes as a factual, albeit eternal, analogy to feuding Jews. There are dreams and fantasies, jealousies and misconceptions. Unfortunately, the saga never seems to end, as even today it seems that there are those of our brethren who would sell out their kin - all for the sake of Heaven.

The Torah relates: Yoseph's brothers go to Shechem to tend the flock of their father, Yaakov. Yoseph is sent by Yaakov to find out what they are up to. As he approaches them they declare, "Behold, the dreamer approaches." At first they plot to kill him but Reuven and Yehuda intervene, one suggesting he be cast into a pit, and the other convincing the brothers to sell him to passing merchants.

Were the plans to rid themselves of their younger sibling premeditated, or was the sale an impromptu action based on sighting Yoseph as he approached them?

Let us analyze the story and the commentaries.

Yaakov asked his children to tend his sheep. The verse tells us that, "Now, his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem." In the Hebrew language, a prefix "es" is often used in conjunction with a noun. Here it is used in conjunction with the word sheep. Es is a word usually placed to allude to something additional. (e.g. the famous command, "In the command, "Honor your father and your mother" the Torah adds an es before the words father and mother, "Honor es your father and es your mother." The extra word es is there to include elder siblings, stepparents and the like, all who must be afforded honor.) In this case the word es in conjunction with the sheep is not only extra, it also has dots above it. Those dots intone, says Rashi, in the name of the Midrash, that the brothers did not set out to tend only the sheep, thus solely for the purpose of honoring their father, rather they were intent on tending to themselves. They were interested in a self-serving outing, one that involved eating and drinking, without the service of their father in mind.

The question is simple. How does the Medrash know that from the extra word es and the dots above it? Maybe the extra word and the dots imply that they had an extra mission to fulfill? Maybe it implies sheep and other cattle, thus the extra es. Where does it imply that they were not fulfilling their fathers's will. rather they were fulfilling their own agenda? The Gemara (Bava Kama 50a) relates that once there lived a man known as Nechunia the Well Digger. Nechunia selflessly dug wells to provide water for the pilgrims, who traveled to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Sukkos and Shavuot.

It happened once that Nechunia's daughter fell into a deep well that he had dug. People ran to the great tzadik, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who was known for his miraculous ability to intercede on behalf of those in distress, and asked him to pray for the child.

It seemed that he was not the least bit concerned. During the first hour he said to them, "Don't worry, she will be all right." An hour later, when there was still no sign of the girl, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa still seemed unperturbed. "She still is fine," he said.

During the third hour, he told those who had come to him "do not worry, she has come out of the well already." When they asked the girl, "Who brought you up?" she replied, "A ram materialized, and an old man was leading it." After hearing this, the people asked Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa, "What made you so sure that she would be saved? Are you a prophet?" Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa replied, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the student of a prophet. But I said to myself, it is impossible that a deep well, one that the tzadik Nechunia the Well Digger took so much pain to dig in order to quench the thirst of travelers, would be a pitfall for one of his children! I felt it would be impossible for his child to be harmed by his good deed. Therefore I knew she would be safe."

The Midrash used simple logic. If the brothers' intent was solely to honor and service their father by tending his sheep, then that mission could never have produced the consequences that brought Yaakov misery for 22 years. How is it possible that an exercise in parental honor would turn into an activity that would cause such parental grief and anguish? Therefore, those two dots that hover over the extra word contain a powerful message. Tainted acts cause tainted results. If the mission is pure, so are the results, and when we see sullied circumstances then we must assume tainted intent. However, when brothers act out of purity of purpose and with a non-tainted mission, then their intent will only bring honor to Heaven.

Good Shabbos

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