

**Weekly Parsha VAYASHEV**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Our father Abraham had to deal mainly with his son Isaac in order to continue the tradition of monotheism and humanity that he had begun. His other children were sent away from his home so that in effect all of his efforts were concentrated on his son Isaac. Isaac himself had two sons, Jacob and Esau. He attempted to divide his attention and share his legacy with both of them.

The sons were of greatly different temperament and potential and Jacob found it impossible to reconcile the two. Both would now be forced to go their separate ways in life and in history. It was recognized early on that the two personalities would never mesh and therefore only through Jacob would the legacy of Abraham and Isaac be fulfilled.

Now we see that Jacob had 12 sons. Every father and mother knows that every child is different and the wise parent recognizes the subtleties of those differences and incorporates them into the parenting process. Now just imagine having to deal with 12 different sons each one of whom had a different personality, different talents and different perspectives on life and the family.

Jacob himself in his final words to his sons at the end of this book describes each of them in a different way, emphasizing their characteristics, talents and abilities. So, it shall not be surprising that sibling frictions abounded in his family. What is surprising is that apparently all of those frictions were channeled into the contest between Joseph and his 10 brothers.

That Joseph was the lightning rod for all of the differences in the family is clear from the description of the Torah in this week's reading. The Torah tells us that they could not speak peacefully one with another. The commentators over the centuries have provided various reasons for the behavior of both Jacob and Joseph as to why this family discord occurred. However it is clear from the biblical narrative itself that Joseph was so special, both in his own mind and in the eyes of his father, and that the brothers felt threatened by the family situation that he created.

The task of reconciling 12 different personalities, all of them strong and powerful, would now occupy the rest of the narrative of the Torah. The ability to live in peace and harmony, given the fact that there are always varied personalities, ideas and viewpoints has remained the main challenge in Jewish life today. It would take a tortured and completely unpredictable path to reunite Joseph and his brothers and allow the people of Israel to be formed positively.

At the end of the story the brothers are reconciled with Joseph but their different personalities still do not meld. Reconciliation in human terms is always a process and there is no magic bullet or instant formula that can accomplish it. It takes time and patience and changing circumstances and eventually the intervention of Heaven itself to bring about true family and national reconciliation.

Hopefully we are in the midst of such a process, with all of its ups and downs, in our current struggles in the Jewish world. The story of Joseph and his brothers and their eventual reconciliation should provide us with hope and faith for our future as well.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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**What Makes Bread Jewish?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

*Since the end of our parsha discusses Pharaoh's non-Jewish baker, I thought it appropriate to discuss some of the laws of pas akum, pas Yisroel and pas paltar.*

Question #1: No Bagels

“Where I live, the local frum bakery does not make bagels. Am I permitted to purchase brand name bagels that are not pas Yisroel?”

Question #2: Commercial versus bakery

“On Shabbos, am I required to use exclusively pas Yisroel, which is hard to get in my town?”

Question #3: Who is a Jew?

“What defines my bread as being Jewish?”

Basic background

In the days of the disciples of Hillel and Shammai, Chazal forbade eating bread made by non-Jews, called pas akum – even when there are no other kashrus concerns, neither about the ingredients nor about the equipment used to prepare the bread (Avodah Zarah 36a). To quote the Mishnah: “The following items of a non-Jew are forbidden to be eaten, but are permitted for benefit: milk milked by a non-Jew without a Jew supervising; their bread and their oil -- although Rebbe and his beis din permitted the oil -- and their cooked items” (Avodah Zarah 35b). This article is concerned primarily with pas akum, but also touches on another takanah mentioned in this Mishnah: the prohibition against eating food cooked by a gentile. The Mishnah refers to this food as shelakos – literally, cooked items – but the prohibition is usually called bishul akum.

Pas akum glossary:

To facilitate our understanding of the prohibition of pas akum, I will now define some of the terms germane to the subject.

Pas Yisroel – bread baked by a Jew, or where a Jew participated in its baking.

Pas baalei batim – bread baked by a non-Jew for his personal use, which is almost always forbidden.

Pas paltar – bread baked by a non-Jew for sale. Notwithstanding the above quote from the Mishnah, the halachah is that pas paltar may be eaten, at least when certain conditions exist.

Bishul akum glossary

Although bishul akum has its own glossary of terms, the only term we need for our article is *oleh al shulchan melachim*, which means “something that would be served on a king’s table.” The halachah is that the prohibition of bishul akum applies only when the food is something that would be served on a king’s table.

Dispute about pas paltar

As our title and opening questions indicate, most of our article will discuss the laws of pas Yisroel and the extent to which pas paltar is permitted. As I explained in another article, the Rishonim understand that pas paltar is permitted under some circumstances. There is a basic dispute among halachic authorities as to what those conditions are. According to the Shulchan Aruch and the Shach, it is permitted to use pas paltar only when there is no comparable pas Yisroel available. However, if the pas paltar tastes better, or one wants to eat a variety of bread that is not available in his locale as pas Yisroel, one may use pas paltar. Nevertheless, according to this opinion, one must constantly assess whether pas Yisroel is available before using pas paltar.

Some authorities permit purchasing pas paltar even when pas Yisroel is available, in a situation where there would not be enough pas Yisroel for everyone if there were no pas paltar available (Kaf Hachayim 112:30). They also permit pas paltar when purchasing exclusively pas Yisroel would drive up its price (Kaf Hachayim 112:30).

On the other hand, other authorities are more lenient, ruling that pas paltar is always permitted (Rema). This heter was so widespread that the Rema, in *Toras Chatas*, his detailed work on the laws of kashrus, wrote: “Since the custom in most places is to be lenient, I will therefore not expound on it at length, because the widespread practice is to permit this bread and eat it, even when there is pas Yisroel available. Therefore, one who is careful about pas Yisroel may choose to be machmir to the extent that he wants.”

Brand-named bagel

At this point, we can answer the first of our opening questions: “Where I live, the local frum bakery does not make bagels. Am I permitted to purchase bagels manufactured by a large company that are not pas Yisroel?”

The answer is that, according to all accepted opinions, one may use these bagels when no pas Yisroel bagels are available locally.

Hechsherim and pas Yisroel

Based on the opinion of the Rema, most hechsherim in North America do not require that the bread products that they supervise are pas Yisroel. Of course, this does not resolve the matter for Sefardim, who should use pas paltar only when no comparable pas Yisroel is available. Mehadrin hechsherim in Eretz Yisroel are, in general, stringent and require their products to be pas Yisroel.

It should be noted that the primary commentary on the Toras Chatas, the Minchas Yaakov, written by seventeenth-century posek and Gadol Rav Yaakov Breisch, points out that someone who has been machmir to follow the approach of the Shulchan Aruch, and then decides that he wants to be lenient and follow the Rema, is required to perform hataras nedorim before he may use pas paltar.

Aseres Yemei Teshuvah

The Rema in the Toras Chatas writes further: "However, during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Rosh and the Mordechai wrote that one should be stringent." This ruling is accepted by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 603) and all later halachic authorities.

Pas akum on Shabbos

The authorities dispute whether the heter of using pas paltar applies on Shabbos. The Darchei Moshe (Orach Chayim 603:1) and the Magen Avraham (242:4) rule that one should not use pas paltar on Shabbos, whereas the Elyah Rabbah (242:10) rules that one may use pas paltar on Shabbos, just as one may on weekdays. Most later opinions follow the approach of the Darchei Moshe and the Magen Avraham that on Shabbos one should use only pas Yisroel, when available (see, for example, Chayei Adam, 1, 4; Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim 242, 45; Mishnah Berurah 242:6). This is considered an aspect of kavod Shabbos, honoring the sanctity of Shabbos (Shulchan Aruch Hagraz, 242:13; Mishnah Berurah 242:6). However, when no pas Yisroel is available, or it is not comparable to the pas paltar, one may use pas paltar, even on Shabbos.

At this point, we can examine the second of our opening questions: "On Shabbos, am I required to use exclusively pas Yisroel, which is hard to get in my town?"

According to accepted halachic approach, one should use pas Yisroel on Shabbos when available, unless the pas paltar tastes better.

Breading for Shabbos

Many people do not realize that although they bake all their Shabbos bread at home, or purchase it only from Jewish bakeries, that when they bread their chicken or use croutons for Shabbos, they may be using pas paltar. Although this breading is certainly kosher and carries reliable hechsherim, according to most halachic authorities, one should use only pas Yisroel breading for Shabbos foods.

To justify those who are lenient, I can share two heterim. One heter was mentioned above: If all Jews would begin using pas Yisroel, there would not be enough for everyone, and this would cause prices to rise. A second heter is that there are authorities who permit pas paltar in a large commercial bakery, where the customer will never meet the employees (Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 112:9, quoting Maharit Tzalot). Note that the Birkei Yosef, himself, rejects this heter.) Disciples of Rav Moshe Feinstein relate that Rav Moshe held this latter reason to be a legitimate basis to be lenient. I leave to each reader to discuss with his or her own Rav or posek whether he personally should be stringent in this matter, particularly since there are simple solutions to the question, as we will soon see.

We should be aware that an earlier authority, the Tashbeitz (1:89), states that, even when technically speaking, the halachah is that one may find reasons to be lenient and use pas paltar, it is appropriate for a person to be machmir in these halachos. He continues that one certainly should be machmir not to use pas paltar for pleasure items – such as pastry. The Tashbeitz advises that a rav should pasken for others that they are permitted to use pas paltar, but he, himself, should refrain from relying on the heterim.

True Jewish rye

At this point, we will examine the third of our opening questions: "What defines my bread as being Jewish?"

The entire issue of whether, and under which circumstances, a Jew may eat bread baked by a non-Jew is problematic only when the entire baking procedure is done without any participation of a Jew. However, if a Jew participated in the baking, the resultant bread is considered pas Yisroel.

What does it mean that a Jew "participated" in the baking? To answer this question, let us begin by quoting the following Talmudic passage: Ravina said: "Bread made by having the oven lit by a gentile and baked by a Jew, or the oven was lit by a Jew and the bread was baked by a gentile, or even if it was lit by a gentile and baked by a gentile and a Jew stirred the coals, the bread is fine" (Avodah Zarah 38b).

Rashi explains that the stirring of the coals increases the heat. The Ran explains Rashi to mean that this is considered that the Jew participated in the baking in a noticeable way. He notes that, according to Rashi, tossing a splinter of wood would not be sufficient to make the bread pas Yisroel, since the Jew's participation does not make a noticeable difference. The Ran quotes this position, also, as that of the Ramban, and this approach was held also by the Rosh.

The Ran then suggests another possibility: If a Jew brings a hot coal or other source of fire, and the fire of the oven is kindled from this flame, the baked goods thereby produced are considered pas Yisroel. Although the Ran, himself, ultimately rejects this approach, others consider it acceptable to make the bread pas Yisroel, considering this to be that the Jew made a noticeable change, since without the original coal or flame, no bread would be produced.

The Ran concludes, as do Tosafos and the Rambam, that if a Jew simply tosses a splinter of wood into the fire, this is sufficient to consider the bread pas Yisroel, since the Jew symbolically participated in the baking of the bread.

Thus, we have a dispute among the early authorities as to whether the Jew's participation in the baking of the bread must have some significance to make it pas Yisroel or whether a symbolic involvement is sufficient. The conclusion of most authorities is that a symbolic act, such as tossing a splinter into the oven, is sufficient (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 112:9).

How many rabbis does it take to change a light bulb?

Some contemporary rabbis have suggested an innovative way to accomplish having commercial bread be considered pas Yisroel. The method is having a light bulb installed inside the oven that is turned on by a mashgiach. They reason that this adds more heat to the oven than does a splinter tossed into the fire. Other rabbonim disagree, contending that the splinter becomes part of the fire, and, therefore, the entire fire is influenced by the Jew, which then renders the bread pas Yisroel. A light bulb, on the other hand, provides insignificant heat and does not become part of the fire that bakes the bread. According to the latter approach, this bread remains pas akum.

Other heterim

The halachic authorities are lenient, ruling that even if the bread was already edible when a Jew added some fuel to the flame, it is still considered pas Yisroel, despite the fact that all the Jew added was some heat that made the bread a bit more tasty (Shaarei Dura; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 112:12; Toras Chatas 75:3).

The Shulchan Aruch (112:10) also concludes, based on a statement of the Mordechai, that if the non-Jew baked a few times in one day, and the Jew did not throw a splinter into the fire on one of the occasions, the bread is still considered pas Yisroel, on the basis of his earlier participation. The Rema follows an even more lenient interpretation, in that he rules that if a Jew added to the flame once, all the bakings made in that oven are pas Yisroel, until the oven is off for 24 consecutive hours. The rationale behind this last approach is that the heat from the previous bakings, which had a halachah of pas Yisroel, is still considered as having been added by the Jew.

Contemporary ovens

In most contemporary ovens, there is no way to add a splinter to the flame. However, it is still very easy to make baked goods into pas Yisroel. All that is necessary is that, once in a great while, a Jew adjusts the flame downward for a second, until he sees that this has stopped or decreased the flow of fuel, and then he resets the thermostat to its original setting. The product quality is not affected at all, and this accomplishes that all the baked goods produced by this bakery are pas Yisroel. This is a very easy way to make all bread baked in large kosher bakeries in the United States into pas Yisroel. The mashgiach can simply adjust the flames of the ovens in the bakeries when he makes his regular inspections.

When is it bread?

The Mishnah quoted above discusses two different prohibitions: one that the Mishnah called bread, which has heretofore been our topic of discussion, and one that the Mishnah called shelakos, to which we usually refer as bishul akum, meaning food that was cooked by a non-Jew. There are several major halachic distinctions between these two prohibitions. The most obvious is that whereas pas paltar is permitted when pas Yisroel is unavailable (and according to the Rema, even when pas Yisroel is available), no such heter exists in the case of

bishul akum. In other words, if the only food available is bishul akum prepared for commercial sale, it remains prohibited. (According to some authorities, there is one exception: A non-Jew cooked food on Shabbos for someone who is ill. According to the Rema [Yoreh Deah 113:16], there is no prohibition of bishul akum on this food, which means that after Shabbos even a healthy person may eat it. However, the later authorities rule that this food is prohibited, and that after Shabbos one should cook fresh food even for the ill person [Taz, Gra].)

Rice bread

The Rishonim explain that the law of pas akum applies exclusively to breads made of one of the five crops that we consider grains: wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats (Tur, quoting Rosh; Shulchan Aruch). Some authorities contend that in a place where these grains are not available and, therefore, it is common to make bread from rice or similar grains, there would be a potential bishul akum issue (Pri Chodosh 112:5). This approach is implied by the Rosh and by the Toras Chatas (75:11). Others contend that there is no bishul akum concern, because rice bread is not oleh al shulchan melachim (Bach; Shach; Shu"t Avnei Neizer, Yoreh Deah 92:7).

What types of bread?

Although our article is about pas and not about bishul, we need to determine whether certain food items are considered bread or whether they are considered cooked foods. If they are bread, then the heter of pas paltar applies. On the other hand, if they qualify as shelakos, this heter does not apply.

One of the earliest responsa on this topic dates back to the days of the Rishonim. The Rivash was asked whether certain dough foods prepared on a stovetop may be purchased from non-Jews because they are considered pas paltar, or whether they are prohibited as shelakos. He concludes as follows: If the product is made from dough, called belilah avah in Hebrew, as opposed to a batter, and it is baked on a stovetop, it is considered bread and the heter to use pas paltar applies. However, if it is considered a batter (a belilah rakah), and it is fried or baked on a stovetop, then it depends on the following: If it is cooked on a stovetop or griddle using a liquid (such as oil), then it is considered a cooked item; the laws of bishul akum apply, and there would be no heter of pas paltar. However, if the liquid is used only to prevent it from burning, or so that it can be removed easily from the pan or griddle (called a "release agent"), it is considered bread, and not shelakos, and is permitted as pas paltar (Shu"t Harivash #28).

Thus, the heter of pas paltar would not apply to blintzes, pancakes or crepes, all of which involve frying a batter on a griddle or stovetop, but it would apply to waffles, which, according to the definition just given, would be considered baked.

Conclusion

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than the Torah laws. In this context, we can explain the vast halachic literature devoted to understanding this particular prohibition, created by Chazal to protect the Jewish people from major sins.

### Rav Shlomo Aviner

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Trump as Reincarnation of Koresh

Q: Is it true that President Trump is a reincarnation of Koresh, King of Persia?

A: Nonsense.

Product with Kosher Certification of Badatz and Not the Chief Rabbinate

Q: What is the Halachah regarding a product with Kosher certification of Badatz but not the Chief Rabbinate?

A: There is a law in the State of Israel that a product - whether produced in Israel or imported - must have the Kosher certification of the Chief Rabbinate. After that, one may add a further Kosher certification. It once happened that a restaurant opened in the Old City of Yerushalayim with Kosher certification from a Badatz and not from the Chief Rabbinate. Ha-Rav Avigdor Neventzal, Rav of the Old City, prohibited eating there. The owner of the restaurant took Rav Neventzal to a Beit Din, but the Rav won, since not having certification from the Chief Rabbinate is forbidden according to the

law. In general, we must have an organization which oversees all products, otherwise there will be all sorts of certifications and we will not know what is Kosher and what is not. In theory, any product with any Kosher certification is presumed to be acceptable until proven otherwise. We rely on the principle of "Chazakah - presumption" based on the Gemara in Niddah (15b) that a Torah scholar "does not allow food to leave his domain without its Kashrut being ensured." In communal matters, however, we must have one clear authority in order to avoid problems.

Learning Gemara

Q: Why do we learn Gemara? It seems irrelevant for us.

A: It is serving Hashem with our intellect by elevating our own human intellect to a Divine level, according to our ability (See at length in Ha-Rav's book "Chayei Olam").

Judaism

Q: Is Judaism a Nation, religion or set of character traits?

A: All of these.

Visiting Glorious Belz Shul in Yerushalayim

Q: Is it permissible to visit a Shul, such as the glorious Belz Shul in Yerushalayim, to see its beauty?

A: In general, it is forbidden, since we should not stroll around a Shul. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 151:1. But it is permissible if one says a verse from the Torah while there, and thereby utilizes the place for a holy purpose (See Tzedakah U-Mishpat Chapter 12 note #10).

Pass the Salt

Q: It is true that one should not pass the salt shaker from one hand to another?

A: Nonsense.

Kosher Supervisor Davening with a Minyan

Q: Is it permissible to work as a Kosher supervisor if, because of the work, one is unable to Daven with a Minyan?

A: It is permissible. 1. One who is involved with a Mitzvah is exempt from another Mitzvah. 2. He is saving Jews from eating Treif (This same ruling is found in Shut Migdalot Merkachim, Yoreh Deah #27).

Greek Mosaic

Q: How is it possible that there is a mosaic adorned with the Greek sun god in the ancient Shul in Tiveria?

A: Jews who assimilated into Greek culture.

Conquering Eretz Yisrael

Q: What is the difference between our Mitzvah to conquer Eretz Yisrael and the Mitzvah of the Muslims to conquer the entire world?

A: The entire world is not theirs and Eretz Yisrael belongs to us.

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### Improbable Endings and the Defeat of Despair

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Vayeshev 5778

We live life looking forward but we understand it only looking back.

As we live from day to day, our life can seem like a meaningless sequence of random events, a series of accidents and happenstances that have no shape or inner logic. A traffic jam makes us late for an important meeting. A stray remark we make offends someone in a way we never intended. By a hair's-breadth we fail to get the job we so sought. Life as we experience it can sometimes feel like Joseph Heller's definition of history: "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open in a wind."

Yet looking back, it begins to make sense. The opportunity we missed here led to an even better one there. The shame we felt at our unintentionally offensive remark makes us more careful about what we say in the future. Our failures, seen in retrospect many years later, turn out to have been our deepest learning experiences. Our hindsight is always more perceptive than our foresight. We live life facing the future, but we understand life only when it has become our past.

Nowhere is this set out more clearly than in the story of Joseph in this week's parsha. It begins on a high note: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age, and he made a richly embroidered robe." But with dramatic speed, that love and that gift turn out to be Joseph's undoing. His brothers began hating him. When he told them his dream, they hated him even more. His second dream offended even his father. Later, when he went to see his brothers tending their flocks, they first plotted to kill him, and eventually sold him as a slave.

At first, in Potiphar's house, he seemed to be favoured by fortune. But then his master's wife tried to seduce him and when he refused her advances she accused him of attempted rape and he was sent to prison with no way of proving his innocence. He seemed to have reached his nadir. There was nowhere lower for him to fall.

Then came an unexpected ray of hope. Interpreting the dream of a fellow prisoner, who had once been Pharaoh's cup-bearer, he predicted his release and return to his former elevated role. And so it happened. Joseph asked only one thing in return: "Remember me when it goes well with you, and please show me kindness: mention me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this place. For I was forcibly taken from the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing to deserve being put in this pit."

The last line of the parsha is one of the cruelest blows of fate in the Torah: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." Seemingly his one chance of escape to freedom is now lost. Joseph, the beloved son in his magnificent robe has become Joseph, the prisoner bereft of hope. This is as near the Torah gets to Greek tragedy. It is a tale of Joseph's hubris leading, step after step, to his nemesis. Every good thing that happens to him turns out to be only the prelude to some new and unforeseen misfortune.

Yet a mere two years later, at the beginning of next week's parsha, we discover that all this has been leading to Joseph's supreme elevation. Pharaoh makes him Viceroy over Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world. He gives him his own signet ring, has him dressed in royal robes and a gold chain, and has him paraded in a chariot to the acclaim of the crowds. A mere thirty years old, he has become the second most powerful man in the world. From the lowest pit he has risen to dizzying heights. He has gone from zero to hero overnight.

What is stunning about the way this story is told in the Torah is that it is constructed to lead us, as readers, in precisely the wrong direction. Parshat Vayeshev has the form of a Greek tragedy. Mikketz then comes and shows us that the Torah embodies another worldview altogether. Judaism is not Athens. The Torah is not Sophocles. The human condition is not inherently tragic. Heroes are not fated to fall.

The reason is fundamental. Ancient Israel and the Greece of antiquity – the two great influences on Western civilisation – had profoundly different understandings of time and circumstance. The Greeks believed in moira or ananke, blind fate. They thought that the gods were hostile or at best indifferent to humankind, so there was no way of avoiding tragedy if that is what fate had decreed. Jews believed, and still believe, that God is with us as we travel through time. Sometimes we feel as if we are lost, but then we discover, as Joseph did, that He has been guiding our steps all along.

Initially Joseph had flaws in his character. He was vain about his appearance:[1] he brought his father evil reports about his brothers:[2] his narcissism led directly to the advances of Potiphar's wife.[3] But the story of which he was a part was not a Greek tragedy. By its end – the death of Joseph in the final chapter of Genesis – he had become a different human being entirely, one who forgave his brothers the crime they committed against him, the man who saved an entire region from famine and starvation, the one Jewish tradition calls "the tzaddik." [4]

Don't think you understand the story of your life at half-time. That is the lesson of Joseph. At the age of twenty-nine he would have been justified in thinking his life an abject failure: hated by his brothers, criticised by his father, sold as a slave, imprisoned on a false charge and with his one chance of freedom gone.

The second half of the story shows us that Joseph's life was not like that at all. His became a tale of unprecedented success, not only politically and materially, but also morally and spiritually. He became the first person in recorded history to forgive. By saving the region from famine, he became the first in whom the promise made by God to Abraham came true: "Through you, all the families of the land will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). There was no way of predicting how the story would end on the basis of the events narrated in parshat Vayeshev. The turning-point in his life was a highly improbable event that could not have been predicted but which changed all else, not just for him but for large numbers of people and for the eventual course of Jewish history. God's hand was at work, even when Joseph felt abandoned by every human being he had encountered.

We live life forward but we see the role of Providence in our lives only looking back. That is the meaning of God's words to Moses: "You will see My back" (Ex. 33:23), meaning, "You will see Me only when you look back."

Joseph's story is a precise reversal of the narrative structure of Sophocles' Oedipus. Everything Laius and his son Oedipus do to avert the tragic fate announced by the oracle in fact brings it closer to fulfilment, whereas in the story of Joseph, every episode that seems to be leading to tragedy turns out in retrospect to be a necessary step to saving lives and the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams.

Judaism is the opposite of tragedy. It tells us that every bad fate can be averted (hence our prayer on the High Holy Days that "penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil decree") – while every positive promise made by God will never be undone.[5]

Hence the life-changing idea: Despair is never justified. Even if your life has been scarred by misfortune, lacerated by pain, and your chances of happiness seem gone forever, there is still hope. The next chapter of your life can be full of blessings. You can be, in Wordsworth's lovely phrase, "surprised by joy."

Every bad thing that has happened to you thus far may be the necessary prelude to the good things that are about to happen because you have been strengthened by suffering and given courage by your ability to survive. That is what we learn from the heroes of endurance from Joseph to the Holocaust survivors of today, who kept going, had faith, refused to despair, and were privileged to write a new and different chapter in the book of their lives.

Seen through the eye of faith, today's curse may be the beginning of tomorrow's blessing. That is a thought that can change a life.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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### Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)

#### Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel — "And Judah said to his brothers: 'What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh.'" [Gen. 37:26-27].

Why are Jews (Yehudim) referred to as such? Historically speaking, the vast majority of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who remained committed to their traditions and faith after the first exile (586 B.C.E.) come from the tribe of Judah (Yehuda), since the ten tribes (not including Levi) were exiled by Sanherib. In addition to the factually-accurate nomenclature, however, I would like to offer a textually-based explanation that provides a complementary but very different answer to our question.

The mere fact that a person can still call himself a Jew (Yehudi) 3,300 years after Sinai and despite nearly 2,000 years of national homelessness is truly a miracle. He is a most unlikely survivor; sustained, nurtured and kept alive by Divine providence in the face of exile, wars, pogroms, and assimilation. To understand what enables a Jew to survive despite all the forces against him, we must turn to his eponym, Judah.

What special traits did Judah possess that set him apart from his eleven brothers, and in particular from his eldest brother, Reuben? For example, when an angry and jealous mob of brothers have the chance to carry out their long-harbored wish to kill Joseph, two siblings—Reuben and Judah—each take a leadership role, and it seems that Reuben's words are the more courageous and moral!

First, Reuben, assuming his status as first-born, attempts to foil his brothers' evil design: "Let us not kill him...let us not shed blood...cast him into this pit...but lay no hand upon him..." [ibid., 37:22]. As the verse itself then explains, Reuben's plan to delay a drastic decision was driven by his goal that "he might deliver [Joseph] out of their hand, to restore him to his father". Although they do indeed place Joseph into the pit, Reuben never gets to fully implement the plan.

This is because Judah sights a caravan of Ishmaelite traders in the distance, and suggests to his brothers that there is no point in murdering Joseph when they could just as easily earn money from his sale to slavery. "What profit [mah betza] is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our

hand not be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh..." [ibid., v. 26-27].

Reuben returns, finds an empty pit, and rends his garments. His despair is deep and painful: "The child is not here, and I, where shall I go?" [ibid., v. 29-30].

If we compare the responses of Reuben and Judah, the former seems to own the moral high ground, risking his brothers' wrath in preventing them from murdering Joseph on the spot.

Judah, on the other hand, appears crass, turning the crisis into a question of profit. Speaking like an opportunistic businessman, he sees a good deal and convinces the brothers to get rid of their nemesis and enjoy a material advantage at the same time.

In this light, his concluding words, "for [Joseph] is our brother and our flesh" sound grotesque. If Judah harbored fraternal feelings for Joseph, how could he subject his younger brother to abject slave conditions? This makes Jacob's subsequent decision to name Judah as the recipient of the birthright even more puzzling.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, I would like to suggest that Judah's decision is actually what makes him the most fitting leader from among his brothers. The real test of leadership is not who provides the most absolute, morally upright solution, if that will not be accepted by the "crowd," but rather he or she who ultimately saves the life of the victim!

It is precisely because Judah is a realist who understands when and how to make the best deal possible under exceedingly difficult circumstances that he is deemed best suited for the yoke of leadership. Faced with dreadful options, he pursues the least horrific one possible. Acceding to Reuben's proposal to leave Joseph inside the pit— which, according to our Sages, was filled with snakes and scorpions— was tantamount to leaving Joseph to die a cruel death (unless we relied on a last-minute miracle!). On the other hand, allowing his brothers to act on their zealous hatred of Joseph would have been unthinkable!

So when Judah sees the Ishmaelites in the distance, he seizes the opportunity to save Joseph from certain death, giving his brother a chance to perhaps survive. However, in order to be heard by his angry and jealous brothers, he understands that he must conceal his motivations under the guise of a profit-making venture for them!

Reuben may have had the best intentions for Joseph, but intentions alone are not enough. "Let us not kill him," Reuben declares, but his words fall on deaf ears. While Reuben nobly appeals to his brothers' "better angels", he fails the leadership test in not utilizing more pragmatic tactics in order to attain his goal of saving Joseph. In contrast, Judah wisely couches his plea in accordance with the politician's "art of the possible".

Thus it is Judah, in his first test of leadership, who becomes worthy of receiving the birthright from his father, Jacob, a man also intimately familiar with navigating in a treacherous world. In an imperfect world in which ideal situations rarely exist, it is Judah, eponymous ancestor of all "Jews," who demonstrates what it is that enables a Jew to survive and thrive: to take responsibility for the welfare and continued life of his brother, even if he must use guile in order to achieve that end-goal!

Shabbat Shalom

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### Rav Shlomo Aviner

God Bless America

The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not withhold the reward due to any person, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not withhold the reward due to America.

America has performed a great act by publicly declaring that Yerushalayim is ours, that she is our capital.

After the Balfour Declaration, Maran Ha-Rav Kook was invited to a ceremony expressing gratitude to Britain. He said: I am not coming to thank Britain. They did not give us something which belonged to them, for the Land of Israel is already ours. Rather I am coming to bless Britain, since anyone who helps the Nation of Israel is deserved of blessing.

And now we have arrived at Balfour Declaration #2 or November 29th #2 (the date on which the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the establishment of the State of Israel): Yerushalayim!

America has acted in contrast to those who ignore the fact that Yerushalayim is mentioned 666 times in the Tanach, and in contrast to the words of the prophet Zechariah (12:3): "And it will come to pass on that day that I will make Yerushalayim a stone of burden for all peoples, all who burden themselves with it will be sorely wounded." And so we say to America: "Yashar Koach!"

Even more so, we say "Yashar Koach" to our Prime Minister, Mr. Binyamin Netanyahu, who has led this process with strength and courage, determination and faith. May Hashem lengthen his days and his stewardship of our Nation.

And as it says in the first stanza of "God Bless America": Let us all be grateful for a land so fair.

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*Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeshev  
For the week ending 9 December 2017 / 21 Kislev 5778*

*Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com*

### Insights

#### *Respect and Dignity*

*"After these things, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Yosef and she said, 'Lie with me.'"(39:7) "And so it was – she coaxed Yosef day after day...." (39:10)*

Wondrous as search engines may be, they don't find everything. Without success I searched for an article I distinctly remember reading a few years ago. It was about a leading Wall Street law office that had introduced rules of office conduct which bore a striking resemblance to halachic norms of conduct between women and men.

Female employees were encouraged to wear modest and non-provocative clothing, and to communicate in a respectfully polite but non-intimate manner. Staying behind after hours alone in the office to finish work was prohibited, and discussions about private life between co-employees or employees and their bosses were also discouraged. Fraternal pecking-on-the-cheek was frowned upon. (Author's note: If anyone remembers where this article appeared, please contact me at [yasinclair@gmail.com](mailto:yasinclair@gmail.com))

*"And so it was – she coaxed Yosef day after day...." (39:10)*

The Talmud (Yoma 35b) says that Zuleika (Potiphar's wife) tried every way possible to entice him. Yosef was outstandingly handsome — so much so that whenever he passed by, women peeling citrus fruit with sharp knives would cut their fingers without feeling the pain, so entranced were they by his beauty.

Zuleika tried to seduce Yosef for over a year. She began by changing her dress three times a day to attract his attention. When this failed, she tried bribing him with a thousand talents of gold. One day, Zuleika found her opportunity. The day of the Nile's over-flowing was a national religious holiday. Potiphar's entire household went out to join the singing and dancing in praise of the Nile god. Ever the faithful servant, Yosef excused himself from these festivities and stayed at home to attend to his master's bookkeeping. Zuleika, pretending to have a headache, also stayed at home, knowing that she and Yosef would be alone together in the house.

She dressed in her finest clothes and bedecked her hair with a crown of jewels. She perfumed herself with scent and her house with incense, and then she draped herself across the doorway where Yosef would have to pass to get to his work. Only the vision of the face of his holy father Yaakov prevented Yosef from succumbing to Zuleika's blandishments.

There can be no doubt of the enormous power of physical attraction. Freud understood that this was the fundamental psychological motivation in man.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) says, "(said G-d): I created the yetzer hara – (the desire for illicit relations) – and I created the Torah as its antidote.

Interestingly, the word for antidote – tavlin – can also be translated as "spice." The Torah is the "spice of life." When food lacks taste, quantity substitutes for quality, and we eat more in the vain search for satisfaction. The Torah puts spice into marriage, and in the vast majority of cases this prevents the mistaken search for illicit recreational excursions outside its hallowed boundaries.

My sister (a'h) used to say, "Sex is the screen-saver that comes on in a man's mind when it's unoccupied."

Lord Acton said, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.” The Ghengis Khans of today ride around Hollywood not on horseback, but in limos.

The more powerful a Jew without Torah is, the more likely he is to fall prey his yetzer hara and the easy pickings that surround him. Don’t get me wrong. I am in no way condoning the disgusting behavior of the moguls of Hollywood and Washington, or London for that matter. But without Torah a man’s “screen-saver” will flash across his mind given even minimal visual stimulation — let alone the un-dress code of the typical Hollywood starlet.

While society at large espouses standards of immodesty and fraternization between the sexes, is it any wonder that #MeToo scandals continue to appear with almost boring regularity?

Many is the time when I demur from shaking a lady’s hand, and try to finesse the moment by saying, “Please excuse me but my wife does my shaking for me.” Gila Manolson in her book “The Magic Touch” tells of an interesting experiment back in the days of “call phones”. The subject of the experiment was asked for a dime to make a phone call by the experimenter. If the experimenter touched the arm of the subject of the experiment, it turned out that he was far more likely to give him a dime. Touch is magic. And thus, Jewish Law goes to great — and to the mind of some — absurd lengths to nip any incipient inappropriate feelings in the bud.

If a woman wishes to be treated with the respect that she deserves, she could well take a page out of the book of the “Jewish Woman of Valor”.

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## **OU Torah**

### **Man Plans, God Laughs**

#### **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

You thought your life would run smoothly, right? We all do. Then, something comes off, tragic or happy, which proves to us that life is not smooth at all, and probably is not supposed to be.

Somehow, each of us has a personal script which envisions what our lives will be like in the near and even distant future. I remember a friend from college who had his life planned out. He knew who he was going to marry, what his career path would be, where he would live, and which friends would be loyal to him.

My friend, like all the rest of us, soon found out that life had many surprises in store for him. His fiancé ended their relationship, he was offered a very different job than that which he was trained for, he moved to a part of the country he had previously never heard of, and his friends soon became but memories.

There is a passage in Psalms 30, and it is one of my favorite biblical quotations, which says this better than I can. It reads, “I said in my tranquility (shalvi), I shall never fall down.”

Of all the fifty-plus weekly Torah portions, it is this week’s parasha (Vayeshev) that conveys this message most powerfully, in a manner designed to leave an impression upon us all.

“And Jacob dwelled...” Rashi comments that Jacob sought to dwell in shalva, tranquility. He thought that he had finally made it home, the dwelling place of his fathers, and that his encounters with Laban and Esau were now over. It was clear sailing from here on in.

But wouldn’t you know, his troubles with Joseph soon “jumped on him”. He never anticipated that his life would be completely disrupted and changed forever because of his favorite son and his internal family dynamics. From this point on, Jacob experienced no tranquility; only surprises, which eventually climaxed in exile to Egypt. Not only could he not live in the land of his fathers, but he was destined not even to die there.

There is a Yiddish saying which captures this lesson in four brief words: “Mentsch tracht, Gott lacht.” Literally, this means, “Man plans, God laughs.” I have seen it paraphrased as, “Man proposes, God disposes.”

At this point, dear reader, I want to introduce to you the second most important traditional Jewish biblical commentator. In previous columns, I have referred to Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, who is unanimously acclaimed as the chief traditional commentator. Second to him is Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, or Nachmanides.

Ramban uses the narrative of Joseph’s search for his brothers and their plot to sell him into slavery as a primary example of how man’s plans usually go awry. He, too, formulates a four-word phrase which conveys this idea, but his is in Hebrew: “Hagezera emet, vehacharitzut sheker.” This means that God’s design is true while man’s efforts are futile. Sounds pessimistic, but it has the ring of reality.

Ramban points out that Joseph was sent by Jacob to the brothers but could not find them. Ordinarily, if he would be convinced that his search for them would be unsuccessful, he would have returned home. But lo and behold, a strange man (an angel, according to rabbinic legends) appeared on the scene and guided Joseph to his brothers, who promptly sold him to the next passing caravan.

This lesson is a profound existential one for all of us. But it has needed implications for the way we tend to raise our children in this day and age.

Many of us parents are guilty of trying to arrange our children’s lives so that they will never experience problems or difficulties. We are protective to a ridiculous extreme in the hope that our children will never have to face the challenges and obstacles which we faced.

But we delude ourselves and, more importantly, are not fair to our children. Their lives will contain unpredicted and unpredictable circumstances, negative and positive, and we cannot make their lives fool-proof.

How much better off they would be if we taught them not how to avoid problems, but how to cope with problems. Problems are unavoidable. They are the very stuff of life. A good parent, and a good teacher, conveys the lesson that life will have its challenges, but that these challenges can be met and that, by meeting them, the individual grows.

We, as observers of current youth, particularly in the Jewish community, have identified a sense of entitlement in our children. They feel entitled to leisure and comfort and an environment free of restriction. We would well-advised to dispel this sense of entitlement, and instead enable them to face the unanticipated surprises that life has in store for all of us.

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### **Weekly Wisdom - Vayeishev 5778-2017**

#### **“The Jealousy Between Brothers”**

##### **by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

In parashat Vayeishev we read of the powerful forces of jealousy and enmity that rip apart the family of Jacob and his twelve sons.

Already in the opening verses of Vayeishev, we learn of a number of reasons for Joseph’s brothers’ formidable resentment of him. The Torah tells us, in Genesis 37:2, והוא נער, that Joseph was a lad, perhaps implying that Joseph was immature. It further informs us: וַיִּבְאֵר יוֹסֵף אֶת דְּבָרֵם רָעָה אֶל אֲבִיָּהֶם, [Joseph] hung out with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (originally handmaidens, now Jacob’s wives) and brought back evil reports about them to Jacob their father.

The Torah continues to build the case for the brothers’ jealousy of Joseph. Genesis 37:3, וַיִּשְׂאֵל אֶהָב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זִמְנֹתִים הוּא לוֹ, וְעֵשָׂה, Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all of his sons, since he was the child of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors. Clearly, Jacob’s favoring of Joseph led to the brothers’ resentment!

The saga of Joseph continues with Joseph relating his provocative dreams to his brothers, implying that he is going to lord over them. In Genesis 37:4 the Torah tells us that when the brothers saw the coat of many colors, and recognized the fact that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his brothers, וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ, וְלֹא יָדְלוּ דְבָרוֹ לְשָׁלֵם, they hated him and could not speak to him peaceably. When Joseph tells the second dream to his brothers, the Torah reports, Genesis 37:5, וַיִּסְפוּ עוֹד שִׁנְאוֹ אֹתוֹ, they hated Joseph even more.

Even when Joseph relates his dreams to his love-struck father, Jacob recoils and says, “What is this dream that you have dreamt? Are we to come—I and your mother and your brothers—to bow down to you to the ground?” The Torah once again records the brothers’ reaction, in Genesis 37:11, וַיִּקְנְאוּ בּוֹ אֶחָיו, his brothers were jealous of him. Now an element of jealousy has been added to the previous feelings of hatred.

In a keen analysis of this episode, Rabbi Ben-Zion Firer in his *Hegyonah Shel Torah* on Genesis, asks a number of pointed questions. If the reason that Jacob loved Joseph was because Joseph was the child of his old age, then shouldn't Jacob have loved Joseph's younger brother, Benjamin, even more, or at least as much as Joseph? Why did he not give a colored coat to Benjamin?

Rabbi Firer suggests that Jacob's love for Joseph was not so much due to his special feelings for Joseph, but because of Jacob's great love and special feelings for Rachel. Rachel's love for her son, Joseph, penetrated the heart of Jacob, so that he too fawned over and loved Joseph. As scripture states, Genesis 29:18, וַיֵּקֶבֶט יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל, and Jacob loved Rachel. Whomever Rachel loves is loved by Jacob. But Benjamin never merited to be loved by his mother because she died in childbirth. While Benjamin was also a child of Jacob's old age (Joseph and Benjamin were the last children born to Jacob), the reason that Joseph is singled out for special love was because of his mother's love for him, and his father's love for Rachel.

Rabbi Firer points out, insightfully, that despite Jacob's favoring Joseph, and despite Joseph's heady dreams, the real reason for the brothers' jealousy toward Joseph was because they were concerned for the honor of their mother, Leah. They saw Jacob's special love for Joseph as an affront to Leah. Clearly, their mother Leah was not as loved by her husband as was her sister Rachel. It was not because of their own honor that they resented Joseph, but rather for the honor of their mother, Leah.

Rabbi Firer continues and asks why it was necessary to bring Benjamin down to Egypt? After all, now that the ten brothers were in Egypt, Jacob would have to come down to Egypt fulfilling the promise of the Covenant Between the Pieces (Genesis 15:13). In this covenant, G-d promised Abraham that he shall surely know that his children will be strangers in the land that is not theirs, and that they will be enslaved and persecuted for 400 years. Now that the mission was complete, Joseph could have revealed himself to his brothers and Jacob would certainly come. What does bringing Benjamin down to Egypt add to the saga?

Rabbi Firer maintains that for the sake of Jewish posterity and because of the damage the resentment could cause in the future, it was necessary to uproot the jealousy from the hearts of the sons of Leah toward their brothers, the sons of Rachel.

When Jacob sends his ten sons down to Egypt, Genesis 42:4, to buy food, the Torah says, וְאֶת בְּנֵימִין אֲחֵי יוֹסֵף לֹא שְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת אֲחָיו, פִּי אִמֶּר, פֶּן יִקְרָאָנּוּ אֶתְּכֶם, Jacob did not send Benjamin down because he was afraid that there would be an accident or a tragedy. The fact that the sons of Leah, along with Bilhah and Zilpah are sent down to Egypt and subjected to the dangers, but not Benjamin, would arouse jealousy among the brothers who would see it as another affront to mother Leah. In order to uproot this jealousy from their hearts, it was necessary to subject Benjamin as well to danger by sending him to Egypt. This demonstrates that it was not because of Jacob's impassioned love for Benjamin that he did not send him down to Egypt, but rather due to Benjamin's tender age.

Only after Jacob finally sends Benjamin down to Egypt together with all his brothers, does the jealousy cease, and is uprooted from the hearts of the brothers, allowing the family to continue on the path to fulfill the intended destiny of the Children of Israel.

May you be blessed.

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**Rabbi Yissochar Frand**

*All Good Characters / Always a Child in the Eyes of a Parent / Mitzvah Messengers*

**Parshas Vayeshev: No Good Guys and Bad Guys Here**

The Yeshiva in Volozhin was known as the "mother of all Lithuanian Yeshivas." There was a period in time when there was a question regarding who should head the yeshiva. The two candidates for the position were Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (the Netzi"v) and Rabbi Yosef Dov haLevi Soloveitchik (the Bais HaLevi). This was such a world class issue, that it was taken before a Beis Din of three distinguished Rabbanim.

One of the members of the panel, after hearing both sides of the argument, noted: "It is Parshas Vayeshev this week." The other

members of the panel looked at him incredulously, because in fact it was not Parshas Vayeshev that week!

He explained himself: Throughout the first eight parshios of Sefer Bereshis, whenever I speak about the parsha, I am able to speak about the hero and the villain of the parsha. In Bereshis, it is Adam against the Snake, in Noach, it is Noach against the Generation of the Flood, in Lech Lecha, it is Avraham against Lot. In Vayera, it is Yitzchak against Yishmael. In Chayei Sara, it is Avraham against Ephron. In Toldos, it is Yitzchak against Avimelech. In Vayeitzei, it is Yaakov against Lavan. Finally, in Vayishlach, it is Yaakov against Eisav. In each parsha, we have a hero and a villain, a good person and a bad person.

However, in Parshas Vayeshev — it is Yosef against the brothers. This is not a question of a good person versus a bad person. They are all Tzadikim here. Therefore, I have nothing to say. The question of who should be the Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin, between the Netziv and the Bais HaLevi, is like the dispute between Yosef and his brothers. They are both qualified. They are both perfectly righteous. This is like the story of Parshas Vayeshev.

**The S'Yata D'Shmaya of the Gerrer Rebbe**

At the beginning of the parsha, the pasuk describes Yosef with the words "v'hu na'ar" — and he was a youth "...with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives..." [Bereshis 37:2]. Rashi, in the name of the Medrash, interprets the words "v'hu na'ar" to mean that he acted immaturely (ma'aseh na'arus) — he would fix his hair and groom his eyes so that he would look attractive.

The Medrash is bothered by the fact that Yosef was a seventeen-year-old at this time. It is not appropriate to call a seventeen-year-old lad a "na'ar". "Na'ar" is a young child. Therefore, the Medrash says that by calling him a na'ar, the Torah is teaching us that Yosef acted immaturely for his age.

Everyone asks a question on this Medrash, and the question comes with a story:

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Tsirelson [1859-1941] was a Rav in Kishinev. He was a great man, but he was living in an area that was detached from the major Eastern European Jewish communities of the day — Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland. He was, however, an important person, and had a connection to the nascent Agudas Yisrael organization. The founders of the organization sought his opinion on whether to appoint the Gerrer Rebbe (Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter [1866-1948]) to a position of leadership within Agudas Yisrael.

Being isolated from much of the Jewish world, Rav Tsirelson did not know who the Gerrer Rebbe was. Therefore, he sent a letter to Rav Moshe Nachum Yerushalmi, who lived in the city of Kalitz, and asked him, "Who is this Gerrer Rebbe?"

Rav Yerushalmi wrote him back and said "This Rebbe is a Tzaddik who has thousands of followers. I know he is a man who has S'yata d'Shmaya [Divine Help]." He then cited proof that the Rebbe had Divine help:

"The way I know this is because the Gerrer Rebbe had an uncle in my town whom he used to come and visit. Protocol was that when a distinguished rabbi visited a town, he would always first pay a courtesy call to the town Rabbi, to give him a Shalom Aleichem. So when the Gerrer Rebbe came to Kalitz to visit his uncle, he would first come to say hello to me, the Rav of the city."

Rav Moshe Nachum Yerushalmi continued:

One time, the Gerrer Rebbe came to visit his uncle during the week of Parshas Vayeshev. When he stopped in to see me, I asked him the following question: The Medrash interprets that Yosef acted immaturely from the fact that the Torah calls him a na'ar, even though he was already seventeen years old at the time. However, by Akeidas Yitzchak, Avraham refers to Yitzchak as a na'ar with the words, "...and I and the na'ar will go up to here..." [Bereshis 22:5]. At the time, according to Chazal, Yitzchak was already 37 years old! Why does the Medrash not make any comment there about the incongruous use of the term na'ar for someone who was already much older than Yosef is in the beginning of Parshas Vayeshev?

The Gerrer Rebbe told me that it was not a valid question. He said if the Torah calls someone who is not really a child a "na'ar", then there is something to be learned from that; however when a father calls his son a "na'ar" — regardless of the age of his child — it is perfectly understandable. (In Yiddish: "Ba a Tatte is a kind ala mol a kind!" In

English: “With a father, his child always remains a child!”). By the Akeida, it was Avraham talking about his son Yitzchak, so therefore the term na’ar is understandable. We do not derive any lesson from it. Rav Yerushalmki then demonstrated his contention that the Gerrer Rebbe had S’yata d’Shmaya: I accompanied him downstairs from my apartment, to see him out of the building, and there was an old Jewish woman who recognized the Gerrer Rebbe as he was coming down the steps. She rushed over to him and asked him for a Bracha. The Rebbe gave her a Bracha. This woman — who was 97 years old — after receiving the blessing for herself, asked the Rebbe “Kent ihr gebben a bracha faar mein kleinem aych?” [“Can you give a Bracha for my little one as well?”] There was a man behind her who was in his seventies, and she was calling him “my little one!”

Rav Yerushalmki felt that the fact that the Rebbe expressed this Torah insight, and only moments later it became manifestly clear that his words were true, was a sign of Divine Inspiration and Divine Assistance that were the hallmarks of the Gerrer Rebbe. (It is perhaps not for naught that the Gerrer Rebbe was known as the Imrei Emes (Words of Truth), after the works he authored.)

Rav Yerushalmki assured Rabbi Yehuda Leib Tselson — “He is not only a Tzaddik and a great person, he is an individual who has S’yata d’Shmaya, and he can certainly be trusted with a position of leadership in Agudas Yisrael.”

#### ***What Happened to the Principle: Shiluchei Mitzvah Einan Nizokin?***

After these two rather “light” observations on the parsha, the following thought, based on the commentary of the “Ohr” HaChaim Hakadosh, is “Light” in a different order of magnitude:

The pasuk says, “And Israel said to Yosef, ‘Are your brothers not pasturing in Shechem? Go, and I will send you to them.’” [Bereshis 37:13]. Yaakov Avinu sent Yosef to check on his brothers. We all know what happened from that instruction. The brothers wanted to kill Yosef, they threw him into a pit, they sold him to Egypt, and the rest is history. The Ohr HaChaim asks — how could this happen? There is a principle “Harm does not come to those sent on a mission to do a mitzvah” (shiluchei mitzvah einan nizokin) [Pesachim 8a]. What happened to the rule of shiluchei mitzvah einan nizokin when Yosef carried out his father’s instructions?

The Ohr HaChaim gives two answers to this question. One is a lomdishe teretz [an answer based on subtle Talmudic analysis] and one is a hashkafa teretz [an answer based on Torah philosophy].

The lomdishe teretz is that Yaakov told Yosef, “Behold, your brothers are grazing the sheep in Shechem” — meaning the extent of his shlichus [mission] was to go to Shechem. However, Yosef went to Shechem and found that his brothers were not there. Yosef learned that they were in Dosan — a different city — and he headed there instead. The Ohr HaChaim argues that he was not a “Shlichus mitzvah” to go to Dosan — that was not part of his father’s instructions to him — and therefore the guarantee that “Shiluchei mitzvah einan nizokin” did not protect him. Technically speaking, the mission terminated when he did not find his brothers in Shechem. He was a “free agent” when he decided to look for them in Dosan, and could not rely on the protection afforded people engaged in the act of doing a mitzvah.

(The HaMakneh (by Rav Pinchas haLevi Horowitz [1731-1805]) in Maseches Kiddushin asks on this answer of the Ohr HaChaim, and says that this argument is not based on normative halachic ruling. The Halacha is that if a person says to an agent “Give this Get [divorce document] to my wife in Shechem” and he gives it to her in a different city, the Get is invalid (because the agent did not carry out the instructions of the husband). However, if the husband says to the agent, “Give this Get to my wife — “she can be found in Shechem” — then even if the agent finds her in a different city and gives her the divorce document there, it is valid. We say that when the husband specifies, “she can be found in Shechem” — he is merely helping the agent find his wife (mar’eh makom hu lah), rather than insisting that the divorce be carried out in a specific location. Thus, the HaMakneh rejects the first answer of the Ohr HaChaim.)

The Ohr HaChaim gives a second answer to his question, in which he redefines the definition of “harm” [nezek].

“Harm whose ultimate purpose is good, is not considered harm.” Ultimately, what happened to Yosef was not a bad thing. Shiluchei Mitzvah einan nizokin means no bad will befall an agent of mitzvah.

This was not bad because this mission led to Yosef’s winding up in Egypt, and ultimately saving the world! Admittedly, he went through some difficulties to get there, but the bottom line was that the result was not only salvation for his family, but also salvation for the entire world. Such “trouble” from which great salvation emerges, is not considered “nezek.”

This idea espouses a very important truth that is not always easy to realize or accept. Many times, people experience tremendous challenges, certain that they are experiencing tragic misfortune, yet the challenges eventually turn out not to be misfortune at all, but rather a true salvation.

I saw a related idea in an interesting sefer called Milchamos Yehudah. At the end of this week’s parsha, Yosef withstood the temptations of Potifar’s wife. Yosef is a young man who is away from home, and away from his family. There are no other Jews around. He is tempted daily by a beautiful married woman, and he successfully rebuffs her advances. Given those circumstances and his ability to remain righteous, he received the title Yosef haTzadik.

This act had far-reaching implications generations later. Egypt, our Rabbis tell us, was immersed in promiscuity (shitufei zimah). It was a country of very loose morals. Yet, the entire time the Jews resided in Egypt, not a single person was unfaithful to their spouse (except for one woman who unwittingly committed adultery — a case that was a total mistake on her part). How did people dwelling in a completely licentious society remain immune from these immoral temptations? It came about as the result of Yosef HaTzadik withstanding the temptations to which he was exposed.

The implication of what Yosef did was huge. Yosef did not only enable the physical survival of his family, but also their spiritual survival — in that because of him, his family had the capacity to withstand the moral challenges that Egyptian society threw at them. This all resulted from Yosef going down to Egypt. The Almighty obviously knew what was in store for us, and in order to prepare us and protect us from what might happen there, He sent a person like Yosef haTzaddik first, so that his influence could save Klal Yisrael for several generations.

This sefer, Milchamos Yehudah, points out the following observation: Every country has a “national preoccupation”. In Egypt, they were “shitufei zimah” (immersed in promiscuity). In America, he argues, the biggest preoccupation of people is money. Everybody wants to become wealthy. Yet we see that over the last twenty, thirty, forty, and fifty years, a cadre of Bnei Torah and Bnei Yeshiva have developed in America who give up the finer things in life to be able to devote themselves to a lifestyle of Torah study. Likewise, there are women who are able to make that sacrifice and become women of valor in families dedicated to financial sacrifice for the sake of Torah learning. How did it come about that a select subset of the population is able to withstand the entire environment of the country in which they find themselves?

The Milchamos Yehudah said it happened because the people who came to America in the 1930s and 1940s — the Gedolim of the previous generation — were willing to live with mesiras nefesh [great self-sacrifice] and in great poverty — just so that they could establish a foundation of Torah learning in this country.

Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin [1881-1973], z”l, who was really the posek haDor [final halachic authority for his generation], lived in great poverty. He was the one who supported Ezras Torah (an organization which provided financial support to rabbinic students) and he felt that every dollar he took for himself was taking away from Bnei Torah. He lived far below the poverty line. Although he was the posek haDor, he would only allow himself to spend \$10 on a Lulav and Esrog. He would take Four Species that were kosher, but not in any way exceptionally beautiful (mehudar). The rest of the money went to charity.

When Rav Aharon Kotler came to America, the self-sacrifice with which he lived — not to take any money that he did not need to take — was legendary. I read recently that he once had to go to Eretz Yisrael for a family Simcha, so the Rebbetzin told the students who went with him, “Buy him a new kappota [frock coat].” The students purchased the kappota, but the Rosh Yeshiva refused to wear it. He totally rejected the idea that the Yeshiva should pay for a kappota for

him just so he could wear it at a family simcha. "I cannot take the Yeshiva's money for that!"

Because there were such people — and the list by no means ends there — who were dedicated to live in poverty for the sake of creating a Torah environment in this country, they implanted this same strength in the generations that followed as well. Just as Yosef was able to pioneer the attribute of preserving sexual morality in the midst of an amoral society for future generations, and preserve spiritual salvation for Klal Yisrael for years to come, the same is true with the spiritual pioneers of every generation.

The reason we are able to survive every exile in every country, despite the tests and temptations that those exiles and those countries throw at us, is that in each generation the Almighty plants Tzadikim in our midst who lead the way, and show the proper path for disciples and spiritual emulators who follow their example.

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
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### **Drasha - Parshas Vayeishev Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Oh Baby!**

Baby. In the sixties it was a term of poetic affection meted to any living organism that a particular party was interested in. In the school yard, its chant — and a directive to stick its head in a sauce usually reserved for a roast — is a verbal taunt usually invoked by one of two immature sparring partners.

But when the Torah refers to someone as a child or a na'ar it is taken very seriously. Often it raises a flag. It is reason to analyze and deduce. The word na'ar is often translated a child. It is hardly used for an infant and rarely for a mature adolescent. But when applied in those circumstances, the commentaries note its usage, and they comment.

In fact, when infant Moshe is found in a reed basket floating on the Nile, the Torah tells us that the daughter of Pharaoh heard a na'ar crying. (Exodus 2:6). Rashi comments on the apparent anomaly. After all the word na'ar is not used for an infant. He explains by quoting Midrashic sources that Moshe had a voice like a mature lad.

This week, the term na'ar is also used, and on the surface it is not complimentary. "Yosef was 17-years-old and was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a na'ar with the children of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives." Again the expression na'ar raises a flag. The Medrash obviously feels that that term should be reserved for children younger than teens. And so the Medrash asks, is it fitting to label a 17-year-old a Na'ar? It teaches us that at that age Yosef acted immaturely; dressing his hair and adorning his eyes to look handsome.

(Ramban feels that the term na'ar would apply, as he was youngest of all the brothers except for Benjamin, a mere child at the time.)

The Sfas Emes asks a powerful question. If the term na'ar is out of place for anyone even approaching his late teens then an earlier verse surely needs clarification.

In Parshas Vayeirah Avraham travels for three days together with his sons Yitzchak and Yishmael, and his servant Eliezer, pursuing Hashem's command to bring his son as an offering on Mount Moriah. As he finally sees the mountain, he knows it is time to conclude the journey alone with only Yitzchak. So Avraham tells Yishmael and Eliezer, "remain here with the donkey, and I and the na'ar will go yonder." (Genesis 22:5).

Yitzchak was 37-years old at the time, yet not one commentator is troubled that his father calls him a baby! Why?

A man once approached my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, quite distraught.

"I know this may not sound like a major problem," he began, "but my 17-year-old daughter is very upset with me. It has come to a point that she hardly talks to me. It began a few nights ago. My wife and I were with a number of old friends at a wedding when my daughter walked by. I introduced her to them by saying, 'This is my baby.'

"I could see that at the moment she became very upset. Moments later she pulled me to aside and was crying. 'You still think I'm a baby!' she sobbed. 'I am almost eighteen already, and all you do is call me

your baby! Won't I ever be a grown-up in your eyes?' Ever since then she doesn't want to talk to me."

The man shrugged as he pleaded with the sage. "I really don't want to make this into a major issue, but I'm not sure how to resolve this. Perhaps the Rosh Yeshiva can guide me."

Reb Yaakov put his hand on the man's shoulder. "You live in Flatbush, don't you?"

At the time Reb Yaakov was staying at his youngest son, Reb Avraham's home, and he invited the man to visit him there together with his daughter. He assured him that he would not discuss the incident but was confident that by the time the visit was over the matter would be resolved."

The next day the man and his daughter visited Reb Yaakov at Reb Avraham's home. Reb Yaakov invited the man and his daughter into the dining room where they discussed a variety of issues from school work to life in pre-war Europe everything but the incident at the wedding.

About 10 minutes into the conversation, my uncle, Reb Avraham, came down the stairs. Reb Yaakov looked over to him and invited him to join the conversation. But first he introduced Reb Avraham to his guests.

"This is my baby!" exclaimed the revered sage as he gave a warm hug to his 55-year-old son.

Needless to say, the impact on the 17-year-old girl changed her perspective on her father's comments. Fifteen minutes later they left the house with a renewed and invigorated relationship!

The Sfaz Emes answers his question very simply. When the Torah in a narrative describes someone as a na'ar it is a flag for concern. It needs explanation, whether complimentary or otherwise. But when a father calls a child his na'ar there is no need to explain. It is simple and more than acceptable. And Hashem Himself refers to his children that way. "When Israel was a na'ar and I loved him, and since Egypt I have called him my child" (Hosea 10).

*Dedicated in memory of Elias Felig, Eliyahu Moshe ben Dovid — 25 Kislev — by Dr. and Mrs. Philip Felig  
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.  
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### **חדשות ערוץ 7**

#### **The Parsha and Current Events: Illuminating the darkness Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

An Israeli family was spending a year in the US teaching. They rented a house in a gentile neighborhood. At Christmas time all the houses on the street were lit up with decorations, inside and out, flashing lights and colorful figures; while our Jewish family had a small chanukiah in their front window. Their young son asked his parents why they couldn't have some impressive flashing electric lights, to which they answered that whenever possible the halakha requires only an oil candle, be it ever so modest!

The following night there was an electric outage in the entire neighborhood, and the only home that had any light was the Jewish one with the chanukiah in the window.

A cute story.

However, it is the essence of the civilization that Hashem has created where the Jewish nation stands against the Esaus and Yishmaels of the world. The gentile empires put on an impressive historic showing; huge and powerful armies, vast areas of conquest, and a Reich that would last for 1000 years. However, each one in turn, from Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Ottoman empire, the British empire, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, etc., were relegated to the refuse bin of history, while the light of Judaism continues to light up the darkness of lost civilizations.

The Valley of Dothan

Our parasha, Vayaishev, relates that Yosef was sent by his father to seek out his brothers in the city of Shechem, but was informed by a man (or angel) that they had moved on to the Valley of Dothan. When the brothers saw Yosef approaching, they threw him into a pit of serpents and scorpions, and he was sold to Yishmaelites, Midianites, and ultimately to Potiphar of Egypt.

Fast forward in time. The Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al Husseini, spent the World War II years in Berlin with his mentor, Hitler. There

the Mufti organized thousands of Moslems to join the Nazi forces, mostly in the Waffen SS.

In return the Mufti requested and received Hitler's promise that when they would conquer "Palestine", the Germans would construct a death camp to which all the Jews of the Middle East would be brought and then murdered.

The place they chose for the camp was none other than the Valley of Dothan!

Unknown to the Mufti and his sinister friends this was where the brothers had betrayed their brother Yosef.

By the grace of Hashem, German general Rommel's troops were defeated at El Alamein in Egypt. The Germans never entered the holy land and the promised death camp was never built.

It is quite clear from our long relationship with the Holy One, Blessed Be He, that we Jews are like the blind groping in the dark, while Hashem protects us at every step to ensure that we do not make any fatal, irreversible mistakes.

**A Small Modest Jewish Candle Illuminating the Darkness**

Parashat Vayaishev is read on the Shabbat preceding Hanukkah, and when there are two Shabbatot on Hanukkah, Vayaishev is read on the first Shabbat. Many reasons have been put forward for the connection of this parasha to Hanukkah. My suggestion... In the parasha, Yosef was, and later the Jews at the time of Hanukkah were, pitted against formidable forces.

Yosef began as the young Hebrew slave against the entire Egyptian establishment. The Egyptians were at a loss at the pending seven years of famine, and in the end, it was the young Hebrew slave that reached the highest point in the social and governmental pyramid available to a commoner. The small modest Jewish candle again burned bright when the darkness filled the gentile night.

On Hanukkah, the small militia of Mattityahu was pitted against the might of Greece. Again, our little lights of sanctity burned bright when the Greeks capitulated and were expelled from the holy land.

So too, the Reich that was to last for 1000 years and destroy the Jewish nation fell while the little light of the Jewish people continues to burn bright.

We are now witnessing the beginning of a confederation of nations that seeks to destroy the Jewish state; Syria, Iran, Turkey, and others who will follow. Goyim never learn that against the small candle of the Jewish people all the winds of the world, even all its hurricanes and tornadoes, cannot extinguish the everlasting flame of God's chosen people.

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**Tamar's Sacrifice**

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar took place after Judah was informed that the young widow had behaved loosely and was pregnant. Judah meted out a harsh punishment for her promiscuity: "Take her out and have her burned" (Gen. 38:24).

Confronted with such a severe sentence, Tamar could have easily pointed an accusing finger at Judah. After all, it was Judah who had made her pregnant, not knowing the true identity of the "prostitute" he had met on the road to Timna. Incredibly, Tamar chose to be silent. Only as she was led out to be executed did Tamar remark enigmatically, "I am pregnant by the man who is the owner of these articles" (Gen. 38:25). When Judah heard that cryptic message, he immediately realized that her pregnancy was not the result of promiscuity, but a form of yibum (levirate marriage), which Tamar had only been able to consummate through deception.

Why didn't Tamar save her life by openly identifying her father-in-law — and judge — as the person responsible?

The Talmud derives an amazing lesson from Tamar's selfless act:

"It is better to throw oneself into a fiery furnace than to shame another person in public." (Berachot 43b)

This remarkable statement raises two questions. First of all, is honor really such an important thing? Did the Sages not teach (Avot 4:21) that the pursuit of honor and fame is an undesirable trait that can 'drive one from the world'?

Secondly, there are only three crimes — murder, idolatry, and illicit relations — so grievous that it is preferable to die rather than transgress them. Why was Tamar willing to die rather than embarrass her father-in-law?

**Superficial Honor versus Inner Worth**

To answer the first question, we must distinguish between two types of honor. The first is an illusory honor based on external acquisitions — wealth, position, fame, and so on. Pursuing this type of honor is certainly a negative trait, a mindset which can cause one to lose his way and squander his time on inconsequential matters.

There is, however, a nobler form of honor. This honor is based on our awareness of our true inner worth as human beings created in God's image. Recognition of our innate dignity, and an aversion to ignominy, has the opposite effect to the pursuit of superficial honor. This awareness is the very foundation of morality. It enables one to value the nobility of a life rooted in ethical and spiritual ideals.

In an essay describing our generation's need to deepen its appreciation of the spiritual side of the universe, through the study of the Torah's esoteric teachings, Rav Kook noted a decline in humanity's awareness of inner values:

"As the world advances in its superficial culture, it simultaneously declines in its inner worth. This deterioration is due to the phenomenon that, with the advance of society's external values, the eye is increasingly captivated by superficialities and learns to belittle inner awareness. Due to this process, humanity's true worth continually dwindles. The world's redemption is dependent upon the revival of our inner perceptions." (Orot HaKodesh vol. I, p. 96)

Human life has value only when it is accompanied by recognition of one's inner worth and dignity. It is preferable to forfeit life in this world rather than publicly shame another person, permanently disgracing him and ruining his honor. Such a public defaming will bring about the loss of all value in living, a slow and degrading demise.

In practice, however, it seems that one should not take such a drastic step. With time, a life lived fully can heal and restore lost honor. Nonetheless, those with a noble and sensitive soul should feel that their own will to live is weakened if their own survival must come at the expense of another's public disgrace and humiliation.

For this reason, the Sages did not write, "One is required to throw oneself into a fiery furnace," but rather, "It is better." This is how one should feel, even if in practice it does not come to that.

*(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 191)*

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Parashas**

**Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

**יוסף ... היה רעה את אחיו בעאן**

**Yosef ... was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock. (37:2)**

As parents, we have an awesome responsibility to infuse our children with proper middos, character traits, coupled with yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, and an abiding commitment to Torah study and mitzvah performance. As parents, we are our children's first and primary mentors. The rebbeim and moros that we choose for them are a reflection of our standards. Last, the joy in mitzvah observance that we present will have a lasting impression upon our children as they journey forward in the world. Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, relates the story of two American families who, on the outside, maintained similar lifestyles, until their children grew up and chose contrasting paths: one remained observant, while the other married out of the faith. Both boys had studied in the same elementary school and yeshivah high school. One became a rav, while the other r'1 apostatized himself.

Both fathers rose early to daven vasikin, early minyan, dressed the part of observant Jews, and were observant in all facets of Yiddishkeit. The father whose son converted came to his rav and, after relating the tragedy that had befallen his family, asked for a reason:

“Rebbe, tell me why my good friend and neighbor merited to have his son become a rabbi, while my son, who became a physician, converted out of the religion to satisfy his wife.”

The rav replied, “I believe I know the reason. Both you and your neighbor did the same things, but it was your individual attitudes, which your sons sensed, that created the difference. Years later, your attitude manifested itself in your son turning away from Judaism. When you arose at 5:00 a.m. to pray, it was unquestionably not easy, but you overcame your weakness, your desire to sleep another hour, and jumped out of bed prepared to serve your Creator. When your son saw this, he asked, ‘Daddy, why do you get up so early?’ You responded, ‘What can I do? I must get up. It is an atonement for our sins.’

“Afterwards, when your son saw you putting on Tefillin and reciting the brachah, blessing, with a pinched face, your son asked why you were doing this. You replied, ‘We must put on Tefillin. We have no choice in the matter. That is what Hashem has commanded us to do.’ You did everything because you were forced to do it; you had to do it. So your son developed the idea that his father was unfortunate, doing everything because he was forced to do it; he had no mind of his own. Thus, the moment your son grew up, he said that he would not have a miserable life like his father. So, now he has nothing!

“Your neighbor, on the other hand, had a different attitude. When his son asked why he rose so early in the morning, he responded with a bright and cheerful face, ‘To serve Hashem! I am so happy to serve my Creator. I cannot wait to go to shul to pray to Him, to thank Him for all that He does for us.’ When they arrived in shul and his son observed his father putting on Tefillin, he asked once again, ‘Why? What are you doing?’ and the father would reply once again, ‘I am becoming one with Hashem.’ These words made the boy long for the day when he could become one with Hashem.

“The big difference between you and your neighbor is that you told your son, ‘I have to do this.’ As a result, at the earliest opportunity, your son demonstrated his disinterest. Your neighbor imparted a different message. He said, ‘I love to do this; I want to do this.’ Why should a son not want to do what his father loves to do?”

The story is not new. The lesson certainly is not. The purpose of this preamble is to shed light on an anomaly concerning the primary focus of the next four parshiyos: Yosef HaTzaddik. While, indeed, Yaakov Avinu and the Shivtei Kah also have starring roles, the anomaly that surrounds Yosef is the statement issued by Chazal: Hu Yosef mitchilah v’ad sof, “He is Yosef from beginning to end.” (Sifri Devarim, cited by Rashi Shemos 1:5) This means that Yosef HaTzaddik maintained his saintliness, his pristine character, from the time he was at home, as his father’s chavrusa, study partner, throughout the various ordeals in his life, until he became viceroy in Egypt; he was consistently the same Yosef!

Let us analyze this statement. Yosef, the son of royalty, the son of Yaakov, the apex of aristocracy, was sold as chattel to a group of Arabs. He was then sold as a menial slave to a common Egyptian. If this would have happened to the average person, he might have begun questioning his faith. How could this have happened to him? He was a tzaddik who had done nothing wrong. To be treated in such a crass manner is bad enough, but, when one is taken from such a spiritual summit and placed as a slave in a base and immoral environment, it is a difficult challenge to one’s faith. Yet, Yosef remained the same righteous Jew in Egypt as when he had been a shepherd living an idyllic Torah life.

Furthermore, when, as viceroy, Yosef was exposed to the fame and glitter of Egyptian society, he was not blinded by the blandishments of wealth and fame; it did not go to his head. After all of life’s troubles, Yosef was blessed with two sons. One would think that some of his embitterment would have crept into the naming of his sons. Absolutely not. The name that he gave to each son expressed his gratitude to Hashem.

The average person might counter that this is why Yosef was called a tzaddik. He was able to maintain his spiritual stature despite the various challenges. That would be true if he had been called a tzaddik only at the end of his life. What Chazal teach us is that he remained the same tzaddik after enduring all of these troubles and challenges as when he was young. What gave him the fortitude to

not only withstand everything that had been thrown at him, but to go on to offer gratitude to Hashem?

It was his mother. Rachel Imeinu had two children, but raised only one: Yosef. Our Matriarch had a similar life, except for the ending. She did not become viceroy of Egypt; she did not ascend to fame and fortune. She finally gave birth to her second child – and died. At first, things appeared to be going her way. She was destined to marry Yaakov. At the very last minute, in her attempt to shield her sister Leah Imeinu from disgrace, Rachel switched and gave Leah the opportunity to become Yaakov’s wife. One would think that this act of selflessness would have incurred incredibly good fortune for her. At least, she should have had a houseful of children, but that did not happen. In fact, she was barren, while her sister had six sons! In the end, Rachel did not even gain entrance to the Meoras HaMachpeilah. That was, however, Rachel’s distinction. Did Rachel complain? Was her cheerful demeanor impugned? No, she was Rachel Imeinu, she accepted everything that came her way as an expression of Hashem’s will. This is how she lived, and this is how she died. It was this form of spiritual equanimity which she conveyed to her son, Yosef. Everything is Hashem’s will: the (what appears as) good, as well as (what appears as) bad. We take it as it comes and accept it, because this is the will of Hashem. Rachel Imeinu taught her son well.

**וישמע ראובן ויעילהו מידם**

**Reuven heard, and he received him from their hand. (37:21)**

Reuven had much to gain if Yosef were to be out of the picture. He was the firstborn. Yosef was a threat to his position, since he, too, was a firstborn. The shevatim rendered a halachic decision, finding Yosef guilty of being a redifah, a pursuer, who was bent on destroying them. Reuven attempted to dissuade them for one purpose: so that he could return later and release Yosef from the pit, thereby saving his life. Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, observes the incredible level of atzilus, nobility, that was manifest by Reuven’s actions. As far as the shevatim were concerned, either Yosef or Reuven would be the bechor, the aristocrat of the shevatim. Reuven was the only one who would benefit from Yosef’s “displacement,” since he had previously been considered to be the bechor, but, due to his impulsivity, he had lost that status to Yosef.

Nonetheless, Reuven took a position with regard to Yosef. He may no longer have been the bechor, which meant that the firstborn fringe benefits were no longer his. He did not care. As far as he was concerned, however, he was the bechor in assuming responsibility. He knew that a stand had to be taken, and, as the bechor, he should be the responsible party, the one to assume that stand. He may no longer have had firstborn rights, but he still retained firstborn responsibilities, which he could now execute. He could overrule his brothers.

All too often we spend most of our time seeking excuses to validate our lack of participation with regard to helping others. Reuven teaches us that small people avoid responsibility. A true leader does what must be done; he assumes responsibility, no matter the consequences.

**והבור רק אין בו מים**

**The pit was empty, no water was in it. (37:24)**

How sad it is when someone considers himself worthy of the appellation talmid chacham, Torah scholar, but does not really warrant this title. Heaven help the person who has the audacity to point out this person’s deficiency. He will be abused for lacking kavod haTorah, the honor due to the Torah, and its representatives. I wrote the word, “sad,” because this person is in a situation which, of course, he brought upon himself, and which he can survive as long as he does not press the wrong buttons. Otherwise, one day, someone who is far from being a scholar will unfortunately put him in his place. This could be a very debasing and sobering experience. Obviously, everyone should maintain a sense of humility, regardless of his level of scholarship, since humility just happens to be one of the criteria of a talmid chacham.

The Torah relates that the pit in which Yosef was thrown was empty. Rashi qualifies the meaning of “empty,” in that there was no water in it, but it was infested with snakes and scorpions, creatures that present a greater and more imminent danger than the lack of water. The Talmud Yoma 23a teaches, “Any talmid chacham who does not take revenge like a nachash, serpent, is not a talmid

chacham.” Are we to believe that the determining factor in deciding one’s level of Torah wisdom is his ability to take revenge like a serpent? Obviously, Chazal’s statement holds deeper meaning.

Many a would-be talmid chacham has employed this Chazal to allow himself license to disparage those who have crossed him. Revenge is an insecure excuse for getting back at people one either envies or has somehow convinced himself have hurt him. The Torah prohibits revenge. To use the appellation of Torah scholar to justify such inappropriate behavior is reprehensible.

Yalkut HaGershuni renders this Chazal homiletically. Mayim ein bo; There is no water in it (the pit). Consider a person who is void of water, which is a metaphor for Torah (which is compared to water), but nechashim v’akrabim yeish bo, concerning the laws of nekamah, revenge. He thinks of himself as a serpent, i.e., allowing himself the dispensation to take revenge. This is false piety, for he is using whatever little he might have learned in his life to justify his revenge.

Our Sages teach (Taanis 10a) that, when rain does not descend after Succos and the people fear that there might be a drought, the yechidim, individuals (of repute) should begin to fast. Perhaps in their merit, rain will descend. Rabbi Huna explains that the term yechidim applies to talmidei chachamim. They should be the first ones to assume responsibility for the community. Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita, adds, that when the situation involves fasting (and any other form of sacrifice) one should consider himself a Torah scholar, but when it comes to the dispensation of taking revenge, one should defer the title of talmid chacham to those who are sincerely worthy of it.

**אין שר בית הסדר ראה את כל מאומה בידו באשר ד' אתו**

***The prison warden did not scrutinize anything that was in his charge inasmuch as Hashem was with him. (39:23)***

Prison is not a happy place. It is usually reserved for the dregs of society. Many are there because they were unable to defend themselves against the prevailing circumstantial evidence. Others just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yosef was accused of a crime which he did not commit, but, in Egypt, as in most countries, this does not prevent the ruling class from disposing one into a system where he is lost – often forever. Yosef was admired and revered by the warden, as well as by the prisoners. They saw that something was special about him. Hashem was with him; thus, Yosef succeeded at whatever task he undertook. All of this was the result of the Egyptians’ recognition that Yosef was not alone.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, makes an insightful observation from this statement. It is possible for Hashem to be with a person even when that person finds himself in an environment that is non-conducive to spiritual refinement and growth. Even if one finds himself in an environment that is secular in nature, antagonistic to religious belief or hedonistic in action, he must never forget that he is never alone. Yes – even within the confines of spiritual filth in which he finds himself, Hashem is present with him. Yosef was a slave in a forlorn dungeon, surrounded by Egypt’s lowest of the low, pagans who had descended to the depths of immorality, who had fallen to the nadir of depravity; yet, the Torah informs us that Hashem was with him.

Thus, says the Mashgiach, one can seek excuses to justify slacking off in his commitment to Torah and mitzvos. He cannot say, “Well, I am alone; Hashem has forsaken me.” This is not true; Hashem can be found anywhere.

“Where is G-d found?” asked Horav Menachem Mendel, zl, m’Kotzk. His reply is classic: “Wherever He is given entry!” The Berditchever, zl, was wont to say, “One can say he is for Hashem; one can say he is not for Hashem; but one can never say that he is without Hashem!” Hashem never forsakes us. He is right there, waiting to be invited in. How does Hashem enter? Through emunah, faith. When we believe in Hashem, we have already allowed Him into our lives.

Rav Wolbe states (Ali Shur), “Emunah is a reality; it is not a concept.” When we were kids we all sang the popular song, “Hashem is here, Hashem is there; Hashem is truly everywhere.” We must take the juvenile entrenchment of Hashem is here and transform it into the mature reality of emunah, of believing that Hashem is here. Sadly, many sang this wonderful melody as children, but – with regard to the reality of the words – remained mere children!

Emunah is not blind faith. It is reality. It is clarity. It is a feeling. A living connection exists between us and Hashem. The maamin, believer, firmly believes unequivocally that Hashem is here, there and everywhere. To him, emunah is palpable, but, as the Kotzker said, we must allow Him in. If we do not “see” Him, we can hardly invite Him into our lives. The individual who is afflicted with spiritual blindness, or even weakened by spiritual myopia, does not see Hashem. If he does not see Him in every place, he will sadly not see him in any place.

Rav Wolbe once attended a seminar in Sweden. During the lecture, the speaker mentioned that “the very atmosphere of Sweden is treif (unkosher, unholy).” Rav Wolbe took umbrage with this statement and wanted to vehemently protest, because it implied that Hashem was not in Sweden! How can one make such a pejorative statement? Melo kol haaretz Kevodo, “His glory fills the entire world” (Yeshayah 6:3). Hashem can be found in the most far-flung, desolate places. Our problem is that we do not look for Him. If we make the effort, we will see Him beyond a shadow of a doubt – everywhere.

The surroundings in which we find ourselves do not always support our service to Hashem. In the course of our daily endeavor, either in the pursuit of our daily bread or in the spiritual work that we do, we might find ourselves in areas that are quite distant from the spiritual utopia in which many of us had the good fortune to grow up. Does that mean that we are alone, that Hashem is not with us at every step? No! We are never alone. We just have to open our eyes and see how everything around us “seems” to be working with us. If we believe, we will see. Without emunah, we have no eyesight.

We must remember that life will not always be a rose garden. As we encounter life’s ups and downs, we will confront challenges and difficulties – some that have the ability to leave us shattered, but, through the spectrum of emunah vision, we are enabled a path through the obstacles, a path called hope. Even then, when our vision lights up the path of hope, we might stumble, so we stretch out our hand and place it in the hands of the Almighty, Who will either walk us through, or, in some cases, even carry us.

The following vignette is a story related by Rabbi Fishel Shachter. I use it because it represents everyone’s story. I, too, was born to Holocaust survivors who saw it all – yet survived, their emunah intact. I write this today on the 75th yahrzeit of my three sisters who perished in the Warsaw Ghetto on Tishrei 13, 1942. Hashem yinkom damam.

A female Holocaust survivor had been married for twelve years without being blessed with children. One day, she sat in the Madison Avenue (Manhattan) office of a distinguished gynecologist and heard the following: “Madame, I implore you to listen to me, since what I am saying is for your own benefit. Medically speaking, there is nothing that we can do for you. Hair will sooner grow on my palm than you will conceive.” The woman listened to the devastating news, bid the doctor good-bye and left. She boarded the Madison Avenue bus. She sat there lost in thought, feeling sorry for herself, her life flashing before her.

She had experienced the terrible horrors of the Holocaust. Her family had a trap door beneath their dining room table, which they would use to access their hiding place, climbing down to the basement to evade the accursed Nazis. Her job (for which she volunteered) was to smooth over the small rug that covered the trap door. She would then hide beneath some furniture, hold her breath, and pray that her presence would not be detected. The family descended the steps to the basement. She closed the trap door, smoothed over the carpet, then curled up as much as possible, and hid under some furniture. Time and again, the family was saved as a result of her courage. Finally, however, the Nazis noticed a soft spot beneath the carpeting, and they discovered the trap door. She remained hidden. Her family – everyone – did not fare as well. They were all dragged away and sent to Auschwitz. None survived the war.

She arrived in America with hope to rebuild her life, raise a family and somehow repair some of the loss of her family. Now, however, these hopes had all been shattered. She sat on the bus, not getting off at her usual stop because she felt she had nothing, no reason to get off: “I have nothing for which to live.” The driver felt bad, but it was the end of the line. He had put in a long, hard day.

“Lady, I’m sorry that you are unhappy, but I have to go home and eat supper. Have a life – somewhere else” were his parting words.

She got off the bus and raised her eyes Heavenward: “Ribbono shel olam! You saved my life countless times. You must have had a reason for keeping me alive. I want so much to start over, to have a family and raise them al taharas hakodesh, amid purity and holiness. Please do not abandon me. I will not give up. I will always serve You. You have done so much for me, I only ask, please, perhaps give me a little more?”

One year later, she was the proud mother of an infant boy. Subsequently, she had a long life witnessing the births of children, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren. She never gave up hope. She believed with all of her heart in Hashem and in His ability to change everything k’heref ayin, with the blink of an eyelash. He did. She was Rabbi Fishel Shachter’s mother.

We all have such stories. Those of us whose parents survived the purgatory of the European Holocaust all can attest to our parents’ abiding faith. It was absolutely clear and unshakeable. They saw with a vision unlike that of anyone else – because they believed.

#### *Va’ani Tefillah*

*זאת השנה הזאת... ברכך עלינו – Bareich aleinu ... es ha’shanah ha’zos.*

After Adam and Chavah sinned in Gan Eden, Hashem brought certain curses to the world. One of these curses was B’zeias apecha tochal lechem, “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.” Toil and labor in the pursuit of a livelihood comprise a curse. Unfortunately, some of us have elevated this “curse” to blessing status, almost as if

one looks for every opportunity to work himself to the bone in order to earn a living. Hashem provides one’s “needs.” Some of us “want” more than we “need.” This is where the curse enters into the picture. We work and toil to the point that we become wed to our livelihoods. Will it make a difference? No. A person earns what Hashem deems for him. When his livelihood takes over his life – he manifests the curse, B’zeias apecha tochal lechem.

Another aspect of this curse is the preoccupation with earning a livelihood. It takes an individual away from his spiritual growth. How is one to achieve spiritual stature if his mind is on his material needs? He must realize that this is a curse. If he would only trust Hashem to provide for him while he instead focuses on his spiritual achievements, it would not be a curse. This does not mean that one should ignore his material needs. He should not, however, let them become his primary focus in life.

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*נפטר ב'ב כסלו תשנ"ז*

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לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה