

In My Opinion CHANUKAH 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

As we know, it is our tradition is to recite the Hallel service on all eight days of the festival of Chanuka. However, on the great festival day of Purim, a day which also celebrates the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people from disaster and extinction, the Hallel service is omitted from prayers recited on that day.

The rabbis of the Talmud, commenting upon this difference between these two rabbinic holidays, explain that the holiday of Chanukah occurred on the basis of miracles that took place in the land of Israel, and, therefore, the recitation of Hallel is proper, while the miracle and salvation of the Jewish people which we commemorate on the day of Purim took place while the Jewish people already were in exile, and took place outside of the land of Israel.

At first glance, this appears to be a technical and superficial distinction. It represents a distinction between two sets of facts but does not explain the fundamental difference between them. In fact, one would be tempted to say that the miracle of Purim, because it did in fact take place outside the land of Israel in a foreign and hostile environment, should be reckoned as the greater miracle, and should merit more strongly the requirement of reciting Hallel on the day of its commemoration. Over the ages, we have accepted this distinction between the two holidays, but for many, the true difference has eluded our understanding.

As you can well imagine, the issue has been thoroughly discussed over the ages by the great rabbinic scholars and commentators. This distinction is especially difficult for us to reconcile with our limited human logic. We see both the Mishnah and Talmud strongly emphasize the holiday of Purim, which has an entire tractate of the Talmud devoted to it, while the holiday of Chanukah appears to have relatively little discussion.

It is not my purpose in this essay to discuss all the various ideas, insights, and comments that the great scholars of the Jewish people have opined on this subject over the ages. Suffice it to say, this matter has occupied much space, thought, and discussion. We can well understand why this would be the case, since we always strive to attain a deeper understanding and spiritual analysis of the special days in the Jewish calendar, and the lessons they come to teach us in each and every generation, in every situation and society.

It would be negligent on the part of all of us who celebrate these days not to have arrived at some sort of insight regarding the different modes of prayer on these different days and the miracles that the Lord performed for us.

My meager contribution this subject, I think, has a certain validity in our time. Living in the land of Israel means living in a constant moment of miracle. Even though we become accustomed to what we call "normal life" in this country, we are reminded every so often by events that the mere presence of the Jewish people in our ancient homeland is an historical miracle almost unparalleled in the annals of human history.

As such, we become what the rabbis called "accustomed to miracles." And, when a special miracle occurs, we would tend to ignore it, not recognize its validity, or not appreciate its import on all Jewish life for generations yet to come.

The miracle of Chanukah that took place in the land of Israel, has to be emphasized in order that the people would appreciate how extraordinary this special miracle was, and how necessary its occurrence was to Jewish survival and growth. Many times, miracles may go unnoticed simply because of the atmosphere of the miraculous which permeates the land of Israel.

Outside of the land of Israel, human beings always deem life to be normal, regular, and predictable. Even though this is never actually the case, we tend to think in those terms when living in the Diaspora. Because of that mindset, we are certainly aware of every miracle that occurs, even if it is, so to speak, relatively minor and hidden.

In the Diaspora, there is no necessity for us to recite Hallel to appreciate that a miracle occurred. I think that this is the essential difference between life in the land of Israel and life outside of the land of Israel.

Happy Chanukah

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha VAYESHEV 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah reading begins with a simple statement that our father Yaakov settled in the land where his father had lived his entire life – the land of Canaan. Why is it so important that the Torah should bother to mention that this land was the land of Canaan? It seems obvious that we know from previous chapters where the family of Yaakov lived, and that it was the land of Canaan that would later be called the land of Israel. What special significance is there now when the Torah adds to the original text the descriptive phrase that it was the land of Canaan?

As usual, in discussing such issues the commentators over the centuries have added their insights and wisdom to help us understand and appreciate the greatness and message of the biblical text itself. Nothing appears in the Torah at random, though there are a few instances when the Talmud does identify certain words and phrases as being additional decorations of beauty on the Torah text. Considering these extraneous words, many explanations and comments have been offered throughout the millennia of Jewish life and scholarship. Each of these elucidations adds understanding to the holiness of the text.

My addition to this wealth of scholarship is the idea that the phrase "the land of Canaan" occurs at the very end of the verse, after it is stated that Yaakov dwelled in the land of his father. The order of the phrases is important because it teaches us an important lesson on how to view our attachment to the land of Israel.

Yaakov came to live there not because it was the land Canaan – its physical location, its landscape, and its geographical structure. Rather, his entire attachment to it was that it was the land where his father had dwelt, and that his father did so under the commandment of the Almighty. Thus, the attachment and bond of the Jewish people, the descendants of Yaakov are not based on purely external considerations. Rather, it is based upon our religious heritage and family tradition that has, over the ages, taught us that this is our home, this is where we belong and where we should live.

Over the long exile of the Jewish people, this attachment to the land has never wavered or waned. It is interesting that even when the Zionist movement had to vote whether to accept the country of Uganda as a substitute for the land of Israel, even the most secular of labor Zionists refused to allow this to happen. For the Jewish people throughout the ages, it was always about settling in the land of Israel and nowhere else. The failed colonies of Baron Hirsch in South America and the rest of the world, as compared to the successful colonies of the Baron Rothschild in the land of Israel, only serve to illustrate this point in historical terms. Yaakov is going home, and he knows exactly where home is located.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Power of Praise (Vayeshev 5781)

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership.

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

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

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

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

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

Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrat, that is, Bethlehem...

While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father's concubine Bilhah ... (Gen. 35:19-22)

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

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

According to the Sages, the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally.[1] After Rachel died, Jacob had moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. This, felt Reuben, was an intolerable humiliation for his mother. It was hard for Leah to endure the fact that Jacob loved her sister more. It would have been altogether unbearable for her to discover that he even preferred Rachel's handmaid. So Reuben moved Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's. The verb *vayishkav* should therefore be translated not as "slept with" but "changed the sleeping arrangement."

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

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

Yet according to the Sages, this did not happen. Had Jacob been willing to speak to Reuben he would have discovered the truth, but Jacob grew up in a family that lacked open, candid communication (as we saw a few weeks ago, during our discussion of parshat Toldot). Thus, for many years Reuben was suspected by his father of a sin he had not committed – all because he cared about the feelings of his mother.

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

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

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

Three times Reuben tried to help but despite his best intentions, his efforts failed. He was responsible for the one recorded quarrel between

Leah and Rachel. His father wrongly suspected him of a major sin and cursed him on his deathbed. He failed to save Joseph. Reuben knew when things were not right, and tried to act to make changes for the better, but he somehow lacked the prudence, confidence or courage to achieve his desired outcome. He should have waited for Leah to be alone before giving her the mandrakes. He should have remonstrated directly with his father about his sleeping arrangements. He should have physically taken Joseph safely back home.

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

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

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

Reuben became what he became because – so the text seems to imply – his father's attention was elsewhere; he did not care for either Leah or her sons (the text itself says, "the Lord saw that Leah was not loved"). Reuben knew this and felt intensely his mother's shame and his father's apparent indifference.

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

There is a fascinating Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers:

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

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

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

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

However, the fact that we may have an exceptional gift may also mean that we have conspicuous deficiencies. No one has all the strengths. Sufficient if we have one. But we must also know what we lack. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus became so fixated on the past that he resisted change even when it was decided on by the majority of his colleagues. Eventually he was excommunicated for failing to accept his colleagues' ruling (Baba Metzia 59b).

Elazar ben Arach's fate was even sadder. After the death of Yochanan ben Zakkai, he separated from his colleagues. They went to Yavneh; he went to Hamat (Emmaus). It was a pleasant place to live and it was

where his wife's family lived. Apparently he was so confident of his intellectual gifts that he believed he could maintain his scholarship by himself. Eventually he forgot everything he had ever learned (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 14: 6). The man more gifted than his contemporaries eventually died while making almost no lasting contribution to the tradition.

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

Shabbat Shalom: Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “She is more righteous than I” (Genesis 38:26)

The biblical drama of the peregrinations of Jacob ended with the patriarch's return to his father's house and homeland in last week's reading of Vayishlah, and now with the reading of Vayeshev the riveting story of Joseph begins. Just as Jacob's exilic wanderings open with his dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, so do Joseph's wanderings begin with his dreams of the brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf and then of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph.

The Joseph story continues at a fast pace, with the brothers' jealousy (a jealousy unto death) resulting in the sale of Joseph into Egyptian servitude and leading to the brothers' deception of their father Jacob, making him think that a savage beast had devoured his favorite son and heir apparent (Gen. 37:1-36).

The biblical account skips a chapter, however, before telling us of Joseph's adventures in Egypt; we must wait for that until Chapter 39, after which we remain with Joseph until his death at the end of the Book of Genesis. Chapter 38—a clear interruption of the Joseph story line—provides a fascinating interlude dealing with brother Judah, his three sons, and daughter-in-law Tamar, who enters into an act of deceptive harlotry with her father-in-law because she felt herself thwarted from her anticipated levirate marriage with Judah's third son, Shelah.

But why does this story—replete with sex, intrigue and moral outrage against the wrong party—find its place in the midst of the Joseph story? Let the Bible first finish with Joseph, and then bring in this tale of Judah, perhaps even as important background for the Messianic legacy he is to receive from Jacob on his death bed (Gen. 49:8-10).

And this leads to a second question. Apparently, Messianism is an important factor here, since Judah is the tribe-producer of the Messiah, scion of the Davidic dynasty who will bring the ultimate peace and the ingathering of all the nations.

Perez, the Jacob-like character who pushes ahead and breaks out his elder twin Zerah's initial lead, to emerge first, is the seventh-generation grandfather of Boaz, in turn great-grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:18- 22). But why choose a forbidden sexual act of immorality, a father-in-law (Judah) with his daughter-in-law (Tamar), and an act of harlotry at that, which adds even further transgression, as the union which will ultimately produce the Messiah? Ought the Messiah not emerge from a much purer act of sexual love within the context of marriage in accordance with Moses and Israel? The entire Book of Genesis after the choosing of Abraham is concerned first and foremost with who will receive the legacy of the firstborn, which son will be the torchbearer to pass down the baton of Messianism: the responsibility of bringing to the world peace and redemption by teaching compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to the next generation. Our portion Vayeshev begins with Joseph, seemingly the choice of his father Jacob, who gave him the striped tunic of many colors.

But Joseph doesn't dream of uniting heaven and earth, God and world; he dreams of mastery over his brothers, domination on land and in sky, and in his two dreams God and Israel do not appear even once! And moreover gathering sheaves of grain, agriculture, was not the pursuit of the family of Abraham in the Promised Land of Canaan; it was the activity discovered in Egypt, a far more sophisticated and corrupt culture

than existed in the Land of Israel. Joseph hankered after the fleshpots of Egypt, not the piety of “Palestine”; Joseph—at least at this point in his life—did not seem worthy of the legacy of the firstborn.

And so the Bible offers another option for the bearer of the familial blessing. You will remember that it was Judah who cleverly saved Joseph's life from death by starvation and scorpions in the pit by offering the brothers financial gain by selling their sibling into Egypt (Gen. 37:26, 27). At this point he marries a Canaanite woman with whom he has three sons; the eldest, Er, he marries off to Tamar. Er dies early, and Tamar is given in levirate marriage to Onan, Er's brother. Levirate marriage enables the brother to grant his hapless sibling a child and heir (even though he is dead) by impregnating—and taking responsibility for—his widow.

Since the child born to Tamar would be considered Er's and not Onan's, Onan refused to give his seed to Tamar. Onan too dies young as a Divine punishment for neglecting his responsibility to his elder sibling. Shelah is left; Judah is frightened to give Tamar as wife to another of his sons lest that son also die.

Tamar poses as a harlot, seduces Judah, and becomes pregnant with his seed. So Perez and ultimately Boaz and King David will ultimately be born.

Joseph attempts to escape his Abrahamic destiny by looking towards Egypt and its naturalism for his future. Judah likewise seems uninterested in guaranteeing Abrahamic fulfillment. Tamar is desperate to carry Judah's seed and continue the road to redemption. Judah also publicly admits his transgression with Tamar, praising her for being more interested in the Jewish future—by taking responsibility for past generations—than he was. Repentance, responsibility to past and commitment to future are the skill that Messianism is made of. Hence the story of Judah at this junction is a prefiguration of why it is eventually Judah and not Joseph who gives over the familial baton.

Shabbat Shalom!

Chanukah: Richness of Spirit

Rav Kook Torah

The holiday of Chanukah raises a number of questions:

- Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? After all, there was enough oil to burn for one day, so the miracle was really only for seven days. Since the holiday commemorates the miracle of the oil, we should celebrate for only seven days.

- The minimum requirement is for each family to light one candle each night. It is customary, however, to light with two hidurim (embellishments): every member of the family lights, and the number of candles corresponds to the day of Chanukah. Why do we perform these two hidurim?

- The Talmud in Menachot 28b relates that the Maccabees were unable to obtain a solid gold Menorah for the Temple as the Torah specifies. Lacking the means for such an expensive Menorah, they constructed a simple one out of iron rods plated with tin. Why was there a miracle for the oil but none for the Menorah itself?

Two Hidurim

The truth is, had the Maccabees not found the small cruse of pure olive oil, they could have used any oil. While it is best to use olive oil, any oil that burns well may be used in the Temple Menorah.

The miracle of Chanukah could have been the Menorah burning all eight days with “miracle oil.” But while “miracle oil” is as good as any other oil, it is not olive oil. Thus the miracle of the first day of Chanukah was not the burning of “miracle oil,” but that the Maccabees found ritually pure olive oil. This discovery was quite unexpected, and it enabled them to light with the optimal type of oil.

In addition, since the majority of the nation at the time was ritually impure, the Maccabees could even have used impure oil. The miracle of finding the cruse of olive oil thus allowed them to fulfill two hidurim: lighting on the first day with olive oil, and lighting with ritually pure oil. We commemorate this miracle by similarly performing two hidurim, with every family member lighting, and lighting multiple candles.

Guarding the Inner Spirit

But why was there no comparable miracle with the Menorah itself? Why didn't the Maccabees also find a gold Menorah in the desecrated Temple?

The Menorah corresponds to the material state of the Jewish people. It is a vessel for holding the oil. The olive oil, on the other hand, is a metaphor for the nation's inner spirit.

While it is fitting that the external vessel should be aesthetically pleasing, there are times when the physical reality is harsh and discouraging. During such times, we make do with what we have, even if it means lighting with a Menorah improvised out of iron rods.

However, the spirit - the oil that nourishes the inner flame - must always remain spiritually rich, with all of the hidurim of purity and holiness. This is an important part of the message of Chanukah: the miracle occurred, not with the Menorah, but with the oil. We may suffer physical hardships and deprivation, but our inner spiritual life should always shine with a clear and pure light.

(Silver from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 116-117. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, p. 797)

Rav Aviner

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample: Wedding Hall which also Hosts Non-Kosher Affairs

Q: If a wedding hall hosts Kosher and non-Kosher affairs, is it permissible for me to work there when there is a Kosher affair?

A: Yes.

Mikveh in Desert

Q: When Bnai Yisrael wandered in the desert for 40 years, where did they immerse?

A: There are many Desert Puddles, big and small, and underground springs.

Q: That is hard to believe...

A: www.shutterstock.com/search/desert+puddle.

Jews in Exile and Anti-Semitism

Q: Is it proper to wish that Jews in Exile suffer from Anti-Semitism so they make Aliyah?

A: G-d forbid! That is evil!

Son Beating Father in Game

Q: Is it permissible for me to beat my father in a game, or is it forbidden because of Kibud Av?

A: It is permissible.

Living in Parents' Attached Apartment

Q: We are a newly-married couple and live for free in an apartment attached to my parents' house, but my wife does not feel comfortable there. What should we do?

A: It is most important to live in a place where one feels comfortable.

Amen between Netilat Yadayim and Ha-Motzi

Q: If I washed Netilat Yadayim and have not yet made Ha-Motzi, is it permissible to say Amen on someone's blessing over Netilat Yadayim?

A: Yes, since it is the same matter. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 41:2.

Reserve Army Duty and Marriage

Q: I perform a short reserve duty in the Army each year but it is very difficult for my wife. What should I do?

A: Perform the military service and pacify your wife in some way.

Tree which Makes a Mess

Q: My tree makes a mess on my neighbor's lawn. Am I obligated to build a fence, move it, or clean his yard?

A: It is proper to do so. Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:32.

Payments for Child

Q: In the case of a divorce, should the father or mother pay for a child's therapy with a Psychologist and driving lessons?

A: The one who loves him should pay. You can call me to talk.

Milchig Feeding Tube

Q: If I am receiving a Milchig feeding tube, is it permissible for me to eat meat?

A: Yes. A feeding tube is not eating.

BS"D Parashat Vayaishev and Chanuka 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Strength and Conquest

Much like a motion picture which is composed of thousands of individual frames passing before the viewer's eye, life too consists of a series of individual time frames of 70 years ("The span of our life is 70 years or with strength 80 years" – Tehillim 90:10). And just as one cannot understand the plot of a movie from a fleeting glance, one cannot decipher HaShem's intent in history from one- or two-time frames or even from a thousand years.

Our parasha relates that Yosef found his brothers in the Valley of Dotan, not far from Shechem. After removing his many-colored cloak, the nine brothers (not counting Yosef, or Reuven and Binyamin who were with Ya'akov at the time) involved in the betrayal lowered Yosef into a pit of snakes and scorpions, before selling him to the Ishmaelites and Midianites, as it says, "Yosef followed his brothers and found them at Dotan" (Genesis 37:17).

On Yom Kippur and on Tish'a Be'Av, we read the heart-breaking saga of the ten martyred rabbis who were cruelly murdered by the Romans, but in fact were divinely sentenced to death for the 1500-year-old sin of Yosef's having been sold into slavery. We weep over the fate that befell these great men and the implications it has had for the Jewish People. Yet, HaShem's ways are mysterious, and no one can fathom the thoughts of the Creator, whose gaze encompasses all generations from Adam to the last man on earth.

The then Mufti of Yerushalayim spent the years of World War Two in Berlin, with his mentor Hitler. The two entered into an agreement: the Mufti would enroll thousands of Moslems from Bosnia and its related areas into the ranks of the S.S.; In return, the Germans, after conquering Palestine, would construct a major death camp where the Jews of the Middle East would be brought to be murdered. But, in November 1942, General Rommel was defeated at the battle of Al Alamein and the murderous plan was averted. The site earmarked for the camp was the very same Valley of Dotan cited above.

The pieces now fit together.

The death of the Ten Martyrs was an atonement for the sale of Yosef. However, the Mufti and the Germans could never have known that the murder of the Ten Martyrs was sufficient to appease the demands of Strict Justice; so that in our time, 2000 years later, calamity would be averted in the Valley of Dotan.

The composers of the Yom Kippur liturgy included the saga of the ten Martyred Rabbis to deliver the incredible, inconceivable and irrational message that yesterday's tragedies pave the way for today's redemption, which only HaShem is capable of performing. Including the overwhelming tragedy of the Shoah which paved the way for the return of Am Yisrael to the holy land through the incredible creation and survival of Medinat Yisrael; which only HaShem is capable of performing. And the ongoing tragedy of 6000 years of Man's inhuman actions towards his fellow man will pave humanity's return to Gan Eden, which only HaShem is capable of performing.

HaShem behind the scenes

Midrash Raba (Beraishiet 85) describes the mood in the house of Ya'akov after the selling of Yosef:

The tribes (brothers) were occupied with what they had done in selling Yosef (their conscience); Yosef was occupied with his (loin) sack and mourning; Reuven was occupied with his sack and mourning; Ya'akov was occupied with his sack and mourning; Yehuda was occupied with finding a wife, and the Almighty was occupied with creating the light of the Mashiach.

In every situation in life, as with the sale of Yosef, there is the subjective interpretation of events as viewed by those involved, but also, and more significantly, there is the will of HaShem as He directs the affairs of human beings while standing unobserved behind the curtains "creating the light of the Mashiach".

In parashat Vayishlach, the brothers Shimon and Levi annihilate the entire population of the city of Shechem. What was HaShem's intention in bringing about this seemingly over-aggressive, unbalanced, asymmetric, excessive, disproportionate Goldstonian reaction by nice Jewish boys?

I suggest:

Avraham Aveinu arrived in Eretz Yisrael at a time when the land was occupied by the pagan descendants of Cham, son of Noach. There were cultures and sub-cultures of avoda zara (idolatry), each according to the family breakdown into the ten "nations," of Canaani, Chieti, Emori, etc. Avraham began to advance the teachings of monotheism with much success. He established a yeshiva and a hotel-restaurant where many people gathered to hear the word of God. This was obviously not to the liking of the religious and political establishment of the times, for Avraham was undermining the core beliefs of the people by introducing God and morality, touching on matters such as family, law, treatment of slaves, and much more. But now the charismatic Avraham and his wife Sarah are long gone. Yitzchak is old and unable to see. Ya'akov, the ben Torah, has not been seen in Eretz Yisrael for over twenty years. The only relevant descendant of Avraham is Aisav, with whom the idolaters can get along fabulously, since Aisav is one of their own. So, for all intents and purposes, Yiddishkeit is no longer present in the holy land, and the natives could return to their old ways, uninterrupted by pangs of conscience brought about by those "holy-than-thou" Jews.

Then one day, Ya'akov reappears in Eretz Yisrael with his family and possessions. His arrival could have been like that of the chassidim and chalutzim 100 and 200 years ago, when they bought "a dunam here and a dunam there," a house here and a house there, with no great message signaling their arrival. However, HaShem speaks to people in the language that they understand. To us HaShem speaks as a father teaching Torah to his children; to gentiles He speaks in the language that they appreciate – the language of strength and war.

Ya'akov and Judaism have returned home, and the occupiers have to learn that it is no longer "business as usual". HaShem, as the ultimate playwright, brings about Ya'akov's return on the stage of history in an explosive manner; the city of Shechem is decimated. Ya'akov explodes upon the stage of history – this is what gentiles understand.

When later in his life, Ya'akov and his 69 relatives leave the holy land to join with Yosef in Egypt, the land is once again devoid of Judaism. Four hundred years later the nation returns under the leadership of Moshe and Yehoshua. Moshe defeats the two super-powers of Og King of Bashan, and Sichon King of Emori, and Yehoshua continues to destroy 31 city-states in Eretz Yisrael.

We again entered the land not by "dunam here and dunam there," but in the way that the gentiles understand – strength and conquest.

For two thousand years, the main body of the Jewish nation was in exile with only a small number of Jews left in the land, so that Judaism was not the dominant force here.

Then came the holocaust and the enemies of our people were certain that it was only a matter of time when the world would be "free" from the shackles of Judaism as the Jewish people dwindle and vanish.

Then in 1948, we again leapt onto the platform of history with an eruption that has caught the attention of the world until this very day. We drove back seven standing armies of Arab states in the War of Independence. And we have been victorious in the most dramatic way in all our other wars. And in those conflicts where Tzahal did not excel, it was only because we imposed self-restraint on the fighters.

Indeed, HaShem speaks to all in the language that they understand. We understand the kol demama daka (the soft gentle voice of HaShem), but the Aisavs of the world are impressed only by strength – with which Ya'akov is endowed when necessary.

B careful B healthy B here

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His Father's Fears

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

There are many ways to interpret biblical texts. Some commentaries take a literal approach, others probe for deeper meanings. The great Chassidic masters, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov in the mid-eighteenth century, offer us many examples of the latter path.

At times, the effort to discover depths of meaning results in what seems to be a distortion of the plain meaning of the text. Such seeming distortions are often referred to colloquially as "Chassidische Torah." I have personally found that these efforts are very worthwhile and that the seeming distortions reveal essential hidden truths.

The collected writings of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809) contain classic examples of Chassidische Torah. Almost invariably, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak diverges from the plain meaning of the text and ingeniously reinterprets the text in a manner that academicians, along with ordinary readers who prefer to read the Bible literally, find scandalous. However, his ingenuity unfailingly reveals unanticipated layers of meaning that are worthy of reflection. Some would even go so far as to maintain that this approach reveals vital truths that are utterly inaccessible were one to limit his study to the plain text itself.

Before proceeding with an example of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's brand of biblical exposition, a few words about the man and his loving personality are necessary. Legend has it that the founder of the Chassidic movement himself, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, appeared one day before his disciples with drinks and pastries, distributed them to the assembled, and told them to rejoice. They were surprised and asked for the reason for the celebration. The master explained, "A holy soul is about to descend into the world today, a soul who will see only the good in every person, and who will ardently advocate for every member of the House of Israel." The year of that small celebration was 1740. The man about whom the master spoke was Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev.

For more details, and for your inspiration, I refer you to any of the many biographies of this great "defender" of the Jewish people. But I particularly suggest two excellent biographies, one by Samuel Dresner and another by Simcha Raz.

Now, let us turn to the very first verse in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23). The verse reads, "Jacob settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan." The Hebrew for "the land where his father had sojourned" is b'eret megurei aviv. There is no dispute among the major commentators as to the meaning of those words, although some translators may substitute "had dwelled" for "had sojourned."

Along comes Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, however, who suggests an entirely different meaning of the word megurei. Elsewhere in the Bible, in admittedly very different contexts, that word means "fear," "anxiety," perhaps even "terror."

Consider but three examples from the book of Psalms. There, in chapter 31 verse 14, we have the phrase magor mesaviv, which translates as "terror on every side." Continuing on to chapter 33 verse 8, we have the phrase "mimenu yaguru," which translates as "they will dread him." Finally, in chapter 34 verse 5, we have the phrase "umikol megurosai hitzilani," which translates as "He saved me from all my terrors."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak does not find it necessary to cite any of those verses in Psalms, for he assumes that his reader can easily come up with many other examples that support his thesis. His thesis is simple: One can easily justify the following translation of the first verse of our Torah portion: "Jacob settled in the land of his father's fears, the land of Canaan."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak also assumes that his reader need not be reminded of the significance of the phrase "his father's fears." After all, it was as recently as two weeks ago that we read in Genesis 31:53 of the oath that "Jacob swore by Pachad Yitzchak, the Fear of his father Isaac." Whereas Jacob's grandfather Abraham symbolizes lovingkindness, his father Isaac has come to represent fear and awe in the Jewish consciousness. In this week's Torah portion, then, Jacob is returning to settle in the land where he cannot escape the attitude of fearfulness that characterized his father.

But what is the nature of his father's fear? Was he anxious about the circumstances that confront us all? Was he fearful of his enemies, of natural disasters, of famine? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak responds to these questions with a resounding, "No."

Isaac's fears were of a distinctly spiritual nature. He feared that he might fall short of the Almighty's expectations of him. He was anxious lest he

sin and, thereby, distance himself from his desired and well-earned closeness to the Almighty.

It was to those spiritual fears that Jacob was returning when he returned to his father's land. When he was distant from his father and struggling to adjust to his father-in-law Laban's treacheries, he could not trouble himself to be concerned about his diminished relationship with the Lord. After all, the Lord had promised him, "Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land" (Genesis 28:15). Now that he had returned to that land, he had to recover his "father's fears." He had to be concerned about his relationship with the Almighty and to become afraid, yes afraid, of *shemma yigrom hachet*, perhaps his sins had caused a breach in his relationship with the Lord.

The selection of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's biblical commentary that I have just shared with you, dear reader, is part of the collection of his teachings known as *Kedushat Levi*. But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak never stops with just a comment upon the biblical text. Rather, he teaches a practical lesson to his readers, a lesson aimed at connecting his reader to the Jewish people at large.

Thus, he goes on to write as follows: "For each of us must serve the Lord at every moment and every occasion, so that we always rejoice when we see that it goes well for other Jews in the world, and so that if, heaven forbid, the reverse is true, we feel the pain of others and are consciously anxious lest we have sinned and are, thereby, somehow responsible for the misfortunes of others."

Each Jew must rejoice when other Jews are fortunate and must not only suffer along with their misfortunes but must do whatever is possible to alleviate those misfortunes.

Jacob's "father's fears" are not mere neurotic anxieties. Rather, they are based upon a felt connection with others and an abiding concern that one's own failures may somehow affect others in his family, others in his community, others in his nation, and others in the world.

But just feeling empathic is insufficient. We must be concerned enough to rectify our own shortcomings for the ultimate benefit of those around us.

Jacob's return to his father's land was not a mere geographic change of location. It was a change in his sense of responsibility for others. He would now be motivated to better himself so that others could gain from his closeness to the Almighty.

Read more about the life and works of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, and you will learn that he practiced what he preached.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeishev
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Detecting the Wink of the Ribono Shel Olam

In Parshas VaYeshev, the Torah teaches "Then they took him, and cast him into the pit; and the pit was empty, no water was in it. They sat down to eat food; they raised their eyes and they saw, behold! – a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead, and their camels were bearing spices, and balsam, and birthwort – on their way to bring them down to Egypt. Yehudah said to his brothers, 'What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites – but let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.' And his brothers listened." [Bereshis 37:24-27]

Chazal say that no slave ever escaped Egypt. Yehudah's plan, therefore, seemed very reasonable to the brothers. Rather than cause Yosef's death, they could merely eliminate him as a problem by selling him to the Arab traders who were heading down to Egypt.

Rashi raises the question – why was it important in this narration for the Torah to specify the load that the Arabs were carrying in their caravans ("spices, balsam, and birthwort" – all possessing a pleasant aroma)? Rashi answers that this shows the reward that comes to the righteous. Normally, he says, the Arabs would transport foul smelling petroleum and resin, but this time it happened that spices were the cargo, so that Yosef should not be harmed by a foul odor. (It is interesting to note – some things never change – even today the Arabs still sell oil!)

The question is, at this stage of the situation, does it really make a difference to Yosef whether the merchants were carrying sweet smelling spices or whether they were hauling pigs? Look what he has gone through! His brothers kidnapped him, they accused him, they tried and convicted him and then they threw him into a snake pit. In the end, they sell him into slavery. He is headed down to Egypt with little hope of returning home and seeing his father ever again. What kind of "reward" is this that the Ribono shel Olam is giving him that he should have spices to smell rather than oil while he is being transported as a prisoner far away from home? Would he even take notice at such a moment? Is this how the Almighty is "nice" to him? This seems irrelevant at this point. It seems meaningless! What does Rashi mean here?

I saw in a sefer called *Nachal Eliyahu* an answer in the name of Rav Mordechai Pogromansky, who was known as the "ilui of Telshe". He suggested the following approach – and the underlying idea is certainly a correct concept:

There are two types of ways the Ribono shel Olam can punish a person. One way is that He can say "I have had it with you. You are on your own. Whatever happens to you, happens. I abandon my Divine Providence over your fate and leave you to the vagaries of statistics and 'teva' (natural happenstance)."

Another type of punishment is when the Ribono shel Olam himself is meting out the punishment. He is the one giving the "Patch". It is much more reassuring when the person realizes that even though I am being punished, I know it is the Ribono shel Olam punishing me and I know that He is still thinking about me and He still cares about me. He feels that I need to go through the suffering I am now experiencing, for whatever reason it must be, but I am not just a statistic. I am very much in His Consciousness.

This is a fundamental idea (yesod) which we have mentioned on various occasions. We have cited a very famous observation of Rav Yonoson Eybeschutz [1690-1764] in his *Yearos Devash*. The Gemara [Brochos 7b] brings a famous drasha on the pasuk "A Psalm of David when he fled from Avshalom his son" [Tehillim 3:1]. This is one of the most tragic scenes in all of Tanach. Avshalom rebels against his own father – Dovid Melech Yisrael! Dovid must flee the capital from his own son Avshalom. When that happened, the pasuk says "A Mizmor (song of praise) to Dovid, when he fled from Avshalom his son." The Gemara asks: Is this a Mizmor? It should rather be an elegy (Kinah l'Dovid), a dirge!

The Gemara explains: Dovid was anxious about a major debt of his which had yet to be paid. The prophet told him he was going to be punished: "Thus sayeth Hashem: Behold I will raise against you evil from the midst of your own household..." [Shmuel II 12:11]. Dovid HaMelech did something wrong and he knew he was going to be punished. This was a price that he was going to need to pay. But he was anxious that the enemy from his household who would rise up against him might be an Eved or a Mamzer who would not have mercy upon him. Dovid was thus expecting that the coup against him would come from some kind of servant or army officer who would be ruthless and cruel to him. When he saw it was his own son, then he was happy.

The *Yearos Devash* explains: It is not natural for a son to rebel against his father, the king, who was so good to him. When Dovid saw that it was his own son who took up arms against him and was usurping the monarchy, he understood that the "Patch" was coming directly from the Ribono shel Olam. A "Patch" from the Ribono shel Olam means that He is still in charge, He still cares about me, He is still involved with me. That itself is a major consolation.

We once said that this is also the key to understanding a famous phrase from Perek 23 Pasuk 4 of Tehillim: "Your rod and your cane will comfort me." A cane, we understand, is an aid – it is a comfort and it helps. But a rod in Tanach is a tool for administering punishment. How could that be a comfort? It is the same idea. Sometimes a "Klop" from the Ribono shel Olam is comforting. A person realizes that he still has a connection with Hashem.

We see this in life. Sometimes it is amazing to hear, but people go through terrible tzores and yet they still feel a connection to the Ribono

shel Olam. They feel that the Ribono shel Olam is punishing them for whatever reason, but He still is in charge and He still cares for them.

That is the meaning here as well. For Yosef to be taken down to Mitzrayim by a bunch of Yishmaelim, who 99 out of 100 times carry smelly petroleum, and against all odds he finds himself riding in a caravan with sweet smelling spices – this was a source of comfort. “G-d still loves me.” It is like a Potch with a wink and a smile. By smelling the sweet aroma, Yosef saw the Wink of the Ribono shel Olam. He saw His smile. This is not normal.

The Gemara [Nedarim 50] says that Rabbi Akiva and his wife, Rochel, were extremely poor. Rabbi Akiva’s wife was the daughter of an extremely wealthy individual who cut her off from his fortune because he was upset that she was marrying an ignorant shepherd. The couple was destitute. They did not have a bed. They slept on straw. Every morning, he needed to pick the straw out of his hair. One night, Eliyahu HaNavi came in the form of a poor person. He told Rabbi Akiva and Rochel that his wife was in labor and they did not have straw. He asked for some straw. Rabbi Akiva and Rochel gave their straw for this ‘woman in labor’ so that she should at least have a more comfortable bed on which to give birth. Rabbi Akiva turned to his wife and said, “You see, there are people who are poorer than us – they do not even have straw.”

The question needs to be asked: If Eliyahu HaNavi is coming to visit, why does he need to come as a pauper asking for straw? Why doesn’t he come as a millionaire and say, “This is terrible that you need to sleep on straw. Here is a bag of gold that will solve your problem!”

The answer is that for whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam wanted Rabbi Akiva to grow in Torah out of a state of poverty. He was the key link in the chain of Torah transmission through the ages. After all his original disciples died out between Pesach and Shavuot, he took five additional students who eventually became the foundational transmitters of the entire corpus of Talmudic literature. For whatever reason, it was part of the Divine Plan that Rabbi Akiva should learn m’toch ha’dchak! But He saw that at that moment, perhaps they were depressed about their poverty – how can we live like this? He therefore sent them a message: There are people worse off than you. That gave them the courage to continue. This is the “Potch with the smile; the Potch that comes with a wink.”

This is what the Almighty did for Yosef as well, and this is what Rashi means “The reward of the righteous”. Even when Tzadikim need to suffer, they still feel that the Hand of the Ribono shel Olam is together with them.

Reuven’s Sackcloth and Fasting: Why Now?

The pasuk says, “Reuven returned to the pit – and behold! – Yosef was not in the pit! so he rent his garments.” [Bereshis 36:29]. Rashi asks – where was Reuven when the entire event of picking Yosef out of the pit and selling him to the Arabs was transpiring? He explains that the brothers took turns taking care of their father, and it was Reuven’s turn that day to serve Yaakov. He had gone home to his father, and consequently was not together with the rest of his brothers during that fateful sale.

Rashi then quotes a second interpretation: “He was sitting in sackcloth and fasting, in repentance for the event in Parshas VaYetzei, where he switched the beds in his father’s tent and his father got angry at him.” But make the calculation. How long ago was that? It happened shortly after Rochel died. She died when Yosef was approximately eight years old. Yosef is now seventeen. It happened nine years prior, almost ten years ago! All of a sudden, Reuven decides he needs to do Teshuva because he switched the beds? Why now?

I saw a beautiful interpretation in a sefer called Abir Yosef. We are all subject to negiyus – our biases and agendas. We do not see straight. The brothers hated Yosef. They hated him because they were jealous. Jealousy is the type of thing that can warp a person’s perspective. You do not see straight because you are so obsessed with your jealousy that you cannot see the facts as they are.

Reuven, Chazal say, got cold feet about this whole incident. He said, “My father is going to blame me for this.” This fear put a brake on his

jealousy. Once he put a brake on his jealous emotion, he was able to see the facts as they were. He recognized that Yosef was not a Rasha. Yosef was not trying to kill them. Reuven saw how the negiyus of his brothers – their jealousy and their agenda – warped their entire perspective, and they were not seeing things as they should be seen.

All of a sudden, Reuven had an epiphany and he said “You know what? Just like their jealousy affects their perspective and they do not see things right, so too when I protested against my father, that was also out of a sense of jealousy for my mother. I felt it was not right that my father should move his bed into Bilhah’s tent after Rochel died. I felt strongly that he should have moved his bed into the tent of my mother, Leah. But I now realize that my jealousy for my mother colored my perspective. It caused me to act improperly and do things that were not right.

Just at that moment, Reuven realized how much kinah and emotions of jealousy affect a person’s view of reality. “Just like the brothers were dead wrong, maybe I was dead wrong as well.” That brought Reuven to Teshuva – fasting and sackcloth – at that very moment.

Chanukah: Once the Shirah Starts – It Must Keep Going

The Rambam writes [Hilchos Chanukah 4:12]: The mitzvah of Chanukah is very precious. A person must be particularly careful to publicize the miracle and to add to the praise of the Almighty, and thank Him for the miracles He did for us; even if he has nothing to eat other than from charity funds – he must borrow or sell his clothing to be able to buy oil and wicks and light.

If we pay close attention to these words, we notice a discrepancy. The Rambam begins by saying the goal of the mitzvah is to publicize the miracle (nes), singular. Then he says that we are to add to the praise of the Almighty and thank Him for the miracles (nisim), plural, that He did for us. So, which is it? Is it nes or is it nisim?

I heard a second question on this Rambam from Rav Daniel Lander of Monsey: After lighting Chanukah candles, we say “HaNeiros Halalu” and then we recite “Maos Tzur.” Maos Tzur recounts the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt, the redemption from the Babylonian exile, the story of Purim, and the Chanukah story of the struggle with the Greek empire. Basically, it is a brief synopsis of Jewish history: Egypt, Bavel, Purim, and Chanukah.

On Purim we say “Shoshanas Yaakov”. We only mention the story of Purim. What about the rest of the miracles of Jewish history? Why in the Chanukah Pizmon (liturgical poem) do we mention all the major miracles of Jewish history and by Purim, the holiday Pizmon is exclusively about Purim?

Rabbi Lander offered the following answer: The Gemara says [Megilla 14a] that there is a fundamental difference between Chanukah and Purim – namely on Chanukah we recite Hallel and on Purim we do not. There are several explanations why this is the case. Rava, in the Gemara there, explains why unlike the commemoration of the Exodus, where we recite Hallel, in commemorating the Purim deliverance we do not: When we left Egypt, we could indeed say Hallel because we were no longer servants to Pharaoh, but even after the “deliverance” of the Purim story, we were still servants of Achashverosh. The “deliverance” of the Chanukah story was more similar to the Exodus: After the successful Maccabean revolt, we were free men, we were in our own country, and we had our own government. We had the Beis HaMikdash. We were not enslaved to anybody! Therefore, on such a Nes, we say Shirah. On Purim, we were very happy that the decree of annihilation was cancelled. That was a terrific miracle. But after all is said and done, we still were in exile, subject to foreign domination by a Gentile king!

Shirah is an expression of the heart. When you say Shirah, you sing! You express your deepest emotions, your feelings of gratitude to the Almighty for all He has done for you. When people engage in Shirah they do not stop with a single expression of thanks. They give thanks for everything! Therefore, on Chanukah, which justifies Hallel, which is Shirah, once we begin singing His praises, we must express thanks for all the tova He has done for us throughout the ages! Purim has various mitzvos commemorating the event, but they are localized to the exact event that happened “in those days at this time of year.” An obligation to say Shirah does not exist “for we are still slaves of Achashverosh.”

So this is what the Rambam means: A person needs to be particularly careful to publicize the miracle (i.e. – of Chanukah) and to add to the praise of the Almighty and thank Him for the miracles that He did for us (i.e. – during the rest of Jewish history as well).”

A Freileche Chanukah!

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Chanukah: We can always climb higher!

The way in which we light the Chanukah candles teaches us how to achieve our full potential.

The Famous Debate

The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat brings to our attention the famous debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel – the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel.

According to Beit Shammai, on the first night of Chanukah we should light eight candles, on the second night seven, going down to one on the concluding night.

According to Beit Hillel, it's just the opposite, and this is our practise. We start with one on the first night, two on the second night, and on the concluding eighth night we light eight candles.

According to Beit Shammai, we should be mindful of the days that are left in the festival, while according to Beit Hillel we should concentrate on the days behind us.

Beit Shammai drew a parallel between the lighting of the chanukiah and the descending number of animals which were brought for sacrifice during the festival of Sukkot. According to Beit Hillel, what matters most of all is 'maalin bekodesh' – we should continuously strive to reach greater heights of spiritual attainment.

Chanukah and Chinuch

I believe that there is a connection between this difference of opinion and Jewish education. The term we use for education is 'chinuch' coming from the same root as 'Chanukah' meaning 'dedication'. I love visiting our schools – I derive so much inspiration from seeing our young children with their passion and enthusiasm for their Yiddishkeit. They love to learn the alef bet, they're proud of what they know, and they really relish those opportunities to sing the songs.

Sadly however, sometimes after an immersive Jewish education at a young age, the dedication to education can start to wane following bar and bat mitzvah – and the commitment can decrease as the years roll on. Beit Hillel however were insistent that actually the opposite should be the case.

We should consolidate what we have learnt and from there climb up one further step as we go higher and higher on the ladder of Jewish attainment and that is what is symbolised through the way in which we light our Chanukah candles.

A Wise Student

The greatest accolade we can give to an authority in Jewish law is to say that a person is a 'talmid chacham' meaning a wise student. Whatever we know, even the greatest authority amongst us must still be a student.

Like the kindling of the Chanukah candles, we can always climb higher on that ladder towards greatness.

Shabbat shalom and Chanukah sameach.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

blogs.timesofisrael.com

Vayeshev: Victim's Collusion

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Silence is the ultimate weapon of power. - Charles De Gaulle

Joseph's half-brothers hate him. The hatred is so deep, that they conspire to kill him. However, at the last moment, brother Judah suggests that they sell Joseph into slavery rather than kill him. Joseph is transported from the land of Canaan, south, to the Egyptian empire, where he

becomes Potiphar's slave. Though he excels in his servitude, Potiphar's wife, whose advances upon Joseph are rejected, ultimately accuses Joseph of accosting her, landing him in prison.

Joseph is eventually released, due to his dream-interpretation skills. By successfully interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph is elevated to the post of Viceroy of the Egyptian empire, a role he had been filling for nine years, before he meets his brothers again. Then he starts the strange charade of remaining unrevealed to them, forcing his full-brother Benjamin to come to Egypt, threatening to force Benjamin into slavery on trumped up charges, and only later revealing himself to his brothers, and subsequently they relay his prominence and wellbeing to their father, Jacob.

The big question that vexes many of the commentaries is why didn't Joseph communicate with his family beforehand? Why, when he was in a position of tremendous power, did he not send a message to his beloved father that he was alive and well? Why did he let his father believe he was dead or missing all those years?

The Bechor Shor on Genesis 37:26, takes us back to the original sale of Joseph into slavery to answer the question. The brothers really had intended to kill him, or at the very least to let him die in the pit they had thrown him into. But Judah, a savvy negotiator, declared to his brothers: "We gain nothing by his death. If we sell him, at least we gain something, and it removes our hated brother from our midst." Then they give Joseph a choice: "Either we let you die as planned, or we sell you into slavery on condition that you never reveal your identity or origins to anyone, that you never return home nor contact our father."

Joseph has no choice but to keep his silence and never contact his family. The purpose of the charade with the brothers then becomes clearer. Joseph couldn't just declare that he was Joseph when his brothers first meet him in Egypt. That likely would not have gone well and the family rapprochement wouldn't have occurred. They needed to go through a few steps first to undue the damage of selling him into slavery. When Judah, who initially sold Joseph into slavery then saves Benjamin from a similar fate, they are redeemed. This then allows the brothers, of their own volition, to suspend the enforced silence, to inform their father as to Joseph's wellbeing and to bring him to Joseph in Egypt, which is what they go on to do.

Joseph's silence and collusion with his brothers in his own harsh fate were painful, but he had little other choice. In the end, he was able to overcome his circumstances, and reunite the family.

May we only use silence in a positive way.

Dedication - To the memory of Chuck Yeager, the man who broke the sound barrier, who passed away this week.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Vayeshev 5781

This Shabbat, we get into the story of Joseph and his brothers, one that will continue until the end of Genesis. It's a complicated story embedded with much sadness. We will read about the struggles among the brothers that lead to the serious act of the brothers selling their younger brother into slavery in a foreign land. We will accompany Joseph as he goes from being his father's favorite son to being a slave, as he succeeds in gaining status in the house of his master but is then thrown into an Egyptian prison pit because of a libel against him. We will continue to follow as Joseph suddenly rises to greatness, and we will end with Jacob and his family being brought to Egypt with Joseph serving as a powerful Egyptian minister who becomes the patron for his extended family.

When we examine Joseph's personality in light of the words of the scriptures and midrash, we can discern different traits in which Joseph excelled. One of them was loyalty to the education bequeathed to him by his father. Even when Joseph was rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery in a land with a culture so different from the one he knew from his father's home, he courageously maintained the ideological legacy he

brought from home. We see this throughout several events in Joseph's life in Egypt.

When Joseph rose to relative greatness in the house of his master, "who all he had he gave into his hand," the master's wife tried to seduce the handsome, young Joseph. She tried to tempt him day after day but Joseph stubbornly rejected her. He explained his refusal this way:

"Behold, with me my master knows nothing about anything in the house, and all he has he has given into my hand...and he has not withheld anything from me except you, insofar as you are his wife. Now how can I commit this great evil, and sin against G-d?" (Genesis 39, 8-9)

One day, the wife waited for him alone at home, and when Joseph came to the house to do his work, she pulled him toward her. The Talmud describes this situation at its climax, as Joseph breaks in the face of her pleas, but suddenly "the image of his father appeared to him in the window" (Tractate Sota, 36). Joseph recalled the education he had gotten, summed up his courage and escaped from the house.

Later, when in the Egyptian prison pit, Joseph was attentive to the other prisoners. When he noticed two prisoners who felt down, he did not ignore them. He turned to them and asked, "Why are your faces sad today?"; a question that ultimately led to Joseph's release from prison.

Joseph was unique in his strong ideological stance in the face of an impressive Egyptian culture. He was loyal to the values he absorbed in his father's home, the homes of the forefathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph did not adopt the values of his surroundings. He understood that he was different, that he carried a special ideological legacy that he had to implement in his life.

This year, Parashat Vayeshev falls on Shabbat Chanukah. Chanukah symbolizes Jewish-ideological independence. The Maccabees, who fought the Greek-Seleucid conquerors, did not only demand sovereignty. They opposed the conqueror's attempts to impose the Hellenistic culture on the Jewish nation. The independence they fought for expressed more than national ownership of a piece of land. It expressed the right of the Jewish nation to live a spiritual life with loyalty and devotion to the Jewish values they inherited from our ancestors.

This devotion does not come out of nowhere. It is the result of countless generations being willing to make sacrifices for Judaism, in better or worse circumstances, with the deep acknowledgement that Jews have no other life that can be suitable for them. We look upon this long tradition that began with Joseph, continued with the Maccabees and thousands of Jews throughout the generations, and we cannot help but be amazed by the courage, the devotion, and the loyalty. The historical narrative of the Jewish nation calls upon us to learn about this impressive devotion and join the glorious chain of generations of the Jewish people.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayeishev

פרשת וישב תשפ"א

וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning. (37:1)

Chazal infer from the variation in the text describing Yaakov's taking up residence, *vayeishev*, he settled, from that of his father, *migurei*, sojourning, which implies wandering that Yaakov sought to settle, finally to relax in one place with a roof over his head and not worry about what tomorrow would bring. No one questions that Yaakov *Avinu* had his fill of struggles and troubles. Would it be so terrible for him to have a little tranquility? *Chazal*, quoted by *Rashi*, say: *Yaakov bikeish leishiv b'shalvah*, the Patriarch wanted to settle down in tranquility. As a result, Hashem sent the Yosef debacle with which to contend. The almighty asks: "Is not what awaits the righteous in the World-to-Come sufficient that they expect to live at ease in this world too?" Apparently, *Chazal* see in the Yosef incident a punishment for Yaakov's desire to live in tranquility. This begs elucidation. Yaakov had no plans to go to a seashore resort to soak up some sun and live a life of abandon. All he wanted was to sit and learn 24/7 and devote himself full time to serving Hashem without dealing with such "interruptions" as Eisav, Lavan, Shechem. Was he asking too much? Furthermore,

Avraham *Avinu* was wealthy and highly respected. Yitzchak *Avinu* was also well-to-do, and he lived a life of full time devotion to Hashem. Was it too much for Yaakov to expect what his father and grandfather had?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, explains that material bounty in this world is sanctioned as long as it is acquired through legal, honest and above-board means. Indeed, one can pave the way to *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come, with the manner in which he appropriates and makes use of his material possessions. He can devote his time more freely to Torah study; he can support those who learn, *yeshivos*, *kollelim*; he can help those in need, widows and orphans. He can establish an entire edifice in the World-to-Come, based upon the goals and objectives he sets for his material assets. *Olam Haze*, this world, was not designated specifically for the unholy. The righteous are entitled to have a "piece of the pie" if they use it purposely and properly.

Avraham and Yitzchak had material wealth, but it meant nothing to them. Their focus was on *Olam Habba*. When Avraham spent 25 years in Chevron, the Torah writes, *Va'ye'ehal*, He camped/made a tent. He did not settle. Concerning his 26 years in Plishtim, the Torah writes *Va'yagar*, He sojourned. It was a temporary dwelling. He would not settle in this world. He had time to settle when he achieved his eternal rest. The first time the word *toshav*, settler, is used concerning Avraham is when he sought a place to designate as Sarah *Imeinu's* final resting place. Regarding Yitzchak, the Torah used *gur*, sojourner, not settler.

Thus, *Chazal* sense in the use of the word *va'yeishev* – in contrast to his forbears' *migurei* – a change in attitude, but they never gave any thought or value to their physical/material accoutrements. Material possessions were meaningless to them, because they were just "passing through" this world. Yaakov *Avinu*, however, indicated that he would like to settle and spend his day learning and serving Hashem without all of the challenges that had plagued him until now. He was willing to become a *toshav*. This would have been acceptable, but Hashem wanted to see how Yaakov would handle the challenge of settling down. Soon after, we see Yaakov demonstrating his partiality to Yosef by giving him a multi-colored tunic. Why did he give the son whom he was singling out from all of the others a physical/material gift? He could have given Yosef a spiritual gift. Why did he pick a *kesones pasim*? When the physical/material have value, then we have cause for concern. (We have no question that profound esoteric reasons motivated Yaakov *Avinu's* decision to give Yosef the *kesones pasim* and material value was clearly not one of them. On the surface, however, it appears that the Patriarch gave his favorite son a material gift which provoked even greater envy and animus in the family.)

I vividly remember an incident that left an indelible impression on me. While I ordinarily do not mention names in a story, this time I will, and may it be a merit for the individual. Across the street from the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland was a butcher store owned by Mr. Leo Israel, a Holocaust survivor who worked very hard to support his family. His greatest pride in life was his daughter and her husband, Rabbi and Mrs. Yochanan Greenwald, who were both outstanding educators at Yavne High School for Girls. Mr. Israel's greatest *nachas* was to watch his grandchildren go to school. It meant the world to him. I would stop by every few days and *shmuess* with him. One day he told me that his grandson, Dovie, was starting to learn *Mishnayos*. He was so excited. I said, "Mr. Israel, buy him a set of *Mishnayos*." Two days later, as I walked by the store, he called me in and said, "Rabbi Scheinbaum, *kimt arein*, come in." I came in and, with great dexterity, he lifted a heavy box. With glistening eyes and a beaming smile from one end of his face to the other, he showed me a set of *Yachin U'Boaz Mishnayos*. Not a Segway, a Gameboy, a scooter, but a *Mishnayos*. This was his greatest pride. *Yehi Zichro Baruch*.

וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן זקנים הוא לו ... וישנאו אתו ... ויקנאו בו אחיו

Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all of his sons since he was a child of his old age... so they hated him ... so his brothers were jealous of him. (37:3,4,11)

The controversy that ensued between Yosef and his brothers was much deeper than sibling rivalry. Certainly, it was understandable that their father favored the son born to Rachel *Imeinu* after years of barrenness. Yosef was an exceptional young man who studied Torah with his father and had much in common with him. Under normal circumstances, they would have overlooked their father's love for Yosef, but they felt that Yosef was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was bent on destroying them and assuming their spiritual position. They simply could not ignore this. Nonetheless, we wonder how the brothers questioned the *daas Torah*, wisdom derived from the Torah, of their father, Yaakov *Avinu*. Once Yaakov determined that Yosef should be treated royally, it became his *p'sak*, halachic decision. He honored Yosef with the *kesones pasim*, multi-colored tunic, as a sign of his favored status. As such, the brothers should have accepted Yosef's authority. To respond with animus was non-Torah-like. Indeed, everything that Yosef did became a justification for their hatred.

Some commentators suggest that the brothers actually were prepared to tow the line and accept Yosef. It was Yosef's flamboyant behavior that prevented the realization of this acceptance. *Rashi* notes Yosef's involvement in enhancing his physical appearance. This was not appropriate behavior for the one whom the Patriarch designated to have special status. With status comes responsibility. Yosef was not acting responsibly. Furthermore, his negative reports to their father concerning his brothers' behavior and lack of adherence to Torah law certainly did not endear him to them. Despite all this, we would be hard-pressed to look so askance at Yosef to the point that his life would have no value. In other words, such hatred that would generate a ruling of execution is unusual – especially for such spiritually exalted and morally refined men as Yaakov's sons. Apparently, Yaakov saw greatness in Yosef. Why did they not agree with their father?

The answer lies in the words, *Va'yikanu bo echav*, "His brothers were jealous of him." Jealousy blinds a person. A jealous person sees what he wants to see. Clarity of vision, lucid perspective, becomes blurred when viewed through a lens tainted with jealousy. What was once clear becomes absurd. What was straight suddenly becomes crooked. The situation has not changed. His vision has become distorted. Jealousy engulfs a person like a wall that is impenetrable. He is unable to hear anything positive about the other person. His heart is unable to feel compassion towards him. His mind is unable to cognitively see him in a positive light. The jealous person is cursed – self-cursed. The brothers could neither hear nor see anything positive concerning Yosef. They were jealous.

The *Pele Yoetz* writes that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, attempts to convince a person that no other can compete with him in wisdom and good deeds. He is in a class all to himself. Therefore, when he discovers someone else who is either on a level with him or better than he is, he becomes obsessed and filled with envy, to the point that he cannot function until he is back on top in a class to himself. One might think that the best way to circumvent envy is to eradicate honor, such that people are treated the same regardless of position, financial standing, pedigree, etc. They attempted to do this in the city of Lodz, Poland. *Baruch Hashem*, they were blessed with a wise, holy *Rav*, *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, zl*, who showed them the fallacy of this approach.

The main *shul* in which the *Rav* davened had a procedure for the disbursement of *aliyos*, being called up to the Torah on *Shabbos*. The *Rav* always had *Shlishi*, the third *aliyah*. *Shishi*, the sixth *aliyah*, went to a *Dayan* or a distinguished, learned member of the *kehillah*, congregation. *Maftir*, the closing *aliyah*, was designated for a *chassan* whose wedding would take place in the coming week or someone who had *yahrzeit*, celebrating the anniversary of the passing of a parent.

The other *aliyos* were allocated to members of the congregation. The position of *gabbai*, the one who handed out the *aliyos*, was not an easy one. Often more than one *chassan* or *yahrzeit* sought *aliyos*, and distinguished guests were always visiting. It became a challenge to satisfy everyone. In addition to the usual demands placed upon the shoulders of the *gabbai*, the issue was exacerbated when one of

the members, who was by nature a boor, uncouth and vulgar, became very wealthy. With his new-found wealth, he purchased a wardrobe fit for a king. He insisted on changing his seat in *shul* from the back to the *mizrach*, up front on the eastern wall (a place reserved for *rabbanim* and the most distinguished members of the community). He flaunted his wealth and spent it in an effort to arrogate himself over others.

One *Shabbos*, he walked over to the *gabbai* and announced, "Today is my birthday. I insist on an honorable *aliyah*, befitting my station in life." The *gabbai* replied respectfully, "*Mazal tov* on your birthday. May you live a long, healthy life. I am sorry to inform you, however, that there are no "honorable" (the *gabbai* knew exactly what this boor wanted) *aliyos* remaining. It is a busy *Shabbos* with a few *yahrzeits* and *chassanim*." In his coarse manner, the fellow countered, "Heaven help you if you shame me in front of the congregation! I expect no less than *shishi* (the *aliyah* reserved for the *Dayan*)." The *gabbai* did not respond, because one does not debate an oaf. He went about his business, and he proceeded to call the fellow to the Torah for *chamishi*, the fifth *aliyah*. (It is important to emphasize that in a *kehillah* such as Lodz, which was a premier Jewish community, every *aliyah* was honorable.)

Hearing his name and noticing that he had not received the *aliyah* that he had demanded, the man seethed. He walked up slowly to the lectern, and, with fire in his eyes, walked over to the *gabbai*, raised his hand, and slapped him forcefully across the face! The *shul* was in an uproar. Men were outraged. The *gabbai* was a highly respected member of the community. To be so denigrated just for doing his job was contemptible. It took some time for the *shul* decorum to return to normal. (I assume the offender stormed out of the *shul*. Such people never remain long enough to face the music. They leave that to their subordinates.)

On *Motzoei Shabbos*, the *gabbaim* (there was more than one) came over to *Rav* Eliyahu Chaim's home to plead their case. Something had to be done to ensure that never again would such an outrage occur in their *shul*. "Do you have a plan?" the *Rav* asked. "Yes," they replied. "We have an idea about how to prevent this travesty from ever occurring again. We think that all *aliyos* should be the same except for the *Rav's shlishi*. All other *aliyos* would be given out based on need – not honor."

The *Rav* listened and contemplated. Finally, he spoke: "It is frightening that people come to *shul* for the purpose of receiving honor, but it is even more frightening if they cease to seek honor in the *shul*." The *gabbaim* stared at the *Rav* dumbfounded. They were not sure to what he was alluding.

"There is no question," the *Rav* began, "that the pursuit of honor is disgraceful, especially if it leads to slapping the *gabbai* out of anger. Sadly, however, we are all in one way or another subject to the pursuit of honor. One wants an *aliyah*; another wants a front seat; yet another seeks a title or an award. If we do not give people honor in the *shul*, they will seek it elsewhere, in places where it is inappropriate for a Jew to enter. Better we should contend with such issues in the *shul* than have it 'farmed out' to places of disgrace."

This was the perspective of a *gadol*.

הבור ריק אין בו מים

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

Rashi comments: There was no water in the pit, but there were serpents and scorpions in it. *Horav Elyakim Schlessinger, Shlita* explains the *halachic* ramifications that vary between a pit filled with water and one filled with poisonous serpents and scorpions. It was Reuven who suggested that rather than take action outright against Yosef, they should put him into a pit. Had there been water in the pit, it would not be a direct act of murder. Throwing Yosef into a pit filled with poisonous creatures, however, is no different than tying a person up and placing him in front of a lion, which the *Rambam* rules is active murder. In any event, Yosef was going to die.

Rav Schlessinger explains that the brothers were certain that Yosef's righteousness would protect him from the poisonous creatures. This is consistent with *Ramban's* opinion (*Parshas Bechukosai*) that animals can strike a human being only if he is tainted by sin. A *tzaddik*,

righteous person, reigns over animals. The brothers were well aware that Yosef was without sin. Thus, even though serpents and scorpions were in the pit, the brothers would not be *halachically* liable for active murder. What about Yosef starving to death? *Ramban* posits that causing starvation is also not considered active murder. Thus, it is not punishable by a *Bais Din*, Jewish Court of Law.

A powerful, frightening lesson can be derived from this. Although they knew that Yosef was a *tzaddik* who had no sin, they nonetheless ruled that he was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was liable for the death penalty. Why? He was misguided in his belief and, thus, harmful to the future of *Klal Yisrael*. If one's *shitah*, ideology/judgment, opinion is flawed, misguided, then he presents a grave danger to his followers – especially if he is righteous. At times, innocence and *naiveté* can sully one's outlook in such a manner that it catalyzes harmful decisions.

ותאמר הכר נא למי החתמת והפתילים והמטש האלה ... ויכר יהודה ויאמר צדקה ממני

And she said, "Identify, if you please, whose are this seal, this wrap and this staff." Yehuda recognized and he said, "She is right. It is from me." (38:25,26)

Yehudah and Tamar were progenitors of *Malchus Bais David*, the Davidic dynasty, and *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*, who descends from it. When one peruses the story of Yehudah's encounter with Tamar: how Tamar was prepared to die rather than shame Yehudah; and Yehudah's ultimate public confession despite the humiliation that would ensue, we see that the entire incident revolves around the *middah*, character trait, of *bushah*, shame. Tamar refused to shame Yehudah, because she understood that if word would get out that someone of his spiritual distinction was involved in a less-than-licit affair, it would humiliate not only him, but also what he represented. When Yehudah became aware that he was the one whom Tamar was protecting, he declared *Tzadkha mimeni*, "She is right. It is from me," and he was prepared to accept whatever humiliation would ensue. The obvious question is: Tamar was willing to die, thus snuffing out the lives of three souls. Yehudah is lauded for coming forward and chancing public humiliation. What about the three lives that would otherwise die? Shame is a terrible chastisement to have to endure, but certainly the lives of three innocent souls should take precedence. Why all the accolades?

Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl, derives from here that the power of shame is overwhelming and serves as a powerful deterrent. Public censure, embarrassment, disgrace, destroys people. They will do anything to spare themselves and their family from the pain of disgrace. Yehudah overcame his fear of shame, because, as *Chazal (Targum Yonasan ben Uziel)* teach, Yehudah weighed the temporary shame experienced in this world against the eternal shame of *Olam Habba*, and he decided that he would rather endure the fleeting disgrace in this world. Apparently, it was not an issue of the three lives that prompted his decision to confess, but his fear of eternal shame. Tamar understood the effect that shame has on a person, and she was not prepared to hurt Yehudah in such a manner.

We have no idea of the everlasting emotional pain that we cause when we embarrass someone. We live in a time when self-righteous zealots feel that it is necessary to expose every indiscretion of their antagonist – without sensitivity to the lifelong anguish they cause for him, his wife and children. These zealots feel that they are expunging the evil from their respective communities when, in fact, they are committing character assassination in its most ignominious form. I would simply call it murder, because that is what it is. Sadly, these holy men will find some way to justify their unholy actions, because, after all, they are holy. Tamar feared shaming Yehudah, and Yehudah feared shame. Tamar left the decision up to Yehudah, who, as a result of his decision, became the progenitor of *Malchus Bais David* and *Moshiach*.

Shame is a powerful deterrent, as demonstrated by the following story. The *Noda B'Yehudah*, *Horav Yechezkel Landau, zl*, was *Rav* of Prague and one of our most distinguished *gedolim*. His daughter married *Horav Yosef, zl*, *Rav* of Posen. It is related that when the *Noda B'Yehudah* would address his son-in-law in learning, his entire being would shake out of fear of his son-in-law's wisdom. The respect and

admiration that the *Noda B'Yehuda* had for the *Rav* of Posen was extraordinary, but this is in keeping with the fact that the *Rav* of Posen was an unusual *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar.

Sadly, the *Noda B'Yehudah's* warm feelings for his son-in-law were not emulated by his daughter, who publicly treated her husband with contempt. She would shame him, using painful barbs to disgrace him in front of his peers. She would enter a meeting of rabbinic leaders and publicly excoriate him in the most denigrating terms. The people were prepared to quiet her, but their *Rav* asked them to ignore what she said and to show her the deference that she deserved as the *Rebbetzin*. *Rav* Yosef swallowed his pride and never once responded to his wife's mortifying remarks. While no one opened their mouth to the *Rebbetzin*, they did not give her the time of day. She was definitely not one of the community's favorite people.

Rav Yosef passed away in the month of Adar, 1801. The community came to pay their respects to their beloved *Rav* whose body, wrapped in a white sheet, was laying on the ground as the *Chevra Kaddisha* recited *TeHillim* near it. Suddenly, his widow, the *Rebbetzin* who all those years had belittled him in public, and, as a result, became the community's least favorite person, entered the room in the presence of the most distinguished members of the community.

"*Rav* Yosef! Confess before the members of the community that it was you who insisted that I humiliate you in public. It was not because I was a bad person or because I did not care for you; you know that this is not true. When we first agreed to marry, you made me promise to act in such an unseemly manner because you were afraid of falling into the abyss of arrogance. Against my will, I accepted your demand, because I am an *ishah k'sherah*, ritually fit and decent woman, who carries out the will of her husband. Who more than I knows that the foolishness that I said about you was untrue?! I know that you were a holy, righteous man!" When she concluded her declaration, everyone in attendance observed that the head of the deceased moved as if in agreement with the *Rebbetzin*.

Exclusive of what we learn concerning the *middah* of *bushah*, we derive a powerful lesson concerning how far a holy man went to prevent himself from becoming arrogant, and the level of devotion of his *Rebbetzin* to carry out his will, even at the expense of her own popularity and esteem.

Va'ani Tefillah

הקל ישועתנו ועזרתנו סלה – *Ha'Keil Yeshuaseinu v'Ezraseinu Selah. O G-d our Savior and Helper forever.*

Yeshuah – Savior, and *Ezrah* – Helper, are not the same. A savior saves in such a manner that the afflicted, persecuted and troubled subject sees an end to his troubles and pain. A helper does not eradicate the trouble, but rather, comforts and cares for the subject. Thus, he alleviates some of the pain and makes the rest somewhat bearable and with the hope that good will come out of it. This, explains *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, is the meaning of the above phrase. To the one who recuperates from his illness, who is released from pain and suffering, who sees the light at the end of the tunnel, Hashem is his Savior. Some people, however, experience no alleviation of their pain, no diminishing of their troubles. These people are relegated to suffering until the end. To them, Hashem is their Helper. Who purifies them and grants them a special place in the World to Come. They realize that their suffering is part of a process, a process that will allow them to achieve everlasting bliss in *Olam Habba*.

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Did the Brothers have a Right to Sell Yosef?

Rabbi Kaganoff

Question #1:

How could the righteous brothers of Yosef want to murder him in cold blood?

Question #2:

If I saw someone do something wrong, what should I do about it?

Question #3:

May I inform a parent that I saw his/her child do something wrong, or is this *loshon hora*?

By properly understanding the story of Yosef's sale, we will be able to answer these three seemingly unrelated questions.

Who are these brothers?

When studying the events leading to the kidnap and sale of Yosef, we must remember that all twelve of Yaakov's sons were pure, tzadikim gemurim.[1] In light of their tremendous stature, this already incomprehensible story is that much more difficult to understand.

Had this story taken place in the most dysfunctional family imaginable, we would still be shocked by the unfolding of its events. After all, even if brothers feel that their indulged, nasty kid brother is challenging their father's love for them, would they consider committing fratricide, or any other murder for that matter?

This would apply even to members of a poorly functioning family. How much more so when we are discussing great talmidei chachamim, who constantly evaluate the halachic ramifications of every action that they perform! How can we possibly understand what transpired? In other words, the Ten Brothers were far greater tzadikim than the Chafetz Chayim or Rav Aryeh Levin, greater talmidei chachamim than the Chazon Ish or Rav Moshe Feinstein (this comparison does not diminish the stature of any of these tzadikim; on the contrary, mentioning them in this context shows how much we venerate them). We cannot imagine any of these people hurting someone's feelings intentionally, much less causing anyone even the slightest bodily harm. It is difficult to imagine any of these tzadikim swatting a fly! Thus, how can we imagine them swatting their brother, much less, doing anything that might cause long-term damage?

Since we cannot interpret this as an extreme case of sibling rivalry, we are left completely baffled by the actions of the ten saintly and scholarly brothers. How could these ten great tzadikim consider killing their brother? And, then, decide that selling him into slavery was more appropriate? As we see clearly, for the next twenty-two years, they assumed that their decision had been justified, although they acknowledged that they should possibly have given Yosef a "second chance."

Yosef reports

Yosef was in the habit of reporting to his father dibasam ra'ah (usually interpreted as slander) – actions that he interpreted as infractions. Rashi quotes the Midrash that Yosef informed his father of whatever bad actions he observed in Leah's six sons. Specifically, Yosef reported:

- (1) They were consuming meat without killing the animal properly, a sin forbidden to all descendants of Noach.
- (2) They were belittling their brothers Dan, Naftali, Gad and Asher, by calling them slaves.
- (3) He suspected them of violating the heinous sin of giluy arayos.

Others explain that Yosef accused the brothers of not caring properly for their father's flock.[2] Although Rashi makes no mention of this accusation, it is clear from his comments that, in his opinion, had Yosef suspected them of this, he would certainly have noted it to his father.

Is dibasam ra'ah equivalent to slander?

We must be careful not to define dibasam ra'ah as slander, which usually intimates malice and falsehood, and would imply that Yosef's intentions were to harm his brothers. Without a doubt, the righteous Yosef had no such intent. It is more accurate to translate dibasam ra'ah as evil report. Yosef did share his interpretations of his brothers' actions with his father, but they were not fabrications, and defaming them was not his goal.

Why is Yosef tattling?

Without question, Yosef's goal was the betterment of his brothers. He acted completely lishmah, with no evil intent, just as later, in Parshas Vayigash, he holds no grudge against his brothers, despite the indescribable suffering they caused him.

Indeed, Yosef's motivation was his sincere concern for his brothers. He knew well the halachah that if you see someone sin, you must bring it to the offender's attention, explaining to him that he will achieve a large share in Olam Haba by doing teshuvah.[3] A person giving tochacha must always have the interests of the sinner completely at heart, and consider how to educate the malefactor in a way that his words will be accepted.

Yosef knew, also, that whoever has the ability to protest sinful activity and fails to do so is liable for his lack of action. However, the Seforno comments that, due to Yosef's youth, he did not realize what might result from hisreporting to his father about his brothers.

At this point, we can already answer one of the questions I raised above: If I saw someone do something wrong, what should I do about it?

Answer: I am obligated to bring to the person's attention that it is in his or her best interest to do teshuvah and correct whatever he or she has done wrong. The admonition should be done in a gentle way, expressing concern, so that it can be received positively and thereby accomplish its purpose.

Why through Yaakov?

Without question, Yosef's goal in sharing his concerns with his father was that his brothers correct their actions. If so, why didn't Yosef admonish them directly? Yosef wanted his father to take appropriate action to correct the brothers' deeds and, thereby, bring them to do teshuvah. The halachic authorities disagree whether Yosef was guilty of speaking loshon hora by using this approach in this

instance. The Chafetz Chayim contends that Yosef was guilty of speaking loshon hora, because he should have shared his concerns directly with his brothers, rather than first discussing them with his father.[4]

Maybe his brothers are right?

Yosef should have considered that his attempts at tochacha might be successful. The Chafetz Chayim also sees Yosef as having neglected the mitzvah of being dan lekaf zechus, judging people favorably. Since the brothers were great tzadikim, Yosef should have realized that they had a halachic consideration to permit their actions. Had he judged them favorably, he would have considered one of three possibilities:

- (1) That his brothers had done nothing wrong – but he (Yosef) had misinterpreted what he had seen them do.
- (2) Alternatively, his brothers might have justified their actions, explaining them in a way that he (Yosef) might have accepted what they did as correct or, at least, permitted.
- (3) That although his brothers were not right, they had based themselves on some mistaken rationale. If their rationale was mistaken, Yosef should have entertained the possibility that he might successfully have convinced them that their approach was flawed. He should have discussed the matter with them directly, and either convinced them of their folly or gained an understanding of why they considered their actions as justified.

In any case, Yosef should not have assumed that the brothers sinned intentionally. The Malbim's approach

The Malbim disagrees with the Chafetz Chayim's approach, contending that Yosef felt that his rebuking his brothers would be unheeded under any circumstances and possibly even counterproductive, and only his father's reprimand would be successful. If you are certain that the sinner will not listen to you, but may listen to someone else, you may share the information with the person you feel will be more successful at giving rebuke. Yosef felt that, although his brothers would not listen to him, their father could successfully convince them of their errors; therefore, he reported the matters to his father.

In the same vein, a student who sees classmates act inappropriately and feels that they will not listen to his/her rebuke may share the information with someone who he/she feels will be more effective in accomplishing the Torah's goal.

We are now in a position to answer the third question I raised at the beginning:

May I inform a parent that I saw his/her child do something wrong, or is this loshon hora?

If a parent is able to do something to improve a child's behavior, one may notify the parent of the child's conduct. Not only is it not loshon hora, it is the correct approach to use. However, if the circumstances are such that the parent will be unable to do anything to improve the child's behavior, or if one can bring about change in the child's behavior by contacting him directly, one may not inform the parents of the child's misbehavior.

Yaakov's reaction

Yaakov, or more accurately Yisrael, reacted passively to Yosef's tale bearing on his brothers. He did not rebuke the brothers for their misbehavior, which we will soon discuss; but, he also did not reprimand Yosef for speaking loshon hora, or for neglecting to be dan lekaf zechus. Indeed, he demonstrated his greater love for Yosef than for the others by producing with his own hands a special garment for Yosef. Yaakov, an affluent sheep raiser who preferred to spend his time studying Torah, took time from his own learning to hand-weave Yosef a beautiful coat. Indeed, Yaakov felt a special kinship to Yosef for several reasons, including Yosef's astute Torah learning. All of this makes us wonder: why did Yaakov not rebuke Yosef for reporting his brothers?

Was Yosef wrong?

Yaakov agreed with Yosef's assessment that his reporting was not loshon hora, although this does not necessarily mean that he felt the brothers were guilty. I will shortly rally evidence that implies that Yaakov was convinced the brothers were innocent. Nevertheless, Yaakov concurred that Yosef behaved correctly in bringing the matters to his (Yaakov's) attention, rather than dealing with the brothers himself.

Yaakov agreed that the brothers would not accept Yosef's admonition, because they did not understand his (Yosef's) greatness. At the same time, Yaakov realized that Yosef had leadership and scholarship skills superior to those of his brothers. Yaakov therefore gave Yosef the kesones passim, to demonstrate his appointment as leader of the household.[5]

Why did Yaakov not admonish the brothers?

This, of course, leads to a new question. If Yaakov did not rebuke Yosef because he felt that his approach was correct, why do we find nowhere that he rebuked the brothers for their behavior? It appears that Yaakov realized that the brothers had not sinned, and that there was no reason to rebuke them. Shemiras Halashon rallies proof of this assertion, because the Torah teaches that Yaakov had a special love for Yosef only because of Yosef's scholarship and not because of any concerns about the brothers' behavior. (See the Sifsei Chachamim and other commentaries on Rashi, who explain why the brothers had done nothing wrong, and what Yosef misinterpreted.) Yaakov understood that the brothers had not

sinned, and that Yosef had misinterpreted their actions. Apparently, Yosef was indeed guilty of not having judged them favorably (Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch). In fact, because of his mistaken accusation of the brothers, Yosef himself was later severely punished: he was sold into slavery, and for wrongly suspecting his brothers of violating arayos, he was suspected by all Egypt of a similar transgression, as a result of Mrs. Potifar's fraudulent allegation (Shemiras Halashon). Thus, the problem of an innocent man being tried and convicted in the media is not a modern phenomenon – Yosef was punished for a crime he had not done.

Was Yaakov correct?

Was the kesones passim an appropriate gift for Yosef? Was Yaakov wrong in giving Yosef the kesones passim?

Even asking this question places us in an uncomfortable position: it implies that we might lay blame on the educational practices of one of our Avos. Notwithstanding our awesome appreciation of the greatness of Yaakov Avinu, the Gemara criticizes Yaakov's deed: "A person should never treat one son differently from the others, for, because of two sela'im worth of fancy wool that Yaakov gave Yosef, favoring him over his brothers, the brothers were jealous of him, and the end result was that our forefathers descended to Egypt." [6]

Yaakov did not act without calculation. Presumably, seeing Yosef's high standard of learning, his refined personal attributes, and his concern for others' behavior, Yaakov felt it important to demonstrate that Yosef was the most skilled of a very impressive group of sons. Yet Chazal tell us that this is an error. One should never demonstrate favoritism among one's sons, even when there appears to be appropriate reason for doing so.

Were the brothers justified?

At this point, we have presented Yaakov and Yosef's positions on what happened, but we still do not know why the brothers wanted to kill Yosef.

Remember that the brothers were both righteous and talented talmidei chachamim. Clearly, they must have held that Yosef was a rodef, someone pursuing and attempting to bring bodily harm to another. No other halachic justification would permit their subsequent actions.

Seforno and others note that the brothers interpreted Yosef's actions as a plot against them, to deprive them of being Yaakov's descendants. Rav Hirsch demonstrates that the pasuk, vayisnaku oso lehamiso, means they imagined him as one plotting against them – so that he was deserving of death. The brothers assumed that Yosef's goal was to vilify them in their father's eyes, so that Yaakov would reject them – just as Yitzchak had rejected Eisav and Avraham had rejected Yishmael and the sons of Keturah (Malbim). After all, Yosef was falsely accusing them of highly serious misbehavior. The brothers interpreted Yaakov's gift of the kesones passim to Yosef as proof that Yaakov had accepted Yosef's loshon hora against them (Shemiras Halashon). The brothers needed to act quickly before he destroyed them; they were concerned that Yaakov would accept Yosef's plot to discredit them and to rule over them. Therefore, they seized and imprisoned Yosef, and then sat down to eat a meal, while they were deciding what to do with him.

Not a free lunch

The brothers are strongly criticized for sitting down to eat a meal. Assuming that they were justified in killing Yosef, they should have spent an entire night debating their judgment. After all, when a beis din decides on capital matters, they postpone their decision until the next day, and spend the entire night debating the halachah in small groups, eating only a little while deliberating the serious matter. [7] Certainly, the brothers' sitting down to eat immediately after incarcerating Yosef was wrong, and for this sin they were subsequently punished (Shemiras Halashon).

The brothers then realized that selling Yosef as a slave would accomplish what they needed, without bloodshed.

Later, in Egypt, they recognized that they should not have been so hard-hearted as to sell him – perhaps, his experience in the pit had taught him a sufficient lesson, and he was no longer a danger. Not until Yosef presented himself to them in Mitzrayim did they realize that Yosef was correct all along -- he would indeed rule over them, and he had not intended to harm them.

Halachic conclusions

1. When you see someone doing something that appears wrong, figure out a positive way to tell the person what he or she can accomplish by doing teshuvah properly.
2. If you are convinced that you are unable to influence the wrongdoer, while someone else may be more successful, you may share the information with the person who might be able to deliver discreet and gentle admonishment.
3. The information should be shared with no one else, unless, otherwise, someone could get hurt.
4. Always figure out how to judge the person favorably. The entire sale of Yosef occurred because neither side judged the other favorably. Also, bear in mind that we are often highly biased in our evaluation, making it difficult for us to judge.
5. Do not demonstrate favoritism among children, even when there appear to be excellent reasons for doing so.

Concluding the story

To quote the Midrash: Prior to Yosef's revealing himself in Mitzrayim, he asked them, "The brother whom you claim is dead is very much alive; I will call him." Yosef then called out, "Yosef ben Yaakov, come here. Yosef ben Yaakov, come here." The brothers searched under the furniture and checked all the corners of the room to see where Yosef was hiding. [8]

By this time, Yosef had already revealed that he knew the intimate details of their household. They knew that Yosef had been taken to Mitzrayim. They now have someone telling them that he knows that Yosef is in the same room, and there is no one in the room save themselves and Yosef. Nonetheless, they cannot accept that the man that they are facing is Yosef!

Contemplate how these giants of spirit were blinded by their own interests! Is it not sobering how convinced a person can be, despite facts to the contrary, that he is entirely right? We can stare truth in the face, and still not realize that it is Yosef standing before us.

1. Ramban, Iggeres HaKodesh, Chapter 5
2. Seforno
3. Rambam, Hilchos Dei'vos 6:7
4. Shemiras HaLashon Volume 2, Chapter 11 [Parshas Vayeisheiv]
5. Seforno
6. Shabbos 10b
7. Rambam, Hilchos Sanhedrin 12:3
8. Bereishis Rabbah; Yalkut Shimoni

Peeling Away the Parashah's Layers

Science is not the Yellow Brick Road

Jonathan Rosenblum - Mishpacha Magazine

For Rabbi David Fohrman there is no excitement comparable to discovering chiasms in the Torah

I would be remiss if I did not call readers' attention to the publication of Rabbi David Fohrman's newest work, Genesis: A Parsha Companion. I have written previously about his longer, thematic works: The Beast That Crouches at the Door on the sin of Adam HaRishon and Kayin and Hevel; The Queen You Thought You Knew on Megillas Esther; and The Exodus You Almost Passed Over.

Genesis: A Parsha Companion, the first of a projected five volumes, is much closer to the popular weekly parshah videos produced by Rabbi Fohrman for the Aleph Beta Foundation. Rabbi Fohrman began teaching Chumash many decades ago in the adult education division of Johns Hopkins University, while still in the Ner Israel kollel. And his insights into the parshah hold fascination both for the newcomer to Chumash study and for one well versed in Torah texts and the classical commentaries, though the fascination will be of a different sort.

With respect to the first group, he relates in his introduction an incident in one of his Johns Hopkins classes, in which a medical school professor asked Rabbi Fohrman to comment on what he had been always taught — that the Written Torah is the product of multiple authors and an editorial team, chas v'shalom. But even before Rabbi Fohrman could respond, the student answered his own question: "But I'm having a hard time seeing how that could possibly be true. I mean [based on what we've been studying], it's all so interconnected."

The surprises for the veteran student of Chumash are generated by Rabbi Fohrman's invitation to read the text with fresh eyes — e.g., read the Biblical narrative as if we did not already know what comes next, or we were unfamiliar with Rashi and the other classic commentaries. In other words, read the text as the classic commentators themselves did.

My guess is that every long-time student of Chumash will find at least one piece in the collection too novel to accept. But even then, he or she will have to attend to the evidence that Rabbi Fohrman presents. He is a close reader of the Biblical text in a way that only someone who is deeply in love with that text can be. He sees patterns that we have missed, but seem blindingly obvious after he has laid out the text in front of us.

Let me share just one example of his close reading. Bereishis 5:29 describes Lemech's decision to name a son Noach. "And he called his name Noach, saying, 'This one will bring us ease (yenachameinu) from our work (mimaaseinu) and from the toil (u'mei'itzvon) of our hands from the ground (ha'adamah) that Hashem cursed.' " Nine versus later (6:6-7), the Torah describes Hashem's decision to wipe out man from the face of the earth, and some variant of each of these four terms appears, and in exactly the same order.

It's almost as if Hashem is mimicking the hopes expressed by Lemech for his son. But this time, instead of the root נ-ח-ם being used as a term of consolation, it refers to Hashem's regret at having made man.

What connects the consolation that Lemech expected from his son with Hashem's regret at having created man? Rabbi Fohrman finds the answer in a Midrashic comment, that Lemech foresaw Noah's creation of the first ploughshare, an instrument to ease the cultivation of the ground. More than that I will not give away.

For Rabbi Fohrman there is no excitement comparable to discovering chiasms in the Torah — paired structures in which the first element mirrors in some way the last, the second mirrors the second to last, similar to atbash in gematria. Such structures can occur within a single verse or extend over a long stretch of text, and the connections may be linguistic or thematic. They are, he writes, examples of the Torah serving as a commentary on itself by emphasizing the central element to which both sides of the pattern point.

Chiasms abound in the Torah, though most of us would likely miss them and just wonder why the text seems repetitive. Rabbi Fohrman explicates one in parshas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 17:1–17). The first sets of pairs are relatively simple. At the beginning of the passage, Avraham's age, 99, is mentioned; at the end, his age as of Yitzchak's foretold birth, 100. The next pair of elements consists of Avraham falling on his face, in response to Hashem speaking to him. In the next pairing, Avraham is told that he will be a father of nations, which mirrors a similar description of Sarah towards the end of the passage. Corresponding to that status, Avraham's name is changed from Avram to Avraham, and on the other side of the center point of the passage, Sarai's name is changed to Sarah.

Now, things get a little more complicated than most of us would have seen. Two chiasmic structures within the larger chiasm mirror each other, and both contain a verb with the root ה-פ-ר. In the first chiasm, Avraham is told that he will become fruitful (v'hifreisi), and that nations and kings will descend from him. Individuals become nations and unify further under a king. The other side of the chiasm describes what happens to the one who nullifies (הפר) the covenant: he is cut off from the nation, and returns to being an isolated individual.

I have not even exhausted the chiasm or explicated the two middle verses concerning the covenant. That I'll leave to the reader. Just one hint: When all is done, the mystery of the Israelites undergoing circumcision on the eve of going into battle at Jericho, an action contraindicated for any regular army, becomes understood.

Join Rabbi Fohrman as he peels away layer after layer of Torah.

Science is not the Yellow Brick Road

Everyone from politicians to respectable people seeks to wrap themselves in the mantle of science. "Just follow the science," we are told over and over, as if doing so were as easy as following the yellow brick road.

It is not, as the COVID-19 crisis makes clear. A Jerusalem Post article last week, for instance, quoted two experts on the possible long-term dangers of two new revolutionary vaccines based on genetic material produced in a lab (mRNA), which enters cells and takes over their protein-making machinery. Because the form of the vaccine is novel, we cannot know what its long-range effects will be, said one infectious disease expert, while acknowledging that the urgency of producing a vaccine justifies taking

higher risks — among them autoimmune conditions and the persistence of induced immunogen expression.

Another expert, however, felt there was little concern because mRNA molecules are very fragile and not long-lasting. But that, of course, only raises another question — that of the vaccine's long-term efficacy.

If there is one thing we have been told repeatedly, it is that wearing masks protects us and those around us. And we all want to believe that, if only to maintain some feeling of control over our lives. (I, for one, will continue wearing my mask outside the home.)

But a recent Danish study of close to 6,000 participants, published in the Annals of Internal Medicine (after rejection by three prestigious journals), found no statistically significant difference in rates of COVID-19 infection among those who were provided with 50 masks and instructed to wear masks outside the home over a two-month period and those who were not. While far from conclusive — e.g., about half those in the mask-wearing group were not fully compliant — it still raised questions about how powerful a tool masks are.

(Because neither group existed in an environment in which everyone else used masks, the study is relevant, at most, to the protective value of masks, but is not probative with respect to masks' ability to prevent one from transmitting the disease.)

But nothing brings out the difficulty of navigating the science more than dueling op-eds in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal this week. In the former, the dean of Brown University's School of Public Health lambasted Senate hearings on the usefulness of a number of drugs, including hydroxychloroquine, for early stage COVID-19 sufferers. He states flatly, "Trial after trial found no evidence that hydroxychloroquine improves outcomes for COVID-19 patients."

But just the day before in the Wall Street Journal, Dr. Joseph Ladapo, a Harvard-trained MD-PhD and professor at UCLA Medical School, wrote a piece entitled, "Too much Caution is Killing Covid Patients," arguing that doctors should follow the evidence for promising therapies rather than demanding the certainty of randomized controlled trials. When treatment options are few — e.g., quarantine and hope for the best — he writes, "holding out for certainty can be catastrophic."

He mentions at least three drugs that have been used, and found safe, in other contexts for decades. And writes of HCQ, "A meta-analysis of five randomized clinical trials showed that early use of HCQ reduced infection, hospitalization, and death by 24%." Using safe medications at home, he argues, is the optimal public health strategy for preventing hospital overcrowding and death.

What is a layperson supposed to do when confronted by such blatant differences of opinion among experts?

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה