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ON MIKETZ - CHANUKAH - 5776

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A Chanukah Shiur

by **Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**

Delivered at Moriah Synagogue, circa-1950.

Transcribed by **Rabbi Nisson E. Shulman**

The Talmud contains an entire tractate devoted to Purim, Megillah, but scarcely two and a half daf for Chanukah; merely a beraita, Mai Chanukah, some discussion about how you light the lights, that you may not benefit from them, how long they are to remain lit, and that is all. Why? In Kitvei HaKodesh, too, we have an entire Megillah for Purim, and we have none for Chanukah. Even Megilat Chashmonaim is not considered part of Kitvei HaKodesh, although it was written by a contemporary. It is not given any importance by our Sages. Why?

I suggest the Gemarah purposely hid the miracle of Chanukah, covering it up, and told us only certain things but not everything about it. For there are two worlds, alma deiskasya vealma deisgalya, the apparent world, and the world beneath the surface. Man sees the nigleh, the apparent, but often overlooks the nistar, the hidden world. And because of this limited vision, much distortion ensues. In consequence, only the nigleh, the superficial, is usually celebrated on Chanukah, and this causes us to overlook the real miracle of the holiday.

What do we see in the account of Chanukah? The obvious story; slavery, revolt, military victory. Even the miracle of the cruse of oil is part of the alma deisgalya of the Chanukah miracle. It is important to perceive the alma deiskasya, that which lies beneath the surface, as well.

Why go into it? Because if only according to the alma deisgalya, we would no longer have a Chanukah. We had more, and greater military triumphs since then; David Hamelech, Yanai Hamelech, etc. We do not celebrate them, for we commemorate only those events which have consequences through the ages, until today.

The Rambam declares that the part of Israel conquered by Joshua is sanctified only as long as we remained on the land, but that kedushah was removed as soon as we were exiled, since it was a kedushah of kibush. According to this, we would not be able to celebrate the victory of Chanukah today since we had been driven from Eretz Yisrael.

Our sages tell us that there were ten miracles which daily used to happen to our forefathers in the Temple, and one of them is exactly like the miracle of the cruse of oil. The ner tamid burned for 24 hours while it contained only enough oil in its reservoir to burn for half that time. That took place every day during the centuries the Temple stood. Yet the miracle in the Bet haMikdash is not celebrated because we today have neither the Bet haMikdash nor the ner tamid. This should also apply to the miracle of the Chanukah lights. There is no reason to celebrate a miracle that no longer exists. So the only reason for celebrating Chanukah today depends on the alma deiskasya of this holiday.

Zarim, strangers, entered the Bet Hamikdash twice. Once, as described in the bereita in the tractate Shabbat in the time of the Chashmonaim; Keshenichnesu haYevanim baHeychal..., and a second time when the Roman General Titus entered the Holy of Holies.

There is a difference between these two events. Titus entered the Holy of Holies, and destroyed the Bet haMikdash.. This is expressed in the passage describing how Natal Titus sayif vekara et haparochet - But the Greeks didn't destroy; they defiled. Tim'u kal hashemanim.

The consequence of Rome's entry was churban. The Greek entry produced tum'a. Why? And why didn't the Greeks destroy the Heychal?

In the Talmud, Moed Katan, we find: Amar Rav Huna, haroeh sefer Torah shenisraf chayav likroa shte keriot; ahas al hagevil veachas al haketav, sheneemar (when the King Yehoyakim burned Yirmiyahu's megillah), achar serof hamelech et hagevilim veet hadevarim.

At first glance this is contradicted by the episode recounted in the Talmud, Avoda Zara, Besh'a'shesarf Rabban Chananya ben Tradyon, shaaluhu talmidav, Rabbi, ma ata roeh.... He answered, gevilim nisrafim veotiyot porchot. So we see that when you burn a Sefer Torah you can only burn the parchment! Then why did Rav Huna who was a later sage, demand two kriyot, if you can't burn the letters?

The answer is, that it depends on who burns the Sefer Torah. If it is burned by Gentiles, as when Rabban Chanania ben Tradyon was martyred, then only the parchment burns. A Gentile only has power over the guf, the gevilim. The otiyot, the letters, remain whole. They fly, not heavenward, but into the hearts of the students.... The more the gevilim are burned, the mightier the otiyot.

But when Jews, themselves, begin to burn sefarim, Vayehi kisrof hamelech et hamegillah, then the otiyot are also destroyed. For not only the guf, but also the neghamah, is destroyed. Gentiles can only destroy. A Jew can also defile. Gevilim nisrafim, veotiyot nitma'im.

Mizmor leAsaf, Elokim, bau goyim lenahalatecha. Said our Sages, Mizmor? Kina mibaya? Ela sheshafchu chatamim al haetzim veal haavanim. Chasam Sofer says, Mizmor leAsaf, why? Because only Goyim came into your nachala and not Jews. Therefore, shafchu chatamim al haetzim veal haavanim.

When the Romans came into the Bet haMikdash, there were no Jews helping them, so it was only gevilim nisrafim, because bau goyim benachalatecha. But in the case of Chanukah, it was not only Greeks who entered the Heychal. The gezerot hashemad began not with the Goyim, but rather in Yerushalayim, and the first who began it were Jews.

The nephew of Yosi Ish Tzereda was Yehoyakim ben achos Yosi ish Tzereda. He was the one who revealed the secret that there were a group of Jews who would not defend themselves on Shabbat, and to him are attributed the murder of the thousands in the cave on that Shabbat...

The problem of Chanukah was not destruction, but defilement, tum'a;. tim'u kol hashemanim. Kesheamad malchut Yavan? Lohi, ela kesheamdu hamityavanim... But our rabbis sought to hide this as much as possible because dibru belashon nekiya.

Alma deisgalya was the war against the Greeks. Alma deiskasya was the war against the Hellenists.

So why don't we see this in the texts? We do, but we must lift the cover, since our sages did not want to speak evil about the Jews, even about the wicked ones, and so they hid the real story between the lines.

The whole story of Chanukah was euphemised. This is particularly apparent from the prayer, Biyemey Matityanu... The excessive repetition expresses it very well. "You, in Your great mercy, stood by them in the time of their distress; ravta et rivam - you fought their battle". More explicitly, "danta et dinam - you judged their case." Do you want us to be even more explicit? "You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak". Even more explicitly? "The many into the hands of the few". Still not satisfied? "The pure into the hands of the impure". Do you, then, demand an even more explicit statement? Very well, but we say it sadly and very reluctantly, reshaim beyad tzadikim, vezeidim beyad oskei Toratecha".

From the time the Jews re-entered the Heychal, the war against the mityavnim was virtually won, and mityavnim were nevermore in the majority. So this is an eternal miracle. That is why we still celebrate it....

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subject: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Miketz**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #925 – Kavod Malchus – How Far Do You Go? Good Shabbos & Freilichin Chanukah!

A Long Wait Followed By A Speedy Deliverance

Pharaoh, who had experienced a couple of very troubling dreams, was told that there was a person in jail who knew how to interpret dreams. "So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit. He shaved his hair and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh." [Bereshis 41:14]. The sefer Yismach Yehudah quotes a second sefer (Matzmeach Yeshuos) which derives a tremendous lesson from this narrative.

Yosef languished in prison for many years. When he finally got out, his exit from prison came very quickly: Vayereetzuhu min habor – they hurried him out of the pit. The lesson is one that we need to bear in mind throughout our lives – namely – Yeshu'as Hashem k'heref ayin – the Salvation of the L-rd comes in the blink of an eye.

A person can be in a trying situation for years and years and years and see no light at the end of the tunnel, and nevertheless deliverance can in fact come out of nowhere, in literally a split second. This idea is emphasized by the prophet Isaiah: "...I am Hashem it its time I will hasten it (b'Ita achishena)" [Yeshaya 60:22].

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 98a] infers from this pasuk that redemption can come at one of two times – either in its appointed time (b'Ita) or it can be hastened to come earlier, whenever Hashem desires to bring it earlier based on our merit (achishena).

This is the Talmudic exegesis, but the simple interpretation of the pasuk is that "I will bring it at the proper time quickly". Meaning – we have been in exile for 2000 years. Millions and millions of Jews have been born and died expecting redemption and it has not yet arrived. However, that should not discourage us from accepting the fact that it can and it will in fact come speedily, when the time for its arrival is upon us. This is the literal interpretation of the pasuk: It will be in its time, but when it will happen, it will happen very quickly. As overwhelming and as interminable as the gulus [exile] seems that should not discourage us from thinking that things can turn around on a dime.

This is the lesson of Yosef's release from prison. Despite the fact that he languished in prison for all these years, in fact, when the Geulah [deliverance] came, it was "Vayereetzuhum min habor" [they QUICKLY pulled him from the pit].

Unfortunately, this is an extremely common scenario in many facets of life. There are people whose children are looking to find a marriage partner.

Sometimes the process can take a very long time and it is an extremely disheartening time for both parents and children. Quite often, however, when it does in fact happen – it happens just like that (snap of the fingers)! The boy meets the right girl; the girl meets the right boy. They had each been dating for who knows how long and then suddenly it just happens that they are sure they found the right one! This too is an example of b'Ita achishena [in its time I will hasten its coming]. I hope that this will serve as encouragement to the thousands of people who endure this experience.

The Yismach Yehudah quotes the following story involving Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav): Rav Soloveitchik was going to be Mesader Kiddushin [officiate at the wedding] for one of his students. At the Chuppah, the young man realized that he left the ring at home. The Brisker Rav insisted that they hire a taxi, send someone home to retrieve the ring and delay the wedding until the ring arrived. It took fifteen minutes. The ring arrived and they proceeded to the Chuppah. At the Chuppah, the Chosson was about ready to place the ring on the Kallah's finger and say "Harei at mekudshes li"(the formula for transacting the Kiddushin) and he dropped the ring.

This gave everyone pause. First, he forgot the ring and then he dropped the ring. Speaking of bad omens! Being the halachist that he was, the Brisker Rav made light of these "omens" and told the couple, "This means absolutely nothing!" It only means that a Chuppah needs to take place "b'sha'ah tova u'mutzlachas" [at a good and auspicious moment]. Fifteen minutes ago, it was not a sha'ah tova u'mutzlachas. Thirty seconds ago, it was not a sha'ah tova u'mutzlachas. The sha'ah tova u'mutzlachas was exactly fifteen minutes and thirty seconds after the originally scheduled time of the Chuppah and that is when it has taken place.

It is this way with all shiduchim [marriage matches]. Sometimes the sha'ah tova u'mutzlachas takes more than fifteen minutes and thirty seconds. Sometimes it can take five years, ten years, or even longer. We need to remember the b'Ita achishena. When the time will finally come, it will come with haste. G-d willing, the future redemption will also come in its proper time (b'Ita) and it will come speedily (achishena).

Yosef Emulated The Almighty's Attribute

There is an interesting Ba'al HaTurim in this week's parsha. On the pasuk, "And to Yosef was born two sons, before the coming of the year of famine, whom Osnas daughter of Poti-Phera, Chief of On, bore to him." [Bereshis 41:50] the Baal HaTurim comments (as is his trademark): There are only two places in Chumash where the word "u'l'Yosef" [And to Yosef] appears – here and in Moshe's bracha to the Tribe of Yosef in Zos HaBracha: "And to Yosef he said: Blessed by Hashem is his land..." [Devarim 33:13]

The lesson to be derived, teaches the Ba'al HaTurim, is that since Yosef properly abstained from marital relations during the years of famine (derived from the fact that the pasuk emphasizes his two sons were born before the start of the years of famine), he merited that Hashem should bless his land. This exegesis appears in Tractate Tanis, which goes on to state: "Whoever participates with the community in their time of trouble will merit participating with them also in their time of comfort." [Taanis 11a].

The land that Yosef received in Eretz Yisrael was blessed with the bounty of the Almighty. How did Yosef merit this? Yosef was the Viceroy, the second most powerful man in the world. He lived in the lap of luxury. However, he specifically denied himself the pleasure of marital relations because people were suffering and he wanted to empathize with them. For this reason, he was rewarded with especially bountiful land.

Rashi writes (there in Parshas Zos HaBracha): "There was no land filled with such bounty amongst the inheritance of all the tribes as that of the land of Yosef." It was the most fertile land in all of Eretz Yisrael.

He shared the burden with other people and for that, the Ribono shel Olam paid him back, many times over.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon makes a beautiful observation on the comment of the Ba'al HaTurim. The bracha of Moshe to Yosef in Zos HaBracha goes on to add "and with the delicacies of the sun's crops; and with the delicacies of

the moon's yield; and with the beginning of the early mountains; and with the delicacies of eternal hills; and with the delicacies of the land and its fullness; and by the goodwill of Him who rests in the thorn bush (u'ratzon shochnei sneh)... [Devorim 33:14-16]. What does the pasuk mean by "U'ratzon shochnei sneh"? Rashi in Zos HaBracha explains that "the One who rests in the thorn bush" refers to the Almighty who is called shochnei sneh because he appeared to the Jewish People for the first time from a (burning) bush.

Rashi, in Parshas Shmos, explains that the reason HaShem made His first appearance to Moshe from a bush was because it is a low lying tree. Hashem said to the Jewish people, so to speak, "You are in pain, you are suffering from the bondage of Egypt, I am in pain, also." This is a physical manifestation of the concept "Imo Anochi b'Tzarah" [I am with him in his time of trouble]. I feel your pain. This is the Attribute of the Almighty. He dwells in the thorn bush and thereby participates with the community in times of travail.

Rav Matisyahu points out that there are only two times in all of Torah that the Almighty is referred to as One who dwells in a thorn bush – that first time in Shmos and in the bracha to Yosef in Zos HaBracha. The point is, he says, that the Almighty "bears the burden with his 'friend'", as it were. (He is a Noseh b'ol im chavreiro.) He feels the pain of the Jewish people and He appreciates a person who feels the pain of others as well. Yosef was such a person and Hashem rewarded him appropriately with the most bountiful portion of Eretz Yisrael.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Miketz is provided below: Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadychiel.org or visit <http://www.yadychiel.org/> for further information. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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Why Hanukkah is the Perfect Festival for Religious Freedom
Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

December 7, 2015

Hanukkah is the festival on which Jews celebrate their victory in the fight for religious freedom more than two thousand years ago. Tragically that fight is no less important today, and not only for Jews, but for people of all faiths.

The Jewish story is simple enough. In around 165 BCE Antiochus IV, ruler of the Syrian branch of the Alexandrian empire, began to impose Greek culture on the Jews of the land of Israel. Funds were diverted from the Temple to public games and drama competitions. A statue of Zeus was erected in Jerusalem. Jewish religious rituals such as circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath were banned. Those who kept them were persecuted. It was one of the great crises in Jewish history. There was a real possibility that Judaism, the world's first monotheism, would be eclipsed.

A group of Jewish pietists rose in rebellion. Led by a priest, Mattathias of Modi'in, and his son Judah the Maccabee, they began the fight for liberty. Outnumbered, they suffered heavy initial casualties, but within three years they had secured a momentous victory. Jerusalem was restored to Jewish hands. The Temple was rededicated. The celebrations lasted for eight days. Hanukkah, which means "rededication", was established as a festival to perpetuate the memory of those days.

Almost twenty-two centuries have passed since then, yet today religious liberty, enshrined as article 18 in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is at risk in many parts of the world. Christians are being persecuted throughout the Middle East and parts of Asia. In Mosul, Iraq's

second city, Christians have been kidnapped, tortured, crucified and beheaded. The Christian community, one of the oldest in the world, has been driven out. Yazidis, members of an ancient religious sect, have been threatened with genocide.

In Nigeria Boko Haram, an Islamist group, has captured Christian children and sold them as slaves. In Madagali, Christian men were taken and beheaded, and the women forcibly converted to Islam and taken by the terrorists as wives. Nor has Boko Haram limited itself to persecuting Christians. It has targeted the Muslim establishment as well, and was probably behind the attack on the Grand Mosque in Kano.

Sectarian religious violence in the Central African Republic has led to the destruction of almost all its 436 mosques. In Burma, 140,000 Rohingya Muslims and 100,000 Kachin Christians have been forced to flee. No wonder that the 2015 report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom speaks of "humanitarian crises fuelled by waves of terror, intimidation and violence."

Countries where the crisis is acute include Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Vietnam. In Syria alone, where some of the worst crimes against humanity are taking place, 6.5 million people are internally displaced while 3.3 million have become refugees elsewhere.

Nor is the violence confined to these places. As became evident in the recent terrorist outrage in Paris in which 130 people were murdered, globalization means that conflict anywhere can be exported everywhere. It would be hard to find a precedent in recent history for this widening wave of chaos and barbarity. The end of the Cold War has turned out to be not the start of an era of peace but instead an age of proliferating tribal, ethnic and religious clashes. Region after region has been reduced to what Thomas Hobbes called "the war of every man against every man", in which life becomes "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

Is there a way forward? More than half a century ago the Oxford philosopher John Plamenatz noted that religious freedom was born in Europe in the seventeenth century after a devastating series of religious wars. All it took was a single shift, from the belief that "Faith is the most important thing; therefore everyone should honour the one true faith", to the belief that "Faith is the most important thing; therefore everyone should be free to honour his or her own faith."

This meant that people of all faiths were guaranteed that whichever religion was dominant, he or she would still be free to obey their own call of conscience. Plamenatz's striking conclusion was that "Liberty of conscience was born, not of indifference, not of scepticism, not of mere open-mindedness, but of faith." The very fact that my religion is important to me allows me to understand that your quite different religion is no less important to you.

It took much bloodshed before people were prepared to acknowledge this simple truth, which is why we must never forget the lessons of the past if we are to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Hanukkah reminds us that people will fight for religious freedom, and the attempt to deprive them of it will always end in failure.

The symbol of Hanukkah is the menorah we light for eight days in memory of the Temple candelabrum, purified and rededicated by the Maccabees all those centuries ago. Faith is like a flame. Properly tended, it gives light and warmth, but let loose, it can burn and destroy. We need, in the twenty-first century, a global Hanukkah: a festival of freedom for all the world's faiths. For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we are each free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness of the world.

Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to:
info@jewishdestiny.com date: Wed, Dec 9, 2015 at 3:00 PM subject:
Parshat Miketz 5776- Rabbi Berel Wein
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog MIKETZ

The dreamer is about to be saved by dreams, albeit not the ones that he dreamt but rather those of an unlikely stranger – the Pharaoh of Egypt himself. But dreams are dreams and often times they do not coincide with human reality. What makes Yosef so extraordinary in the eyes of Pharaoh was his ability to, so to speak, dream along with Pharaoh, interpret his dreams and translate them into practical life-saving action. The Torah here teaches us an important lesson about life and events. Everyone has dreams and again, so to speak, they are relatively easy to come by. Nevertheless, it is what follows the dream that counts most. The rabbis and the Talmud taught us that all dreams are judged and realized according to their interpretation. By this statement, they meant to teach us that what is actually done or accomplished with the dream becomes the lasting value of the dream itself. There are many dreams that remain just that – dreams, unfulfilled reveries, good ideas and rosy predictions that somehow never come to action or fruition. Yosef worked his entire life to make his dreams become real and true. He spared no effort to force his brothers to recognize him as their leader and to validate the dreams that he reported to them in his youth. And it was his administrative skill and foresight that made his interpretation of the dreams of the Pharaoh accurate, meaningful and providential. It is only the behavior and actions of humans after the dream that give the dream a challenging and meaningful purpose. The Jewish people have long dreamt and prayed for their return to the Land of Israel and for the ingathering of the exiles to their homeland. Over the past century, in unlikely fits and starts, this dream has taken on reality and substance. And, it did so, certainly, with the help and guidance of Heaven but just as importantly with the actions, achievements and sacrifices of real people and the Jewish world everywhere.

This great dream lay dormant for many centuries because no one acted upon it ...more of a fantasy than a possible reality. But somehow the Jewish people awoke from the slumber of the exile and over the past century has succeeded in bringing this dream to physical reality. It is difficult to assess why it was only in the recent past, historically speaking, that the practicality of the dream began to be emphasized and exploited. There were many great people and great Jewish communities that existed before our time who perhaps would have been deemed more worthy to give flesh and bones to the great dream of Israel. Why did they not do so and why did Jews over the last century and a half devote themselves to the realization of this dream? That will remain one of the many mysteries of God that surround us on a regular basis. But one thing is clear, that the fate of dreams, national and personal, depends upon our practical, human interpretation and implementation of those dreams. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

CHANUKA TODAY

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Maccabees of old lived in a very fortuitous time. Had they lived today they would be accused of extrajudicial executions of the poor Syrian Greeks who, after all, were only trying to kill them and improve their civilization. At least that is certainly how the Foreign Minister of Sweden would have seen the matter. But since Sweden at that time was inhabited by pagan tribes and there was no Internet or media to speak of, we really do not know what the Swedish attitude towards the Maccabees would have been. We can certainly surmise though that it would not have been a positive one. And if the current president of the United States were alive then he would certainly have been critical of the use of arms just to purify the Temple and regain the territory and sovereignty that was rightfully Jewish. He would have advocated conferences, shuttle diplomacy and above all, the willingness to compromise with an enemy that openly professed the desire to destroy you no matter what concessions are granted to it. And the Maccabees were also fortunate that the European Union did not exist then. If it had, then the olive

oil that the Maccabees searched for and eventually found to light the great candelabra in the Temple would have had to be labeled as being produced in areas of the Land of Israel that were previously occupied by the Greeks and now subject to the "occupation" policies of those stubborn Jews. Needless to say, had the United Nations existed then the Maccabees would have been the subject of many resolutions condemning their policies, actions and behavior. But as mentioned above, the Maccabees lived at a time when none of this nonsense existed and, perhaps, that alone is one of the great miracles of our holiday of Chanuka. We are not as fortunate as the Maccabees. For us, all of the above is not a parody but rather the reality of the world in which we live. So, the holiday of Chanuka must come to give us hope and determination and a renewed belief in our cause and our rights. The Maccabees faced not only powerful external enemies but an insidious internal foe as well. The Hellenists amongst the Jews were so influenced and enamored by Greek culture that they actively proposed steps that would have completely snuffed out the Jewish state and Judaism itself. The defeat of the Hellenists within the Jewish world was as vital to the triumph of Chanuka as was the military victory over the Syrian Greek oppressors. The Hellenists distorted Judaism to make it fit their own Hellenist-Greek template of what they considered politically correct and their view of an advanced civilization. The Torah and Jewish tradition in their eyes was antiquated and deserved to be ignored and/or rewritten to fit the then seemingly modern Greek view of the world. Well, the current day Hellenists are alive and well amongst us. They are the leading Israel bashers and tradition haters in the Jewish world. They are driven by a false vision of Jewish values and a complete misunderstanding of the role of Israel in Jewish and world affairs. They not only give comfort to our enemies but in many respects they are our enemies themselves. The Maccabees, if they were alive today, would certainly recognize them as the heirs and followers of the Hellenists of old. We should also think of them in those terms and react accordingly to their baseless charges and pernicious programs. The recent spate of Islamic radical violence the world over has yet to change the mindset of the Western world regarding Israel. The Palestinian narrative regarding Israel is so fixed in the minds of Western academia, media and political leadership that almost no facts, no matter how obvious they may be, can somehow expose that narrative for its basic falseness. The world has long known that the Jews are the canary in the mine. Nevertheless, the world not only tolerated but in many respects even encouraged Islamic violence against the Jewish state and its citizens. After all, only Jews are being killed and Israel is the catalyst for all the violence that wracks the Middle East. But as Pastor Neimoller commented regarding the Nazis, they first came for the Jews and no one rose to object or protect them. Eventually they came for everyone and there was no one left who could object or protect the innocent. Well, they have now come for everyone, everywhere in the Western world. The Maccabees would certainly recognize our current world and they would instill within us the courage to resist annihilation and to rekindle the lamp of hope that Chanuka symbolically represents. Shabbat shalom Happy Chanuka Berel Wein

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**To Wait Without Despair
by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Something extraordinary happens between last week's parsha and this week's. It is almost as if the pause of a week between them were itself part of the story.

Recall last week's parsha about the childhood of Joseph, focussing not on what happened but on who made it happen. Throughout the entire roller-coaster ride of Joseph's early life he is described as passive, not active; the done-to, not the doer; the object, not the subject, of verbs.

It was his father who loved him and gave him the richly embroidered cloak. It was his brothers who envied and hated him. He had dreams, but we

do not dream because we want to but because, in some mysterious way still not yet fully understood, they come unbidden into our sleeping mind.

His brothers, tending their flocks far from home, plotted to kill him. They threw him into a pit. He was sold as a slave. In Potiphar's house he rose to a position of seniority, but the text goes out of its way to say that this was not because of Joseph himself, but because of God: "God was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that God was with him, and that God caused all that he did to prosper in his hands."

Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, and failed, but here too, Joseph was passive, not active. He did not seek her, she sought him. Eventually, "She caught hold of his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside." Using the garment as evidence, she had him imprisoned on a totally false charge. There was nothing Joseph could do to establish his innocence.

In prison, again he became a leader, a manager, but again the Torah goes out of its way to attribute this not to Joseph but to Divine intervention: "God was with Joseph and showed him kindness. He gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer ... Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because God was with him; and whatever he did, God made it prosper."

There he met Pharaoh's chief butler and baker. They had dreams, and Joseph interpreted them, but insisted that it is not he but God who was doing so: "Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.'"

There is nothing like this anywhere else in Tanakh. Whatever happened to Joseph was the result of someone else's deed: those of his father, his brothers, his master's wife, the chief jailer, or God himself. Joseph was the ball thrown by hands other than his own.

Then, for essentially the first time in the whole story, Joseph decided to take fate into his own hands. Knowing that the chief butler was about to be restored to his position, he asked him to bring his case to the attention of Pharaoh: "Remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For indeed I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into prison."

A double injustice had been done, and Joseph saw this as his one chance of regaining his freedom. But the end of the parsha delivers a devastating blow: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, and forgot him." The anticlimax is intense, emphasized by the double verb, "did not remember" and "forgot." We sense Joseph waiting day after day for news. None comes. His last, best hope has gone. He will never go free. Or so it seems.

To understand the power of this anticlimax, we must remember that only since the invention of printing and the availability of books have we been able to tell what happens next merely by turning a page. For many centuries, there were no printed books. People knew the biblical story primarily by listening to it week by week. Those who were hearing the story for the first time had to wait a week to discover what Joseph's fate would be.

The parsha break is thus a kind of real-life equivalent to the delay Joseph experienced in jail, which, as this week's parsha begins by telling us, took "Two whole years." It was then that Pharaoh had two dreams that no one in the court could interpret, prompting the chief butler to remember the man he had met in prison. Joseph was brought to Pharaoh, and within hours was transformed from zero to hero: from prisoner-without-hope to Viceroy of the greatest empire of the ancient world.

Why this extraordinary chain of events? It is telling us something important, but what? Surely this: God answers our prayers, but often not when we thought or how we thought. Joseph sought to get out of prison, and he did get out of prison. But not immediately, and not because the butler kept his promise.

The story is telling us something fundamental about the relationship between our dreams and our achievements. Joseph was the great dreamer of

the Torah, and his dreams for the most part came true. But not in a way he or anyone else could have anticipated. At the end of last week's parsha - with Joseph still in prison - it seemed as if those dreams had ended in ignominious failure. We had to wait for a week, as he had to wait for two years, before discovering that it was not so.

There is no achievement without effort. That is the first principle. God saved Noah from the flood, but first Noah had to build the ark. God promised Abraham the land, but first he had to buy the cave of Machpelah in which to bury Sarah. God promised the Israelites the land, but they had to fight the battles. Joseph became a leader, as he dreamed he would. But first he had to hone his practical and administrative skills, first in Potiphar's house, then in prison. Even when God assures us that something will happen, it will not happen without our effort. A Divine promise is not a substitute for human responsibility. To the contrary, it is a call to responsibility.

But effort alone is not enough. We need *seyata di-Shemaya*, "the help of Heaven." We need the humility to acknowledge that we are dependent on forces not under our control. No one in Genesis invoked God more often than Joseph. As Rashi (to Gen. 39: 3) says, "God's name was constantly in his mouth." He credited God for each of his successes. He recognized that without God he could not have done what he did. Out of that humility came patience.

Those who have achieved great things have often had this unusual combination of characteristics. On the one hand they work hard. They labour, they practice, they strive. On the other, they know that it will not be their hand alone that writes the script. It is not our efforts alone that decide the outcome. So we pray, and God answers our prayers - but not always when or how we expected. (And of course, sometimes the answer is No).

The Talmud (Niddah 70b) says it simply. It asks, What should you do to become rich? It answers: work hard and behave honestly. But, says the Talmud, many have tried this and did not become rich. Back comes the answer: You must pray to God from whom all wealth comes. In which case, asks the Talmud, why work hard? Because, answers the Talmud: The one without the other is insufficient. We need both: human effort and Divine favour. We have to be, in a certain sense, patient and impatient: impatient with ourselves but patient in waiting for God to bless our endeavors.

The week-long delay between Joseph's failed attempt to get out of jail and his eventual success is there to teach us this delicate balance. If we work hard enough, God grants us success - but not when we want but, rather, when the time is right.

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date: Thu, Dec 10, 2015 at 11:05 AM

subject: **Meshech Chochmah - Parshas Miketz**

Parshas Miketz

Divine (Almost) Justice

Now let Paroh seek out a discerning and wise man and place him over the land of Egypt.

Meshech Chochmah: The two dreams do not strike us as equally compelling. If we had to choose one of the two to convey the essential message, we would pick the one featuring sheaves of grain. After all, grain was what this was all about - its abundance, followed by its scarcity. Why, then, is the dream of the grain preceded by one about cows, which seems only marginally related to the message that Paroh was meant to receive?

Ramban's[2] approach to the dreams offers one solution. He sees the two dreams as a matched set. The cows arose from the Nile, because it was recognized as the source of water - and hence sustenance - to the land. The cows themselves were used as draft animals; they pulled the plows that readied the land for sowing. The sheaves represent reaping - the other end of

the growing cycle. The cows and the sheaves, therefore, bookend that cycle. Both contribute equally to the idea of the availability of food.

A Yerushalmi[3] relates a fascinating story that suggests a different solution to our original question. Alexander the Great visited a far-off kingdom, not in search of riches, but to learn how others dispensed justice. He observed a court case presided over by the local king. One party sold a garbage dump to another. The buyer discovered treasure that had been hidden away in that dump. The buyer and seller disputed whether the sale included the hidden treasure, and turned to their monarch for a just resolution. He learned that the two litigants had unmarried children, and suggested that they marry each other, and in that way, both sides would enjoy the treasure.

Alexander laughed, prompting his royal colleague to challenge him and ask how he would have ruled in his own kingdom. Alexander said that he would have had both litigants killed, and kept the spoils for himself. The king asked whether the sun shone and the rain fell on Alexander's kingdom. Alexander responded affirmatively. "Do you have small cattle?" asked the king. "You had better own cattle. You survive in the merit of your cattle, as is written,[4] 'You save man and animal!'"

The king upbraided Alexander concerning his ease with gross corruption of justice. Such a society, he argued, would surely not be sustained by G-d. It survived, he reasoned, because Hashem's compassion reached the animals. He sustained them - and the humans among them came along for the ride.

We know that Paroh established himself as a deity. He fully played the role, staying aloof from the petty affairs of man. He did not involve himself with the problems of ordinary mortals, not oversaw the running of his kingdom. The hands-on leadership of Egypt he left to layer upon layer of government bureaucracy. (As the saying goes, woe unto the land whose government officials are many!) Such governments are notoriously inefficient and given to corruption. They almost beg for miscarriages of justice, especially by the powerful who can act as they please without fear of consequences. Thus, it was acceptable for defenseless foreigner like Yosef to be thrown into prison indefinitely and without recourse to justice, all because of what was essentially a private matter that affected a person in a position of power. Each official could do what he wished, without fear of reprisal.

Hashem's message to Paroh with the dream of the cows was the same as the king to Alexander: Justice has been so corrupted in your realm, that the primary focus of the good years will be the animals. They are the ones worthwhile saving. Furthermore, if you expect real relief from the upcoming famine, you must first address the endemic corruption in your realm. The cow-dream came first to instruct Paroh that his first order of business was to make his subjects - not just their animals - worthy of Divine compassion in their own right.

Yosef jumps in with advice. "Let Paroh seek out a discerning and wise man." Having a deity sit on the throne and absent himself from the pedestrian affairs of real people virtually ensured corruption. Egypt needs an ordinary human being to judge and to guide its citizens, not a god-man whose sanctity prevents him from attending to the affairs of his realm, leaving it lawless and corrupt. This man's capability should be in his grasp of accepted practice, and of efficiency.

Yosef continues: "Place him over the land of Egypt." This, too, is a reaction to the frequent miscarriage of justice in Egypt. With an uncaring monarch on the throne, many a nobleman could trample upon the law and expect to get away without penalty. Yosef tells Paroh that the antidote to this is someone of authority over the entire land of Egypt, who will serve in an oversight position, and will be the ultimate recourse for those who feel they were mistreated. He will be motivated to act responsibly, because he will also be given ultimate responsibility in the event of any wrongdoing.

Yosef's position dictated the charges he leveled against his brothers. He accused them of being spies - a crime against the State, and therefore governed by extrajudicial policies. He did not have to subscribe to any rules

or protocols in dealing with a crime against the State. Sitting at the top of the pyramid of power, he did not have to submit to any oversight in this matter.

Paroh fully buys into the arrangement. "I am Paroh. Without you no man may lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." [5] He meant that he would continue in his guise as the river-god, and hold himself aloof from the everyday affairs of the realm. All those goings-on would be subject to the approval and oversight of his appointee, Yosef.

[1] Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bereishis 41:33

[2] Bereishis 41:2

[3] Bava Metzia 2:5

[4] Tehillim 36:7

[5] Bereishis 41:44

From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date: Thu, Dec 10, 2015

Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Mikeitz

Yosef saw his brothers and he recognized them, but he acted like a stranger towards them. (42:7) Yosef apparently wanted to conceal his identity from his brothers. He wanted them to think that he was the Egyptian viceroys, a pagan, not a Jew, and certainly not their long-lost brother, Yosef. Why? A practical, insightful explanation for Yosef's behavior is rendered by Horav Moshe Yaakov Ribicov, zl, the holy man known as the Der Shuster, HaSandlor, the Shoemaker. Let me first digress from the subject and introduce the reading audience to this holy man. The Sandlor lived in Tel Aviv, and the Chazon Ish considered him to be rosh ha'lamed vov tzaddikim, the head/leader of the thirty-six righteous Jews, in whose merit the world is sustained. These men are, for all public purposes, simple Jews, not on rabbinical boards, honorees at dinners, Roshei Yeshivah. They keep to themselves and conceal their righteous activity. It takes another holy Jew, of the caliber of the Chazon Ish, to recognize the greatness of such an individual. The Rosh Yeshivah of Ponevez, Horav Yaakov Edelstein, Shlita, was very close with him.

I present one short vignette (among many) to demonstrate his saintliness: The Sandlor was once invited to attend a Bris Milah, circumcision. Upon entering the room, he raised up his head, looked around and yelled out, Ich zeh em nish! Ich zeh em nish! "I do not see him! I do not see him!" He immediately left the room. He was referring to Eliyahu HaNavi who attends every Bris.

The Sandlor's reference to not seeing Eliyahu HaNavi made everyone anxious - enough to delay the Bris, while they investigated why Eliyahu HaNavi would not attend this Bris. A number of hours went by, and the matter was resolved. The original child who was supposed to have been circumcised had been somehow switched at the hospital and exchanged for a gentile child. The parents had been clueless, and the error might have gone undetected for some time. Once they brought the true Jewish-born child to the home, they called the holy Sandlor to attend the Bris. When he entered the home, his face lit up as he announced, Ah, yetzt zeh ich im, "Ah, now I see him." The Bris took place in the presence of Eliyahu HaNavi.

Having said this, we return to our original question: What lesson is the Torah teaching by informing us that Yosef made a point not to identify himself to his brothers? The Sandlor explains that Yosef did this due to his righteous nature. He originally had dreamt that he would achieve a position of distinction, as a result of which his brothers would bow down to him. They, of course, did not acquiesce to Yosef's dream and, indeed, were quite adamantly against any thought of their bowing down to Yosef.

Under normal circumstances, when one wins a debate, a dispute with someone, the victor might act presumptuous, often displaying a sense of pomposity in the presence of the loser. The individual who had not emerged successful is, likewise, ill at ease when he confronts the person who defeated him. This is only if he is aware of the victor's identity. If, however, the

victor's identity is concealed, then the individual who lost has no undue feelings of shame, since no one is aware of his defeat.

When the brothers bowed down to Yosef, it was his moment of triumph. The dreams that they attempted to squash were, in effect, a prophecy that came true! Imagine if Yosef had revealed himself to them; it would have been devastating. In order that his brothers not feel bad that all this time they had been wrong and Yosef had actually been destined to become royalty, a person to whom they had to bow down to, he covered up the truth; so that they would not recognize him.

The desire to vindicate oneself before those who had suspected him of impropriety is all-consuming. Imagine, all of those years Yosef was reviled as the usurper of the Patriarchal legacy, a man who sought to undermine his own brothers and lord over them. His brothers had reached a halachic conclusion that Yosef was a rodef, pursuer, who sought to destroy them. For this, he warranted death. In the end, they compromised by selling him instead. When they sold him, it was good riddance; they were finally free of his maligning mouth and arrogant dreams. For years, this had been their impression of Yosef. Now, at this moment of vindication, Yosef could have easily (and many of us would have gloated to put our detractors in their proper place) revealed the truth. He did not, because it would mean hurting his brothers' feelings.

What about Yosef's feelings? What about all of those years of separation from his father, from his home? Rejected and left to die, then sold to the Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt, one would think that Yosef had every reason to gloat, but he did not, because to hurt another person, especially his brothers, despite their animus toward him, was the farthest thing from his mind.

A great person does not minimize himself over petty and sometimes not so petty occurrences, which have offended or hurt him. He rises above the pain and reimburses good for the bad that was done to him. A great person empathizes with the pain of others, even if it is self-inflicted, or if they are personally responsible for their own downfall. Furthermore, a great person does not gloat when Hashem pays back the individual who hurt him. He understands that it is all part of a Divine plan. He was destined to suffer, and the other person was the tool Hashem used to inflict him with that suffering.

Caring for the feelings of a fellow Jew is the hallmark of greatness. Stories abound about the lives of our Torah leaders and the love they manifested for each individual Jew. They felt the pain of every Jew and, likewise, shared their joy. This is because a Torah leader does not live for himself. He lives for Klal Yisrael. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, was once asked by a man for the Rosh Yeshivah's assistance in helping him resolve a serious financial crisis. Rav Pam listened intently and then wrote the man a check. The Rosh Yeshivah's financial portfolio was far from great, yet he did his utmost to help the man. The man began to weep profusely. Apparently, he wanted more than the Rosh Yeshivah's check. He was seeking his help in soliciting his talmidim, students, who were financially successful and who could spare some money to help him. Rav Pam apologized and said that he could not possibly call upon his students to give money generously - again. He had just turned to them concerning another matter. There is a certain point at which the well goes dry.

The man understood - accepting the Rosh Yeshivah's explanation. Later that day a talmid visited the Rosh Yeshivah and noticed him going through a box of index cards - and crying. "Rebbe, what is it about the index cards that provokes such weeping?" the talmid asked.

"I just turned a man away empty handed because I could not help him," the Rosh Yeshivah said. "He asked me to call my well-to-do talmidim and ask them to help. I told him that I could not do it. He understood but, nonetheless, left my house crying. I just went through my index cards to see if there might be someone whom I missed, someone who could help this man. Alas, I could not find anyone."

"I understand," the talmid said, "but why is the Rebbe crying?"

"I am crying because he is crying. How could I not cry, if another Jew is in pain?"

In order to achieve the Torah-mandated level of love for a fellow Jew, one must acquire the middah, character trait, of humility. Without humility, one neither can achieve achdus, unity, nor can he truly empathize with his fellow. In his Sefer Yismach Yisrael, Horav Yisrael Chortkover, zl, writes: "One of the most important aims of the derech ha'chassidus, the Chassidic approach toward serving Hashem, is achieving the goal of true harmony and love among Yidden. The Baal Shem Tov and the Mezritcher Maggid constantly stressed the need for their talmidim, disciples, to live together in achdus.

In order to achieve a supreme level of achdus one must, however, first acquire the trait of humility. As long as a person maintains pride and arrogates himself over others (because he considers himself better/higher than they), he will remain unable to live together with them in harmony."

In a second dvar Torah, the Rebbe makes the following observation: "The mitzvah of V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho, to 'Love your fellow Jew as (you love) yourself' is comprised of two parts. The first half is to 'love one's fellow Jew,' and the second half is to love him 'as oneself.' It follows that someone who has an inflated opinion of himself will find it difficult to honor his friends properly. He will never be able to love them (properly), 'as himself,' for he is (has) convinced (himself) that he is far superior to them all."

He searched; he began with the oldest and ended with the youngest; and the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack. (44:12)

Stealing represents a character defect - if the thief is an adult. The mere fact that a person is not affected by the pain he inflicts upon another person is in and of itself an indication of a flawed, even perverted, personality. When the thief is a young child, it is usually an indication of a lack of ethical values which were not inculcated in him by a responsible mentor. We will soon discern exactly who the responsible mentor is. While I often include a story only for the purpose of buttressing the lesson which the dvar Torah teaches, in this instance, the story is so compelling and the lesson so powerful, that I take the liberty of quoting it without an accompanying dvar Torah.

The story is quoted by Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita, in the name of Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, venerable Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaas, was asked to be mesader kedushin, perform the marriage ceremony, for a young man. (The story does not mention if the chassan, groom, was a student of Rav Pam.) Shortly before the chupah, the chassan broke down in bitter weeping. Rav Pam asked everyone to leave as he spoke softly to the young man. "Tell me, what is wrong?" the Rosh Yeshivah asked. "What provoked your sudden outburst of weeping?"

The chassan related the following heartrending story: "I was fourteen-years-old and studying in elementary school. One of the boys in the class had a trinket to which I helped myself. The victim of the theft was noticeably upset and complained to the rebbe. The rebbe immediately closed the door, not permitting anyone to leave, and then began to search everyone's pockets. I was quick with my hands, and I placed the trinket in the jacket pocket of another student. A few minutes later, the rebbe discovered the lost trinket in the pocket of the "innocent" student and declared him to be the thief!

"The rebbe did not leave well enough alone by simply sitting down with the student and talking about his lamentable disregard for another person's property; rather, he proclaimed that this student was a thief, mercilessly shamed him before the class, called his parents, and took him to the principal. The parents were devastated and terribly angry, refusing to believe their son's claim of innocence. Sadly, the cards were stacked against the boy. No one believed his innocence. After all, the trinket had been discovered in his possession. The strong punishment which the boy received, coupled with the horrible humiliation that he experienced, catalyzed a downward spiral in his mitzvah observance. He was angry that no one believed him, disappointed by the behavior of frum, observant, people, who should have been serving as an example for others to emulate. Eventually, he left

Yiddishkeit and now is about to marry out of the faith! All of this is my fault. How can I go to the chupah knowing that I am the cause of another Jew marrying a gentile?"

Rav Pam looked the chassan in the face, and -- in his calm, soothing voice -- said, "There is no doubt that you committed an act of theft, which is no simple matter. It is a maase chamur, egregious (sinful) act. You may not blame yourself, however, for the spiritual demise of your friend. The primary guilt lies squarely on the shoulders of his parents and rebbe for not believing him when he claimed innocence."

Veritably, what kind of parent turns a deaf ear to a child's plea of innocence? How can a person call himself a mechanech, educator, if he acts so heartlessly and does not attempt to ferret out the truth? When a child cries out, we should at least lend a compassionate ear and look for a reason to believe him. Otherwise, we are not worthy of the lofty title of parent or rebbe!

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Parsha Potpourri by Ozer Alport –
Parshas Mikeitz

Vayehi mikeitz sh'nasaym yamim u'Paroh choleim v'hinei omeid al ha'ye'or
(41:1) Vayedaber Paroh el Yosef b'chalomi hineni omeid al s'fas ha'ye'or
(41:17)

There are numerous discrepancies between the actual dream of Pharaoh and the way in which he related it to Yosef. For example, in his dream he saw himself actually standing on the river, while in telling it to Yosef he claimed to have been standing on the banks of the river. Why did he change this detail when recounting his dream to Yosef?

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the Nile river was one of the Egyptian gods, and in envisioning himself literally standing on it, he was showing how wicked and conceited he was, in thinking himself even more mighty and powerful than the god he purported to worship, yet he was embarrassed to admit as such to Yosef, so he doctored it and reported having seen himself standing by the banks of the river. Yosef recognized the change and made no reference to the banks of the river in interpreting the dream, as he knew that hadn't been part of the original dream.

Rav Meir Shapiro and Rav Boruch Teumim-Frankel beautifully suggest that this is the meaning of the verse in Tehillim (81:6) Eidus bi'Yehosef samo b'tzeiso al Eretz Mitzrayim s'fas lo yadati eshma, which can be read as referring to the testimony of Yosef upon his rise to greatness in Egypt, that he heard a reference to "the banks" of the river, but had no clue why it was being mentioned or how to interpret it as it hadn't been part of the original dream.

K'she'amda malchus Yavan ha'resha'a al am'cha Yisroel l'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram me'chukei retzonecha (Al HaNissim) On Chanuka we add a paragraph known as "Al HaNissim" to the Shemoneh Esrei prayers and to Birkas HaMazon, in which we thank Hashem for the miracles that He performed at this time. In this prayer, we describe the threat posed to us by the Greeks in the times of the Chanuka miracle as an attempt to cause us to forget the Torah and to deny us the ability to perform mitzvos. Although it is physically possible to prevent another person from doing mitzvos or engaging in additional Torah study, how is it possible to cause somebody to forget the Torah that he has already learned?

Rav Meir Wahrsager of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim posits that in their war against Hashem and His Torah, the Greeks understood that it was impossible for them to delete knowledge from somebody's mind, so in their wickedness, they instead developed and promoted a new culture and value

system in which Torah has no significance, and by making it irrelevant, it would naturally be forgotten. The Ramban (Vayikra 16:8) describes Aristotle, one of the foremost Greek philosophers, as denying anything that couldn't be physically sensed and experienced. The Greek's new value system was one in which only chitzoniyyus (externality) was important. They constructed magnificent edifices, created beautiful art, and glorified the human body, but the underlying common denominator behind all of their advances and developments revolved was the pursuit of superficial accomplishments.

In contrast to the advice of Chazal in Pirkei Avos (4:20) not to look at the vessel, but at what it contains inside, the Greek approach was precisely the opposite. As the Jewish people became surrounded by this culture and the Greek philosophy began to permeate their thinking, they slowly began to forget about Torah and mitzvos, which revolve around a focus on penimiyus (internals). We can't observe or measure any physical impact on the world when we put on tefillin, shake a lulav, or recite the daily prayers, because Torah and mitzvos occupy the world of the internal, beyond the facade and the glitter.

The Gemora in Shabbos (130a) teaches that the Jewish people are compared to a yonah, a dove. There are no coincidences in the Hebrew language, and the word yonah is comprised of the word Yavan - Greece - with an additional letter "heh" at the end. In Hebrew, adding a "heh" to the end of a word transforms it into the feminine grammatical construct. While Yavan epitomizes the male emphasis on the external, the Jewish people possess the uniquely feminine ability to recognize and appreciate the internal.

This insight into the Jewish focus on penimiyus and the non-Jewish emphasis on chitzoniyyus can also help us understand a seemingly perplexing comment by Rashi at the beginning of Parshas Vayeishev (37:1), which is read in most years on the Shabbos just before Chanuka. Rashi questions the juxtaposition of the beginning of Parshas Vayeishev, which begins by mentioning Yaakov's son Yosef, to the end of Parshas Vayishlach, which concludes by listing the kings and leaders who were descended from Eisav.

Rashi explains the connection by way of a parable. A flax merchant was traveling with camels that were laden with a large quantity of flax, and as the merchant passed by, a blacksmith wondered aloud where so much flax could possibly be stored. A wise man responded by telling the blacksmith that his tools could produce one spark that would burn and consume all of the flax. Similarly, when Yaakov saw that so many powerful leaders would be descended from Eisav, he wondered how they could possibly all be conquered. The Torah responds to Yaakov's concern by invoking his son Yosef, as the verse (Ovadiah 1:18) compares Yaakov to a fire, Yosef to a flame, and Eisav to straw. Just as the wise man told the blacksmith, one spark will come forth from Yosef that will burn and destroy all of Eisav's descendants.

Rashi's parable is difficult to understand, as the blacksmith's question was where so much flax could be stored, not how it could be destroyed. How did the wise man's response address his question, and how does this parable help us understand the nature of the conflict between Yaakov and Eisav? Rav Wahrsager suggests that the wise man was conveying a profound insight into the deeper struggle between Eisav and the Jewish people. The wise man explained to the blacksmith that although at first glance the flax appears to take up a tremendous amount of space, upon further reflection one realizes that it's actually a lot of fluff and there's not much substance there, as demonstrated by the fact that one small spark is capable of reducing all of the flax to nothing.

Similarly, when one looks at the world superficially, Eisav and his powerful descendants appear quite formidable. Eisav dominates the world of external appearances, and in terms of quantity, he has a clear advantage over the Jewish people. The Jewish strength lies in the realm of penimiyus, the ability to penetrate beyond the facade and appreciate what is hidden from the eye. If Yaakov and Yosef and their descendants attempt to counter Eisav in

the external world of raw numbers, they are doomed to failure. However, when they are on fire spiritually by focusing on the internal world of Torah and mitzvos, they are able to expose and defeat Eisav's vacuous facade. This concept is clearly manifested on Chanuka, when we celebrate the triumph of the Jewish emphasis on quality over quantity, as we praise Hashem in Al HaNissim for delivering the many into the hands of the few, and the wicked into the hands of the righteous.

Sadly, although our ancestors were victorious over the false worldview of Eisav and the Greeks, the battle is not over and these struggles continue in our generation, as Western culture once again attempts to entice us to abandon the internal world of spirituality for the pursuit of the temporal pleasures of this world. Chanuka gives us an opportunity to reflect and reorient our priorities and values. As we light the menorah each day, we should remind ourselves of the flame's message not to get caught up in the flax. The glitter and sparkle of Western culture is designed to seem tantalizing and appealing, but ultimately, it's empty, as there's nothing inside. Torah and mitzvos are our special inheritance, and by recommitting ourselves to the penimiyus spiritual world that they represent, we should merit sending forth the spark that will consume Eisav and his superficiality once and for all.

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Rabbi Yakov Haber - Chanukah: the Power of the Light of Torah and Chachmei haTorah

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Rabbi Yakov Haber

Chanukah: the Power of the Light of Torah and Chachmei haTorah

According to a well-known tradition concerning the events leading up to the great Chanukah miracles, Antiochus and his cohorts banned performance of many mitzvos including Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, and b'ris mila. Why were these specific mitzvos banned? In general, what was the source of the Greeks' obsession to eradicate any vestige of the Jewish religion and not satisfying themselves with subjugation of the Jewish people as other conquering nations would?

Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht zt"l, the founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, presents a profound analysis of this battle which has enormous implications as to how we view Torah study and Torah scholars.[1] I present his ideas here in my own style with some additions. On a simple plane, studying Torah and performing its mitzvos are our mission in life, and through these activities, we are rewarded with eternal life. But this certainly does not present the complete picture; Torah is both transformative and elevating. The human being, seemingly just a higher animal life form, by studying Torah becomes uniquely elevated, is endowed with the light of Torah penetrating into his G-dly soul, and elevates his physical aspect as well; in a word, the created becomes much more similar to the Creator. Even though no created being can come close to Hashem's perfection, the more Torah they absorb, the more G-d-like they become.[2] How is this G-dliness created through connection to Torah manifested?

A well-founded idea concerning the Greek attitude toward existence and their antagonism toward Judaism states that the Greeks viewed wisdom, beauty, and all of life's endeavors as ends in and of themselves.[3] The body was inherently beautiful and certainly could not be improved, hence the Greek obsession with drawing, sculpting and parading the human form. The celestial bodies represented perfect spheres incapable of being affected by any Higher Being. Wisdom was to be valued for its edification value not because of its power of elevation. There was no hypocrisy in a wise scholar

living a morally reprehensible life. Judaism, by stark contrast, views all of life's activities including wisdom as necessarily transformative; else, they are being misused. Rav Goldwicht would often quote the Talmudic dictum (B'rachos 17a in the name of Rava), "tachlis chachma, teshuva uma'asim tovim - the goal of all wisdom is repentance and good deeds".

The Midrash (B'reishis Rabba 2:5) comments that the Greeks told the B'nei Yisrael to "write on the horn of an ox (shor) that we have no share in the G-d of Israel." [4] Rav Goldwicht questioned the curious formulation of this demand. Shouldn't they have demanded that the Jews write "that there is no G-d of Israel!" The phrase "That they have no share in the G-d of Israel" implies that there is a "G-d of Israel", but that the Jewish people have no share in Him. But this is exactly what the Greeks represented. Belief in a G-d is acceptable. That human beings have the ability to transform through connecting to the Divine wisdom was not acceptable to them. The Midrash precedes this statement with the fact the Greeks wished to "darken the eyes of Israel". This is a reference to the chachmei haTorah who are referred to as the "einei ha'eidah - the eyes of Israel" (Shlach 15:24). It is they who epitomize the transformative power of Torah, and it was toward them that the main thrust of the Greeks' spiritual attack was directed.

This concept is expressed fully by precisely the mitzvos the Greeks tried to eliminate. The b'ris mila represents the ability of man to partner with his Creator in perfecting the human personality. In a famous conversation (Tanchuma Tazria 5), the Roman general Turnus Rufus challenged R' Akiva with the question of whether Divine actions or human actions were better. R' Akiva responded: "human actions!" Turnus Rufus, expressing surprise at his answer, immediately challenged him: "Why do you circumcise yourselves?" Meaning, why do you attempt to improve upon the creation? R' Akiva, properly prepared, commented, "I anticipated your question and I already answered you!" R' Akiva requested that wheat and bread be brought. He then exacted an admission from the general that indeed man's actions were a significant improvement on the original Divine creation. As to the general's question "If G-d desires that man be circumcised why does He not create him that way?", R' Akiva answered that G-d wishes that man be purified through the mitzvos. R' Akiva's answer contains a profound lesson: man can and indeed is charged by his Creator to elevate and transform himself. He is not fixed in a set of base, animalistic desires and drives which Fate has prescribed to him; this, of course, is contrary to the worldview to which the Roman general, steeped in Greek culture, subscribed. Because of the worldview of the Greeks, as expressed by Turnus Rufus, they battled against the concept of mila.

Rosh Chodesh represents a unique mitzvah wherein human beings literally affect the spiritual cosmos. In a well-known distinction in the liturgy, whereas the Shabbos prayers end with "m'kadeish haShabbos - [Hashem] sanctifies the Sabbath", the Yom Tov prayers end with "m'kadeish Yisrael v'haZ'manim - [Hashem] sanctifies Israel and the [holiday] times". G-d sanctifies Israel; it is they who sanctify the holidays. Through the process of accepting witnesses who sighted the new moon, the Beis Din determines whether to declare Rosh Chodesh on the 30th or 31st day of the previous month. The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 25a) teaches a remarkable halacha: If Beis Din accidentally or even willfully declares Rosh Chodesh on the wrong day, their pronouncement remains halachically binding.[5] How does a mere mortal have the ability to modify which day on which to celebrate a holiday? What is the secret of "flesh and blood" having such transformative power to bindingly declare a holiday, with all of its intense spiritual significance, on the wrong day? How do they suddenly make that the right day? This is a direct result of their elevating themselves through the kedushas haTorah. Through that they partner with Hashem in transforming the nature of time! [6] This is the essence of the Torah Sheb'al Peh, the part of Torah which is not Divinely fixed, but depends on the input of man, using the Divinely given principles to determine the halachic reality. Rosh Chodesh represents an extreme of this concept wherein the Torah sages have total control of the halachic reality. This concept was totally foreign to the

Greek way of thinking; they therefore tried to obliterate it from the world scene to allow their own worldview to dominate.

Ultimately, due to Divine salvation granted the Chasmona'im who battled to preserve the eternity of Torah, the Torah worldview was victorious. It is for this reason, explains Rav Goldwicht, that the Gemara (Shabbos 23a), concerning the lighting of the Chanukah menorah, asks how we can say "v'tzivanu - and He commanded us" in the blessing when the mitzvah is Rabbinically ordained; "heichan tzivanu - what is the Biblical source of this commandment?" To this question, the Gemara answers, "Lo tasur mikol davar 'asher yagidu l'cha yamin us'mol" (Devarim 17:11). Why doesn't the Gemara ask the same question concerning other mitzvos d'Rabbanan? Our Sages are trying to teach us this important lesson of Chanukah: the unique ability of chachmei haTorah to even create Rabbinic laws that are as binding as Torah laws!

Sifrei Chassidus[7] stress the elevating nature of the holiday of Chanukah and especially the lighting of the menorah. Its illumination contains within it an element of the "or haganuz", the supernal light created at the beginning of time, hidden away by G-d as reward for the righteous in the future. This hidden light, teaches the Ba'al Shem Tov and others, was hidden in the Torah. Through its study, the Jew becomes attached to sparks of this eternal, elevating light. The Chanukah lights, parallel to the light of the menorah in the Mikdash, represent the light of Torah. The victory of the Chasmona'im over the Y'vanim was not just a physical victory; it was a spiritual one indicating that the Torah view of mankind - one in which G-d's wisdom is given to man to study and practice and elevate himself to literally partner with G-d in affecting the world - was the correct and eternal one.

We are fortunate to live in an era where so many thousands are returning to a Torah lifestyle, an era in which so many tens of thousands are intensely studying Torah in one venue or another and partaking of its great light, perhaps unique in numbers in comparison to many previous generations. But at the helm of the Jewish people, as they always should be, are the chachmei haTorah, the Torah giants, who do not just establish set times for the study of Torah, but are so connected to its wisdom that it transforms them and elevates them, enabling them to partner with Hashem in guiding the Jewish people and ultimately transforming the entire world.

[1] I was privileged to hear the core of these ideas when I studied at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh. They were subsequently printed with additions in 'Asufas Ma'arachos : Vol. 2 Chanukka & Purim.

[2] Compare the Midrash (VaYikra Rabba 24:9) on K'doshim Tih'yu - "You should be holy! I might think you should be as [holy as] I am; therefore, the verse states 'for I [G-d] am holy!', 'My sanctity is above yours.'" As every student of Talmud knows, a hava 'amina is a seriously entertained possibility. The very initial thought of being exactly as holy as G-d, even though ultimately rejected, demonstrates the enormously elevating power of Torah.

[3] See Wisdom for a Purpose for a fuller exploration of this idea.

[4] See Wisdom for a Purpose for an exploration of the imagery of the ox.

[5] This was the halacha R' Akiva taught the senior R' Yehoshua who was troubled by being forced to comply with Rabban Gamliel's declaration of Rosh Chodesh Tishrei (Rosh HaShana) which R. Yehoshua thought was erroneous.

[6] Of course this ability is not designed to be abused and wantonly misused for invalid reasons. This is an often misunderstood point concerning Rabbinic authority in general. Granted that the Torah bestows certain powers, within limits, to the sages of each generation, but they are charged by G-d to utilize this authority with great sagacity, motivated by much yiras shamayim and loyalty to the Torah system and not personal agenda. (See the introduction of the Ig'ros Moshe for more on this point.)

[7] See for example B'nei Yissaschar (Kislev Ma'amar Beis).

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from: Aish.com <newsletter@ish.com> date: Thu, Dec 10, 2015 at 9:08 AM
subject: San Bernardino and You; More Hanukkah Inspiration
The San Bernardino Massacre And Prayer
Why those who think "God isn't fixing this" are wrong.
by **Rabbi Benjamin Blech**

In the aftermath of the horrific terrorist attack in San Bernardino a new phrase – prayer shaming – has made its way into the coverage of much of the media. In its own way, it too is an attack on the spiritual values that define our civilized society.

"Prayer shaming" describes the reaction of a significant number of commentators in the press and social media to a response to tragedy that in the past would almost certainly have been greeted with respect and reverence. The blazing headline of the NY Daily News illustrated it most starkly. Following a caption in eye-catching red "14 dead in California mass shooting" a super large font screamed the message: "God isn't fixing this". That was trailed with these words: "As latest batch of innocent Americans are left lying in pools of blood, cowards who could truly end gun scourge continue to hide behind meaningless platitudes."

Just in case you don't fully understand the paper's intent that prayers are no more than platitudes, that turning to God in a time of crisis is a cowardly reflex achieving nothing other than the avoidance of personal responsibility, the headline sarcastically adds quotes from four politicians offering prayers on behalf of the victims and their families in order to mock them as archaic and pious sentiments which have no place in the real world confronting evil and terror.

Our nation's Pledge of Allegiance speaks of one nation under God. Prayer-shamers, however, don't believe the Almighty "can fix" anything and any mention of His involvement in our affairs and any call for His assistance is nothing less than an abdication of our own obligations.

What an incredible perversion of faith and lack of understanding of prayer.

Man becomes truly powerful only when he comprehends his human powerlessness.

In a remarkable passage in the Torah we find the perfect paradigm for the relationship between prayer and personal responsibility, between our dependence on God and our recognition of the need for us to exert our own efforts to the best of our abilities. When Amalek attacked our ancestors shortly after the Exodus from Egypt, Moses instructed his disciple Joshua to form an army and fight the enemy. But at the same time Moses, aided by Aaron and Hur, son of Miriam, ascended a hill overlooking the battle in order to fervently pray for victory. The link between prayer and battle, divine assistance and human effort, was profoundly illustrated by what happened next. Whenever Moses lifted his hands in prayer the Jews gained the upper hand in combat. Whenever Moses stopped beseeching God, the tide of war shifted in favor of Amalek. Once understood, Moses didn't stop praying for even a moment – and that is what assured victory.

Man needs God – and God wants man. Man becomes truly powerful only when he comprehends his human powerlessness. Prayer is the link between the creator and his creations. Without prayer man thinks he is God – and that unwarranted sense of ego insures his defeat and destruction.

And that is the meaning of faith. Faith is not knowing what the future holds. It is knowing who holds the future.

Faith is not knowing what the future holds. It is knowing who holds the future.

Prayer defines us. Prayer gives us hope. Prayer puts into words the values we hold most precious, the people we most treasure, the ideals for which we live and for which we are prepared to give up our lives.

When the survivors of the San Bernardino massacre realized they were saved they did what countless generations past did in similar circumstances. They prayed. They prayed because they could not help but express gratitude for their deliverance. And together with all those who heard of this calamitous event they joined in prayer for the souls of the victims. Those who perished will find eternal reward in the heavens above – and our prayers will keep alive their memories for us here on earth.

Prayers are not pointless. All prayers are heard by the Almighty. And all prayers are answered in God's own and inscrutable ways.

So yes, God is fixing this - and the answer to the evils of Isis and the terrorists of our times is what it has always been, the partnership between our efforts and God's intervention. For the first, we need to do battle; for the second we need not to shame but to share in a collective groundswell of impassioned prayer, the kind of prayer which will convince God that we truly deserve God's redemptive intercession.

Published: December 8, 2011

www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/kosher-certification-for-maccabees/2014/12/25/0/

**Kosher Certification for Maccabees
Hanukkah-Still burning bright!**

By: **Rabbi Natan Slifkin** Published: December 25th, 2014

Hanukiyah created by world famous Venetian Glass Blower {Originally appeared on author's site, Rationalist Judaism}

Over Shabbos I dusted off my ancient copy of ArtScroll's Chanukah: Its History, Observance and Significance – A Presentation based upon Talmudic and Traditional Sources, written by Rabbi Hersch Goldwurm and published way back in 1981. The

subtitle is interesting, because some of the primary sources used are only traditional in the loosest sense of the term. Presumably sensitive to this concern, the preface to the History section includes the following explanation:

...Through an understanding of the history of the period, we can gain a deeper insight into the significance of Chanukah itself. With this goal, we shall approach our historical inquiry into the events of the period.

For information, we are indebted primarily to the books of Maccabees I and II the authors of which lived relatively close to the time of the miracle (in the case of I Maccabees), or drew upon contemporary sources. The authorship of these books is unknown, but they were undoubtedly written by staunchly loyal Jews. Although there is evidence that I Maccabees was originally written in Hebrew, both books were available only in Greek and Latin for over 1500 years and came down to us through gentile hands. For this reason, the two books were largely unknown to Jewish chroniclers and commentators until recent times... Despite the fact that the books of Maccabees are not mentioned in virtually any early classic Rabbinic work, we may assume that Jewish scholars would have accepted them, because they are cited by the great commentator to the Mishnah, R' Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (Tosefos Yom Tov, Megillah 3:6), and by the great halachist R' Eliyah Shapiro of Prague in his magnum opus *Eliyah Rabbah* to Orach Chaim 671:1. I know of only three other relatively early Jewish scholars who had access to Maccabees: R' Azariah min HaAdomim (De Rossi) in his *Me'or Einayim* (Imrei Binah ch. 16, 25, 25, 51, 55); and the disciple of R' Moshe Isserles, R' David Ganz (in *Tzemach David*, part I, year 3590). Nevertheless, it is fair to assume that such scholars would not have cited the books of Maccabees unless they were convinced of its reliability.

The reader should bear in mind that the period of Scripture was sealed prior to the events of Chanukah. No later book, even if it were historically accurate and true to the underlying spiritual theme of events it chronicled, could have been canonized. Consequently, the status of Maccabees as an apocryphal work does not, in and of itself, prove that it is not reliable.

In general, I'm not into the genre of "ArtScroll-bashing" – for the most part, ArtScroll is simply catering to the needs, desires and sensitivities of their readership, as well as understandably desiring to avoid trouble. But analyzing ArtScroll does afford an opportunity to understand the dynamics of the Orthodox community (as Dr. Yoel Finkelman has shown), and there are a number of observations to be made with regard to these paragraphs.

First, it's fascinating to see how sources are conferred with the status of "traditional," or its equivalent level of kashrus – something that I also have to do quite often. We are first assured that the authors of Maccabees were "staunchly loyal Jews." Then a justification is given for these works not being cited in classic Rabbinic literature. We are then told that prestigious later rabbinic authorities did make use of these works, and thus must have been convinced of their reliability. This also provides the importance assurance that had Chazal and the Rishonim had access to these works, "we may assume... that they would have accepted them." Finally, we are told that the stigma of being "apocryphal works" does not disqualify them "in and of itself," since they were written too late to be canonized. It's quite an elaborate set of justifications. Also of interest is the statement that the citation of Maccabees by various Acharonim shows that they were convinced of its reliability (and hence we can also be convinced). What exactly does "reliability" mean in this context? Historical accuracy, or kosherness in Orthodox circles? It's hard to see how the citations by various Acharonim confer the former, so I assume that it means the latter, but I'm not certain.

Then, as I started to read the list of Torah scholars cited as endorsing Maccabees, I was intrigued to see R' Yom Tov Lipmann Heller as the first such authority cited. After all, he also quotes from R' Azariah De Rossi, a scholar whose name is anathema in many Orthodox circles, following the vehement condemnation of De Rossi by Maharal and (reportedly) by R. Yosef Caro. Reading on, I was flabbergasted to see that De Rossi himself is one of these authorities cited to show that Maccabees must be reliable! While it is encouraging to see that he is presented as someone who can be relied upon to show that something is reliable, it does raise some interesting questions. For if a source is "reliable" because it was quoted by R' Azariah, then we can also add a number of others to the list of works that Torah Jews can consider "reliable," including the works of Augustine, the works of Sebastian Munster, and the works of Annius of Viterbo (which are, ironically, completely unreliable).

Finally, if the Books of Maccabees are being quasi-canonized as reliable, traditional works, then what does this mean with regard to the reason for Chanukah lasting eight days? For II Maccabees explains the eight days of Chanukah not in terms of the miracle of the oil, but rather as due to the first Chanukah making up for the eight-day festival of Sukkos not having been celebrated in the Beis HaMikdash that year. And Josephus, who is also mentioned in the ArtScroll Chanukah, had a very surprising explanation as to why Chanukah is called "the festival of lights". This is a problem that has been hotly debated in recent years. For a variety of perspectives, see Rabbi Dr. David Berger's

article, the comment thread on this post, R. Josh Waxman's discussion – and if anyone has any other useful links, please submit them.

Now, of course it is to be expected that an ArtScroll work is only going to present the view of the Bavli, that the reason for eight days of Chanukah is due to the miracle of the oil (which is also presented in Megillas Antiochus, of uncertain antiquity). But it is interesting that when presenting that account (on p. 55), it adds that when this happened, "they celebrated the rededication of the altar for eight days and offered up peace and thanksgiving offerings." Where did this come from?

It seems to me that this is incorporating the view of II Maccabees, that there was a reason for celebrating the initial eight days that had nothing to do with the oil, but rather was due to there having been an initial eight-day festival which Chanukah commemorates. ArtScroll doesn't give Maccabees' reason as to why they celebrated for eight days, but the fact of describing an eight-day celebration in that first year itself implies that there was a reason that was independent of any miracle involving the oil. (I don't think that quoting this reason is necessarily undermining the reason given by the Gemara; after all, Megillas Taanis also gives two reasons for the eight days.) Note that much later in the work on p. 95, when discussing the famous question of the Beis Yosef regarding why we have eight days of Chanukah rather than seven, it quotes Megillas Taanis (in the scholia - later additions) that there was an eight-day rededication celebration, and then cites Birkei Yosef as saying that the extra day that we celebrate commemorates this rededication. But Birkei Yosef did not quote Megillas Taanis as saying that there was an eight-day rededication celebration, and with good reason: because it does not say any such thing! As well as describing the miracle of the oil, Megillas Taanis says that it took eight days to repair the vessels of the Beis HaMikdash – not that there were eight days of celebrating its rededication. (Furthermore, Birkei Yosef does not give this as a reason for an eighth day, supplemental to celebrating seven over the miracle of the oil, but rather he says that the eight days of repair are the reason for all eight days of the current festival, and that the question of the Beis Yosef is therefore redundant!) It therefore seems to me that on p. 95, ArtScroll has subconsciously replaced the view of Megillas Taanis with the view of II Maccabees.

Also of interest is the statement that the citation of Maccabees by various Acharonim shows that they were convinced of its reliability (and hence we can also be convinced). What exactly does "reliability" mean in this context? Historical accuracy, or kosherness in Orthodox circles? It's hard to see how the citations by various Acharonim confer the former, so I assume that it means the latter, but I'm not certain.

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About the Author: Rabbi Natan Slifkin is the author of several works on the interface between Judaism and the natural sciences. Later this year he is publishing The Torah Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom, and he is currently developing a Biblical Museum of Natural History to be located in the Beit Shemesh region. Rabbi Slifkin's website is www.zootorah.com and he also runs a popular blog at www.rationalistjudaism.com.

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Torah Musings

<http://www.torahmusings.com/2015/12/hezekiahs-seal/>

Hezekiah's Seal

R. Dr. Joshua Berman

Why Does King Hezekiah's Seal Bear an Egyptian Winged Sun God?

Hebrew University archaeologists created a stir last week announcing the discovery of a seal bearing the name of the Hezekiah son of Ahaz, the first time a seal bearing the name of a Judean king had been found in the environs of the Temple Mount and City of David. But for some, the discovery gave pause: in the center of the seal is a winged image of the disc of the sun. The Bible however (2 Kgs. 18:1-8; 2 Chr 29-32), credits Hezekiah with cleansing the Temple of impurity and of removing a variety of idolatrous sites from across the countryside. The presence of the winged sun on Hezekiah's seal seemed to unearth a less than pious monarch.

Or does it? The truth is that the winged sun on the seal in no way refutes the biblical account of Hezekiah's reforms.

Sun and Wings in the Bible

It is true that the winged sun is a symbol of an ancient Egyptian deity. However, both the sun and the motif of protective wings are de rigueur symbols across the ancient Near East. In fact, we find them amply attested within the Bible itself, in both profane and sacred references. The sun is a metaphor for strength, as seen at the end of the Song of Deborah, where the prophetess proclaims that Hashem's faithful will "rise as the sun to the zenith of its strength" (Jud 5:31). Wings are a symbol of protection, as seen in Ruth's proclamation to Boaz, "I am Ruth your handmaiden; spread now your wing over thy maidservant (Ruth 3: 9). It is no surprise therefore, that each of these images can describe Hashem, as well. Hashem is likened to the sun in Ps. 84:12: "For Hashem is a sun and a shield." Any number of verses speak of his protective wings, as in Boaz's praise of Ruth (Ruth 2:12): "You have come to take shelter under His wings" (cf. Deut 32:11; Ps. 36:8, 57:2, 61:5, 91:4). The sun as an image of strength, and wings as an image of protection did not belong to any one culture. In fact, the winged sun is found as an image of both kings and deities across the ancient Near East.

The image of the winged sun is clear in Hezekiah's seal. Less clear is what it precisely symbolizes. Is the sun here a representation of Hashem, as per Ps. 84:12? Or, perhaps, the might of Hezekiah himself? Who offers protection, symbolized by the wings – again, God, or his servant the king? Perhaps the symbol conflates king and God. It is difficult to say. What is clear is that the symbol in no way suggests that Hezekiah worshipped an Egyptian deity. Were that case, the very name on the seal would read "Hezek-Amun", or "Hezek-Re." "Hizki-yahu" leaves no doubts as to this monarch's loyalties.

Graven images of the Sun

It is one thing to accept the clear evidence that the Bible is comfortable describing God's attributes through the images of the sun and wings. But to contemporary sensitivities, the notion that these things could be engraved by a saintly king is harder to grasp. Is this not forbidden?

The key verse here is Ex 20:20: [Lo taasun iti elohei chesef v'elohei zahav lo taasun lachem] "You shall not make with/for me gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves and gods of gold." The midrashic and Talmudic literature to this verse derives many prohibitions. According to one opinion we are forbidden to draw celestial entities such as the sun and the moon. Another opinion, however maintains that the prohibition pertains solely to angelic creatures (cf. Mechilta to Ex. 20:20). Curiously, nowhere across midrashic and Talmudic literature is the express prohibition of drawing an image of God Himself, although this is rendered prohibited by later descisors. Anyone who has visited the synagogues of Poland can attest to the wide spectrum of interpretation that this verse has had within halachic sources. Synagogues that remain in Sephardic lands show no representations whatever, much in line with Muslim sensitivities on the issue. Foreign religious influence, it turns out, can sometimes work le-chumrah!

Many medieval commentators, however, sought out the simple meaning of the verse. For some, (Rasa"g, Ibn Ezra, Seforno) the verse prohibits creating images to be used as intermediaries in the service of Hashem. For others (Rashbam, Hizkuni) the verse prohibits the production of images of God at all, for any purpose, though this restriction, on the level of peshat, would presumably pertain solely to images made of gold and silver.

I raise this discussion not with the intent of surveying the full history of halachic interpretation to this verse, and certainly not with the aim of offering halachic guidance on the question today. Rather, I raise it with an eye toward how this verse may have been understood by a pious Judean king in the 8th century BCE. The simple meaning of Ex. 20:20 would seem not to limit such a king from employing these images. While the Rambam (Avodah Zarah 3:9) adopts the gemara's conclusion forbidding a graven image of the sun such as that found on Hezekiah's seal, the debate in the gemara may reflect a longstanding difference of opinion on the understanding of this verse. Its normative interpretation in Hezekiah's day may have been closer to the opinion in the gemara that prohibits only the images of angelic beings. If that was the case, the seal may represent in visual form what the Bible expresses in words: that some combination of God and his chosen king offered strength and protection symbolized through the sun and wings.

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Chanukah

"For Yourself You made a Shem Gadol v'Kadosh / Great and Holy Name in Your world . . . And they established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and to praise Your Great Name." (From the Al Ha'nissim prayer)

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762-1839; rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Pressburg, Hungary; known as "Chatam Sofer") writes: Commentaries ask why Chanukah has eight days; if one day's supply of oil burned for eight days, then only seven of those days were "extra," and, therefore, miraculous! [Numerous answers to this question have been suggested. Chatam Sofer answers:] The Chanukah miracle actually consisted of two miracles. One miracle was that the kohanim found a jug of oil at all. The second miracle was that one-day's supply of oil sufficed for eight days. Therefore there are eight days of Chanukah—one day for the miracle of finding a jug of oil and seven days for the extra seven days that the oil burned.

Chatam Sofer continues: The first miracle was a nes nistar / hidden miracle, meaning that it was consistent with the laws of nature. Indeed, one easily could overlook the fact that it was a miracle. In contrast, when one day's supply of oil sufficed for eight days, that was a nes ngleh / obvious miracle. Kabbalists teach that the Divine Name "Gadol" refers to G-d when His Will is accomplished through the laws of nature, while the Name "Kadosh" refers to Him when He "overrules" nature. Thus, we say in Al Ha'nissim, Hashem made for Himself a Name that is both "Gadol" and "Kadosh" through the two miracles just described. And, because of those same two miracles, "they established these eight days of Chanukah." (**Derashot Chatam Sofer**)