

BS"D

words can make a difference. They made a vast difference in Yosef's life and for Klal Yisrael's [The Jewish Nation's] lives.



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYEISHEV - 5766

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From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of
Rabbi Yissocher Frand [ryfrand@torah.org]
Sent: Thursday, December 22, 2005 2:04 PM To:
ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on
Parshas Vayeishev

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayeishev

Nice Guy's Finish Second -- Second in Command to Pharaoh
(Rabbi Frand quotes both insights this week from the sefer Shemen HaTov by Rabbi Dov Weinberger.)

This week's parsha contains four words that changed the course of history. Yosef was arrested and imprisoned. Shortly afterwards, two members of Pharaoh's Court were also thrown into jail.

Imagine what it was like to be in jail with two officers of Pharaoh's Court. As an analogy, this would be like having a two-bit drug dealer in jail together with two members of the President's cabinet. These were 'Cabinet level' people in the Egyptian government -- the person who brought Pharaoh his wine was a trusted individual. He was the wine taster, a person in whom the King had implicit trust. These were people who could be compared to the Attorney General and the Secretary of State.

They were sitting in jail with a Hebrew slave -- the lowest rung of society, someone who was serving time for a petty crime. We can be sure that there was not a lot of camaraderie and social interaction between Yosef and Pharaoh's officials.

The officers had their respective dreams, which upset them. Yosef saw that they were depressed and asked them "Why are you depressed?" The "drug dealer" (Yosef) comments to the "Secretary of State" (Wine Butler), "You don't look so good this morning!" Because of that remark, because of those four words, what happens?

The dreams are related to Yosef. Yosef interprets the dreams. The Butler sees that Yosef has special powers. The Butler is eventually released from jail and, in the time-honored tradition, gets put back on the 'Cabinet'.

Years later, the Butler remembers Yosef. Yosef is brought out of jail. He interprets the dreams of Pharaoh correctly. He becomes the second in command. He feeds the entire world including his own brothers and father. And the rest -- as they say -- is history!

What started this entire series of events? Four words: "Madua peneichem ra'im hayom?" (Why are your faces troubled today?) What is the ethical lesson to be learned here? The lesson is that it is incumbent upon us to be a "nice guy." Yosef was concerned about how they looked and how they felt, even though we would need to assume that these were people who did not give Yosef a second look. Merely saying a nice, kind word makes such a difference!

Four words changed history. Two words can change history -- "Good Morning!" "How are you?" "How are you doing?" "How was your holiday?" "How is your spouse?" "How are your kids?" These types of

The Significance of 'Eight' -- Outside the Forces of Nature

Yosef was seduced by with the wife of Potiphar. Yosef refused. "...How can I do this terribly wicked deed?..." [Bereshis 39:9] Finally, when she cornered him alone and grabbed hold of his garment, Yosef fled and ran out of the house (va'yanos vayetze haChutzah), rather than accede to her will. There is a very famous Medrash in Tehillim on the pasuk "The Sea saw and fled..." [Psalms 114:3] The Medrash says that when the Jewish people came to the Red Sea, the Sea saw the coffin of Yosef and fled. In the words of the Medrash, "It fled because of the one who fled." In the merit of the one who withheld and did not succumb to his passions, the Sea split for Israel.

What is the connection between the merit of Yosef and the splitting of the Red Sea? If one looks in the parsha, one will notice a peculiar thing. The expression "va'yanos haChutzah" (and he fled outside) is repeated four times in the narrative. What is the significance of this?

The terminology "Vayotze oso haChutzah" (and He took him outside) was used previously in Parashas Lech Lecha during the Covenant between the Pieces [Bereshis 15:5]. HaShem took Avraham -- haChutzah (outside). The Medrash comments that HaShem told Avraham, "Go out from your constellation" -- go out from the normal forces of nature. "You, Avraham, are above nature. You are not beholden to the powers of nature. Even naturally, you should not have children, you will, in fact, be the father of great nations. You are bigger than nature."

The words "Vayotze oso haChutzah" implicitly contain the power to overcome nature. Yosef utilized the ability of a Jew to be superior to nature and nature's dictates.

When everything in nature would suggest that he had to succumb to the seductions of Potiphar's wife, Yosef was able to invoke the power of Avraham, his great-grandfather, who was outside the power of nature. Yosef overcame his particular nature and he too did not succumb.

Therefore, when Yosef's coffin arrived at the Red Sea, whose nature it is to flow, the Red Sea split in Yosef's merit. Nature was suspended. The sea fled before the one who fled. The one who overcame nature has the power to suspend the nature of the sea.

The Shemen HaTov takes this one step further. He brings a Sefer HaPardes who relates a fascinating insight. (This is delving here on the fringes of Kabbalah, and we can only speculate regarding the meaning of the Sefer HaPardes. The Sefer HaPardes is a Halachic compendium from the school of Rashi.)

The Sefer HaPardes says that there are 112 pasukim in Parshas VaYeishev. Out of those 112 pasukim, every single pasuk begins with a 'vov', with the exception of 8 pasukim! [Note: The count of eight pasukim begins only after Pasuk 3 where the series of Vov pasukim actually begin. Do not count from the beginning of the parsha, but rather from Pasuk 3.] The Sefer HaPardes says that the 8 pasukim that do not begin with a vov correspond to the 8 days between the birth of a boy and his circumcision. They allude to Milah, which is performed on the 8th day.

The Shemen HaTov suggests that all the incidents of Parshas VaYeishev are one big vov. And this happened, and this happened, and this happened... It is all one big story -- one event emerging from the other. It is all one big cause and effect.

The Torah is teaching that this may be the way things work in the outside world. History involves one thing leading to another to another. But the life of a Jew is above nature.

The 8 pasukim correspond to Milah. According to traditional literature, 7 connotes nature -- the number of days in a week; while 8 connotes the property of being above nature. That is why circumcision is on the 8th day, because Milah is l'maleh min haTeva [above Nature]. Jews are above nature, because that is what G-d told Avraham Avinu. He took Avraham outside and told him "You are above nature."

The 8 pasukim that do not have the vov teach us something about the entire remainder of the parsha. None of it is a 'vov'. Nothing is just cause and effect. It is not just a story. It is not just natural happenstance. It is all above nature. There is, in effect, a grand plan. Nothing in history is just coincidence. Israel has no Mazal -- we are above all that!

One does not have to be a genius to make the connection to the 8 days of Chanukah, which are also supra natural. We all understand that the miracle of the jug of oil was a miracle. But we also have to know that the miracle of the oil reveals that the victory in battle is also not nature -- because nothing is nature. The Jewish people live a miraculous existence -- outside the forces of nature.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org - These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 125, Hamalbin P'nei Chaveiro. THE SALE EVENT THAT YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR... Now, for a limited time only, purchase RABBI FRAND'S TAPES at deep discounts INDIVIDUAL TAPES - \$5.00 each INDIVIDUAL CDs - \$7.00 each (plus shipping and handling) COMPLETE TAPE SETS - TAKE 20% OFF Offer Expires January 1, 2006 BE SURE TO MENTION THIS OFFER IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THE SPECIAL SALE PRICE! For complete listings of the entire Yad Yechiel Tape Library, featuring the complete collection of Rav Frand's cassette and CD shiurim, log onto our secure site at <http://www.yadvechiel.org>. You can browse through a comprehensive listing of 17 years of weekly shiurim, view Parsha Perceptions, Halacha Tapes, Hashkafa Tapes and Theme Sets. Plus, you'll find order information on this easy-to-navigate secure site. For a catalog either call us at 410-358-0416 or write to Yad Yechiel, P.O.Box 511 Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511 or e-mail us at tapes@yadvechiel.org

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[From last year - didn't make it in time for last year's sheet]

Rabbi Frand on Parshas VaYeishev

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 440, Third Night of Chanukah but Only Two Candles. Good Shabbos!

Special Privileges Bring Special Responsibilities

Parshas VaYeishev begins with the story of Yosef and his brothers. It ends with the story of Yosef arriving in Egypt and his initial adventures in that land. Yosef seems to be the central figure throughout the Parsha. There is only one exception -- Chapter 38 narrates the story of Yehudah and Tamar.

On the surface, the complex narrative of Yehudah, his sons, and his daughter-in-law has no relationship whatsoever to the story of Yosef. It seems to fit awkwardly into the middle of what would otherwise be a smooth-flowing narrative. The obvious question is: what is it doing here?

Rashi quotes a statement of Chazal (which is actually part of a longer Medrash) that this chapter, beginning with the words "And it was at that time, Yehudah descended from his brothers..." marks a descent in the stature of the leadership of Yehudah. Up until this point, the brothers accepted Yehudah as their leader. After the sale of Yosef and the impact of his disappearance on their father Yaakov, the brothers blamed Yehudah for the sequence of events, and demoted him, so to speak, from his leadership role in the family.

This seems to be a rather unfair reaction on the part of the brothers. The pasukim [verses] describing the plan to dispose of Yosef indicate, if anything, that Yehudah was the "good guy". The other brothers wanted to kill him. Yehudah tried to save his life. Now, the brothers suddenly turn around, and blame Yehudah for the reaction of Yaakov! What chutzpah [audacity] on the part of his brothers, to blame him for not doing more to protect Yosef!

The other part of the aforementioned Medrash is even more unsettling. The Medrash states that a person who begins a mitzvah, but doesn't complete it, is punished by having to bury his wife and children (which is what happens to Yehudah in Chapter 38). Yehudah began the mitzvah. It was his idea to try to save Yosef. He should have gone all the way. He should have stood up and told his brothers, "This is not acceptable. I am going to take Yosef out of that pit and bring him back home to our father."

This is a really mind-boggling Medrash! The other brothers, who were ready to kill Yosef, suffered no negative family consequences. They did not bury their children. Yehudah, who at least tried to save Yosef -- and was partially successful -- winds up losing his wife and children. Where is the fairness here?

Rav Yeruchum Levovitz (1874-1936) says we learn two startling facts from this Medrash. We learn from the fact that Yehudah was demoted that leadership does not only include privileges, it also includes responsibilities. Ultimately, the buck stops at the leader. Every brother was responsible for his own deeds. But Yehudah was the leader and as such he was responsible for the collective deeds of everyone. If the leader fails to meet his responsibility, the results are disastrous.

This is true of every area of responsibility. If the foot soldier "blows his assignment", it can cause trouble. If the general blows his assignment, the results can be disastrous. If we want to give a mundane analogy from American football -- if the tackle blows his assignment, it is not the end of the world. But if the quarterback drops the football, the play is over. The team and the fans and the coach will all come to him with complaints: "It's all your fault now."

Yehudah was the leader. He had the power to save the day, but he did not do so. In terms of the "fairness" issue raised by the second Medrash, Rav Yeruchum says that we see from here that when one begins a mitzvah he creates a force in the world that if carried to fruition can take on a life of its own. When one begins a mitzvah, he creates something tangible. The mitzvah beckons to its initiator: nurture me; follow through with me. Those who did not begin the mitzvah did not create such a force. The chain reaction that may be generated by the initiated mitzvah is not going to be theirs to nurture and follow through on.

Stopping a mitzvah in the middle is analogous to squashing out a life. The analogy here is to someone who decides not to have children. This is, from our perspective, not a good thing; but we would not call that person a murderer. On the other hand, if a person decides to have a child, conceives a child, and then aborts this child, that is another story. Alternatively, what if the person allowed a child to be born and then strangled the baby? The latter person is certainly deserving of much harsher criticism than the person who decided from the outset not to have children.

When a person creates something real and then destroys it or does not allow it to reach its expected potential, he is or is like a murderer. He created a human being or a force that has the capacity to become something.

Starting a mitzvah is like conceiving a child. Aborting the mitzvah, before it has a chance to be completed leaves the initiator much worse off spiritually than one who merely said, "I am not going to try."

The brothers didn't even try. For whatever personal reasons, they never even "began the mitzvah." But Yehudah started something. He created a force with a potential to become real and alive. He decided to squelch it and stomp it out. He aborted his mitzvah. This is the poetic justice, that Divine Providence caused him in the end to bury his own children.

This is truly a frightening idea. It runs counter to our usual inclinations. We would normally tend to say, that the brothers were worse than Yehudah. Yehudah at least tried to save Yosef. He should get credit for trying -- "An A for effort!"

While it is true that effort is what really counts when it comes to ruchniyus [spirituality], in this case there is a chesoron [something lacking] in the effort. The imperfect effort is worse than no effort. When one tries and creates something that creates responsibility. Just like leadership has

responsibility, so too the creation of the life force of a mitzvah includes responsibility as well. May we all merit to begin mitzvos and see them through to fruition.

A Happy Chanukah to everyone.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org



From: Adam Pincus [<mailto:harhamor@bezeqint.net>]

Sent: Thursday, December 22, 2005 6:49 AM

Yeshivat Har Hamor, Jerusalem

YESHIVAT HAR HAMOR – JERUSALEM THE

HEART OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

From "The Faith of our Time" vol.4

by **Rabbi Tzvi Israel Tau**

The Book of Maccabees describes the Maccabees' victory in battle, in which they also suffered tragic

losses:

"The five sons of Mattityahu set out on that day and they fought the nations and killed many among them, and of the brothers, Judah was killed. At that hour, when the sons of Mattityahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and came to their father. He said to them: why have you returned? They answered: because our brother, who was equal in worth to all of us together, has been killed. Mattityahu replied: I will set out with you and fight the nations so that the House of Israel not be lost and you were alarmed by the loss of your brother?! And Mattityahu set out on that day with his sons and fought the nations. And the G-d of the heavens delivered the fierce warriors of the nations into their hands ... there were no survivors, and the remnant of the nations withdrew to foreign lands. Elazar was busy killing the enemy's elephants and he drowned in their dung ... And the Children of Israel rejoiced because their enemies had been delivered into their hands..."

We encounter in these verses contradicting emotions: on the one hand - grief, mourning and bewilderment over those who died sanctifying G-d's name, over those lost in the horror of the battle. On the other hand – "and the Children of Israel rejoiced"!

The sorrow over the tragic loss of Judah and Elazar seems appropriate. Why did Mattityahu stifle it? And what is the place of joy in such a horrible thing as war?

The answer to these questions requires an understanding of unique character of the nation of Israel and its relationship to each individual Jew.

Unlike the gentile nations, the Jewish people is not a conglomeration of individuals. On the contrary, Knesset Yisrael has a Divine, national neshama, that is reflected in the Torah and in Jewish history. The link between the individual and Klal Yisrael is a holy one. The soul of each Jew is like a limb of the single organic whole of Klal Yisrael, and the connection to the Klal is the basis of the sanctity of each Jewish life. The lifelong task of each Jew is to realize this connection by tying his own values and fate to those of the Jewish nation.

The wars and struggles we have waged are unlike those of other nations – they are the wars of G-d and spring from an internal aspiration to establish and strengthen that which is holy. The special character of Israel's wars leaves its impression on each individual who participates in them. When the individual is called upon to endanger his life for the sake of the nation, his separate concern for his own welfare, including family, becomes like the light of a candle in the midday sun, outshined by the overall love of the good that the nation of Israel embodies.

In "The Laws of Kings and their Wars," Maimonides describes the soldier's subordination of his personal concerns as he rises to the sublime life of the nation:

Once one enters battle...he must be willing to give his life, mindful that he is fighting for the sake of G-d. He must not fear, and he must not think of

his wife or children. Rather, he must blot their memory from his heart and concentrate solely on doing battle

This state of mind is one and the same with the joy felt by Mattityahu and the Children of Israel. The joy, of course, does not derive from the destruction and bloodshed of battle, but from the sanctification of G-d's name, the exaltation of Israel, and the uprooting of evil and corruption. Certainly, Mattityahu shared the emotional pain expressed by his sons when his eldest son Judah was killed. But in the midst of a battle fought for the preservation of the Jewish people his thoughts were focused on the big picture. When his sons approached him with disheartening matters of personal loss, he rebuked them: We are waging the war of Israel – and you have been stunned by the loss of individuals?

The Jewish people suffer continual losses, tragic losses, in the struggle for our existence and redemption against our enemies who seek to extinguish the light of Israel. May heaven forbid that we allow personal grief to weaken our valor and total concentration on doing our share for the salvation of Israel!

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

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

Parashas Vayeishev: Joseph Rises Twice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

in order to fulfill God's will for his family. Even in exile, Joseph displayed uninterrupted spiritual leadership.

From: **Rabbi Berel Wein** [rbwein@torah.org] Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2005 5:05 PM To: rabbiwein@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Wein - Parshas Vayeshev
www.RabbiWein.com
Weekly Parsha December 23, 2005 <http://www.rabbiwein.com/parsha-index.html> VAYESHEV

This weeks parsha deals with the temptations of human beings. The brothers of Yosef are mightily displeased with his attitude and behavior towards them. They choose to overlook the fact that he is only seventeen years old, orphaned from his mother and overly favored and protected by his father. When he arrives alone and vulnerable at their camp, he is an inviting target for their frustrations and wrath. Thus they are tempted by the obvious opportunity presented to solve the Yosef problem. In giving in to this temptation and not assessing correctly the consequences of their so doing they are dooming themselves to being haunted by this fatal impulse of theirs all of their remaining lives. All sins and temptations require opportunity to be actualized. Human social existence by its very nature provides opportunity and our own innate character supplies the temptation. Thus the contest between right and wrong, good and evil, the moral and the despicable, is a never ending one as far as our lives are concerned. This is the basis for Judaism's posit of free will and freedom of choice as being the ultimate arbiter of our physical and spiritual existence and immortality. We are always tempted but we are bidden not to give in to temptation. Our ability to control ourselves in the face of temptation is the battlefield of our lives. It is no wonder therefore that the rabbis in Avot declared that the truly strong hero in life is the one who can deal with and overcome temptations. He is the one who captures the city.

Yosef is also sorely tempted by opportunities that arise in his life. Alone and in servitude, he is seemingly easy prey for the jaded wife of Potiphar. Yet at the last moment he resists the passion and temptation of the moment and realizes the destructive consequences of immoral behavior. At great risk and danger he resists the temptation of the flesh and through that act of momentary self-denial attains for himself the title of Yosef hatzadik Joseph the righteous. The Torah and the Midrash in recounting this tale of Yosef's temptation and triumph point out the strengths that allowed Yosef to resist the advances of the wife of Potiphar. They included, but are not limited to, the upbringing and education he received from his father, his own visions and dreams and ambitions in life, his inherent holy nature and its ability to clearly identify right from wrong and his refusal to sin against God. All of these and other factors as well, for human beings are very complex creatures, combine to allow Yosef to resist the temptation of the moment. The opportunity is present but the choice regarding that opportunity is left to each one of us to exercise. The factors that came to aid Yosef in avoiding the temptation to do wrong a sense of family, a vision of the future and how we would wish ourselves to be remembered by later generations, and an innate fear of G-d are present within all of us. Temptations to do wrong will always abound. The ability to deny victory to those temptations becomes the hallmark of true Jewish living.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2005 10:14 AM To: weeklydt@torahweb2.org Subject: [TorahWeb] Rabbi Yaakov Haber - VaYeishev and Chanuka : A Different Outlook on the World

the HTML version of this dvar Torah can be found at: <http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

Rabbi Yaakov Haber

VaYeishev and Chanuka : A Different Outlook on the World

After Yehuda's tragic loss of both his wife and two of his children, the Torah describes his encounter with Tamar, his former daughter-in-law - whom he refused to allow to marry his third son, Shaila - disguised as a harlot. Midrashim and commentaries offer widely diverse interpretations of this apparently unseemly act. (See Rambam (Hilchos Ishus 1:4) and the classic Mikra'ot G'dolot commentaries.) One famous Midrash posits that Yehuda instinctively turned away from this mysterious woman, only to be drawn back by a supernatural desire placed within him in order to set the stage for the birth of two children who would, by their peculiar birth, be a harbinger for the eventual redemption of Israel (see 38:28-30 and Rashi there), and one of whom would be the ancestor of the Melech HaMashichah, the anointed redeemer of B'nai Yisrael. In the words of the Midrash (B'raishis Rabba 85):

"R. Yochanan stated: He wanted to pass [her] by, but Hashem placed sent him the angel appointed over desire. He [Hashem] said to him: 'Where are you going, Yehuda? From where will kings arise? From where will redeemers emerge?' 'And he turned to her on the road...' - against his will and better judgment."

On a simple plane, the Midrash describes how, often unknown to us, Hashem guides us on the correct path toward our destiny, even if sometimes in mysterious ways. In light of the fact that Yehuda's act, before the Torah was given, was permissible (see above cited Rambam) even if unseemly, the utilization by Hashem of this encounter for producing righteous children from two righteous parents from the seed of Yehuda who was to father the Davidic dynasty - once Yehuda refused to allow Tamar to marry his son, Sheila - is understandable.

On a metaphorical plane, perhaps this Midrash informs us of a deeper lesson as well. R. Bachya ibn Pakuda, in his classic Chovot Ha'L'avot (Sha'ar 'Avodas Ha'Elokim 2) describes the tension of body and soul. The soul, from a higher, spiritual world, where it only cleaved intensely to its Creator, strives to separate itself from all physicality and leave the mundane, disappointing, shallow, dark world behind. The body does not allow it to do so. It craves this world, its physical pleasures and its mundane pursuits. These physical desires, states R. Bachya, assure that Man will survive on this world by pursuing his craving for food and will produce additional generations by pursuing marriage. We can expand on R. Bachya's approach. Many sources indicate that the whole purpose of the soul's descent to this world is the creation of this tension between body and soul. To be holy in an all spiritual environment is easy. To engage a physical world masking a deeper reality and sanctity and elevate every mundane desire and activity by using them as a vehicle to connect to one's Creator is the supreme calling of the combined soul-body entity. Perhaps the above Midrash highlights this same theme. "Yehuda," Hashem calls out, "do you seek to divorce yourself from the physical aspects of the world? Can you realize your mission solely with spiritual contemplation?" To this question, the Midrash answers a resounding: No! The human being must engage the world and elevate its passions and drives for a higher calling.

Another R. B'chaye (ben Asher), in his commentary on the Torah, makes a related statement. On the passage "v'ahavta eis Hashem Elokecha" - "and you should love Hashem, your G-d" (D'varim 6:5), he asks why the Torah did not use the more intense "v'chashakta BaShem Elokecha" - "and you should crave (or desire) Hashem, your G-d". To this

question, he answers that cheishek leaves no room for any other desire or love. Ahava allows for other loves as well. Since Man, in order to survive and serve Hashem with every aspect of his existence, must also pursue food, money, and marriage, he must "make room" for other loves in his life besides G-d and love G-d above all of them. This statement is truly shocking! In light of the above, I believe R. B'chaye's remarks can be amplified by stressing that it is precisely through these vehicles of engaging the world in a pure, dedicated way geared ultimately toward Divine service that one arrives at the ultimate, unadulterated love of G-d. Rav Soloveitchik once stated in a lecture that it is through the love of a spouse that one ultimately comes to the love of G-d. Through the finite one arrives at the infinite!

Another Talmudic passage (Kiddushin 30b) also sheds light on this same broad theme. "Barasi yeitzer hara, barasi lo Torah tavlin" - "I created the Evil Inclination; I create the Torah as its antidote!" Whereas the word tavlin is usually translated as antidote, its literal meaning is "spice or flavoring." How is the Torah the spice for the Yeitzer Hara?! A Chassidic giant explained that the "ikkar is the Yeitzer Hara; the Torah guides its application!" In other words, human drives, desires, and ambitions cause the person to engage the world, strive for greatness, yearn for goals and aspirations. The Torah informs us as to how to channel these same urges for a higher purpose.

The upcoming festival of Chanuka is normally associated with the victory of the spirit over the physical, the family of Kohanim over the paganistic Greeks, the Torah outlook over the diametrically opposed Hellenistic outlook. Indeed, Levush explains why the Shulchan 'Aruch (670:2) rules that festive meals eaten during Chanuka do not have the status of se'udot mitzva. Since the danger was a spiritual one and the victory was of a spiritual nature, we celebrate in a purely spiritual way with the lighting of the menorah symbolizing the light of Torah. In the events leading up to Purim, by contrast, the danger was physical, and the salvation was a physical one. Hence, we celebrate in a physical way through a meal of thanksgiving. However, other pos'kim quoted by Rema maintain that meals eaten during Chanuka do have the status of se'udot mitzva and certainly if shirot v'tishbachot are sung and offered at these meals. Perhaps our approach above helps explain this view. The Jews rising up against the Hellenistic Greeks - famous for their glorification of the body alone and for the hedonistic pursuit of bodily pleasure for the sake of pleasure itself - were fighting to reestablish the message of a Torah lifestyle in Israel. This lifestyle urges us to elevate the physical by channeling all aspects of life for a higher calling which is exactly the message of a se'udat mitzva. Perhaps this also explains the practice of eating latkes and sufganiyot, or, more generally, foods cooked in oil. By using food to commemorate the miracle of the oil of the menorah and express our thanksgiving to Hashem, we elevate the most basic of human activities - eating - and inject it with additional meaning. May the renewed sensitivity which Chanuka brings to kiddush hachomer - sanctifying the material - remain with us throughout the year!

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www.vbm-torah.org/salt.htm SALT!! ("Surf A Little Torah")

RABBI DAVID SILVERBERG

<http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/salt-bereishit/09-3vayeshev.htm>

Surf A Little Torah Yeshivat Har Etzion

PARASHAT VAYEISHEV

Yosef's courageous defiance of Potifar's wife's advances renders him the paradigm of self-control and restraint. "Yoshef HaTzaddik," as he is known, demonstrated how far will-power and spiritual consciousness can extend, to the point where one can overcome the strongest challenges, so long as he possesses sufficient resolve and determination.

Interestingly, however, specifically his inability to exercise self-restraint seems to have contributed to his decision to finally reveal his identity to his

brothers. The verse states that just prior to his unveiling of his disguise, Yosef was unable "le-hit'apek." Rashbam explains this phrase to mean that whereas heretofore Yosef had the wherewithal to overcome his strong, fraternal emotions towards his brothers, at this point he simply broke down. He could no longer contain himself, and felt compelled to truly become their brother once again. (Other commentaries - most notably, Rashi - interpret the verse differently.)

Why is it that Yosef, the master of self-control, suddenly loses his composure and emotional discipline?

The answer seems to be that Yosef's emotions directed themselves in accordance with his value system. Fraternal love and affection earned a respectable place in his hierarchy of values; his physical attraction towards a gentle, married woman was clearly suppressed by his demanding moral code. Yosef HaTzaddik mastered the art of self-control; he channeled his emotions in the directions determined by his strict ethical standards. Regarding the virtuous emotion of brotherly love, his feelings overflowed beyond control. When it came to the sinful desires of a forbidden relationship, his feelings were kept in check.

Essentially, herein lies the secret of overcoming one's improper tendencies. The stronger the resolve, the more one reinforces within him the conviction to do what's right, and the more his temptation for sin will give way to his inner will to do good. Yosef's self-control could not help him overcome his affection towards his brothers; but it was his self-control that directed his emotion away from Potifar's wife and towards his righteous brothers.

[Prepared by David Silverberg.]

Parashat Vayeshev describes Potifar's attempt to seduce Yosef and his heroic resistance to her efforts. The verse states, "He refused; he said to his master's wife... How could I do this great evil, and I will have sinned against God?"

Generally, the verse is understood as if a colon appeared after the opening word of the verse - "Vayema'en" ("He refused"). That is, the rest of the verse describes his refusal, expressed in his comments to Potifar's wife. However, Rav Itzele' of Volozhin notes that a "pesik" (separation mark) appears after the word "Vayema'en." Additionally, the unusual cantillation note, the "shalshelet," which dictates the tune to be chanted with the word "Vayema'en," sets the word apart from the rest of the verse.

Rav Itzele therefore suggests that the verse in fact tells of two different stages of Yosef's refusal to Potifar's wife. Firstly, he refused, no questions asked. His instinctive response was an unquestionable, unequivocal "No!" This reaction involved no thought process whatsoever; the act itself was so unthinkable that not a millisecond of hesitation was ever entertained. Thereafter, Yosef proceeded to explain to Potifar's wife why he could not satisfy her wishes.

If this interpretation is correct, then Yosef's response to Potifar's wife involved, first and foremost, instinct. Yosef's impulses had been conditioned by his moral sense and commitment to Torah, to the point that inappropriate behavior could not even be entertained.

For us, perhaps the lesson is the constant reinforcement of the ideals of Torah and mitzvot. By studying Torah, we learn what G-d expects of us, we learn what He deems appropriate and what not. This process conditions our characters accordingly, as we incorporate within us the values of the Torah. The more we learn and develop a sense of right and wrong, the more these principles become part of our natural instinct, and the more we will be naturally inclined to pursue mitzvot and avoid aveirot.

[Prepared by David Silverberg.]

The tragic episode of Yosef's sale is followed by the puzzling incident of Yehuda and Tamar. The Torah introduces this section with the phrase, "It was, at that time, Yehuda went down from his brothers..." He entered into a partnership with Chira, a man from a place called Adulam. According to the simple meaning of the text, the phrase "went down" refers to topographical descent: Yehuda went from the highlands of Chevron, where

the family lived, down towards the Judean desert, where Adulam is situated. Chazal, however, add a deeper meaning to the verse. The brothers "lowered" Yehuda from his stature of leadership in the aftermath of Yosef's sale. As the recognized leader, he could have prevented the tragedy.

Interestingly, though, the verse attributes the descent to Yehuda himself, not his brothers: "Yehuda went down from his brothers." Even if we accept the Midrashic interpretation, we must explain why the Torah presents the "descent" as Yehuda's initiative. Apparently, the brothers demoted Yehuda and he consented without protest. He recognized his failure and accepted the consequences. Once the brothers decided to "lower" him, he immediately "lowered" himself.

In fact, the episode of Yehuda and Tamar itself reflects this great attribute of Yehuda. The story ends with his heroic confession of having fathered Tamar's children. The Torah portrays Yehuda as far from perfect, but always prepared to sincerely admit to his mistakes and bear the responsibility thereof. The rebbe of Kotzk views Yehuda's marriage after Yosef's sale as the initiation of his teshuva process - procreation is the first mitzvah in the Torah. Aware of his failure, Yehuda lowers himself and starts his life anew. He rebuilds his character and, ultimately, his leadership. As Chazal point out, this incident sowed the seeds of the Davidic line, Yehuda's return to royalty.

Yehuda's name is related to the verb "hoda," to confess. This attribute which he represents signifies a critical characteristic of leadership. Like everyone else, kings and rulers make mistakes. Only they cannot afford to ignore them. A true leader is one who is willing to acknowledge his shortcomings and commit himself to overcoming them. Yehuda, the ultimate "confessor," was truly destined to serve as the royal tribe of Israel.

[Prepared by David Silverberg]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth [From 2 years ago 5764]

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

Vayeshev

REUBEN IS THE GREAT MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN IN THE TORAH. His father Jacob says as much in his dying words:

Reuben, you are my firstborn, My power and the beginning of my might, Pre-eminent in bearing and pre-eminent in strength. Unstable as water, you will not be pre-eminent . . .

His story is of potential unfulfilled, virtue not quite realized, greatness so close yet unachieved. How so? What does his example teach us about what it takes to live an accomplished life?

There is an extraordinary moment in Vayeshev. The Torah freeze-frames a critical juncture in Reuben's life, showing the diverging paths he faced when confronted with a moral challenge.

The background to the scene is the early years of Joseph, Jacob's child by his second wife and first love, Rachel. Jacob – the man who loves more than any other figure in Bereishith - cannot help showing his favoritism, to the hurt and slight of the other sons. The vignettes we have of Joseph as an adolescent are (as Rashi notes) less than endearing. He tells tales to his father about his brothers. He has dreams in which his family bow down to him, and worse – he reports them. There is about him, as the commentators observe, the air of a spoiled child. His father tolerates his behaviour and even gives him a richly embroidered cloak, the famous "coat of many colours," the sight of which acts as a constant provocation to the other sons. One day, as his brothers are tending the flocks far from home, Jacob sends him to see how they are doing. On this encounter, the whole future of the

children of Israel will depend. The brothers see Joseph from afar, and the sight of the cloak enrages them. They realize that, alone with no one to see them, they can kill Joseph and concoct a tale that will be impossible to refute. Only Reuben protests. It is at this point the Torah does something it does nowhere else. It makes a statement that, construed literally, is obviously false – indeed, the text goes on immediately to show that it was not quite so. The text states: "Reuben heard and saved him [Joseph] from their hands." He did not. The discrepancy is so obvious that most translations simply do not translate the phrase literally. What Reuben actually did was to attempt to save him. The phrase "Reuben heard and saved him" tells us what might have been, not what actually was.

Reuben's plan was simple. He told the brothers not to kill Joseph but to let him die:

"Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him."

The text then - again unusually, for it is rare for the Torah to describe a person's thoughts - explains Reuben's intention: "[Reuben said this] in order to save him from their hand and take him back to his father." Reuben had no intention of letting Joseph die. His plan was to persuade the brothers to leave him in the pit so that, when their attention was elsewhere, he could come back to it, lift Joseph out and take him home.

What happens next is obscure, though the outcome is clear. While Reuben was somewhere else, Joseph was taken from the pit and sold to a passing caravan of merchants who carry him to Egypt to be sold as a slave. The text itself makes it impossible to determine whether this was done by the other brothers at the suggestion of Judah, or by passing Midianites (Nechamah Leibowitz has a fine analysis of the various readings given by the commentators). Reuben, unaware of all this, returns to the pit to rescue Joseph but finds him gone. He is bereft. "When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, 'The boy is gone! And I, where can go?'"

Commenting on this episode, the midrash states:

If Reuben had only known that the Holy One, blessed be He, would write of him, "And Reuben heard and saved him from their hands," he would have picked him up on his shoulders and carried him back to his father.

This is a deeply puzzling comment. Did Reuben really need the endorsement of Heaven to do the right thing? Did he need G-d's approval before rescuing his brother?. Yet, as we will see, it holds the essential clue about Reuben's character. It tells us what stands between what might-have-been and what was.

Reuben is the Hamlet of Bereishith, whose "native hue of resolution" is "sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." He is a person of good intentions. He cares. He thinks. He is not led by the crowd or by his darker instincts. He penetrates to the moral core of a situation. That is the first thing we notice about him. The second, however, is that somehow his interventions backfire. They fail to achieve their effect. Attempting to make things better, Reuben makes them worse. The Torah clearly wants us to reflect on Reuben's character. To this end it paints a portrait of the young man, in a series of rapidly sketched yet revealing vignettes.

In the first, we see him in the fields during the wheat harvest. He finds some mandrakes. From the context it appears that mandrakes were believed to be both an aphrodisiac and a fertility drug (John Donne refers to this in a famous poem: "Get with child a mandrake root"). His first thought is to give them to his mother Leah. This tells us something about Reuben. He is not thinking about himself but about her. He knows she feels unloved, and identifies with her anguish with all the sensitivity of an eldest son. He hopes that, with the aid of the mandrakes, Leah will be able to win Jacob's attention, perhaps even his love.

It is a strikingly mature and thoughtful act. Yet it has negative consequences. It provokes a bitter row between the two sisters, Leah and Rachel. Rachel sees the mandrakes and wants them for herself. The following exchange then takes place:

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"

This is the only time that angry words are reported between the two sisters. Reuben, seeking to help Leah, creates a scene in which her bitterness rises to the surface. That is scene one.

Scene two takes place when Rachel dies. An obscure incident takes place which has tragic consequences. The biblical text is cryptic:

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb. Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it. . . .

Read literally, this suggests that Reuben took his father's place in Bilhah's tent – an almost Oedipal act of displacement, as we discover later in the Bible when Absalom does the same with his father David's concubine (II Samuel 16: 21). Rashi, following midrashic tradition, prefers a gentler explanation. When Rachel died, Jacob, who had slept in her tent, moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, her handmaid. This, for Reuben, was an unbearable provocation. It was bad enough that Jacob preferred Rachel to her sister Leah, but intolerable that he should prefer her handmaid to his mother. He therefore removed Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's.

Even according to this interpretation, however, it is clear that Jacob misunderstood the act and believed that his son had in fact usurped his place. He never forgot or forgave the incident and on his death-bed he reminded Reuben of it:

Unstable as water, you will not be pre-eminent, For you went up onto your father's bed, Onto my couch and defiled it.

Earlier, at the time of the event itself, the text uses an unusual stylistic device. After the words, "And Israel heard of it," the Masoretic text indicates a paragraph break in the middle of a sentence. The effect is to signal a silence, a complete breakdown in communication. Hence the pathos of the rabbinic interpretation of the passage, which certainly fits all we know about Reuben. He was not seeking to displace Jacob but rather to draw his attention to the hurt and distress of Leah. Yet Jacob says nothing, giving Reuben no opportunity to clear his name or explain why he did what he did. The result: a second tragedy.

Inevitably, we are drawn to the third scene, chronologically the first – Reuben's birth. One does not need to be a Freudian to hear, in this passage, the key to Reuben's character. Leah, we recall, had been substituted for Rachel on the wedding night. It was Rachel whom Jacob loved and thought he was marrying, after seven years working for her father Laban. The next morning, when Jacob discovered the identity of his new wife, there was an angry scene between the two men. Jacob accuses Laban of deception. Laban replies, "It is not done in our place to give the younger before the elder" (hinting that this is what Jacob had done by disguising himself as Esau and taking his blessing, as if to say: what right have you to complain if what you did is done to you in return).

Jacob does marry Rachel a week later, and thereafter Leah must live with the knowledge that she was not her husband's choice. There then follows a passage of great pathos:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben ["see, a son"], for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Shimon.

Leah hoped that the birth of Reuben would make Jacob love her. But he does not. We know this because she is still voicing the same hope when Shimon is born. Reuben has to carry with him throughout his life the knowledge of his mother's slight and his father's lack of attention.

Significantly, it is Leah, not Jacob, who gives both Reuben and Shimon their names. It is almost as if Jacob was not there.

We now have a rich, composite and penetrating portrait of Reuben – and we now know that the psychological key to his character is already given at his birth.

Jacob is a hero of faith, the man who gave Israel its name, the only patriarch all of whose children remained within the covenant. Yet the complexity of Jacob's character is light years away from the idealised heroes of other religious traditions. In Jacob we discover that the life of faith is not simple. Not by accident does his name Israel mean "the one who wrestled with G-d and with human beings and prevailed." 11 We also discover something else. Every virtue carries with it a corresponding danger. The person who is over-generous may condemn his own family to poverty. The individual (like Aaron) who chooses peace at any price can sometimes allow those around him to make a golden calf. There is no single authoritative role model in Judaism. Instead there are many: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Moses, Aaron and Miriam; kings, prophets and priests; masters of halakhah and aggadah; sages and saints, poets and philosophers. The reason is that no one can embody all the virtues all the time. A strength here is a weakness there.

Jacob loved, passionately and deeply. That was his strength, but also his weakness. His love for Rachel meant that he could not bestow equal favour on Leah. His longing for a child by Rachel meant that there was something lacking in his relationship with Leah's firstborn, Reuben. Had he loved less, there might have been no problem. He might have divided his attention more equally. But had he loved less, he would not have been Jacob.

The result, however, is that Reuben carries with him a lack of confidence, an uncertainty, that at critical moments robs him of his capacity to carry through a course of action that he knows to be right. He begins well but does not drive the deed to closure. Returning with the mandrakes he might have bided his time until Leah was alone. After Rachel's death he might have spoken directly to his father instead of moving the beds. In the face of his brothers' murderous intentions toward Joseph he might, as the midrash says, have simply carried him home. Instead he hesitated, choosing to put off the moment until the brothers were elsewhere. The result was tragedy. It is impossible not to recognise in Reuben a person of the highest ethical sensibilities. But though he had conscience, he lacked courage. He knew what was right, but lacked the resolve to do it boldly and decisively. In that hesitation, more was lost than Joseph. So too was Reuben's chance to become the hero he might and should have been.

If Reuben had only known – says the midrash. If only he had known that the Torah would write of him, "And Reuben heard and saved him from their hands" – meaning that his intention was known and valued by G-d as if it were the deed. Knowing this, he might have found the courage to carry it through into action. But Reuben could not know. He had not read the story. None of us can read the story of our life – we can only live it. The result is that we live in and with uncertainty. Doubt can lead to delay until the moment is lost. In a moment of arrested intention, Reuben lost his chance of changing history.

Reuben could not read his story, but we can. If there is a single verse in Tenakh that stands as a commentary on his life it is the inexpressibly poignant line from Psalm 27: "Though my father and mother may forsake me, the Lord will receive me." Jacob, being human, loved some, not others. G-d, not being human, loves each of us, and that is our greatest source of strength. G-d heeds those not heard. He loves those whom others do not love. Reuben, still a young man, did not yet know this. But we, reading his story and the rest of Tenakh, do.

We are here for a reason, conceived in love, brought into being by the One who brought the universe into being, who knows our innermost thoughts, values our good intentions, and has more faith in us than we have in ourselves. That, if only we meditate on it, gives us the strength to turn intention into deed, lifting us from the person we might have been into the person we become.

From: Weekly Sedra United Synagogue London [DAF-HASHAVUA@SHAMASH.ORG] on behalf of Rafael Salasnik [rafi@BRIJNET.ORG] Sent: Thursday, December 22, 2005 6:56 AM To: DAF-HASHAVUA@SHAMASH.ORG Subject: daf-hashavua Vayeshev 5766/2005

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SHABBAT MEVARACHIM
Hertz p.141 Soncino p.229
Shabbat ends in London at 4.50pm
JEWISH VALUES

by **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks**

The recent riots in France have reminded us again what a fragile thing society is, and how quickly human beings can descend into a maelstrom of violence and lawlessness. "Pray for the welfare of the government", said Rabbi Haninah in Pirkei Avot, "for without it, people would eat one another alive."

It is impossible, as a Jew, not to feel empathy for those living in the communities and circumstances from which the violence has come. Our grandparents, and theirs, knew what it was like to live in ghettos, to suffer poverty, unemployment and an eclipse of hope, to feel a sense of discrimination and prejudice surrounding you from the wider society.

At the same time, it is also impossible not to feel uneasy at the state of a world in which anger and aggression, violence and terror, stalk us at every turn: in the Balkans, Africa, the Middle East, Indonesia, Chechnya, and other conflict zones - and now in the liberal democratic West: Holland after the death of Theo van Gogh, New Orleans after the hurricane, and the Lozells area of Birmingham after a false report of rape. We seem to be living through one of those ages that the Torah describes before the Flood, when

"the world was filled with violence".

Violence happens when people lose faith in society, when they become impatient with the political process, when they feel they have more to gain by lawlessness than by the rule of law. That is when they begin to take the law into their own hands. The result is what Thomas Hobbes described as the state of nature, the war of all against all, when life, in his famous phrase, becomes "nasty, brutish and short".

That is always a prelude to tragedy. The perpetrators become the victims. The neighbourhoods they destroy are their own. They intensify the very prejudice against which they were protesting. Violence blocks the road to hope. Maimonides said that anger is the most destructive of all emotions. In the 21st century, we have seen how true that is.

Chanukah contains a message for our time. At first, what seemed to be most important was the military victory of Jews against the mighty empire of Greece. As time passed, however, a quite different narrative emerged. What had once seemed a tiny miracle - the cruse of oil left undefiled, which kept burning and giving light - came to be seen as the most important symbol of all, a peaceful symbol, spiritual rather than political. The menorah is the light of hope. Jews kept going through dark times because they never lost hope.

In the 21st century we need, more even than politics and economics, to find ways of kindling the candle of hope in regions where anger rules and violence reigns. That is the choice: the peaceful flames of Chanukah, or the destructive flames of burning cars.

Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue.

Editor: Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis <mailto:editordaf@brijnet.org> Address: Finchley Synagogue, Kinloss Gardens, London N3 3DU Editorial Board: Rabbi Yisroel Fine, Rabbi Philip Ginsbury, Mr Simon Goulden, Rabbi Emanuel Levy, Rabbi Meir Salasnik, Rabbi Dr Julian Shindler To sponsor Daf Hashavua please contact Anthony Cummings <mailto:Anthony.Cummings@unitedsynagogue.org.uk> Copyright 2005 United Synagogue Publications Ltd.

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From: **Rabbi Kalman Packouz** [<mailto:newsletterserver@aish.com>]
Sent: Sunday, December 18, 2005 10:59 AM Subject: Shabbat Shalom - Vayeshev

Dvar Torah based on **Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin**

When the brothers saw Joseph approaching them in Dotan, they plotted to kill him. The Torah states:

"And Reuven heard and he saved him from their hands. And he said, 'Let us not hit a mortal blow.' And Reuven said to them, 'Do not shed blood.'" (Genesis 37:21-22)

What can we learn from Reuven that will develop our skills of convincing others?

Rabainu Bachya comments that Reuven wanted to save his brother, Joseph. If he were to have said, "Let us not hit him," he would have shown his brothers that his motivation was compassion for Joseph and they would not have listened to him. Therefore, Reuven added the word nefesh, a mortal blow. Reuven was saying, "I don't want you to commit murder regardless of who the person is." Similarly, in verse 22 he said to them, "Do not shed blood." He did not say "his blood." This implied, "I, too, hate him and it is not his blood that I am concerned about. Rather, I am concerned that you should not become murderers."

From this observation of Rabainu Bachya we see a very important principle when it comes to influencing someone. The focus of your arguments should be on points that the listener will accept even though your own focus might center on a different aspect of the situation. Reuven's goal was to prevent the shedding of blood. He wanted to save Joseph. If he would have told them to have mercy on Joseph, they would have disregarded his pleas. He wisely showed them that their behavior was not in their own best interests since they would lower themselves by their actions.

A person will only do what he or she perceives is in his or her best interest. Therefore, it is always more effective to present ideas and suggestions from that point of view.

* * *

Dvar Torah based on **based on From Living Each Day by Rabbi Dr. A. Twersky**

Hillel, the great Jewish rabbi, taught that on the first night of Chanukah we light one candle and each successive night we add an additional candle until on the eighth night there are eight candles.

Why did Hillel prescribe this method for commemorating the eight days of Chanukah? Wouldn't it have been more impressive to light eight candles each night?

There are two important lessons for us to learn:

We must always strive to grow and increase our spirituality. One never stays in the same place -you either improve or you fall behind.

It is a mistake to grasp too much too fast. Growing spiritually is like climbing a ladder. If you try to climb too many rungs in one step, you're likely to fall. That is why we increase the Chanukah lights one candle at a time!

...

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From: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Sent: Friday, December 09, 2005 6:22 AM
To: ZeitlinShelley@aol.com Subject: A Chanukah Message of Hope by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

A Chanukah Message of Hope
By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss

The Gemora, in the second perek of Masechtas Shabbos, asks an unusual question. "Mai Chanukah – What is Chanukah?" Such a question is not asked about any of our other festivals or special days. This is primarily due to the fact that Chanukah is our only major calendar event that has no scriptural references and explanations. Therefore the Gemora grapples to find the message of Chanukah. It concludes, "V'kavu shemonas yamei Chanukah eilu lahallel v'hoda – That the eight days of Chanukah were instituted for praise and thanksgiving." Thus, the Gemora establishes that the lesson of Chanukah is to train us to appreciate Jewish survival throughout the ages and Hashem's special blessings to us as Jews.

But Chanukah has many messages. In Judaism, fire is synonymous with Torah – as the Gemora teaches us in Masechtas Megilah, "LaYehudim hoisa Ora – To the Jews there was Light." The Gemora clarifies that Ora, Light, refers to the glow of Torah. Thus, the centerpiece of Chanukah, the lights of the menorah, represents the inner glow of the Jewish home. It is the light of the Torah that illuminates our way through the darkness of our materialistic world and affords the special warmth that permeates our homes.

But, I'd like to zoom in on another contemporary message that I believe Chanukah conveys. We live in a time when despair and depression abound. The sale of anti-depressants such as paxil is literally a billion dollar industry (thank G-d that there are such wonderful drugs available). Their use is prevalent in our Jewish world as well. For us there is gloom over parnasa, one's livelihood, where so many can't seem to make ends meet and are worried about the future – how to continue paying ever rising tuition costs and marry-off children. There is a desperation for so many who can't find work and feel vastly unfulfilled and helpless. There is the deep despair of the myriads of lonely singles and their families as they look at the years going by without success. There is the despondency of the many couples trapped in lifeless marriages or, even worse, caught in the web of marital fighting and daily unhappiness. There is the vast number of middle-age men and women feeling the pangs and the melancholy of mid-life crisis.

I strongly feel that the small flickering light of the Chanukah menorah symbolizes the message of hope. At the time of the Yevanim, the Syrian-Greeks, things looked very black indeed for Klal Yisroel. On the physical side, we were dominated by the cruel Antiochus and his Olympian army that was all-powerful. There seemed to be no hope in sight. In the spiritual arena, the Jews were rapidly losing the battle, becoming Hellenized and assimilated by the tempting hedonistic culture of the Yevanim. But, one small family did not succumb to the doom and gloom. The Macabees took action and with the help of Hashem, turned everything around. So too it was with the miracle of the lights. One of the most famous questions in Jewish literature is why Chanukah is eight days when the miracle seemed to only have been for seven days. We know that they found one jug of oil with the seal of the kohein gadol declaring its purity. It would take eight days to manufacture and transport new pure oil to the Beis HaMikdash so it would seem to be that they only needed seven days of miraculous oil. Yet we celebrate the miracle for eight days. How come? Known as the Beis Yosef's kashah, there are scores of answers to this question, such as they divided the oil in the eighths and yet it burned the full amount every day so

that it was a miraculous event all eight days. But again, consistent with our theme of hope, I'd like to zoom-in on two answers to this popular question.

First is the explanation of the Pri Chasdash that the finding of the one jug of oil was itself a great miracle. The Syrian-Greeks, knowing that the inner strength of the Jewish people is the wisdom of Torah and knowing that the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash was the national symbol of Torah, set out to contaminate all of the menorah's supply. Things looked hopeless but the Jews did not give up and miraculously they uncovered the lone jug. So, on the first day, we celebrate the miracle of the finding of the jug itself.

The Taz offers a more profound explanation. He teaches that in order to be deserving of a miracle, there has to be something for the miracle to devolve upon. So, on the first day, when there was enough oil to burn for that day, Hashem miraculously allowed some to be left over for the second day so that the miracle should be able to kick in on the second day over some leftover oil. This is the meaning of the Moaz Tzur song, "Uminosar kankanim," that which was left over from the flask, "Naaseh neis lashoshanim," a miracle occurred to the Jewish people who are compared to roses. This is also the reason why, at the end of the meal when we bench, we make sure to keep some bread or some crumbs on the table so that when we ask Hashem, "Harachamon, Hu yishlach lanu b'rachah merubah babais hazeh, v'al shulchan zeh she'achalnu alav – O Merciful, send us blessing on this house and on this table that we are eating by," there should be something for G-d's blessings to devolve upon.

I strongly feel that this message of hope is a vital and fundamental one. Many people struggling with life's challenges have thrown in the towel; they are burnt out and years of frustration have caused them to simply give up. Chanukah is an urgent reminder: Don't do it," for Hashem wants only a shred of our effort in order to shower upon us His intervention.

Hashem, Who provides a beshert for everyone at their births will come through but there has to be the little oil; on our part, the crumbs of effort must always be there. Whether it's in the arena of looking for a job, working on our marriages, finding a life's mate, or working on our dreams and ambitions, we cannot afford to cave in. Hashem says, "Pischu li pesach pisku she'machat, v'Ani eftach lachem pesach k'pishcho shel ulam – Open for Me an opening even the size of the eye of a needle and I'll open for you an opening the size of a ballroom." But, we must take that step of keeping the opening open.

Similarly, the Gemora teaches, "B'derech she'adam rotze l'leches, molichin oso – In the way that person wants to go, Hashem leads him." So, while the Yeitzer Hara would like nothing better than for us to give up on our marriages and lead separate lives under one roof, he would cherish nothing better than a man or a woman to bleakly consign themselves to permanent solitude, the message of Chanukah is to gaze at the small flickering flames of our history and to remember the message of hope, the miraculous turnabout the Chanukah story. The Macabees teach us, Roll up your sleeves and persevere. Do your part against the odds and, no matter how dark the situation is, Hashem will come to the rescue. How ease it is, after a couple of years of fruitless and insulting interviews, to just give up, go bankrupt, sleep the days away, and be abjectly miserable. The one jar of oil that turned the tide reminds us to push on and give Hashem the ingredients of our struggling efforts and He will assuredly come through for us.

This message of hope should also embrace the many struggling with midlife crisis. There were so many Jews at the precipice of complete Hellenization and assimilation that were turned around by the inspiration of the Chashmanoim. Chanukah teaches us that we can take even the little that we have and turn it into greatness – no matter how old we are we can initiate a course of Torah study, a campaign of revitalized prayer that will give us spiritual fulfillment and a sense of real happiness in a very short time from when we embark a such a revitalization. May it be the will of Hashem that the triple Chanukah messages of thanksgiving, Torah, and renewed hope fill our homes with warmth and joy, and may Hashem bless us all with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

To receive a weekly cassette tape or CD directly from Rabbi Weiss, please send a check to Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss, P.O. Box 140726, Staten Island, NY 10314 or contact him at RMMWSI@aol.com.

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Thursday, December 22, 2005 4:33 PM To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

- Parshas Vayeishev

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings. (37:1) Rashi comments that the Torah records the offspring of Eisav in a perfunctory manner, because Hashem did not hold them in high esteem. It would, therefore, be unnecessary to detail how they settled or to give accounts of their battles. The offspring of Yaakov Avinu are a different story. They are important enough for Hashem to dwell at length about their settlements. Alternatively, Va'yeishav Yaakov, Yaakov settled, can be explained by the following parable. A certain flax merchant entered a town with his camels heavily laden with flax. The blacksmith who observed this entrance wondered, "Where can all this flax be stored?" A clever fellow noticed his consternation and replied, "One spark can go forth from your bellows which will burn it all up." Likewise, Yaakov saw all the chiefs of Eisav, whose names are mentioned at the end of the last Parsha. He voiced concern, "Who could conquer all of them?" The response comes in the way of the following pasuk (37:2), "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef." This pasuk implies that Yosef provides the solution to the threat of Eisav's numbers. As it is written (Ovadia 1:18), "The house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for straw," a spark shall go forth from Yosef which will annihilate and burn all of them.

The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, have a profound understanding of the above analogy. They view it as a fundamental lesson concerning the Jewish People in their age-old battle against the forces of Eisav, manifest in the various external forces which are dedicated to seeing us become an extinct nation. Eisav and his cohorts are represented by straw. The value of straw can be measured in one way: quantity. The more straw one possesses, the greater its value. Small quantities of straw are basically without value. Only in numbers does it achieve significance. Its mass determines its value. This is the salient characteristic of Eisav and his minions. These nations value the material and negate the spiritual. Thus, he who has more has greater significance. He who has less has diminished worth. When Eisav met Yaakov, he ignored Yaakov's gift, declaring, Yeish li rav, "I have much." His value system was based upon mass and volume. Eisav was materially wealthy. There was nothing Yaakov could give to the man who had everything. Indeed, the nations who live by the barometer of material wealth would deluge our People, if they could. They would establish a system whereby he who has - is, and he who does not have - is not. It would be a world unencumbered by moral and spiritual values, by ethics and humanness. It would be a world of who has and who has not. They would use their mass to overwhelm Yaakov. This is what the blacksmith saw. How could the village survive with all of this straw?

Yaakov had the answer illustrated by the way of life he had chosen for himself and his offspring. When he met Eisav, he said, Yeish li kol, "I have everything." He lived on a spiritual moral plateau in which values are not measured by size, bulk or mass. Quantity has no relevance. Quality determines value and significance. Yaakov had everything. He achieved shleimus, completeness/perfection, an impossible accomplishment in the realm of the physical, since, regardless of what one possesses, he wants and can obtain more. Harmony, peace, completion and wholesomeness are words which define measurement in the spiritual realm.

Let us compare Eisav's bulk of straw to Yaakov's spark. This little spark is a complete unit of energy, regardless of its size. One tiny spark has the power to inflame and incinerate all of Eisav's straw. In the battle of physical might against genuine spirit, the authentic quality will prevail over the quantitative substance, which is nothing more than an external covering, a fa?ade. One tiny spark of true Judaism can enlighten a world of darkness, a world built upon the foundations of shallow superficiality.

The spark, however, has power only as long as the tiniest flame burns with it. Once the fire is gone, the spark is extinguished and worthless. Indeed, an extinguished spark is worth less than a bulk of straw. What a powerful lesson for us to absorb and integrate into our lives. As long as the flame burns within the Jew, in his heart and mind, Eisav can have no mastery over him. He has nothing to fear. If the ember cools, if the fire dies out, he falls prey to Eisav's blandishments of materialism,

superficiality and one-dimensional perspective. How fortunate are we that the spark of the Jew, his neshamah, soul, is of a Divine origin - one that burns eternally.

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

Chazal teach us that Yaakov Avinu wished to settle down in tranquility, but the anguish of Yosef's kidnapping came to haunt him. Although the righteous seek tranquility, Hashem says, "Are the righteous not satisfied with what is in store for them in the World to Come, such that they expect to live at ease in This World also?" Understandably, the commentators offer various approaches to explain Yaakov's desire to live in tranquility. The question that confronts us, however, is whether we can understand the nature of a request for tranquility from an individual who is used to such a life. Yaakov's life actually had been filled with anguish from the beginning. From birth, he had to contend with Eisav, followed by Lavan and the incident of Dinah; he was always running from Eisav. In reality, the episode with Yosef was typical of Yaakov's previous life experiences. Regrettably, it fit perfectly into the scheme of the tzaros, miseries, he had sustained throughout his life. What was there about the anguish concerning Yosef that consumed Yaakov?

The Brisker Rav, zl, explains that the tzaros that Yaakov Avinu experienced became the foundation for building Klal Yisrael. Whatever Yaakov sustained comprised the building blocks for the future nation that would descend from him. Yaakov's dispute with Eisav concerning the rights of the first-born was a portent of Klal Yisrael's sojourn in Egypt. Hashem refers to His People as Beni b'chori Yisrael, "My son, My first-born, Yisrael." The misery and trials that he experienced in Lavan's home, Rachel and Leah's travail, and Yaakov's ultimate descent to the land of Egypt, all were pieces of Hashem's Divine Plan for His nation. Thus, Yaakov accepted these tzaros as aspects of a collective harbinger of what was in store for his offspring. He withstood the trials and acquiesced to the pain. They served a purpose.

The torment concerning Yosef, however, was completely different. It was personal. Everybody else knew that Yosef was alive. Yosef's status had been concealed from only one individual: Yaakov. This vexed Yaakov to no end. He was acutely aware that every consequence has an origin, every result has its source, every torment has its precursor in sin. When Yaakov noted that he was being visited with personal trauma, he realized that he must have sinned. He sought to understand the reason for his personal anguish. Yaakov signifies the individual, while Yisrael represents the collective nation. Yaakov, the man, sought to pinpoint the sin that was disrupting his personal "tranquility." What did he do to deserve this retribution?

Furthermore, with regard to the actual request to settle in tranquility, is it improper for the righteous to request the opportunity to serve Hashem in a calm, undistracted venue? After all, it is not as if they are asking for a vacation. They simply want to serve Hashem without the constraints of anguish. Is that so inappropriate? The Brisker Rav teaches us a powerful lesson: One is not to entreat Hashem to alter his circumstances, so that he can serve Him better. On the contrary, one is to rise above the challenges presented by his current situation to serve Hashem, regardless of the impediments.

He would often cite the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, whose practice it was to daven in a small room on the side of the shul, while his chassidim davened in the bais hamedrash. One Rosh Hashanah, the Kotzker opened his door and said, "I know for what you are praying, and I also know Hashem's reply." The Rebbe immediately closed his door and continued praying in private. One of his close chassidim knocked on the door and asked, "Rebbe, what is it that we are requesting?"

The Rebbe replied, "You are requesting less difficulty in earning a livelihood, so that you will have more time to study Torah. And Hashem's reply is, 'This is what I want, and this is how it should be.'" In summation, we are to serve Hashem in our current situation without excuses.

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