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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
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Vayeishev Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: CD #880 – Lying for the Sake of Truth. Good Shabbos!

One Can Rely On The Gerer Rebbe

Rav Yehudah Leib Zirelson was the Rav of Kishinev (Moldova). He was a great individual, but Kishinev was "off the beaten path" in terms of what was going on in the Torah world of his time. In other words, it was far removed from Central Europe and the major Torah communities of the day – Poland, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, etc. Rav Zirelson used to correspond with a Polish Rav named Rav Moshe Nachum Yerushalmi. One day, Rav Moshe Nachum received a letter from Rav Yehudah Leib of Kishinev in which he wrote the following: "I recently received a letter that a group of Rabbis intend to start a new organization called 'Agudas Yisrael' and they want to place at the head of this organization someone known as the 'Admor of Gur' (the Gerer Rebbe). They are asking me to go along with their decision. Please tell me, who is this fellow known as the 'Admor of Gur' and should I acquiesce to his being given this leadership position in the proposed new organization?"

This is what is called "being out of it". However, he simply did not know any better. He was stuck in Kishinev in Moldova and he simply did not have his finger on the pulse of what was going on in the wider Jewish community.

The Polish Rabbi wrote back to his colleague in Kishinev as follows: "Yes the Admor of Gur is someone who can be relied upon. He is in fact a great Tzaddik and indeed has thousands of Chassidic followers. Furthermore, I know that he is a person who has "Siyata d'Shmaya" [Divine Assistance]. He is certainly worthy of the position."

Rav Yerushalmi proceeded to relate the basis of his first-hand knowledge that the Gerer Rebbe possessed "Siyata d'Shmaya": In my little village there is a Jew named Rav Sheinfeld, who happens to be the uncle of the Gerer Rebbe. Every so often, the Gerer Rebbe comes to visit this uncle and -- as was the custom in Europe -- whenever a visiting Rabbi visits another town, he pays a courtesy visit to the town's official Rabbi (Moreh d'Asra). Therefore, I had yearly visits from the Gerer Rebbe. During one visit, I was

discussing with him the weekly parsha and I told him that I had a question on Parshas Vayeshev.

The pasuk states "Yosef was a 'na-ar' [youth or lad] with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah" [Bereshis 37:2]. The Medrash questions the use of the term 'naar' here, which connotes a young immature child, as at this time Yosef was already 17 years old. The Medrash infers from this description that Yosef did childish things. Rashi, citing the Medrash, explains that Yosef used to fix his hair and groom his eyes so that he should look attractive.

Rav Yerushalmi asked the Gerer Rebbe, that by Akeidas Yitzchak, the pasuk says, "I and the 'na-ar' will go up to here" [Bereshis 22:5] where the word 'na-ar' refers to Yitzchak, even though he was 37 years old at the time! Why does the Medrash not question the use of the term na-ar for Yitzchak, who was more than twice as old as Yosef when he was described as a na-ar?

The Gerer Rebbe dismissed the question. He explained that in the story of the Akeidah, Avraham Avinu called Yitzchak a na-ar. To a father, a child is always a child! It is not at all noteworthy to hear a father refer to his son, regardless of his age, as a young child. However, in Parshas Vayeshev, the Torah calls Yosef a na-ar, not his father. Therefore, this usage can be used for Medrashic exposition!

Rav Yerushalmi, who lived on the second floor of his building, went to accompany the Gerer Rebbe out of his apartment when the visit was over. A 100 year old widow lived on the first floor of the building. The widow came out of her house and upon seeing the Gerer Rebbe she asked him for a Bracha. The Rebbe gave her a bracha. This woman had a son who was 80 years old. She then requested of the Rebbe "Give my little one a blessing as well." Here then was an 80 year old man who was referred to as "my little one" by his mother.

The point of Rav Yerushalmi was that literally within moments of the Gerer Rebbe giving an answer to the question, his insight was validated with a real life story, proving from Heaven as it were, that the 'vort' was true!

The current Tolner Rebbe (Jerusalem) asks on this answer of the Gerer Rebbe one basic question: In the Akeida we find a later pasuk in which the Angel from Heaven calls out to Avraham and also uses the term 'na-ar': "Do not send forth your hand to the 'na-ar'" [Bereshis 22:12]. This was not a parent speaking. Why then does the Medrash ignore the Torah's use the term na-ar by Akeidas Yitzchak?

The Tolner Rebbe answers that the Angel speaks in the Name of Hashem and to the Almighty, every Jew is like a child! "For Israel was a na-ar and I loved him..." [Hoshea 11:1]; "Children are you to the L-rd your G-d" [Devorim 14:1]. Once we are like the sons of G-d, it is understandable why we should always be thought of as a young lad (na-ar).

This Is Not A Story About Heroes and Villains

We should not make the mistake (as others have) to impose personality traits of common sibling rivalry upon Yosef's brothers when the Torah says about them that "they were jealous of him" [Bereshis 37:11] or that "they hated him" [Bereshis 37:4]. We must remember that we are speaking of the "Shivtei Kah" [The Tribes of G-d], the founding fathers and pillars of our people. We are not speaking of petty jealousies but of fundamental theological disputes that were taking place within the family, between Yosef and his brothers.

To bring this point home, I would like to share the following incident:

The Yeshiva in Volozhin, founded by Rav Chaim of Volozhin (a disciple of the Gaon of Vilna) was the mother of all Lithuanian Yeshivos. It had an illustrious history and from it emerged all the Lithuanian-based Yeshivos with which we are so familiar.

In its early days, there was a leadership struggle in Volozhin as to who should become the next Rosh Yeshiva. The two candidates for the job were each great men in Israel. One was Rav Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (The Netziv) the other was Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik (The Beis haLevi), the patriarch of the Brisker dynasty and the Soloveitchik family.

They were both in the Yeshiva. They had very distinct styles of learning and different groups of students rallied around each of the Rabbis with whom they found a particular affinity for their 'derech haLimud' [style of learning]. The Netziv was a 'baki', who had brilliant encyclopedic knowledge of virtually all sources of Torah learning. The Beis haLevi was more of a 'charif', known for his sharp and incisive analysis.

The administration convened a Beis Din of the great Rabbinical leaders of the time to rule on the question regarding who should be the next Rosh Yeshiva of the Volozhin Yeshiva. One of the personalities present at this Din Torah was the famous Vilna Maggid.

The Vilna Maggid requested permission to express his opinion and began his remarks with the following statement: "Today we find ourselves involved in the story of Parshas Vayeshev." This remark immediately drew everyone's attention because it was the end of the month of Tishrei and it was NOT the week of Parshas Vayeshev. Everyone gave the Vilna Maggid quizzical looks. He continued:

I am a Maggid. My stock in trade is that I use the weekly parsha to bring out lessons of life. On a consistent basis, I always show the difference between good and evil. In Sefer Bereshis, I can go through every single parsha showing the 'good guy' and the 'bad guy' and setting them against one another as moral lessons for good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice.

In Parshas Bereshis, I can use Adam and Chava vs. the Snake or Kayin vs Hevel. In Parshas Noach, it is Noach vs. his generation. In Lech Lecha, it is Avraham Avinu vs. Pharaoh. In Vayera, it is Avraham Avinu vs. Lot. In Chayei Sarah, it is Avraham vs. the Bnei Ches. In Toldos, it is Eisav vs. Yaakov. In Vayeitzei, it is Yaakov vs. Lavan. Each of the parshiyos has paradigms of good and evil. However, in Parshas Vayeshev, I am stuck. I have no material. Here it is not good vs. evil. Here both sides – Yosef and his brothers – are wholly righteous. It is very difficult to take sides regarding who is right and who is wrong.

The Vilna Maggid concluded, "Gentlemen, today we find ourselves in a situation comparable to Parshas Vayeshev. On the one hand, the Netziv is a genius and a thoroughly righteous individual and on the other hand the Beis haLevi is a genius and a thoroughly righteous person. This is exactly like Parshas Vayeshev, where we cannot take sides because we are not talking about a righteous person vs a wicked person.

This is how we need to view Parshas Vayeshev.

[The 'Din Torah' was ultimately resolved in favor of the Netziv, who therefore became known as the Netziv of Volozhin].

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah series on the weekly Torah portion.

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Rabbi Reisman - Parshas Vayeishev 5774

1. I would like to share with you a Vayeishev thought and a Chanukah Vort or two. Regarding Parshas Vayeishev I remembered that once upon a time Rav Pam told me the following. He said that Rav Schwab related that the Chofetz Chaim once had a dream and in the dream he dreamt that he was a wealthy man. The next day, the Chofetz Chaim fasted a Taanis Chalom. When this was related by Rav Schwab he explained that it seemed that the Chofetz Chaim held that being a wealthy man is a bad thing, a difficult thing perhaps. For him it required a Taanis Chalom. To this, Rav Pam responded he didn't like the idea that it was a Taanis Chalom because it was a bad dream, and to this he responded that he feels that it was a different reason that he fasted. We have a Kabbalah that Rov Chalomos, most dreams go according to the thoughts of the day. The Chofetz Chaim thought that he was

thinking about money too much during the day and he fasted as a way of doing Teshuvah. A disagreement regarding this dream.

What puts this to mind is that in this week's Parsha Yosef has his dream which he relates to his brothers. The question is Yosef was a bright person, why did he tell this dream to his brothers, didn't he understand that this dream would bring about a negative reaction that it seems that he is bragging. Why is he telling this dream to his brothers?

Rav Belsky suggested that on the contrary. Yosef like the Chofetz Chaim was concerned about the dream and he wasn't happy about the dream. Yosef didn't see it as a wonderful dream. He went to his brothers because the Halacha is that if someone has a bad dream it is good for him to be Maitiv Chalomos, to go to others and do what is called Hatovas Chalom. The concept of Hatovas Chalom is an idea that the dream is interpreted by friends as something good. Had the brothers not had a personal agenda, had they not gotten angry, they would have interpreted and said in a positive way that they would sit and learn and Yosef would support them. Because of their anger, they interpreted it differently and that dream was a dream that was Niskayeim. So although we can't talk negatively about the level of the Shevatim who are so far greater than us, but nevertheless the way the Torah related the story this seems to be a very appropriate and rather interesting lesson.

2. I would like to move on to a thought regarding the upcoming Yom Tov of Chanukah. Fire is a unique creation. Fire has many attributes to it. Probably the two most important attributes of fire is that fire a) gives light (the sun lights the entire world and gives warmth), and b) fire consumes, it burns, it can destroy. This mirrors the two parts of Avodas Hashem (serving G-d). We serve Hashem with the Asei Tov, we try to light up the world and warm up the world, give warmth to the spirituality for the spiritual values of the world, L'ha'ir. Also we are commanded Sur Mai'ra to destroy bad, to destroy temptation, to destroy the Yeitzer Hora. It is an Avoda, Lisrof (to consume). And so, if Torah is compared to Ohr, there are two attributes to Ohr, the warmth, the light and positive and the ability to consume, to destroy that which is negative.

Of all the heavenly bodies, the moon is quite unique. The moon gives light but it doesn't destroy, it doesn't consume. Whereas the stars and the sun have fire and they consume as well as giving light, the moon alone or almost alone among the stars gives light but does not consume. Klal Yisrael is Nimshal to the Levana and our Ikkur Avoda is to give light to the world, to be an Ohr unto the nations. Why is it that the moon is able to give light but does not consume? This is because the light is not its own. It knows that its light comes from a different source, it comes from a bigger source, it comes from the sun. So too in Klal Yisrael they know that its energy and its power comes from the Ribbono Shel Olam. We can live a life of light, of warmth without having to consume.

The Bais Yosef writes that the Ner Chanukah, the oil put into the Menoros on Chanukah on the first night lit all night and when Klal Yisrael and the Kohanim returned in the morning they saw that the cups were still full of oil. The Ner Chanukah miraculously gave light but did not consume. That is the miracle of Chanukah, the energy of Chanukah. The ability to give light without consuming. Similar to the Sneh which the Ribbono Shel Olam appeared to Moshe Rabbeinu. A Sneh which was on fire, it gave light (,הַשֵּׁן הַזֶּה לֹא יִשְׂרֹף וְיִתֵּן אֵשׁ וְלֹא יִשְׂרֹף וְיִתֵּן אֵשׁ וְלֹא יִשְׂרֹף וְיִתֵּן אֵשׁ) but the fire did not consume the bush (as it says in Shemos 3:2). So it is a unique aspect of Ner Chanukah of the moon to which Klal Yisrael are compared and we focus on our positive attributes. Of course Sur Mai'ra is important but if we focus on the positive, and we work hard on the positive it will be easier and more natural to do the Sur Mai'ra. If Chanukah comes, we need to work on that ability, that strength to be able to focus on positive, to undertake more in Avodas Hashem, to do so in a lit up way and a Simchadika way. This is a thought regarding the Koach Ha'aish (fire).

3. A second thought regarding Chanukah. This I saw in the Divrei Yoel in either Siman 40 or 42 on Chanukah. The Pri Chodosh writes and it is well known that the 8th day of Chanukah comes as a commemoration for the

Nitzachin Hamilchama. The Neis of the oil burning was a 7 day miracle and day # 8 is to commemorate the Nitzachin Hamilchama (the winning of the battle). The Pri Megadim asks a Kasha. He asks on the Pri Chodosh that if we want to commemorate winning the battle why do so with a flame, why do so with Neiros Chanukah. It doesn't seem as if that is meant to commemorate the battle.

In answering this, the Satmar Rebbe writes a beautiful Yesod. He talks about Gevurah, (גבורים בְּיַד הַלְשִׁים) Geborim B'yad Chalashim. He talks about Gevurah in Milchama. The Satmar Rebbe writes that there are two types of strength. There is a typical type of strength, a brute force, the brute energy, the power, the physical power. We say that G-d gave (גבורים בְּיַד הַלְשִׁים) we are talking about this type of Gevurah, the Gashmiasdika Gevurah. There is another Gevurah, a strength of spirit, a resolve. A strength that comes from an energy, a driven person, a person who is focused. That energy also appears in this world. It is the energy of a mother who miraculously lifts the car to save the life a child who is underneath. It is the energy of a small army defeating a great army which the Kesef Mishneh says is not a Neis, it is not a miracle. Because when the small army is focused then the small army can defeat the large army. It is a second type of Gevura. That Gevura is a Gevura of the Chashmanayim. The Chashmanayim being able to win in battle. We say (וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעֻשִׂים), G-d gave many in the hands of few. Why few asked the Satmar Rebbe? There were so many Jews in Eretz Yisrael at that time that they far outnumbered the number of Greeks that were in Eretz Yisrael. But the answer is to get into this war you had to be a Gibor Haruach, you had to have that strength of spirit of the Chashmanayim. Therefore, when we talk about Gevura in regard to Chanukah, when we talk about the Ner of Chanukah, the Ner that gives light but doesn't consume, the Ner that comes from an inner spiritual energy and that which is commemorated in a Ner is the Gevura of the Chashmanayim.

The Pri Megadim asked why do we light a candle for the miracle of winning the battle. The Teretz is that the winning the battle came from the spirit which is symbolized by the Ner. Once you have this Gevuras Haruach then it is not an extraordinary miracle for a person to be able to win in battle. It is something which a person can understand, a person could follow. And so as we come to Chanukah, we come with a desire that there is a long winter Zman ahead of us. This year Chanukah has been widely circulated and it falls in November which is very unusual. Indeed it is unusual, but what meaning does that have? It means that it is a preparation for a long winter Zman, it is a preparation for a long Zman until Purim comes. It requires a special energy, a special Koach. To undertake in the coming Zman to be able to succeed in our learning, in our Avodas Hashem, in our waking up early to serve HKB"H, and making it to Minyan. We commemorate Chanuka it is a celebration of Avodah, of serving Hashem in the Bais Hamikdash. Therefore, it has to come with a renewed energy to Daven right, to Daven well. A new energy in the appreciation of Davening, that is the Chanukas Hamishkan (the renewal of the Mishkan).

It is an interesting thing and I say this B'derech Efsher, I seem to note that the Torah doesn't stress the lighting of the Menorah in the Bais Hamikdash. When we talk about the Seder Avoda of the day typically we talk about Hatovas Haneiros in the morning. We say (אֲבִי הָיָה מְסַדֵּר סֵדֵר הַמְעֻבְרָה), we talk about the order of the day in the Bais Hamikdash. In that order of the day what do we do? In the order of the day we talk about (וְהִקְטַבְתָּ חֶמֶשׁ גְּרוֹת) and (וְהִקְטַבְתָּ שֶׁתִּי גְרוֹת) we don't even talk about the Hadlakah. The Ikkur of this aspect of Avoda is the right preparation, the Hatova, the preparation of the Mitzvah. As we prepare for Chanukah let us prepare more than Latkas, Dreidals, and parties, let us prepare for a Zman that has an increased Ohr. Of course this year the first day of Chanukah falls out on a Thursday. Two days of Chanukah fall out on Thursday. The reason that is is because this is the year that the Thursday night Mishmar began and on Thursday you have to prepare for the Thursday night Mishmar. And so on this Thursday we prepare for the upcoming Chanukah with the hope that we will have the

strength, energy, and the light to serve HKB"H properly. A Gutten Shabbos to all!

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

**Parshat Vayeishev: Who Sold Yosef?
Excerpted from Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text:
An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha- Bereishit**

Context

After thrusting Yosef into a pit, his brothers sit down to eat. When they observe an approaching caravan of Ishmaelites, Yehuda convinces his siblings to sell Yosef into bondage rather than allow him to die.

The text then continues (note the pronouns and their referents): “And Midianite men passed by, merchants, and they drew Yosef up out of the pit; and they sold Yosef to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver; and they brought Yosef to Egypt.”

Later, the Torah relates: “And the Medanites sold him (Yosef) to Egypt, to Potiphar, a court official of Pharaoh...”

Finally, even later, the text states: “And Potiphar...bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.”

Questions

The text concerning the critical event of Yosef's sale seems strangely ambiguous, even contradictory.

Who are the Midianite men who suddenly appear, as if out of nowhere, and what is their relationship, if any, to the caravan of Ishmaelites?

Who actually pulled Yosef out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites: his brothers or the Midianites?

If Yosef was sold to the Ishmaelites why does the Torah state that the Medanites “sold him to Egypt, to Potiphar...”?

Why does the Torah seem to contradict itself again with the statement “and Potiphar...bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him there”?

Finally, why is the Torah so deliberately vague concerning the sequence of events at this critical juncture in the story of our people?

Approaches

The commentaries directly confront the ambiguity of the text in their discussions of the sale of Yosef.

A

Rashi maintains the classical position that Yosef's brothers actively sold him into slavery. Commenting on the phrase “and they drew...,” Rashi simply states, “The sons of Yaakov (drew) Yosef from the pit.”

Rashi further explains that the appearance of the Midianites reflects the fact that Yosef was sold numerous times: “The brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites who sold him to the Midianites, and the Midianites sold him to Egypt.”

Yosef's grievous treatment at the hand of his brothers is further exacerbated when he is treated like chattel and sold from one hand to the next. [Rashi identifies the Medanites, mentioned later in the text, with the Midianites. He fails, however, to explain the final statement which declares that Potiphar bought Yosef from the Ishmaelites.]

B

Numerous other scholars, while agreeing with Rashi's basic premise that the brothers sold Yosef into slavery, offer their own solutions to the mention of Ishmaelites, Midianites and Medanites.

The Ramban and the Sforno both simplify the scene by suggesting that the Ishmaelites and Midianites were operating in partnership within one caravan, with the Ishmaelites serving as camel drivers for the Midianite merchants. Yosef was, therefore, only sold twice: first by the brothers to the passing caravan and then by the merchants of the caravan to Potiphar. The Ramban further explains that the references in the text to the Ishmaelites underscore

their role as the ones who physically brought Yosef to Egypt, while the Midianites are highlighted as the merchants who actually bought and sold him. The Sforno, for his part, suggests that the brothers were unwilling to speak directly to the Midianites for fear that they might be recognized. For this reason, he says, they negotiated with the Ishmaelites.

The Ibn Ezra goes a step further and claims that there was only one group of merchants, at times referred to by the text as Ishmaelites and at times as Midianites. To prove his position he quotes a passage from the book of Shoftim which identifies Midianite kings as Ishmaelites.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Chizkuni suggests that Yosef was actually sold four times. The brothers sold Yosef to the Midianites while he was still in the pit. The Midianites then drew Yosef out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites who in turn then sold him again to the Midianites (Medanites). Finally, the Medanites sold Yosef, for the last time, to Potiphar.

C

An entirely different, revolutionary approach to the sale of Yosef is first suggested by the Rashbam and then echoed by a number of subsequent commentaries including Rabbeinu Bachya, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and the Malbim. Remaining true to his pashut pshat approach to text, the Rashbam maintains that Yosef's brothers were not actually involved in his sale. He literally interprets the passage "and Midianite men passed by, merchants, and they drew Yosef up out of the pit; and they sold Yosef to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver..." as follows: The brothers were eating at a distance from the pit...and waiting for the arrival of the Ishmaelites whom they had observed approaching.

Before the Ishmaelites arrived, however, others, Midianites, passed by, saw [Yosef] in the pit, drew him up out of the pit – and the Midianites sold him to the Ishmaelites. It is even possible that the brothers were unaware of these events. This approach, closer to the text, changes our entire conception of the events surrounding Yosef's sale: Yosef's brothers fully intended to sell him but never actually got the chance to carry out their plans.

D

The most important question, however, yet remains. Why is the Torah, at this critical and dramatic moment in the story of our people, so deliberately vague? Why doesn't the text tell us clearly whether or not Yosef's brothers were actively involved in his sale? Why allow for conflicting interpretations?

Perhaps the text is deliberately vague to teach us that it really doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether the brothers actually pulled Yosef out of the pit and sold him or whether they simply set the stage for others to do so. Their guilt, in either case, remains constant.

Centuries later the Torah text will proclaim: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your friend" – If you witness danger to another, you are obligated to act.

We are responsible for the pain we cause or allow to occur to others even when it is not inflicted directly by our hands.

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Loose Change

One of the most clichéd and oft-used words that mark election campaigns, such as the one we are now beginning to undergo here in Israel, is "change." One of the basic human drives is to achieve change for the better in one's personal life and in the national life of the country where one resides.

Barack Obama was elected president of the United States on the promise of change. Whether actual change has been accomplished under his leadership and whether that change is positive and beneficial to American society are issues that are currently being debated and yet to be decided. But, there is no question that the promise of change is a potent political and psychological weapon and is always exploited by those seeking office and power.

Yet, change is hard to come by, for the inertia of past events always weighs heavily upon the current drive for change. There is a basic feeling of dissatisfaction of the present situation that fuels our desire for change. We long for the good old days, even though they may not have really been so good.

We instinctively resort to nostalgic and often fanciful memories of the past. For some change means reverting to those imagined glory years. And at the same time, we dream great dreams about an idyllic future where all current problems will be solved in a satisfactory and equitable fashion.

This also drives our desire for change and eventually even justifies wickedness, slander, violence and lawlessness in an attempt to facilitate that hoped-for change. Both Jewish and general history are replete with examples of these types of behavior – all in the name of bringing about the desired positive change in society and in our personal lives as well.

Yet, King Solomon in Kohelet taught us that change is very difficult to obtain. He stated that "what was, is what will be," in that human nature is pretty much unchangeable and that complete change is really an ephemeral and almost unattainable goal.

The desire for change – any change at any cost – is a potent example of human arrogance and hubris. We are all convinced somehow that we can change the world and refashion it in our image and according to our values and beliefs. Again, history mocks us in this belief. The problems that face the world generally and the Jewish people particularly are the same ones that existed thousands of years ago.

Many of the proposals for change heard today are merely the recycled theories of the past dressed in new language and implemented by new technology. Change does occur but it is a process and processes take time, patience and tenacity.

The changes in Western society wrought by the ideas of the Enlightenment have taken almost five centuries to be fully absorbed in the Western world. The attempt to achieve instant change, which is what our politicians always promise us, is futile simply because change requires time and deliberate patience.

Hasty and revolutionary change, in the main and in most historical events, has proven to be more destructive than beneficial. In societies where change is fostered from the bottom up rather than from the top down, the change that occurs lasts longer and is more positive. Forced change, whether by fiat or legislation, rarely is able to survive the test of time.

Over the last century, there are a number of prime examples of how forced change – immediate and radical – though initially successful, eventually collapsed because of the inability of changing the nature of human beings. The Soviet Union enforced a radical change on the people of Russia and most of Eastern Europe. For seventy-five years this new way of life ruled, enforced by a police state and very draconian methods. But atheism, the lack of private property, state control of thought and everything else, are all contrary to basic human nature. What resulted was that the Soviet system collapsed of its own weight, in a sudden and unexpected fashion, a quarter of a century ago.

After the First World War, Kemil Ataturk ruthlessly transformed Turkey from a Moslem caliphate into a Western, completely secular, modern country. This change, laudatory as it may have looked to Western eyes, has also collapsed in our time. Instead, we see that Turkey has reverted to an aggressively Moslem country with caliphate ambitions that it barely hides. So, when we contemplate change in our society we should bear in mind that it is a process that takes time and deep public acceptance. Otherwise, every attempt to change, no matter how apparently positive and necessary it may

appear, rarely will it be of lasting consequence or value. It must be deeply personal and societal in its origin for it to take hold. The old joke about “How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? One, but the bulb must want to be changed” is a true comment on personal and national life.

Shabbat shalom

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Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel

Vayeshev

Yaakov and Yosef, the two main protagonists of the narrative in this final section of the book of Bereshith, are both blindsided by the events that befall them. After years of exile and turmoil, incessant danger and inherent loneliness, Yaakov attempts to settle down to an apparent tranquil retirement.

He is not looking for new worlds to conquer, nor is he intending to be active or aggressive in further building and expanding his nascent national entity, the people of Israel. Yet all of his hopes will be dashed by the events surrounding the enmity of the brothers to Yaakov’s visibly favorite son, Yosef.

In his love for Yosef, Yaakov remains unaware of the storm brewing within his own house and family. The trauma of Yosef’s sudden disappearance will haunt Yaakov for the ensuing decades. In an unforeseen instant, Yaakov’s entire life and seeming accomplishments are turned upside down and he is depicted as being powerless to do anything. Yosef is also apparently blissfully unaware of the consequences of his behavior towards his brothers. He cannot imagine that his brothers would take violent and drastic action against him. He does not assess correctly how threatened they feel by his behavior, his dreams and his indiscretions towards them. Therefore, he accepts the mission that his father has proposed for him, to find his brothers and report back regarding their welfare and activities. There is no adequate way to describe his shock and amazement at being stripped and thrown into the pit and at finally being sold into slavery by his own brothers. None of this was ever imaginable to him.

Though all of the participants in this drama are to be held accountable for their actions, there is no doubt that there is an unseen hand that is guiding the events and directing them towards a certain goal. The realization of this will come only at the end of the drama when Yosef and his brothers reconcile and embrace one another. Only then will Yaakov also recognize that this is the opening act of the fulfillment of the prophecy made to his grandfather Avraham regarding the exile, servitude and redemption of the people of Israel.

Only at the end of the drama does Yosef understand the full import of his dreams and visions. It is as the holy poet phrased it: “Only at the end of events, does one understand and contemplate correctly the original thought and plan.” Though we are all held responsible for all of our actions and we possess complete freedom of choice regarding those actions, nevertheless it would be impossible for us to ignore the fact that our generation is part of an era where an unseen hand somehow is guiding events towards a certain purpose and fixed goal.

We may be involved in our mundane lives, in elections and disputes, minor victories and great tensions, but we should notice that we are also part of a great drama and historical process that is unfolding with almost irresistible force. I think that this is the most important lesson for us to ponder as we study the Torah reading of this week.

Shabbat shalom

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeshev
For the week ending 13 December 2014 / 21 Kislev 5775
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com
Insights

Wanting and Seeking

“And Yaakov dwelled...” (37:1)

A cardinal rule when analyzing the lives of the Patriarchs is that when the Torah describes their failings it always speaks relative to their lofty spiritual level. G-d judges the righteous to within a hair’s breadth; the higher the spiritual level of a person the more penetrating and uncompromising is G-d’s inspection of their deeds and motives.

With this in mind we can appreciate a comment by the Alschich on this week’s Torah portion.

Rashi tells us that the first word in this week’s Torah portion — Vayeshev — implies that Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility, and G-d said: “Is it not sufficient for the righteous the portion which is set for them in the World-to-Come, rather they should seek to dwell in tranquility also in this world? As a result of this, G-d sprung upon him the ordeal of the loss of his favorite son Yosef and the assumption for twenty-one years that Yosef had been killed. Why was Yaakov punished so severely for wanting a normal life? What’s wrong with living in comfort and peace? Why couldn’t Yaakov enjoy the dividends of his good deeds in this world, and the principal await him in the next world?”

There’s a big difference between “wanting” and “seeking.”

Rashi uses the word “seeking” here.

One can want to have comfort and tranquility in this world. There’s nothing wrong with that.

And if G-d sends it to us we should be very grateful. However, we should never exert ourselves to achieve that material comfort. If, through a modicum of effort, G-d blesses our labors, then the fruits are permitted to us.

However, we must never allow ourselves to be distracted from our true mission in this world — to serve G-d, to do the mitzvot and to meet life’s challenges. If the desire for material comfort and success becomes our goal, then we have missed the point.

On his level Yaakov made more than the acceptable level of effort to achieve a tranquil life.

Rashi doesn’t say “he wanted” to dwell in tranquility, but rather that “he sought.” There’s nothing wrong with wanting. However for someone on the level of Yaakov Avinu to take active steps, however minimal, to achieve that “want” was considered a flaw.

Source: as seen in Talelei Orot

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Rabbi Weinreb’s Parsha Column

Vayeshev: Thinking and Dreaming

When I recall the great teachers I was blessed with over the course of my lifetime, I realize that one thing comes to mind: they were a diverse group. This eclectic group included the gentle man who introduced me to the study of Chumash, Bible, when I was in fourth grade; the seventh-grade teacher who inspired me to read great literature and to try my hand at writing; the Talmudic scholar who turned me on to rabbinic study when I was about 18 years old; and the devout Roman Catholic psychiatrist who was my mentor when I trained to become a psychotherapist.

What did they all have in common? They all were thinkers and intellectuals, each in his own distinct field. And they were all imaginative. They combined sechel with regesh, intelligence with emotion, information with creativity.

My fourth-grade teacher used pictorial materials, which he had personally designed using his own substantial artistic skills, to illustrate the Biblical stories we studied.

My seventh-grade teacher read to us as a reward at the end of a long day, made longer by the strain of a double curriculum. He read with great drama, moving us sometimes to tears and at other times to fits of laughter.

The rabbi who made Talmud study so exciting did so using stories of great Talmudists over the ages, employing vivid imagery to convey the meaning of the most abstract texts.

And my mentor taught us how to understand people. He especially taught us the importance of the dream. But he was not interested in the dreams of our patients. He was interested in our own dreams, and he insisted that we pay attention to our dreams as one way to know ourselves better, something which he considered an absolute requirement for an effective psychotherapist. "The way to cultivate the imagination necessary to know another person," he would insist, "is to be aware of your own dreams and what they might mean."

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23) we meet Joseph, the dreamer. He was not the first person in the Bible to dream. His great-grandfather Abraham dreamt and his father Jacob dreamt several times. But Joseph not only dreamt himself. He paid attention to the dreams of others: the chief baker and chief cupbearer in this week's parsha, and King Pharaoh in next week's parsha.

Joseph, though, was the first person in the Bible to attempt to interpret dreams. In modern terms, he was the first to use intellect in order to analyze the quintessential product of the imagination, the dream. It is no wonder, then, that Joseph was the first person in the Bible who is referred to as a *chacham*, a wise man.

Jewish tradition has always revered the intellect. The paramount mitzvah in our religion is Talmud Torah, Torah study — an intellectual pursuit if there ever was one. We are proud of the towering geniuses in our history: Rabbi Akiva, who could "uproot mountains and grind them together" with the power of his intellect; Maimonides, who composed his commentary on the Mishnah while still in his teens and went on to write his magisterial code and his awesome philosophical treatise; the Gaon of Vilna, whose genius encompassed every aspect of Torah and extended into the fields of mathematics and astronomy.

But what about the imagination? What place does that have in our tradition? Is it suspect because it is not bound by reason? Is it acceptable but clearly secondary to rational thought? Is it in some way superior to the intellect?

The answer to these questions lies buried in the vast and daunting writings of two of our greatest philosophers: Maimonides, in his *Guide to the Perplexed*, and Rabbi Yehuda Halevi in his fascinating work, *The Kuzari*.

I can only briefly summarize the differing positions these two sages took on the subject of the *koach hadimyon*, the power of the imagination. I trust that the reader will understand that I am simplifying very complex ideas.

For Maimonides, reason is the essential quality of man. Intellect is all-powerful and all-important. Philosophical expertise is a prerequisite for spiritual achievement. The imagination, according to Maimonides, is clearly secondary. It is limited to the sensory world and cannot transcend it. It is inadequate when thought is required. Even the prophet, whom one would think exemplifies the imaginative person, is basically a philosopher blessed with an additional skill: imagination.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, on the other hand, sees the imagination in very positive terms. For him, it is an alternate way of perceiving the world and, in some ways, is a superior method of perception. The intellect can perceive the world of physical reality, whereas the imagination has access to spiritual reality, to the *inyan eloki*, the "God factor." The prophet, according to Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, is essentially a mystic, not a philosopher.

At this point, the reader might be wondering about the relevance of these philosophic discussions to our everyday lives. It is here that I resort to yet a fifth great "teacher" that I was blessed to have. This teacher is the product of

the decades I have amassed of working with people in the fields of education, psychology, and the pulpit rabbinate. After all, is not experience the best teacher?

Experience has taught me that our imaginations help us achieve some very important interpersonal goals. First of all, our imaginations enable us to put ourselves in the shoes of another person, to sense what he or she is going through. This is the skill of empathy, which is so essential if we are to get along with others. To be able to feel what another person is feeling requires an active imagination. Too often, we are limited in our ability to empathize with another because we only know our own feelings and reactions and fail to comprehend that the other has different feelings and different reactions, even to the very same circumstances.

Imagination is not only important if we are to get along with others. It is also necessary if we are to succeed in life, for success requires the ability to envision new possibilities and creatively discover the options that are available in challenging circumstances. Problem-solving cannot be done with intellect alone. Flexibility and creativity and an imaginative vision are absolutely essential counterparts.

What made Joseph great? He was, as we will read next week, a *chacham* and a *navon*, a wise and discerning man. But he was also, as we read this week, a dreamer who could inquire empathically after the wellbeing of his fellow prisoners and ask them, "Why are you so downcast today?"

It was his imaginative capacity that allowed him to develop new options and to plan to avert the famine which threatened to annihilate the entire then-known world.

Joseph's role in the history of our nation is as a model of the exquisite blending of intellect with imagination. This balance is required of all of us if we are to understand each other, if we are going to succeed in life, and if we are to personally experience personal growth.

Joseph's example is one that we are challenged to emulate and which we are assuredly capable of following in our own lives.

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
The Heroism of Tamar

This is a true story that took place in the 1970s. Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch, then Principal of Jews College, the rabbinic training seminary in London where I was a student and teacher, was approached by an organisation that had been given an unusual opportunity to engage in interfaith dialogue. A group of African bishops wanted to understand more about Judaism. Would the Principal be willing to send his senior students to engage in such a dialogue, in a chateau in Switzerland?

To my surprise, he agreed. He told me that he was sceptical about Jewish-Christian dialogue in general because he believed that over the centuries the Church had been infected by an antisemitism that was very difficult to overcome. At that time, though, he felt that African Christians were different. They loved Tanakh and its stories. They were at least in principle open to understanding Judaism on its own terms. He did not add, though I knew it was in his mind since he was one of the world's greatest experts on Maimonides, that the great twelfth century sage held an unusual attitude to dialogue.

Maimonides believed that Islam was a genuinely monotheistic faith while Christianity in those days was not. Nonetheless, he held it was permitted to study Tanakh with Christians but not Muslims, since Christians believed that Tanakh (what they called the Old Testament), was the word of God while Muslims believed that Jews had falsified the text.[1]

So we went. It was an unusual group: the semikhah class of Jews College, together with the top class of the yeshiva in Montreux where the late Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg, author of *Serdei Esh* and one of the world's foremost

halakhists, had taught. For three days the Jewish group davened and bentsched with special intensity. We learned Gemarra each day. For the rest of the time we had an unusual, even transformative, encounter with the African bishops, ending with a Hassidic-style tisch during which we shared with the Africans our songs and stories and they taught us theirs. At three in the morning we finished by dancing together. We knew we were different, we knew that there were deep divides between our respective faiths, but we had become friends. Perhaps that is all we should seek. Friends don't have to agree in order to stay friends. And friendships can sometimes help heal the world.

On the morning after our arrival, however, an event occurred that left a deep impression on me. The sponsoring body, a global Jewish organisation, was a secular one, and to keep within their frame of reference the group had to include at least one non-orthodox Jew, a woman studying for the rabbinate. We, the semikhah and yeshiva students, were davening the morning service in one of the lounges in the chateau when the Reform woman entered, wearing tallit and tefillin, and sat herself down in the middle of the group. This is something the students had not encountered before. What were they to do? There was no mechitzah. There was no way of separating themselves. How should they react to a woman wearing tallit and tefillin and praying in the midst of a group of men? They ran up to the Rav in a state of great agitation and asked what they should do. Without a moment's hesitation he quoted to them the saying of the sages: A person should be willing to throw himself into a furnace of fire rather than shame another person in public.[2] With that he ordered them back to their seats, and the prayers continued. The moral of that moment never left me. The Rav, for the past 32 years head of the yeshiva in Maaleh Adumim, was and is one of the great halakhists of our time. He knew immediately how serious were the issues at stake: men and women praying together without a mechitzah between them, and the complex question about whether women may or may not wear a tallit and tefillin. The issue was anything but simple.

But he knew also that halakhah is a systematic way of turning the great ethical and spiritual truths into a tapestry of deeds, and that one must never lose the larger vision in an exclusive focus on the details. Had the students insisted that the woman pray elsewhere they would have put her to shame, the way Eli did when he saw Hannah praying and thought she was drunk.[3] Never, ever shame someone in public. That was the transcending imperative of the hour. That is the mark of a great-souled man. To have been his student for more than a decade I count as one of the great privileges of my life.

The reason I tell this story here is that it is one of the powerful and unexpected lessons of our parsha. Judah, the brother who proposed selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37: 26), had "gone down" to Canaan where he married a local Canaanite woman. The phrase "gone down" was rightly taken by the sages as full of meaning. [4] Just as Joseph had been brought down to Egypt (Gen. 39: 1) so Judah had been morally and spiritually brought down. Here was one of Jacob's sons, doing what the patriarchs insisted on not doing: marrying into the local population. It is a tale of sad decline. He marries his firstborn son, Er, to a local woman, Tamar.[5] An obscure verse tells us that he sinned, and died. Judah then married his second son, Onan, to her, under a pre-Mosaic form of levirate marriage whereby a brother is bound to marry his sister-in-law if she has been widowed without children. Onan, reluctant to father a child that would be regarded as not his but his deceased brother's, practised a form of coitus interruptus that to this day carries his name. For this, he too died. Having lost two of his sons Judah was reluctant to give his third, Shelah, to Tamar in marriage. The result was that she was left as a "living widow," bound to marry her brother-in-law whom Judah was withholding, but unable to marry anyone else.

After many years, seeing that her father-in-law (by this time a widower himself) was reluctant to marry her to Shelah, she decided on an audacious course of action. She removed her widow's clothes, covered herself with a veil, and positioned herself at a point where Judah was likely to see her on his way to the sheep-shearing. Judah saw her, took her to be a prostitute, and

engaged her services. As surety for the payment he had promised her, she insisted that he leave his seal, cord and staff. Judah duly returned the next day with the payment, but the woman was nowhere to be seen. He asked the locals the whereabouts of the temple prostitute (the text at this point uses the word kedeshah, "cult prostitute," rather than zonah, thus deepening Judah's offence), but no one had seen such a person in the locality. Puzzled, Judah returned home.

Three months later he heard that Tamar was pregnant. He leapt to the only conclusion he could draw, namely that she had had a physical relationship with another man while bound in law to his son Shelah. She had committed adultery, for which the punishment was death. Tamar was brought out to face her sentence. She came, holding the staff and seal that Judah instantly recognised as his own. She said, "I am pregnant by the person to whom these objects belong." Judah realised what had happened and said, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38: 26).

This moment is a turning-point in history. Judah is the first person in the Torah explicitly to admit he was wrong.[6] We do not realise it yet, but this seems to be the moment at which he acquired the depth of character necessary for him to become the first real baal teshuvah. We see this years later, when he – the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave – becomes the man who is willing to spend the rest of his life in slavery so that his brother Benjamin can go free (Gen. 44: 33). I have argued elsewhere that it is from here that we learn the principle that a penitent stands higher than even a perfectly righteous individual.[7] Judah the penitent becomes the ancestor of Israel's kings while Joseph, the righteous, is only a viceroy, mishneh le-melekh, second to the king.

Thus far Judah. But the real hero of the story was Tamar. She had taken an immense risk by becoming pregnant. Indeed she was almost killed for it. She had done so for a noble reason: to ensure that the name of her late husband was perpetuated. But she took no less care to avoid Judah being put to shame. Only he and she knew what had happened. Judah could acknowledge his error without loss of face. It was from this episode that the sages derived the rule articulated by Rabbi Rabinovitch that morning in Switzerland: Rather risk being thrown into a fiery furnace than shame someone else in public.

It is thus no coincidence that Tamar, a heroic non-Jewish woman, became the ancestor of David, Israel's greatest king. There are striking similarities between Tamar and the other heroic woman in David's ancestry, the Moabite woman we know as Ruth.

There is an ancient Jewish custom on Shabbat and festivals to cover the challot or matzah while holding the glass of wine over which Kiddush is being made. The reason is so as not to put the challah to shame while it is being, as it were, passed over in favour of the wine. There are some very religious Jews, sadly, who will go to great lengths to avoid shaming an inanimate loaf of bread but have no compunction in putting their fellow Jews to shame if they regard them as less religious than they are. That is what happens when we remember the halakhah but forget the underlying moral principle behind it.

Never put anyone to shame. That is what Tamar taught Judah and what a great rabbi of our time taught those who were privileged to be his students.

[1] Maimonides, Responsa, ed. Blau, no. 149.

[2] Berakhot 43b, Ketubot 67b.

[3] 1 Samuel 1: 13-17.

[4] Gen 38: 1. According to midrashic tradition (Midrash Aggadah, Pesikta Zutreta, Sechel Tov et al.), Judah was "sent down" or excommunicated by his brothers for advising them to sell Joseph, after the grief they saw their father suffer. See also Rashi ad loc.

[5] Targum Yonatan identifies her as the daughter of Noah's son Shem. Others identify her as a daughter of Abraham's contemporary Malkizedek. The truth is, though, that she appears in the narrative without lineage, a device often used by the Torah to emphasize that moral greatness can often

be found among ordinary people. It has nothing to do with ancestry. See Alshikh ad loc.

[6] The text here is full of verbal allusions. Judah has “gone down” just as Joseph has been “brought down.” Joseph is about to rise to political greatness. Judah will eventually rise to moral greatness. Tamar’s deception of Judah is similar to Judah’s deception of Jacob. Both involve clothes: Joseph’s blood-stained coat, Tamar’s veil. Both reach their climax with the words Haker na, “Please examine.” Judah forces Jacob to believe a lie. Tamar forces Judah to recognise the truth.

[7] Berakhot 34b. Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings, 303-314.

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

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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Parshat Vayeshev: Between Hope And Despair

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

December 11, 2014 Thursday 19 Kislev 5775

The story of the sale of Joseph begins this week and continues over the next few weeks.

This week, in Parshat Vayeshev, we read one of the most dramatic stories in the Torah. The story of the sale of Joseph begins this week and continues over the next few weeks until its surprising conclusion when the tables turn and Joseph, the hated and demeaned teenager, becomes the leader of his family and of all of Egypt.

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Let’s read the story in order. In short: Jacob Avinu had 12 sons, one of whom – the 17-year-old Joseph – was his favorite. This led to his brothers’ jealousy. Joseph added to their hatred of him when he told them about the dreams he dreamed in which he rules over the entire family. The brothers’ deep hatred bursts forth in a terrible act when they sell him into slavery.

Joseph is brought down to Egypt and sold to one of Pharaoh’s ministers. Afterward, following a despicable libel made up by that minister’s wife, he is thrown into an Egyptian prison cell. He languishes in prison, his future obscure but known – to rot there until the day he dies, alone, lacking basic rights, and with no one even finding out about his bitter fate.

And then a rare opportunity presents itself. An Egyptian minister is thrown into jail and three days later, is slated to be released to return to his lofty position. Joseph begs him not to forget about him when he returns to serve Pharaoh, Egypt’s imperious ruler. Joseph asks him to whisper into his ear about the innocent young man rotting in prison.

One can imagine the situation. The righteous Joseph falls at the feet of the minister of ceremonies and begs, “But remember me when things go well with you, and please do me a favor and mention me to Pharaoh, and you will get me out of this house.

For I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and here, too, I have done nothing, for which they have put me into the dungeon.” A thin ray of hope appears in Joseph’s heart. Maybe, maybe there is someone left who still cares about justice... Maybe there is someone who will be moved by the suffering of a young man... Maybe I can still have a better future...

Two years later, that minister remembered the boy thrown into the dungeon. He mentions him to Pharaoh who, shockingly, releases him from prison and promotes him to greatness. We’ll read about this next week.

The sages of the midrash asked the following interesting question: Since this entire extraordinary story was Divine planning in order to bring about Joseph’s rule and bring Jacob and his family down to Egypt, why did Joseph

have to suffer for two additional and unnecessary years in an Egyptian prison? Why didn’t that Egyptian minister remember to have him released right after he was asked to? The sages’ answer is worth examining. They answered that Joseph trusted that minister when he asked him to remember him, and for that he was punished with two additional years in prison! This answer is extraordinarily perplexing. What did Joseph ask for? Just to see the light of day, to leave prison for a life of slavery. Nothing could be more legitimate than this. Didn’t Joseph take the most natural step when he made this request of the minister? Is man supposed to be passive and accept his fate without taking a step that might benefit him? The explanation of the midrash lies in the nickname given to the Egyptian ministers: “Rehavim,” meaning liars without conscience. A subtle point is hidden here. There is no doubt that it was Joseph’s right, even obligation, to take care of himself in every way possible. But Joseph turned to the man who was not the natural person to help him, since the minister was a man interested only in himself and nothing else. The choice to ask someone like that was not made judiciously, but from a place of despair. And one must never act out of despair.

The difference between a man who acts out of hope and a man who acts out of despair is tremendous.

A man who acts out of hope measures his steps, carefully examines what he’s doing and if his actions will lead him to his goal – in this case, being released from prison. However, a man who acts out of despair will do anything, even things that are irrational and ineffectual, just for the possibility that it will increase the chances of reaching his goal.

This is where Joseph failed in turning to the Egyptian minister. This was not a request made from hope, since it was made in vain. It was a request made from deep despair. This despair is destructive, and for this Joseph paid with two more years in the Egyptian prison.

There is no question that it is our right and obligation to act in the best possible way to succeed. Man cannot remain passive and wait for success to come on its own. However, we must beware actions that come from despair, such as reckless investments that promise easy profits, or cost an unreasonable personal price. These actions that come from despair are a mistake, and will almost always bring no benefit.

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Just a thought: On Hanukka

Aharon E. Wexler

December 11, 2014 Thursday 19 Kislev

The real miracle of Hanukka...is that there are Jews still around to tell the story.

Hanukka is, at once, the least understood and most celebrated of our holidays.

The simplified story told to us as children and codified in coloring books (usually with Mr. Dreidel narrating it for us as an eyewitness to it all), is a rather straightforward narrative.

The Jews were living peacefully in their land, until the evil Greek King Antiochus forbade the practice of Jewish religion. Mattathias and his five brave sons, the Maccabees, led a revolt against the Greeks in which Judah the Maccabee distinguished himself as leader. Against all odds, the Jews were victorious over their enemies and recaptured the Temple in Jerusalem, which had previously been defiled.

Looking to relight the Menorah, the symbol of the Jewish people, the Jews needed pure olive oil. In the aftermath of the war, none was to be found save for one small flask, which was only enough fuel for one day. Miraculously, the oil stayed lit for eight days until more oil was able to be prepared. In remembrance of this miracle, Jews today light the Hanukka menorah for eight days.

As with most things in life, the reality is more complicated and nuanced. Let's begin our story in the year 332 BCE, with Alexander the Great's capture of the Land of Israel.

Until then, Judea had been a rather unimportant province in the Persian Empire.

Far from the center of power, the Jews were left pretty much to themselves. As long as they paid their taxes, they were free to conduct their own affairs and even practice their religion in a rather autonomous, if not independent state.

This came to an end with the Greek conquest. Not only did the Jews now find themselves quite literally in between two great centers of power, Syria to the north and Egypt to the south, but they met a culture that for the first time rivaled Judaism.

Until the Greeks, every single pagan culture the Jews met was "beneath them."

Yes, the Egyptians had their pyramids; Canaanites, their iron; Assyrians, their literature; Babylonians their ziggurats and gardens; and Persians their vast empire – yet they all paled in comparison to the light of the Torah.

While the Jews were usually poorer and less technologically capable than their neighbors, they shared a Torah that made the achievements of the pagans seem petty and temporal.

The Greeks were different. Moses's law and the visions of the Prophets dwarfed Marduk and Gilgamesh, yet Euclid, Socrates and Plato actually had something to say that interested the Jews.

Indeed, to this day, one of the most remarkable figures in rabbinic literature is Alexander the Great. In a literature filled with stories about evil pagan kings, the rabbis seem to go out of their way to paint Alexander in the most positive light; talmudic legends portray him as an enlightened friend of the Jews. In fact, the very name Alexander is a Jewish name today, as a testament to those fond feelings.

In other words, the first meeting between the Jews and Greeks was a positive one.

The reasons are not hard to understand.

In the beginning of this meeting between the cultures, the Jews only flirted with Greek ideas, but after over a century of Greek rule, many were seduced entirely. As usually is the case when it comes to Jewish assimilation, it was the upper classes that were more quickly converted, and the lower classes – with their lesser exposure to the arts, theater and literature – which were more resistant to change.

The introduction of a gymnasium, with its attendant pagan rituals, soon rivaled the Temple as the center of Jerusalem's culture and social attractions; even the priests neglected their Temple duties to go there. Over time, the Jewish population in Judea split between those who adopted the Greek culture, called the Hellenizers; and those who stayed true to their Jewish beliefs and practices.

By the time Antiochus made his decrees outlawing the Jewish religion, there was already a very fertile ground of Greek culture in Jerusalem for it to land on. It is for this reason that the rebellion against the Hellenizers began in Modi'in. At the time, Modi'in was a small village and therefore outside the realm of the pervading Hellenistic culture.

And this brings us to the crux of our story: The Maccabean rebellion was not just against the Syrian Greeks, but against our fellow Jews – who were assimilating Hellenizers, looking to supplant Judaism with Greek culture.

While the upper classes were on board with the new measures, the majority of Jews in the middle and lower classes demonstrated a fierce resistance and willingness to die in their masses for the faith of their fathers. While the idea of Kiddush Hashem, martyrdom for the sake of Judaism, did not originate with these rebels, it was the first time in human history that huge numbers of willing participants preferred death to conversion – serving as the paradigm of future martyrdoms of Jews and even Christians through out the millennia. (In fact it was the Christians – not the Jews – who retained the historical story of Hanukka, through the preservation of the Books of Maccabees in

their biblical canon.) The decrees were cruel by any measure. Anyone found with a Torah scroll was put to death. Mothers were killed for circumcising their sons, and others were executed for refusing to eat non-kosher meat or desecrate Shabbat.

The real miracle of Hanukka, then, is that there are Jews still around to tell the story. The resulting war was not a war for political freedom, but religious freedom; the first of its kind in human history. The Jews, fighting the assimilationists within and the vast resources of the Syrian Greek military without, emerged victorious! Those who have the privilege of living in the resurrected Jewish state would be wise to learn the lesson of Hanukka. We have to be very careful in the global village of the 21st century not to lose our Jewish identity among the family of nations.

It amazes me how much we Jews yearn to be loved and accepted by the gentile world. We seem to be starved for their love, we ache to be acknowledged and approved by them. It seems we are so quick to adapt their culture, we risk losing our own.

The task of the Jewish state is to be at once a part of the world, and apart from it as well. A Hanukka that tries to mimic Christmas in its celebration is to negate the very reason for the holiday.

Hanukka is a celebration of the victory of our ancestors against the assimilation in their time. It was instituted as a holiday for all future generations, to serve as a reminder against too tight an embrace of the surrounding culture.

We would be wise to learn its lesson as we light the candles this year.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Vayeishev: Joseph's Labors in Exile

One of life's biggest questions is: do our actions have true significance? The performance of mitzvot is metaphysically meaningful, but what about our day-to-day activities? Ultimately, how much of our lives and pursuits truly matter?

39 Types of Melachah

The Mishnah (Shabbat 7:2) enumerates 39 categories of melachah, activities which are forbidden on the Sabbath, such as planting, cooking, and building. What is the source for these categories of melachah?

The Talmud in Shabbat 49b presents two possibilities. The first opinion is that 39 types of work were performed when constructing the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in the desert.

The second opinion is that the word melachah (in its various forms) appears 39 times in the Torah.

In fact, the word melachah appears 65 times, but the Sages were only counting verses that are connected to the Sabbath or the Tabernacle. As a result, the Sages sometimes disagreed which verses should be included in this count. One of the verses in question, from the reading of VaYeishev, speaks of Joseph's labor for his Egyptian master, Potiphar: "And he came to the house to do his work (melachto)" (Gen. 39:11).

Why should this verse be counted? Surely it has no connection to the Sabbath!

Belonging to the Realm of Shabbat

We must first analyze the two views presented in the Talmud, connecting the 39 categories of activity either to building the Mishkan or to the word melachah in the Torah.

The Sabbath day of rest is in complete contrast to the weekdays filled with activity and work. The Sabbath belongs to the final goal of the universe, a

time when all activity is finished. Work, by definition, indicates a state of incompleteness. Shabbat, on the other hand, is mei'ein olam haba, a taste of the future world, perfected and complete.

We live in an unfinished world of preparations and labor, a time of development and progress. The Tabernacle was a center of holiness within a spatial framework, subject to the limitations of our incomplete world. The Divine command to build the Tabernacle required that all the various categories of human activity be utilized in constructing it. The Jewish people needed to overcome and master the obstacles of mundane activity which hinder elevated life; then they could attain their ultimate objectives, living a life of holiness and closeness to God.

The second opinion quoted in the Talmud is based on a loftier perspective. The distinction between kodesh and chol, between the holy and the profane, only exists within our incomplete and divided reality. But when all of the forces and actions in the world are gathered together towards one elevated center, when all of life is directed to fulfill its true purpose, then the distinction between holy and profane disappears, and all aspects of life are bound together in the elevated union of kodesh kodashim, the Holy of Holies.

When we view the world through this higher prospective, adding the dimension of kodesh kodashim, then all activities become connected to the Sabbath ideal. All of life is bound to the sublime aim of absolute rest, without toil and preparations, only lofty joy and eternal truth. The view that sees in every mention of melachah in the Torah as relating to the Sabbath is not satisfied with ascribing meaning and significance only to that which is kodesh, only to those activities utilized to build the Mishkan. This is a inclusive vision that encompasses the holy and the profane, the natural and technological. Bound together, all activities are elevated with the holiness of the Sabbath day and the future realm of complete Sabbath. Not only is the holy center raised up, but also the branches - all forms of activity and melachah as recorded in the Torah.

In short, these two opinions deliberate our original question. The Talmudic discussion of what may be counted as the source for the melachot is, in fact, our question of how much of life truly 'counts.' Are only holy activities truly meaningful? Or is there eternal significance even in other aspects of life?

Labor for Alien Goals

According to the second, more inclusive view, the Sabbath encompasses all activities of the Jewish people, both past and future, personal and national. However, the Jewish people in their long history have expended much time and energy in dispersed directions. Many Jews invested their talents to serve alien agendas. This is the essence of the Talmud's doubt regarding Joseph's labors in Egypt. Can individual activities performed in foreign lands for foreign goals still be counted as part of the accumulated service of the Jewish people over the millennia? Do they have eternal value?

On the one hand, it cannot be that the labors of a Jewish soul will not carry some residual imprint of the Jewish nation. Even if it was 'planted' on foreign soil, that which is suitable can be added, after removing the dregs, to the treasury of elevated Sabbath rest that Israel will bequest to itself and all of humanity.

On the other hand, labor that was performed under foreign subjugation and enslavement is perhaps so far removed from the spirit of the Jewish people that it cannot be added to the national treasure of Israel.

Joseph's Labors under Potiphar

Joseph, the Midrash states, represents the entire Jewish people (Tanchuma VaYigash 10). Even when laboring in Egypt, even as a slave under Potiphar and a prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon, his actions carried the mark of blessing and Divine success:

"His master realized that God was with him and that God granted him success in all that he did.... God blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph" (39:3,5).

Nonetheless, we should not forget Potiphar's position: Pharaoh's chief executioner! The activities that Joseph performed under Potiphar's direction

were certainly alien to the spirit of Israel. Could the inner blessing of Joseph's labors under such conditions be added to the treasury of activities connected to the perfected realm of Shabbat? This was the unresolved doubt of the Sages, whether to include the verse describing Joseph's labors in a foreign land.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, pp. 7-9)

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Rav Yehudah Hachassid and his Shidduchin II

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In a previous article (now posted on the website RabbiKaganoff.com under the title Rav Yehudah Hachassid and his Shidduchin), we discussed the writings of Rav Yehudah Hachassid, who prohibited or advised against many potential marriages that are otherwise perfectly acceptable according to halachah. But first some background on the chassidei Ashkenaz.

Who was Rav Shmuel Hachassid?

Rav Yehudah Hachassid's father, known as Rav Shmuel Hachassid, was a very righteous individual who was a great mekubal, one of the baalei Tosafos, and a highly-respected leader of twelfth century Ashkenazic Jewry. Because of his great levels of righteousness, Rav Shmuel Hachassid was also sometimes called Rav Shmuel Hakadosh or Rav Shmuel Hanavi.

Rav Shmuel Hachassid was born in Speyer, one of the bastions of Torah that then existed on the banks of the Rhine River. (People whose family name is Shapiro and its various pronunciations and spellings are probably descended from someone who lived in Speyer; you might be progeny of either Rav Shmuel or Rav Yehudah Hachassid.) Rav Shmuel was the rabbinic leader of the community in Speyer and the head of a yeshiva. He was also the repository of much kabbalistic knowledge, both oral and written, that had been handed down from the generations of great Ashkenazic leaders before him, including many great baalei kabbalah. He became the recognized leader of a scholarly movement whose members were called the Chassidei Ashkenaz, individuals who lived their lives in an other-worldly existence, devoted exclusively to Torah and growth in yiras shamayim. The lengthy Shir Hayichud, recited in many congregations in its entirety after davening on Kol Nidrei evening, is attributed to Rav Shmuel Hachassid.

One of Rav Shmuel's sons was Rav Yehudah Hachassid, who was born in approximately 4910 (1150). Rav Yehudah Hachassid is also one of the baalei Tosafos, and is quoted several times in the Tosafos printed in the margins of our Gemara (for example, Tosafos, Bava Metzia 5b, s.v. Dechashid; Kesuvos 18b, s.v. Uvekulei). Rav Yehudah Hachassid's students included a number of famous rishonim who are themselves baalei Tosafos, such as Rav Yitzchok Or Zarua, Rav Elazar ben Rav Yehudah (the Rokeach), Rav Moshe of Coucy (the Semag), and Rav Baruch ben Rav Yitzchok (the Sefer Haterumah).

Rav Yehudah Hachassid also continued his father's role as the head of the Chassidei Ashkenaz. He followed what we would consider an ascetic relationship to this world. For example, he fasted all day the entire week, eating only in the evenings. His disciple, the Or Zarua, records that Rav Yehudah Hachassid, fasted two days Yom Kippur (Hilchos Yom Kippur, end of #281).

Rav Yehudah Hachassid also authored numerous works on kabbalah and was the author of the poem Anim Zemiro, sung in many shullen at the end of Shabbos davening. He was also the source of several works that can be easily read by the layman, two of which, the Sefer Chassidim and the Tzavaas [the ethical will of] Rav Yehudah Hachassid, are the subject of today's article. The Sefer Chassidim includes halacha, minhag, mussar, and commentary on tefillah. This work is mentioned numerous times by the later halachic authorities, as are many of the instructions in his tzavaah. As we will soon

discuss, there is some question as to whether he actually wrote the tzavaah or whether he transmitted its content orally and it was recorded by his children or disciples. Rav Yehudah Hachassid graduated to olam haba on Taanis Esther, 4977 (1217), in Regensburg, Germany.

The tzavaah of Rav Yehudah Hachassid

In his ethical will, Rav Yehudah Hachassid prohibits and/or advises against a vast array of practices for which he is the earliest, and sometimes the only, halachic source. Why did Rav Yehudah Hachassid prohibit these actions? Although we are not certain, because he offered no explanation, many later authorities assume that, in most instances, these were practices that Rav Yehudah Hachassid realized are dangerous because of kabbalistic reasons. Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, author of Shulchan Aruch Harav and Tanya) is quoted as having said that to understand one of Rav Yehudah Hachassid's statements in his tzava'ah would require a work the size of the Shelah, a classic of halachah, kabbalah and musar that is hundreds of pages long.

Reasons for the injunctions

Although the considerations behind Rav Yehudah Hachassid's rulings have been lost to us, several Acharonim proposed various reasons for one of his rulings, that a chosson and his father-in-law or a kallah and her mother-in-law should not share the same given name:

1) Some Acharonim maintain that the prohibitions are in order to avoid ayin hara. Due to the novelty, people would be more apt to talk about such a shidduch and cause an ayin hara (Chida, Peirush Lesefer Chassidim #477; Heishiv Moshe #19; Pri Hasadeh, vol. I, #69).

2) Others contend that if the kallah has the same name as the chosson's mother, the chosson will be unable to fulfill the mitzvah of kibbud eim when his mother dies, since he will not be able to name a child after her (Maharil #17).

3) Another explanation is that it will cause a lack of respect towards the parents. If the chosson's name is the same as the kallah's father, she will inevitably use her husband's name in her father's presence (Even Haroshah #31).

The responsum of the Noda Biyehudah

In my earlier article, I mentioned the responsum of the Noda Biyehudah (Shu't Even Ha'ezer II #79), who explains that the shidduchin that Rav Yehudah Hachassid discouraged are concerns only for his descendants. The Noda Biyehudah also holds that Rav Yehudah Hachassid's concerns apply only to birth names or names given to sons at their bris, but do not apply to any name changes that take place afterwards. And most importantly, the Noda Biyehudah feels that it is more important to marry off one's daughter to a talmid chacham than to be concerned about names.

Double whammy

The Chasam Sofer (Shu't Even Ha'ezer, end of #116) was asked by Rav Shmuel, the av beis din of Balkan, concerning a highly scholarly and qualified bachur whose first name was the same as the father of the girl that was suggested, and whose mother carried the same name as the girl. The Chasam Sofer permitted this shidduch, providing two reasons not cited by the Noda Biyehudah:

The Gemara (Pesachim 110b) explains that sheidim, evil spirits, are concerned only about people who are afraid of them, but that someone not troubled by them will suffer no harm. The Chasam Sofer reasons that the prohibitions of Rav Yehudah Hachassid apply only to people who are concerned about them.

Other authorities accept this conclusion of the Chasam Sofer. For example, after providing an extensive discussion on all the rules of Rav Yehudah Hachassid, the Sdei Chemed (Volume 7, page 20) notes that when he assumed his position as the rav of the Crimea, he discovered that the local populace did not observe any of the rules of Rav Yehudah Hachassid. The Sdei Chemed, who himself was concerned about all of these rules, writes that he thought about mentioning these matters to his community. He

subsequently decided against it, reasoning that no harm will come to someone who is not apprehensive.

Following this same approach, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that such a shidduch should be prevented only if the couple getting married is concerned that one of them shares a name with his or her future parent-in-law.

However, if the marrying couple is not disturbed about violating the rules of Rav Yehudah Hachassid, one may proceed with the marriage, even if the parents are -- the concern of a parent will not bring harm upon the couple (Shu't Igros Moshe, Even Ha'ezer 1:4). Similarly, I found a different authority who rules that when the couple makes the shidduch themselves, there is no concern for the rules of Rav Yehudah Hachassid (Sdei Chemed Volume 7, page 21, quoting Heishiv Moshe).

It is reported that someone asked the Chazon Ish regarding a shidduch where the prospective kallah had the same name as the mother of the suggested young man. The Chazon Ish asked the prospective chosson whether he was apprehensive about this. When he responded that he was not at all concerned, the Chazon Ish told him that he could proceed (Pe'er Hador, vol. IV, pg. 90).

It is interesting to note that in another instance, someone asked the Chazon Ish about a situation where the prospective chosson had the same name as the prospective kallah's father. The Chazon Ish ruled that as long as they do not live in the same city, they could go through with the shidduch. He explained that the whole reason beyond these rulings of Rav Yehudah Hachassid is ayin hara -- people should not say "Here are the two Yankels." However, if they live in different cities, people will not talk about them (Ma'aseh Ish pg. 215).

Others, however, view Rav Yehudah Hachassid's prohibition differently. For example, some question whether a man whose mother is deceased may marry a woman who has the same name as his late mother. It would seem that, according to most of the reasons mentioned above, one may proceed with this shidduch. Nevertheless, some authorities are opposed, which indicates that they do not accept the reasons cited above (Kaf Hachayim, Yoreh Deah 116:127).

Two versions

Returning to the responsum of the Chasam Sofer, he mentions another reason to be lenient, which requires some explanation. Regarding the concern that a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, or a son-in-law and father-in-law not share the same name, we find that the two sources attributed to Rav Yehudah Hachassid, the Sefer Chassidim and the tzava'ah, quote different versions of the prohibition. Whereas the tzava'ah states that a man should not marry a woman whose father shares his name, and a woman should not marry a man whose mother shares her given name, the text in the Sefer Chassidim (Chapter 477) states that if a man married a woman named Rivkah whose son also married a woman named Rivkah, then the grandson (the son's son) should not marry a girl named Rivkah. The version quoted in Sefer Chassidim seems unconcerned about a man marrying a woman who shares his mother's name or about a woman marrying a man with her father's name. The Chasam Sofer concludes that the tzava'ah of Rav Yehudah Hachassid should also be understood this way.

Similar to the comment of the Chasam Sofer, the Chachmas Odom (123:13) notes that Rav Yehudah Hachassid clearly meant the same in both places, and that the Sefer Chassidim is written more accurately. Therefore, these two great authorities rule that even Rav Yehudah Hachassid was never concerned about a woman marrying someone whose mother shares her name, or a man marrying a woman whose father shares his.

Other lenient reasons

Although these three authorities, the Noda Biyehudah, the Chasam Sofer and the Chachmas Odom, are basically not concerned with the commonly understood application of Rav Yehudah Hachassid's tzava'ah, other authorities are concerned, but provide additional reasons and applications when the concerns of Rav Yehudah Hachassid do not apply. Some mention that one need not be concerned where the two parties spell their names

differently, even when they pronounce the name the same way (quoted in Sdei Chemed, Volume 7, page 17). However, the Sdei Chemed (Volume 7, page 20) concludes that the spelling should make no difference: either way, one should be concerned.

Variances of the name

The Kaf Hachayim (Yoreh Deah 116:12) mentions a dispute whether there is a concern when the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law have somewhat different names. For example, may a woman named Rivkah Rachel marry a man whose mother's name is Rachel, since their names are not identical?

Some feel that this is relevant when the woman now being considered for the shidduch is called Rivkah, but does not provide any basis for lenience if, indeed, she uses Rachel regularly as part of her name. According to this opinion, if she chooses to add another name to avoid the concern of Rav Yehudah Hachassid, she should be called only by the new name (Kaf Hachayim, Yoreh Deah 116:126).

Similarly, some rule that if the son-in-law is known by two different names, some people calling him by one name and others by a different name, there is no concern if the potential father-in-law has one of these names (see Sdei Chemed Volume 7, pages 17).

On the other hand, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules there is concern only if the full given names of both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (or the father-in-law and son-in-law) are identical. Prevalent practice follows this approach. An example is that my rosh yeshivah Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, was not concerned that his daughter marry Rav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, notwithstanding that both father-in-law and son-in-law used the named Yaakov alone as their primary name.

Different English names

Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that if the father-in-law and son-in-law (or mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) have different English names, there is no concern, even if they share identical Hebrew names.

Changing the name

Some earlier authorities suggest that the chosson or the kallah change their name or add to it. For example, when the Chasam Sofer's daughter married someone by the name of Moshe (which was the name of the Chasam Sofer as well), he had the chosson change his name (Pischei Teshuvah, Even Ha'ezer 2:7, in the name of the Kerem Shlomo).

Rav Moshe Feinstein accepted this approach of the Chasam Sofer in theory. However, in a responsum on the topic, he wrote not to rely on changing the name since, at the time and place that he wrote his teshuvah, people would continue to use the original name. A name change means that the person is now called by the new name.

Stricter approaches

There are, however, other authorities who are more concerned about violating the instructions of Rav Yehudah Hachassid and challenge or ignore the above heterim (quoted in Sdei Chemed Volume 7, pages 17 ff. ; Kaf Hachayim, Yoreh Deah 116:125).

In conclusion

I leave it to the individual to discuss with his or her posek whether or not to pursue a particular shidduch because of an identical name or a different concern raised by Rav Yehudah Hachassid. Of course, we all realize that the most important factor is davening, asking Hashem to provide the appropriate shidduch quickly.