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The Daf Yomi Project And Siyum

During the upcoming month, there will be worldwide commemorations and programs marking the conclusion of the almost seven-and-a-half-year cycle of studying one page each day of the Babylonian Talmud. The originator of this program was the famed Rabbi Meir Shapiro, a leader of Polish Orthodox Jewry in the interwar years of the twentieth century. Rabbi Shapiro was a member of the Polish Parliament and the leader of the Agudat Yisrael party, who represented the interests of the Polish Orthodox Jewish community.

At a convention of Agudat Yisrael in the early 1920's, he publicly proclaimed the inauguration of the Daf Yomi initiative. The idea gained traction in the Jewish world, though like all ideas, especially in Jewish society, it also raised criticism in certain circles. The scholarly purists objected to Daf Yomi because they claimed it would only provide a superficial understanding of the Talmud, and would prevent the deeper knowledge and discussion, which was so central to the study of the Talmud in the great yeshivot.

Nevertheless, because of the great stature of Rabbi Shapiro himself, this criticism remained muted, and was kept alive only in the most densely scholarly of Talmudic circles. By the beginning of World War II, after a number of cycles of Talmud study were complete, there were thousands of Jews, especially in Eastern Europe, who were loyal participants in the daily study program. Rabbi Shapiro himself passed away tragically at a very early age, in the first half of the 1930s, and his death had a profound effect upon the Jewish world of that time, and on his beloved project.

After the destruction of European Jewry in World War II, Torah study generally was in precipitous decline. A great percentage of the prestigious Torah academies of Europe, as well as its scholars, leaders and students, had been destroyed. A handful of great scholars, those who had escaped the Holocaust, began the painstaking work of rebuilding the world of the yeshivot and with it, the intensive study of the Talmud. This work was mainly carried on in the nascent state of Israel and in the United States.

The Agudat Yisrael religious political party saw itself as an influential force in Israel as well as in the United States. Part of this renaissance was its activity in restarting the daily learning program. Though initially, in the middle decades of the 20th century, the participants in this learning program were small in number, the program itself eventually gained great popularity among all sections of the Jewish Orthodox world, even among Jews who were otherwise ideologically opposed to many of the ideas and worldview of the Agudat Yisrael. All groups within the broad Orthodox Jewish community began to participate in this learning program, and the Daf Yomi became an integral part of the daily lives of tens of thousands of Jews throughout the world. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that today there are more participants in this daily learning program today than ever before in its history.

As we near the commemoration of the completion of another cycle of this worldwide study of the Talmud, we certainly should note the remarkable success that began almost a century ago in Eastern Europe. Its success testifies to the unbreakable bond of the study of Torah with the Jewish state and the Jewish people. In our time there have been many innovations in helping people study Talmud. Translations, expanded commentaries, electronic communication, recorded lectures and classes have all contributed to the revival of the study of the Talmud. It is one of the many miraculous achievements of the Jewish people over the past 80 years, that the Daf Yomi learning program is so popular and continues to grow from cycle to cycle. It should be clear to all that basis of healthy Jewish life is the knowledge of Torah.

The rabbis of the Mishna stated long ago that ignorance is the enemy of morality and piety. There can be little understanding of Jewish life, its traditions and value system if one is ignorant of the teaching and

methodology of the study of Talmud. This Daf Yomi learning program and process grants the participants the ability to swim in the great ocean of Jewish knowledge and holy values that the Talmud represents.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

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Vayeshev: Actors in a drama

Everyone involved in the story of Joseph seemingly follows his own individual course of action, but the result is a historic change in the dynamics of the family and the trajectory of Jewish history.

In this great emotional drama that will consume the balance of the sections of this book of the Torah, we are witness to a very difficult family situation and the dynamic consequences that it creates. The Torah itself testifies to the love and favoritism that Jacob shows towards his son Joseph. We can well understand this relationship of Jacob to Joseph, since Joseph strongly resembled his father physically, was extremely talented and precocious, and was the son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. However Jewish tradition raised objections to the overt favoritism shown to Joseph by Jacob when he bestowed upon him the special garment that signified their bond and love for one another.

We can also understand why Joseph himself felt so special, and justified in lording it over his brothers, by telling them of his dreams and ambitions. Again, the traditional commentaries to the Torah found fault in Joseph's youthful arrogance and lack of judgment. And, finally, we can also appreciate how hurt the brothers were by the actions of their father and brother.

They were so hurt that they felt that Joseph was an existential threat to their very survival as a family and future nation. So, we are faced with a situation where all the leading people involved in the story are both right and wrong at the very same time. We can appreciate the feelings of each of the parties to the story, and, yet we are aware of the disaster and trauma that could result.

There is an over-arching drama that is being enacted here in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Jewish tradition teaches us that we are all somehow mere actors in the great drama of human civilization, presented on the stage of Jewish history. Even though each of the individuals involved in the narrative presented in this week's Torah reading apparently acts on his own volition, the sum total of their actions will result in the descent of the Jewish people into Egyptian slavery and the eventual redemption and acceptance of the Torah at Sinai.

We recite in our daily prayers that there are many thoughts and intentions in the hearts of human beings, but that eventually it is the guidance of Heaven that will prevail. Nowhere is this basic understanding of the pattern of Jewish history more evident than it is in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Everyone involved seemingly follows their own individual course of action, but the result is a historic change in the dynamics of the family and the trajectory of Jewish history. Only if we step back and view the entire chain of events in its totality can we begin to see this emerging pattern as the will of Heaven guiding the family of Jacob and the Jewish people.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rav Kook Torah

Chanukah: The Hellenist Challenge

"When the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all of the oils. After the Hasmoneans defeated them, they searched and found but one cruse of oil, untouched and sealed with the seal of the High Priest. The cruse

had only enough oil for one day, but a miracle occurred and they were able to light from it for eight days. The following year they established these days as a holiday for praise and thanksgiving.” (Shabbat 21b)

We may ask a number of questions on the Talmudic account of Chanukah:

- The Jewish people have fought many battles in their long history. Some of these battles were accompanied by miracles, such as the walls of Jericho that fell and the sun that stood still during the battle at Givon. Why was only the Hasmonean victory chosen to be commemorated as a holiday for future generations?
- Why celebrate a military conflict in which the Temple was defiled and many Jews were lost to a foreign culture?
- Why is there no mitzvah to celebrate Chanukah with a festive meal, unlike other holidays? Why only ‘a holiday of praise and thanksgiving’?
- What is the significance of the miracle of the undefiled cruse of oil?

Culture Clash

The military victories of the Greek empire brought about the spread of Greek culture and philosophy, and the superficial charm of Hellenism captured the hearts of many Jews. These new ideas undermined fundamental teachings of the Torah and central mitzvot. The danger was so great that this clash of cultures could have caused permanent damage to the spiritual state of the Jewish people.

The Talmud emphasizes the significance of the small cruse of oil in the rescue of the Jewish people. The sealed jar of pure oil is a metaphor for the kernel of pure faith that resides in the depths of the Jewish soul. It was this inner resource of pure holiness that guarded the Jewish people in their struggle against Hellenism.

The Sages understood that Chanukah needed to be established as a permanent holiday. They realized that the battle against an overwhelming foreign culture was not just the one-time struggle of the Hasmoneans. All generations require the strength and purity of inner faith to protect the Torah from the corrupting influences of foreign beliefs and values.

The Contribution of Hellenism

The Sages also realized that this conflict with Hellenism, despite its disastrous short-term effects, would ultimately bestow great benefits. This is a basic rule of life: those challenges that confront us and threaten our beliefs and way of life will in the end invigorate the sources of truth. Greek wisdom, after it has acknowledged the Divine nature of Torah, will serve to further honor and strengthen the Torah and its ideals. Therefore it is fitting to celebrate these days, despite the trauma of the Hasmonean period.

Significantly, the festival of Chanukah is celebrated without feasting and wine. There were two sides to Hellenism: its intellectual aspects – Greek philosophy, literature, and so on — and its popular culture of physical pleasures and crass entertainment. One might mistakenly think that Hellenism’s positive contribution also includes its hedonistic delight in wine, parties, and naked wrestling matches. Therefore we specifically celebrate Chanukah with spiritual rituals — lights and Hallel, praise and thanksgiving. For the true contribution of Hellenism is its intellectual side, that which posed such a grave challenge to the Torah in the times of the Hasmoneans. It is this aspect of Greek culture that will defend and enhance the Torah in the future.

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 109-111. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III on Shabbat 21b (2:13).)

The Angel who did not know he was an Angel (Vayeshev 5780) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The story of Joseph and his brothers, spread over four parshiyot, is the longest and most tightly-scripted of all the narratives in the Torah. Nothing is there by accident; every detail counts. One moment,

however, seems gloriously irrelevant – and it is this that contains one of the most beautiful of the Torah’s ideas.

With great speed, we are introduced to the broad lines of the story. Joseph is envied and hated by his brothers. So deep has the animosity gone that they cannot talk peaceably with one another. Now the brothers have left home to tend their sheep, and Jacob tells Joseph to go and see how they are doing. This encounter will set in motion the central drama from which all else will follow: the moment when the brothers sell Joseph into Egypt as a slave.

But it nearly didn’t happen. Joseph arrived at Shechem where he expected his brothers to be, but they were not there. He might well have wandered around for a while and then, failing to find them, gone home. None of the events that take up the rest of the Torah would have happened: no Joseph the slave, no Joseph the viceroy, no storage of food during the years of plenty, no descent of Joseph’s family to Egypt, no exile, no slavery, no exodus. The entire story – already revealed in broad outlines to Abraham in a night vision – seemed about to be derailed. Then we read the following:

A man found [Joseph] wandering around in the fields and asked him, “What are you looking for?” He replied, “I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?” “They have moved on from here,” the man answered. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. (Gen. 37:15-17)

I know of no comparable passage in the Torah: three verses dedicated to an apparently trivial, eminently forgettable detail of someone having to ask directions from a stranger. Who was this unnamed man? And what conceivable message does the episode hold for future generations, for us? Rashi says he was the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra says he was a passer-by. Ramban however says that “the Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a guide without his knowledge.”

I am not sure whether Ramban meant without Joseph’s knowledge or without the guide’s knowledge. I prefer to think both. The anonymous man – so the Torah is intimating – represented an intrusion of providence to make sure that Joseph went to where he was supposed to be, so that the rest of the drama could unfold. He may not have known he had such a role. Joseph surely did not know. To put it as simply as I can: he was an angel who didn’t know he was an angel. He had a vital role in the story. Without him, it would not have happened. But he had no way of knowing, at the time, the significance of his intervention.

The message could not be more significant. When heaven intends something to happen, and it seems to be impossible, sometimes it sends an angel down to earth – an angel who didn’t know he or she was an angel – to move the story from here to there. Let me tell the story of two such angels, without whom there might not be a State of Israel today.

One was a remarkable young woman from a Sephardi family who, at the age of seventeen, married into the most famous Ashkenazi family in the world. Her name was Dorothy Pinto; her husband was James de Rothschild, son of the great Baron Edmond de Rothschild who did so much to support the settlement of the land in the days before the proclamation of the State.

A critical juncture occurred during the First World War that would eventually lead to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the placing of Palestine under a British mandate. Suddenly, Britain became absolutely central to the Zionist dream. A key figure in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, was in Britain, experimenting and lecturing in chemistry at Manchester University. But Weizmann was a Russian immigrant, not a prominent member of British society. Manchester was not London. Chemistry was not politics. The most influential and well-

connected Jewish family was the Rothschilds. But Edmond was in France. James was a soldier on the battlefield. And not every member of the British Rothschilds was a Zionist.

At that moment, Dorothy suddenly assumed a leading role. She was only nineteen when she first met Weizmann in December 1914, and understood very little of the political complexities involved in realising the Zionist dream. But she learned quickly. She was perceptive, resourceful, energetic, delightful and determined. She connected Weizmann with everyone he needed to know and persuade. Simon Schama, in his definitive account of Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel, says that “young as she was... she combined charm, intelligence and more than a hint of steely resolution in just the right mixture to coax commitment from the equivocal, enthusiasm from the lukewarm and sympathy from the indifferent.”

His judgement on the effect of her interventions is that “through tireless but prudent social diplomacy she had managed to open avenues of influence and persuasion at a time when they were badly needed.”[1] The result, in 1917, was the Balfour Declaration, a milestone in the history of Zionism – and we should not forget that the Declaration itself took the form of a letter to Lord (Walter) Rothschild.

Dorothy’s husband James, in his will, left the money to build the Knesset, Israel’s parliament building. In her own will, Dorothy left the money to build a new Supreme Court Building, a project undertaken by her nephew Jacob, the current Lord Rothschild. But of all the things she did, it was those connections she made for Chaim Weizmann in the years 1914 to 1917 that were surely the most important. Without them, there might have been no Balfour Declaration and no State of Israel.

The other figure, who could not have been less like Dorothy de Rothschild, was Eddie Jacobson. The son of poor Jewish immigrants, born in New York’s Lower East Side, he moved with his family to Kansas City where he met a young man called Harry Truman. They knew one another in their youth, and became close in 1917 when they underwent military training together. After the end of World War I, they opened a haberdashery business together. It failed in 1922 because of the recession.

From then on, they went their separate ways, Jacobson as a travelling salesman, and Truman successively a county administrator, Senator, Vice-President, and then when F.D. Roosevelt died in office in 1945, President of the United States. Despite their very different life-trajectories, the two stayed friends, and Jacobson would often visit Truman, talking to him about, among other things, about the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

After the war, the position of America vis-à-vis the State of Israel was deeply ambivalent. The State Department was opposed. Truman himself refused to meet Chaim Weizmann. On 13 March 1948, Jacobson went to the White House and persuaded Truman to change his mind and meet Weizmann. Largely as a result of this, the United States became the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel on 14 May 1948.

Many years later, Truman wrote:

One of the proudest moments of my life occurred at 6:12 p.m. on Friday, May 14, 1948, when I was able to announce recognition of the new State of Israel by the government of the United States. I remain particularly gratified by the role I was fortunate to play in the birth of Israel as, in the immortal words of the Balfour Declaration, “a national home for the Jewish people.”

Two people, Dorothy de Rothschild and Eddie Jacobson, appeared on the scene of history and connected Chaim Weizmann with individuals he might otherwise not have met, among them Arthur Balfour[2] and Harry

Truman. They were like the stranger who connected Joseph and his brothers, but with infinitely more positive consequences. I think of them both as angels who did not know they were angels.

Perhaps this is true not only about the destiny of nations but also about each of us at critical junctures in our lives. I believe that there are times when we feel lost, and then someone says or does something that lifts us or points the way to a new direction and destination. Years later, looking back, we see how important that intervention was, even though it seemed slight at the time. That is when we know that we too encountered an angel who didn’t know he or she was an angel. That is what the story of Joseph’s stranger is about.

Shabbat Shalom

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1 – 40:23) Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “And Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup and I placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.” (Gen. 40:11)

The Bible believes in the significance of dreams; so did the Sages of the Talmud (B.T. Berakhot, chapter 9), so did William Shakespeare and so did Sigmund Freud. Shakespeare declared that “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” (The Tempest 4:1) – that the thoughts and emotions of the human being provide the raw material for the dreams he experiences in his sleep at night. Conversely, Freud taught that the best code to unlocking the mystery of an individual’s personality is by studying the symbolism of his dreams.

Hence when Joseph heard that the imprisoned cup-bearer is dreaming of serving wine to Pharaoh once again, he understood that this man did not have a guilty conscience and in all likelihood, Pharaoh’s investigation would find him innocent; the cup-bearer would be freed and re-instated. The baker, on the other hand, dreamt that birds were eating Pharaoh’s baked goods from a basket he was carrying on his head. One who paranoically believes that others are robbing him of the food he has prepared for Pharaoh obviously feels that he was derelict in his duties and worthy of being punished. Joseph knew that the baker would be found guilty...

Interestingly, the Sages of the Talmud utilize this dream of the cup-bearer as the source for one of the primary activities of our Passover Seder, and, in so doing, reveal a great truth about the personality of Joseph as well as about the political significance of our exodus from Egypt. In chapter ten of tractate Pesachim in the Jerusalem Talmud, Rabbi Yohanan suggests that the four cups of wine which punctuate the Seder and enhance our Festival of Freedom hark back to the four references to “cups” of wine in the cup-bearer’s dream – rather than to the four expressions of redemption in Exodus (6:6-8) as brought down in the version of that same tractate in the Babylonian Talmud. (Those who are familiar with my Commentary on the Haggadah will note that there is a fifth time when “cup” is mentioned in Genesis paralleling the fifth expression of redemption in Exodus.).

What would cause the Jerusalem Talmud to prefer a source from the period of Joseph over a seminal Divine prophecy which foretold the exodus?!

Firstly, the cup-bearer’s dream relates specifically to goblets of wine, the precise objects with which we are dealing in the Seder. Halakhically speaking, Rav Haim Brisker maintains that the cup, or goblet, is very significant; one must not only drink the majority of a *revi’it* of wine (3.3.ozs) with each blessing over the wine, but one must drink a majority of the cup from which one is drinking, no matter how large it is. Remember that wine not only helps one feel joyous, but it also makes one feel free.

Moreover, the cup-bearer had been wrongfully imprisoned (enslaved) by Pharaoh, and was then exonerated and freed, perfectly paralleling the situation of the Hebrews at the time of the exodus. Herein lies a great lesson, which might have been overlooked had we only had the source from Exodus.

The four expressions of redemption apply specifically to the Israelites – which might have led us to believe that the significance of the exodus related only to God’s special love for Israel. Linking the four cups of freedom to the Egyptian cup-bearer reminds us that God wants every human being to be free – because every human being is created in the image of the Divine, is equal to every other human being, and no human dare enslave his brother. Joseph is the true universalist among the tribes. He initially dreams of sheaves of grain, Egyptian agriculture, and he wishes to influence the entire cosmos, the sun, the moon and the stars.

This fundamental principle of a free humanity is a meta-halakhah which must govern human affairs. At the Song of the Reed Sea, all the nations – Edom, Moab, Canaan – are pictured as submitting to the power of the one God of the Universe, who alone must rule the world (Ex. 15:14-18). The American Revolutionaries got it right: “Rebellion against tyranny is obedience to God.” Would that the President of the United States today would lead the United Nations in that direction vis a vis Syria and Iran!

For Maimonides, this principle must be the basis of our Oral Law as we interpret the Torah for each generation. Yes, says the Ramban, the law in the past did allow us to treat the Gentile slave with “rigor,” but this must not be the attitude of any Jew now. He cites the Book of Job, wherein God says to the Master who is inconsiderate to his slave, “was it not the one God who formed both Master and Slave in His womb?” (31:13-15). Maimonides in effect abolishes slavery (see the last law in his Laws of Slaves).

And this fundamental human right to be free causes Maimonides to re-interpret the simple meaning of the Bible to enable the woman imprisoned in an insufferable marriage to be freed. “Our wives are not to be treated as captives under the control of their husbands,” he declares! (Laws of Matrimony 14:8). If only today’s legal decisors would take Maimonides’ words to heart and mind. Shabbat Shalom!

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"ta

[<https://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/was-yehudah-hamaccabee-a-fanatic-an-interview-with-rav-shlomo-aviner/2019/12/12/>]

With Hanukkah approaching, The Jewish Press visited Rosh Yeshiva HaRav Shlomo Aviner at the Ateret Yerushalyim Yeshiva in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, located in the building which housed the famed Torat Haim Yeshiva until 1936, when Arab pogroms, and the British Mandate Authority, forced the Jews to abandon the once-thriving Jewish neighborhood, then known as the Western Wall Quarter. HaRav Aviner handed me a booklet filled with old photographs which pictured the history of the yeshiva, whose Beit Midrash looks exactly the same as its photo from 80 years ago. At the time of the expulsion, the Arab caretaker of the building locked the doors of the yeshiva, claiming the building was his, thus preventing rioters and plunderers from entering. During Israel’s War of Independence, Jordan captured the Old City. Then a miracle occurred. The Jordanians destroyed all of the 80 yeshivas and synagogues in what they renamed the Muslim Quarter. Only the Torat Chaim building and its study hall and holy tomes remained untouched - like the small flask of oil discovered by the Maccabees in the Beit HaMikdash with the seal of the Kohen HaGadol still intact. When Tzahal liberated the Old City in 1967, the caretaker handed over the key to the building, declaring that the holy place watched over him more than he watched over it.

While many former Jewish buildings in the neighborhood have been reclaimed and populated by young, idealistic Jewish families, the quarter is still overwhelmingly Muslim, with Arab shops lining the casbah which leads to the yeshiva, situated on Hagai Street between Shechem Gate and the Kotel Plaza. Memorial plaques along the narrow, cobblestone alleyway mark the sites where terrorists murdered Eliahu Amedi, Elchanan Aleli, Aharon Bennet, and Rabbi Nechemia Levi, HY”D.

From the roof of the yeshiva building, it seems like you could reach out and lift off the golden dome from the Shrine of the Rock on the Temple Mount, which the Maccabees reclaimed from the occupying armies of the Greek-Syrian Empire. Visiting the yeshiva, you can feel the valor of its students, who dedicate themselves day and night to learning Torah in the midst of a hostile Arab neighborhood.

Very often, the Israeli media portrays the yeshiva’s students, and the Jews who live in the Muslim Quarter, as fanatics and messianic dreamers who incite the wrath of the Gentiles against us.

“At the time of the Maccabees’ war against the rule of Greece in the Land, that is how most of the Jews regarded Yehuda. At the beginning of the rebellion, only a handful followed him. In the battle against Lisius, he had mustered an army of ten thousand, but by the fourth encounter with the legions of Greece, only four-thousand men stood by him in the vital fight for religious freedom and national sovereignty. The vast majority of Jews were against him. They scoffed at the possibility that a tiny force of untrained and poorly armed farmers from Judea could overcome the mighty armies of Greece. They called Yehuda a fanatic and messianic dreamer, who endangered the security of the Nation, just like the epithets we hear today in the secular media regarding the settlers in East Jerusalem and Yesha. But the truth is the very opposite – Yehuda the Maccabee was a realist.”

A realist? In what way?

“He was as aware of the reality of the precarious situation just like everyone else. Even his own soldiers warned him of the seemingly insurmountable dangers, as the account in the “Sefer HaShmoniim” relates. But Yehuda’s more enlightened perspective encompassed generations. He reminded his troops that if Jewish history had followed the path of the pragmatists, Am Yisrael would never have left Egypt, David would never have killed Goliath, and the Jews would never have established their own Israelite Kingdom in a country inhabited by seven hostile nations. Yehuda reminded them that Hashem is the Chief of Staff of the armies of Israel, and that, if He wills, the Master of Wars can readily triumph over powerful enemies with a tiny number of Jews filled with Emunah. And he reminded his followers that trust in Hashem was not just some fairytale for children, but a down-to-earth reality in the life and history of the Jewish People. The same is true today. Hashem gave Jerusalem and all the Land of Israel to the Jews. Disbelievers and the nations of the world can say what they say, but the promise of Hashem is eternal. We are here to stay.

In the Gemara, the miracle of Hanukkah is attributed to the flask of oil that lasted for eight days, while in the Shemona Esrei and Birchat HaMazone, the victory of the few against the many is emphasized. Which miracle is more significant?

“The Maharal, in his treatise on Hanukkah, “Ner Mitzvah,” writes that the military victory was the primary miracle. In effect, the miracle of the Menorah wasn’t necessary. When there is no pure oil, it is permissible to light with impure oil. This is a law of the Temple concerning the public congregation, similar to the law which allows the Korban Pesach to be sacrificed, and even to build the Beit HaMikdash, when the majority of the Jewish People in Eretz Yisrael are impure. Additionally, the lighting of the Menorah was halted by the Greeks many years previously. Waiting another few days until pure oil could be procured wouldn’t have caused a tragedy. Furthermore, every time the Menorah was lit in the past, a miracle occurred, since after all of the lights died out, the ‘western lamp’ continued to burn day and night. Thus, in effect, the Hanukkah light which lasted eight days was just another miracle of the Menorah. Therefore, the Maharal explains, the miracle of the Menorah didn’t come for its own sake, but rather to teach that the victory over the

Greeks was a miracle from Heaven as well. The miracle of the oil was the “Teudat HaKashrut” revealing to everyone that Hashem was the invisible Hand behind the military triumphs of the Maccabees.”

If victory in war is the main thing, why, in our time, did the Chief Rabbinate in Israel establish Yom HaAtzmaut and the recital of Hallel on the day the State was declared, when there was no miracle at all, and not on the anniversary of the day when the War of Independence ended, symbolizing the salvation of the Nation?

“HaRav Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook was asked this very same question. He answered that the greater miracle indeed occurred with the declaration of Jewish Statehood, when we overcame all of doubts, hesitations, and fears of the Arabs and the nations of the world, when we stood up and boldly proclaimed the establishment of Medinat Yisrael. This awakening of Jewish valor in the eyes of all mankind, after nearly two-thousand years of Jewish impotence in the galut, was the foundation for all of the military miracles which followed after that in Israel’s wars.”

Why do we recite Hallel on Hanukah, and not on Purim?

“The Gemara (Megilla 14A) replies that we don’t recite Hallel over a miracle that occurred outside the Land of Israel.”

Why then do we recite Hallel on Pesach?

“The Gemara explains that the miracles associated with Pesach occurred before we entered Eretz Yisrael. From that time forth, we don’t recite miracles of the Diaspora. In the Hallel, we say: “Let the servants of Hashem praise Hashem,” while at the time of Purim we remained servants of Achashverus. The Jews were saved from mass slaughter, but the miracle didn’t include salvation from subjugation to freedom. We remained subjects of a foreign nation. This situation is unnatural to our essence, as the Psalmist says, ‘How can we sing Hashem’s song in a foreign land?’ (Tehillim 137). The Jewish People as a whole can only attain true national simcha in Eretz Yisrael, in our own Land, and not when we live in Gentile countries, subjugated to Gentile cultures and Gentile laws. In contrast, our joy on Hanukah expresses our healthy, natural condition, which comes to expression, as the Maharal explains in the first chapter of ‘Nezach Yisrael’ citing three necessary conditions: when the Nation is physically together, when we enjoy our own Israeli sovereignty, and when the Nation dwells in Eretz Yisrael.”

In Israel, many people and yeshivot light their hanukias in aquarium-like containers outside by the doorways to their buildings, or at their gateways by the street, in the public domain as mentioned in the halacha. In the Diaspora where anti-Semitism is so prevalent today, should Jews do the same as an expression of Jewish pride, or is it better to light inside the house or yeshiva building.

“Everyone has to evaluate the options for themselves, but certainly, if there is a clear danger, it is proper to light inside.”

Does Hellenism still exist today?

“Definitely. There are many forms of Hellenism. For the ancient Greeks, Hellenism meant conforming to Greek culture, which glorified the body and fostered the free expression of individual lusts and pleasures. The term for this is Hedonism. This exists today in the cultures of Western society where movements of liberalism and pluralism abound. In ancient Greece, the indulging in pleasure was a way of serving the gods. Today, the quest for pleasure and surrendering to its temptations are the gods themselves.”

How can we fight against this cultural impurity and moral darkness?

“By adding holiness and light.”

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeshev
For the week ending 21 December 2019 / 23 Kislev 5780
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights
Picking up the Tallit

“For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews” (40:15)
Rabbi Arthur Kohn zt”l was the Rabbi of a synagogue in Finsbury Park in London. Finsbury Park Mosque was a well-known hotbed of radical

Islamic Judeophobia. In 2004, its imam, the notorious Abu Hamza al-Masri, was arrested by British police after the United States requested his extradition to face trial. He was later charged by British authorities with sixteen offenses for inciting violence and racial hatred and, in 2006, a British court found him guilty of inciting violence and sentenced him to seven years’ imprisonment. On October 5, 2012, after an eight-year legal battle, he was extradited from the UK to the United States to face terrorism charges and on April 14, 2014 his trial began in New York. On May 19, 2014 Hamza was found guilty of eleven terrorism charges by a jury in Manhattan and on January 9, 2015 he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

On the “baby slopes” of his terrorist career, Hamza and his cronies once vandalized Rabbi Kohn’s synagogue. As Al Webb, United Press International reported at the time, “LONDON, April 30 2002 (UPI): “Windows have been smashed, a swastika daubed on a rabbi’s lectern and holy books ripped apart at a London synagogue, triggering fears that a wave of anti-Semitic attacks on Jews and Jewish religious sites across continental Europe may have reached Britain. “This is the first incident in the country that resembles what’s happening on the continent,” a spokesman for British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks told journalists. “In terms of desecration, this is one of the most disturbing attacks we have seen.” Police said the attack appeared to have been planned. Vandals smashed their way into the building by breaking more than 20 windows, then used green paint to inscribe a huge, Nazi-style swastika on the lectern and splash across the Ark, where the synagogue’s Torah — biblical scrolls — were kept. They stomped on Israel’s Star of David flag, splattered more paint on it and ground it into the sand they dumped on the floor. Prayer books were torn to pieces, shawls and skullcaps slung into excrement that was mixed in with the sand and ceremonial wine was emptied into the mess.”

Then Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, journeyed to Finsbury Park and asked, Rabbi Kohn, “What are you going to do?” Rabbi Kohn replied, “My father was a rav in Berlin. After Kristallnacht, they came and asked him, ‘What are you going to do?’ He picked up his charred tallis and said, ‘Look, it’s a little bit burned, so what, I’m going to continue.’ Picking up his paint-spattered tallit, Rabbi Kohn said to Rabbi Sacks, “Look at my tallis, there’s a little bit of paint on it, I’m going to continue.”

“For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews”

Despite its risks, Yosef identified himself with the Jewish People (see also 39:14). For this he earned the privilege of being buried in Eretz Yisrael — something that even Moshe did not merit. Whether we are in Berlin, in London, or in Jerusalem, the world at large would prefer us not to identify as Jews, but in every generation we will pick up our ‘tallit’ whether it is charred or stained and proclaim to the world, “Am Yisrael Chai!” “The people of Israel live!”

Sources: Devarim Rabbah 2:5; story heard from Rabbi Moshe Cantor

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Parshas Vayeishev

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

“The ‘Wisdom’ of the East”

There are jokes which are very funny on the surface, but which, upon reflection, can be quite painful and disturbing.

One of them, which was told frequently twenty years ago or more, concerns a matronly woman from the Bronx who seeks to visit a famous guru somewhere in the Far East, perhaps in the mountains of northern India or Tibet.

She boards a plane at John F. Kennedy airport and begins the long and arduous flight, which necessitates several stopovers and the changing of planes. She lands at the closest airport to the remote ashram, or temple, where the guru has his mountain retreat. She finds a bus that takes her part of the way to the ashram and, although she’s never even seen a

donkey before, summons a donkey cart to continue her trek to her encounter with the guru.

Totally exhausted, she finally arrives at the guru's quarters. To her great disappointment, she learns that the guru has just begun a three-day period of fasting and meditation and cannot possibly be interrupted. Anything but total solitude is forbidden.

She pleads and begs and finally resorts to one of the strategies of persuasion that she learned back in the Bronx. She tells the guru's guards that she only wants to say three words to him.

On the condition that she limits her message to just three words, they allow her access into the guru's inner chamber. There she finds him sitting in the lotus yoga position, totally entranced in his meditation.

She approaches him, but he remains unaware of her presence. Finally, she bends over him and whispers in his ear: "Melvin? Come home!"

I used to tell his story many times, not so long ago, when so many young Jewish men and women, from the Bronx and from elsewhere, left to the Far East in their quest for spiritual truth and a meaningful path in life.

The story always drew laughs from the crowd, but the laughs were inevitably followed by a contemplative silence as the audience began to reflect upon the point of the story. Young Jews by the thousands had become alienated not only from their Jewish roots, but from Western civilization in general.

Although this phenomenon is no longer as prevalent as it once was, Eastern religions remain attractive to many, and not just to young Jews but to a wide variety of individuals in search of a "New Age" alternative to Western culture.

The reasons why so many are dissatisfied with the Western way of life center around the relentless pressures and frantic pace which that way of life entails. Eastern religions offer an alternative which promises serenity, tranquility, and inner peace.

This leads us to a question that surprisingly connects to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23).

The question is: "Is there anything wrong with seeking tranquility and inner peace? Are they not highly desirable components of a healthy and meaningful lifestyle?"

An answer can be found in the words of the Midrash Rabbah that appear in most contemporary editions of Rashi's commentary, although they are absent from earlier manuscript editions.

The first words in this week's Torah portion read: "Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned..." The Bible then narrates the story of Jacob's son Joseph and how he is sold into slavery by his brothers.

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, comments: "Jacob wished to dwell in peace and tranquility but immediately was beset by Joseph's troubles and tribulations."

These words imply that it was somehow improper for Jacob to desire a calm and serene existence. The comment even suggests that Jacob was punished for his wish by suffering the disappearance, and supposed death, of his favored son.

Why? What possible sin would Jacob have committed by hoping for tranquility? Had he not suffered enough during his years of exile? Were the family crises described in detail in last week's parsha not sufficient torture?

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter (the second Rebbe of Gur), the author of the Sfat Emet ("Lips of Truth"), a profoundly insightful Chassidic work, suggests that the calm and peaceful life is not necessarily the religiously desirable. Such a life is conducive to complacency.

"What God wants from the Jew," he writes, "is for him to have a life of constant toil in the service of His Blessed Name, because there is no limit to striving for perfection."

The Torah's ideal is a life of action and involvement in worldly affairs. The Torah rejects the attitude of detachment and passivity which is implicit in the teachings of Eastern religions.

The Torah cannot envision the good life if that life is without challenge. Achievement of inner peace is not the ultimate value, especially not if it results in withdrawal from responsible action within society.

The author of the Sfat Emet led his flock and wrote his works in the latter half of the 19th century. But the important lesson he taught was expressed about a century before, in the words of Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto, the 18th-century Italian mystic, whose work *Mesilat Yesharim* ("The Path of the Just") contains the following demanding passage:

A man must know that he was not created to enjoy rest in this world, but to toil and labor. He should, therefore, act as though he were a laborer working for hire. We are only day laborers. Think of the soldier at the battlefield who eats in haste, whose sleep is interrupted, and who is always prepared for an attack. "Man is born to toil" (Job 5:7).

The teaching of both of these authors was anticipated by this passage in the Talmud (Berakhot 64a), as translated and elucidated in the Koren Talmud Bavli:

Torah scholars have rest neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come, as in both worlds they are constantly progressing, as it is stated: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion."

The differences between the ideologies of Judaism and other religions are sometimes subtle and hard to define. But in contrasting Judaism with the religions of the Far East, the differences are quite clear. The latter promise inner peace and serenity and advocate detachment. Judaism makes no such promises. It tells us that life is all about struggle and challenge, and it demands that we be actively involved in improving the world.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeshev Hashem's Puppet Show

Parshas VaYeshev is Like a Puppet Show with G-d Pulling the Strings

The Rokeach, one of the early Chumash commentaries, makes a very cryptic and enigmatic statement. The Rokeach says Parshas Vayeshev contains 112 pesukim and Chapter 92 in Tehillim (Psalms), which we say Friday night and Shabbos morning (Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos) contains 112 letters. So somehow, Parshas Vayeshev has a connection to the Chapter in Tehillim of Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbos.

This is the type of statement that requires explanation. The Rokeach certainly had more in mind than making a type of "Gezerah Shavah" "112-112". What does he mean? What is the connection?

In order to understand this, we need to see a very important Ramban on the pasuk "A man discovered him and behold! — he was blundering in the field..." [Bereshis 37:15]. Yaakov told Yosef to find his brothers. Yaakov instructed Yosef that the brothers were shepherding in Shechem. Yosef went to Shechem and did not find them. Yosef started wandering around. He was found by a "man" (Chazal say he was none other than the Angel Gavriel).

The Ramban writes that Scripture elaborated on this discussion to inform us that there were many reasons for Yosef to return safely to his father. Yosef, upon coming to Shechem and not finding his brothers, had every justification in the world to return home and claim that he tried but was unable to find his brothers. However, Yosef persisted over and above the call of duty until his mission was complete. The point of telling us all this was to emphasize the fact that when a decree is made in Heaven, it will inevitably be carried out. All the efforts and attempts that man might make to avert a Heavenly Decree will be for naught. Whatever Hashem wants to occur, will occur, regardless of all man's efforts to the contrary.

The Ramban uses the Hebrew expression *HaGezeirah Emes v'ha'Charitzus Sheker* — the decree comes true; the efforts [to avert it] are in vain. This is equivalent to the old Yiddish expression: *A mentch tracht un G-t lacht* — man thinks and G-d laughs.

The Ramban adds that when it appeared that the meeting between Yosef and his brothers might not occur, Hashem sent a personal guide to make sure Yosef knew how to find them. Logically, Yosef should have turned back and gone home, but the Ribono shel Olam wanted this rendezvous to occur, and He made sure that it did occur. Unlike the simple reading

of the pasuk that there was only one “man” who pointed out the way so that Yosef could find his brothers, the Medrash notes that the word “Ish” (Man) is written 3 times to indicate that 3 different messengers were sent to help Yosef at various points in his state of disorientation to locate his brothers. Finding his brothers needs to happen because this is part of the Ribono shel Olam’s Master Plan.

Parshas Vayeshev—if we can use such a mundane expression—is similar to a “puppet show.” The puppets, as it were, are Yaakov, Yosef, and the brothers. The puppeteer is the Master of the Universe and He is pulling the strings.

Yaakov Avinu is considered the most chosen of the Patriarchs. “A righteous Tzaddik who is the foundation of the world” is too tame an expression to say about Yaakov Avinu. However, Yaakov Avinu makes a basic parenting mistake here. He gives Yosef a Ketones Pasim and shows favoritism amongst his sons. The Talmud says [Shabbos 10b] that a person should never show different treatment to one child over another. A person does not need a Gemara to tell us this. Anyone who has had children knows that they all need to be treated the same. If someone does not treat them equally, the sibling rivalry that already exists will just become inflamed.

So how does Yaakov Avinu make such a mistake? The Torah explicitly states that Yaakov loved Yosef more than he loved all his other children. How could he do that? How could the wise patriarch violate the most basic rule of raising children?

The brothers are convinced that Yosef is a ‘Rodef’ (in pursuit of them with the intention to eliminate them). Convinced that he is about to kill them, they convene a court and rule about Yosef that he is a rodef who is deserving of death. This is Yosef haTzadik (the Righteous Joseph)! They were so off the mark! How do the Tribes of G-d make such a gross error of misjudgment about their brother?

The righteous Yosef suspects his brothers of sexual immorality and of eating flesh from a living animal! How did he make that mistake?

The answer to all these questions is that HaGezeirah Emes v’ha’Charitzus Sheker. This is part of the Ribono shel Olam’s Grand Plan, so the normal logical way people act all falls by the wayside. Hashem blinds all the “actors” here, and they do not think or act as they normally would.

This indeed is one way we can answer the question we discussed in the (non-transcribed) Halachic portion of this shiur. How could Yosef go on this mission? How could Yaakov send him on this mission? It was a dangerous mission—a makom sakana. A person normally may not place himself into an inherently dangerous situation.

Indeed, in other circumstances Yaakov would have never sent Yosef, and Yosef would have never gone. It would have been forbidden. But here they were merely playing roles. This is all part of the Almighty’s Grand Plan of getting Klal Yisrael down to Egypt, which was necessary for the construction of the Jewish People.

This is what Rashi means when he comments on the pasuk, “So he sent him from the valley of Chevron (m’Emek Chevron)” [Bereshis 37:14]: “from the deep counsel of the one who is buried in Chevron.” Rashi notes that Chevron is on a mountain, not in a valley, therefore, we must interpret the pasuk allegorically to refer to the prophecy of Avraham Avinu, who is buried in Chevron. Avraham had a prophecy that his offspring would be strangers in a foreign land, they would be enslaved there for 400 years, and afterwards they would leave with great wealth [Bereshis 15:13].

How was this prophecy going to occur? Knowing this tradition in the family, would we expect them to voluntarily go down to Egypt? Of course not! That is why all of this needs to happen. Yaakov makes this mistake, Yosef makes that mistake, and the brothers make their mistake. It all needs to occur, because somehow they need to get down there.

When we look at the story of Yosef, when we look what happened to him, the chain of events seem nonsensical. Yosef works for Potiphar. He is a 17-year-old boy, away from his parents. His master’s wife tries to seduce him. He withstands one of the most difficult temptations. What is his reward? He is thrown into prison for twelve years. He could certainly have asked, “This is Torah and this is its reward?” We read the story and

we say, “What is Hashem doing?” The whole story does not make sense. Of course, we know the end of the story. We know that in prison, Yosef meets Pharaoh’s Butler and Baker. He interprets the dreams. Eventually, he becomes second in command to the King of the Egyptian empire. He saves the whole world from famine. Eventually, he brings his family down to Egypt. This is how the Egyptian Exile began.

But what is the overriding theme of the parsha? It is that the Ribono shel Olam will make it happen and while it is happening it is inexplicable. However, with the passage of time, we understand almost everything.

This is the same theme of Tehillim Chapter 92, the paragraph of Mizmor Shir L’Yom HaShabbos. Chazal say that Adam composed this chapter. When Adam was created, the Almighty showed him the 6,000 years of world history. Adam expressed his reaction in this Psalm: “How great are your actions, Hashem” [Tehillim 92:6]. He was amazed at the world, at the universe the Almighty created. But he was also amazed at “the extreme depth of Your Thoughts” [ibid.]. The depth of Ribono shel Olam’s way of dealing with the world amazed him. He saw the entire scope of 6,000 years of history and how in the end, everything fits in. Adam did not only have the benefit of hindsight but of foresight as well. Adam states: “An empty-headed man cannot know; nor does the fool understand this. When the wicked bloom like grass, and all the evildoers blossom...” [ibid. 92:7-8]. We see how the wicked prosper and how the righteous suffer.

But what is the answer? The answer is, “how deep are Your Thoughts.” I know the answer, says Adam, because I see it all.

So Mizmor Shir L’Yom HaShabbos and Parshas Vayeshev address the same theme. They address the theme that we cannot understand things while they are happening, but sometimes looking back decades later, we can say, “You know, that was the best thing that could have ever happened to Yosef—that he got thrown into the pit, got sold into slavery, and made his way to Egypt, etc., etc.”

That, the Rokeach says, is the connection between the 112 pesukim of Parshas Vayeshev and the 112 words in Chapter 92 of Tehillim. It is the same message. They both teach “How deep are Your Thoughts.”

Rav Schwab, in his Sefer on Iyov, says that this is also what the last pasuk of Tehillim Chapter 92 is all about. Sefer Iyov is all about the horrific punishments that Iyov suffered, and how he questioned the Almighty’s justice. He could not understand, and he complained. A fellow named Elihu, towards the end of Sefer Iyov, tries to straighten him out. Elihu introduces to him the concept of “Tzadik v’Rah Lo” (A righteous person who suffers at the Hand of G-d). He explained, “That is what is happening to you, Iyov. You are right, you did nothing wrong. But this is a manifestation of ‘Tzadik v’Rah Lo’. In one of Elihu’s speeches, he uses the words “Essa dayee l’mei’rachok (I will raise my knowledge from afar), u’l’Poalee etein Tzedek (and I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker)” [Iyov 36:3]. Rav Schwab explains that the key to understanding what is happening here is to take the long view (mei’rachok), the long view of history. Someone who is shortsighted will never understand it. It is only because I take the long view that I can say u’l’Poalee etein Tzedek—I can justify what the Ribono shel Olam is doing.

This too is how Perek 92 of Tehillim ends: “They will be fruitful in old age; they will be full of sap and freshness.” [Tehillim 92:15] There will be old people who, despite their age, will be full of vigor. They will have all of their faculties and vitality, even in their old age. If someone lives long enough, he can sometimes say, “Now I understand what happened fifty years ago!” Therefore, these old people, who witnessed history and saw what happened, will be able to testify: “To declare that Hashem is upright, He is my Stronghold, in whom there is no injustice.” [Tehillim 92:16].

Imagine, says Rav Schwab, if someone had died in the middle of the story of Yosef, for example when Yosef was in prison. What would he have said? “Hashem is unjust.” Is this Yosef’s reward? The problem is that such a person did not observe for long enough. He did not see the final act. However, people who will be around long enough, as it proclaims at the end of Psalm 92, they will be able to testify that Hashem is upright, my Stronghold, in whom there is no injustice.

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Vayeshev: A Person of Trust
Ben-Tzion Spitz

I have seldom known a person, who deserted the truth in trifles and then could be trusted in matters of importance. - Babe Paley

Joseph finds himself unjustly imprisoned in the royal Egyptian jail. Among his jail mates are the royal baker and the royal wine steward who had each been party to some affront to Pharaoh. Joseph famously interprets their dreams, correctly predicting that the wine steward would return to the good grace of Pharaoh while the baker would be executed.

The Meshech Chochma on Genesis 40:13 brings our attention to the fact that the wine steward had a particularly sensitive role which required Pharaoh to have the utmost confidence in the man. If Pharaoh did not trust the steward, he would not accept a cup of wine poured exclusively for him. He would have the steward pour two cups, Pharaoh would pick one at random, have the steward drink it, and then, satisfied that there was no foul play, Pharaoh would drink from the second cup. The fact that Pharaoh was willing to drink from a cup that the steward poured only for Pharaoh signified that Pharaoh had the highest level of trust in the steward, putting his very life in the steward's hands.

Joseph, in interpreting the wine steward's dream, assures the steward he will return to the same level of trust, that he will pour a cup exclusively for Pharaoh and that Pharaoh will accept it. God also arranged that the baker should also be present so that Joseph could give the equally predictive but fatal interpretation of the baker's dream. This way the steward would see that Joseph wasn't merely giving good interpretations to curry favor with his listeners, but rather, he had the gift of divine prophetic interpretive powers.

Furthermore, God wanted Joseph to be incarcerated with these royal servants in order to learn the methods and practices of the royal palace, in preparation of his forthcoming sudden elevation from slave and prisoner to Viceroy of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, who would unexpectedly need to know how to conduct himself and maneuver within the royal court.

Joseph, upon his release and elevation, proves himself to be both trusted by Pharaoh and able to astutely navigate the royal court.

May we prove ourselves worthy of trust and may we successfully navigate our various social milieus.

Dedication - To the Chassidic celebrations of 19 Kislev.

Shabbat Shalom

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

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah: Vayeishev

What is Murphy's Law and how should we respond to it?

Where can you find Murphy's Law in the Torah?

The answer is most definitely in Parshat Vayeishev. Murphy's Law states that if something can go wrong it will – and usually at the worst time. That's the story of Yosef in our Parasha.

He starts out as the favourite son of his father, but his brothers hate him for it. They gang up against him and then they sell him into slavery. He is taken down to Egypt and sold into the hands of Potiphar. And there, there is a false accusation made against him, and he is plunged into a dungeon in Egypt – forgotten about – languishing there without any future.

But then there is a twist at the end of the parashah. Suddenly things start to get better. The spell of Murphy's law is broken. Yosef correctly

interprets dreams and he is elevated to become none other than second to Pharaoh in Egypt. How can we explain all this?

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein zt'l gave a beautiful insight on Parshat Vayeishev. He said it all depends on the dreams. This is a Parsha that is book-ended by dreams. Two and the beginning and two and the end. At the beginning of the Parsha, Yosef is dreaming about himself: his importance and that others will be prostrating themselves before him. At the end of the parashah however, the dreams are not about Yosef, they are about other people: Pharaoh's ministers, their futures and their welfare. Here, Yosef is not telling the world about himself, he is trying to help others understand themselves. According to Rabbi Bernstein, when your dreams are all about yourself, your ego and your importance – you will be on the way down. But when you see your role as helping others achieve their dreams, you will certainly be on the way up.

This is a lesson I have seen to be so true in terms of leadership. It is natural that every person has an ego. However, when that ego gets in the way of one's responsibility to others when one's entire existence is about promoting oneself – it won't work. You'll find yourself, like Yosef, on the way down. Rather, in positions of leadership, we need to see ourselves as existing for the sake of others. It is a gift from Hashem to help other people to help themselves.

So from Parshat Vayeishev, we learn the important lesson that if you exist for the dreams of others, Murphy's law need not apply.

Shabbat Shalom

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

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

בין תקווה ליאוש - פרשת וישב

Between Hope and Despair – Parashat Vayeshev

This week, in Parshat Vayeshev, we read one of the most dramatic stories in the Torah. The story of the sale of Yosef begins this week and continues over the next few weeks until its surprising conclusion when the tables turn and Yosef, 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: Yaakov Avinu had twelve sons, one of which – the 17-year-old Yosef – was his favorite. This led to his brothers' jealousy. In addition, Yosef 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. Yosef is brought down to Egypt and sold to one of Pharaoh's ministers. Afterwards, 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 in the Egyptian prison 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. Yosef begs him not to forget about him when he returns to serve Pharaoh, Egypt's exclusive ruler. Yosef asks him to whisper into his ear about the innocent young man rotting in prison.

One can imagine the situation. The righteous Yosef 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 Yosef'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 actualize Yosef's monarchy and bring Yaakov and his family down to Egypt, why did Yosef 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 Yosef 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 incredibly perplexing. What did Yosef 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 Yosef 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 with no conscience. A subtle point is hidden here. There is no doubt that it was Yosef's right, even obligation, to take care of himself in every way possible. But Yosef 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 done 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 which are irrational and ineffectual, just for the possibility that it will increase the chances of reaching his goal.

This is where Yosef 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 Yosef "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 reap no benefit.

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayeishev

פרשת וישב תלש

וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו... אלה תולדות יעקב יוסף

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning... These are the chronicles of Yaakov: Yosef. (37:1,2)

Yaakov *Avinu* had more than one son. Yet, when the Torah enumerates his offspring, it mentions only Yosef. Furthermore, why does the Torah first inform us that Yaakov continues to live in Canaan, the land that his father chose as his place of habitation, and then inform us about his offspring? Clearly, his family had the obligation to take ownership over the place in which he lived. It is almost as if where he chose to live is connected with his offspring. *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, explains that in the Torah's vernacular, offspring is a reference to one who is spiritually connected to his father, rather than merely biologically connected. Thus, only one who follows his father's spiritual pathway of life is worthy of the term *toldos*, offspring.

Even in a family in which all of the children follow their father's religious path, one child will always stand out in his relationship, thereby earning the appellation of *toldah* more so than the others. More than his brothers, Yosef had established a unique relationship with his father. Therefore, the Torah grants him *toldah* status. *Rav Sholom* suggests that Yosef studied his father's *derech ha'chaim*, approach to living, because he wanted to be just like him.

Additionally, Yosef maintained a physical resemblance to Yaakov; both were born circumcised. Therefore, the Torah informs us that Yaakov's offspring was Yosef. Furthermore, when Yosef almost succumbed to the blandishments of Potifar's wife, the image of Yaakov appeared before him at the last moment – and saved him. Yaakov bore the exact same visage as Yosef, and the son was able to realize how succumbing to sin would affect his spiritual countenance. (Sometimes, looking in the mirror and visualizing oneself prior to committing a sin will inspire a person to cease his actions, before he distorts his present image.)

Yaakov wanted to be just like his father, Yitzchak, so he lived in *Eretz Canaan/Israel*. He continued the Abrahamic legacy – not Eisav. Yaakov followed Yitzchak, and Yosef followed Yaakov.

While we are aware of stories of illustrious Torah leaders who maintained a negative relationship with their progeny who rejected their Torah way of life, we have an equal number of stories of similarly great individuals who, although not supporting their children's negative activities, continued to leave the door open and the light on, in anticipation of the return of their children. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the pros and cons of these opposing parenting approaches, one thing is for certain (author's opinion): If the parents, by virtue of their personal approach to raising their child (being too demanding, inflexible, unforgiving, etc.), maintain (or should maintain) some of the onus of guilt for how their child developed spiritually – they certainly should leave their "light on"!

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, observes that in the *brachah*, blessing, *Modim* (during *Shemoneh Esrai*), we thank Hashem as "our G-d and the G-d of our fathers." In other words, we first thank Him that He is "our G-d." This means: He has given us life and supervises us constantly. We then thank Him for enabling our tradition to be transmitted from father to son, from generation to generation. It is this gift of being able to pass *Yiddishkeit* from generation to generation that has maintained our religious tradition throughout the most difficult times. A secular Jew once told *Rav Gamliel*, "You religious Jews have a great gift of being able to pass down your *emunah* and your traditions. This is why you are able to withstand all of the difficulties that come your way!"

Returning to Eisav's rejection of Yitzchak *Avinu's* way of life, we wonder what it was that spurred him to turn his back and shun tradition? *Rav Sholom* explains that actually two occurrences negatively influenced his actions. The Torah writes (*Bereishis* 35:6,7), "Eisav took his wives, his sons, his daughters... and went to a land because of his brother Yaakov." *Rashi* lists a number of reasons that Eisav separated from Yaakov. Primarily, Eisav understood the decree that whoever lived in Canaan would be subject to a long, harsh exile. He wanted no part of that. Furthermore, he was embarrassed that he had sold the *bechorah*, birthright. *Rav Sholom* presented two questions. If living in *Eretz Yisrael* would incur a difficult exile, why did Yaakov have no problem with it? Second, why did Eisav suddenly become embarrassed now (after so many years) for selling the *bechorah*? If Yaakov reasoned that the exile, with its accompanying travail, was worth the benefit of *Eretz Yisrael*, why did Eisav shun it? Embarrassment over a foolish decision is usually immediately apparent, not exhibited years later.

Rav Sholom posits that both reasons are actually one: shame. Eisav gave up his purported right to the Land, because he was overwhelmed with shame for his nonsensical sale of his birthright. Certainly, Eisav was immediately embarrassed over the sale. He soon realized that his actions were governed by the need for immediate gratification, coupled with stupidity, but, as long as Yaakov was not in *Eretz Yisrael*, he was able to downplay his shame. Now that Yaakov was returning, however, Eisav sought another reason to gloss over and conceal his embarrassment.

We seek excuses to cover up our mistakes, but the real reason is the one that we do not acknowledge: the shame over committing an error. Our ego is impugned, which is an experience most of us cannot handle. The *Maggid* relates an incident that occurred in Chevron with a student who acted with *chutzpah*, audacity. The *Mashgiach*, *Horav Yehudah Leib Chasman, zl*, considered his actions audacious and called

him a *mechutzaf*. The student figured that the *Mashgiach* (by calling him a *mechutzaf*) was also placing him in *nidui*, excommunication, so he left the *yeshivah*.

The *Mashgiach* summoned him to return to the *yeshivah*. The student demurred, claiming that one who is in *nidui* was prohibited from coming in contact with others. When the *Mashgiach* called him for a second time, the student understood that there was no *nidui* and he returned to the *yeshivah*. The *Mashgiach* called him in and said, "Let us analyze your current situation. You learn well, and, for all intents and purposes, you are a good student and a credit to the *yeshivah*. The moment someone offends you, however, you lose control and become insulted to the point that the ensuing shame has the potential to cause you to leave the *yeshivah*! Once you leave the *yeshivah*, it will not be long until Torah and Judaism become your next victims. All of this is the result of embarrassment. The issue at hand is not a question of *chutzpah* or *nidui*. The issue is your inability to tolerate a little bit of disgrace. In order to cover up your embarrassment and support your self-imposed inability to return to the *yeshivah*, you invoked the concept of *nidui*, which does not apply in this instance."

We must give this rejoinder some thought. How often does it happen that someone wrongly insults us or we act foolishly, and the humiliation comes back to haunt us? How often do we wallow in degradation, rather than accept and own up to the shame, in order to be able to return to good standing? No, we would rather be miserable, remain alone, divorced of our friends, all because our ego does not permit us to admit wrong, accept the ridicule and move on. This was acceptable behavior for Eisav, not us.

אלה תולדות יעקב יוסף

These are the chronicles of Yaakov: Yosef. (37:2)

While the word *toldos* is usually translated as offspring, in this *pasuk* it means chronicles, since the only offspring of Yaakov *Avinu* that the *pasuk* mentions is Yosef. *Rashi* explains why the Torah applies the term *toldos* to Yosef more so than to any of his brothers. First, Yaakov worked for Lavan in order to get Rachel *Imeinu*, Yosef's mother, as his wife. Second, Yosef's countenance closely resembled that of Yaakov. Third, whatever happened to Yaakov (so to speak), happened to Yosef: Yaakov was hated by his brother; so, too, was Yosef (obviously for different reasons); Yaakov's brother sought to end his life; it was not much different with Yosef. The Torah is not a story book, and it does not waste space retelling various occurrences, regardless of their relationship to the present. Thus, *Rashi* recalls Yaakov's past and its similarity to that of Yosef, to teach us why Yosef is that *toladah*, offspring, of Yaakov who carried on his father's tradition, his legacy. While this explains why *Rashi* draws a parallel between Yaakov and Yosef, it does not clarify why, if father and son have similar life experiences, it indicates that this son – to the exclusion of his brothers – is his father's spiritual successor. Since when do occurrences in one's life play such critical significance that resemblances in life's experiences between father and son create an everlasting bond?

Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita, quotes *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, who asks why Hashem created the dynamics of the world (Hashem is the dynamics of the world), such that people have individual experiences, varied cultures and lifestyles: some are wealthy; others are poor; some are blessed with good health, while others suffer from varied illnesses. He explains that individuals are on different spiritual planes, thus requiring that each individual be "outfitted" with his unique "baggage" to sustain him spiritually and to enable him to navigate through life, so that he is able to serve Hashem to the best of his abilities. Obviously, one who is born with incredible acumen will be expected to excel in his Torah erudition. One who is challenged physically will have aspects of his spiritual accoutrements in excess, to help him to overcome his challenges. There is a balance, with Hashem complementing each individual with attributes, experiences, and even handicaps, which help him achieve his goal as set by Heaven.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* applies this idea to explain *Chazal's* statement (*Pirkei Avos* 4:9), "He who fulfills the Torah amid poverty

will one day fulfill the Torah amid wealth." In his *Ruach Chaim* commentary, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, posits that becoming wealthy is not a reward for one who serves Hashem, despite the fact that he is living in abject poverty; rather, each of us is to fulfill the Torah amid the various challenges that are "thrown" at us. An individual who triumphs over a lesser challenge is soon "elevated" to another status, in which the challenges are consistent in tune with his newly-elevated status. As he progresses from challenge to challenge, they increase in difficulty. Therefore, the *Tanna* teaches us that once one has successfully served Hashem despite the challenge of poverty, Hashem will elevate/intensify his challenge, so that he will be able to serve Him despite the challenge of wealth (which is considered a greater challenge). It is easier to serve Hashem when one has nothing, than to contend with the inclination to hoard one's wealth and not spend his money wisely to the benefit of others.

Returning to the original question, we now understand that life's experiences are not random, disconnected occurrences that "just happen." Everything has a purpose and a reason. It is all commensurate with one's spiritual level. Every person undergoes circumstances that enable him to achieve greater spiritual ascendancy. Therefore, when two people's life experiences are the same, when the challenges that they confront resemble one another, it indicates that they resemble one another spiritually as well. Thus, if Yosef looked like Yaakov and his life's experiences were similar to Yaakov's, then we must view them as having much more than an external, physical resemblance. They are one and the same. Yosef and Yaakov had much more than a physical kinship; their challenges also paralleled one another, catalyzing their physical conformity. Yaakov did not have the same type of relationship with his other sons, because they were not spiritually like him.

וימכרו את יוסף לישמעלים בעשרים כסף ויבאו את יוסף מצרימה

They sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim for twenty silver pieces and they bought Yosef to Egypt. (37:28)

The *Midrash* (cited by *Sefer Ha'Yashar*) teaches that when the Arab caravan taking Yosef to Egypt passed by Rachel *Imeinu's* grave, Yosef ran out to it and prayed. He fell on the tombstone and pleaded, "Mama, Mama! Look at the suffering your son is experiencing. Please, stand before Hashem and plead with Him that He allow me to return to my father (Yaakov *Avinu*). Do not refrain from helping me!" A young man, orphaned from his mother, was wrongfully sold into slavery. To be relegated to living in a country in which debauchery and hedonism are a way of life is a terrible and cruel fate. It is absolutely indescribable for someone of the holy and righteous status of Yosef *HaTzaddik* to be compelled to live as a slave, amid the pain and suffering, and the moral profligacy to which he would be exposed in an Egyptian dungeon alongside criminals and perverts. This was to be Yosef's fate! Despite his heartfelt prayer at his mother's gravesite, he received no positive response to his pleas. Heaven had decided he was to descend to Egypt, to take what would be the first step towards our nation's Egyptian exile.

Why did Yosef's prayer not receive a positive Heavenly reply? An orphan, a righteous saint, to be separated from his family and sent to Egypt is a grim, onerous pill to swallow. This is true even when the "perpetrator" is guilty of sin. Yosef, however, was an innocent, righteous young man who just got caught in a situation that was misconstrued. Should his pleas go unanswered?

The question becomes magnified when we take a look at another example of an individual who supplicated Hashem and received a positive response. This person was as evil as Yosef was righteous. Menashe was a wicked king who sinned and caused others to sin. He worshipped idols and killed anyone who challenged him. Hashem sent prophets to warn him to repent his ways; he did not listen. In the end, Hashem sent the Assyrian army, who captured him and brought him in chains to Babylon, where he was subjugated to what was to be a most painful death. His captors placed him in a large copper pot and ignited a flame beneath it, whose purpose was to burn him alive.

Menashe yelled; Menashe screamed; blood-curdling sounds emanated from him, as he began to burn alive. He cried out to every idol

he had ever worshipped. Understandably, the stone and molten images were powerless to help him. He then declared, “I remember learning as a youth that Hashem will never turn His back on us. He is all-merciful, with no parameters or end to His mercy. I will cry out to Him. If He answers me, good. If not, then He is no different than the idols.” (*chas v’shalom*) The angels did everything to block his prayer from ascending to Hashem. The Almighty told them, “If I do not accept his *teshuvah*, repentance, then I am closing the door before any other *baal teshuvah*. Menashe is right. I have no limits to My mercy. I cannot have this.” Hashem “dug out” a hole beneath His Heavenly throne in order to permit access for Menashe’s prayer to reach him. Menashe was thereby saved.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, questions Menashe’s contention that if Hashem did not accept his pleas, then He is no different than the others who did not hear him. What type of comparison is this? They did not listen because they were stone, inanimate idols who were powerless. Hashem, however, listened, but said no. Why should He absolve the man who murdered His prophets, who placed an idol in the *Heichal* (Temple)?

Horav Pincus explains that if Hashem had not accepted Menashe’s *teshuvah*, because he had exceeded the limits of mercy and he had gone beyond the parameters of *teshuvah* acceptability, it would have undermined all future *teshuvah* applicants. Hashem’s mercy has no limitations, no restrictions, no boundaries. This explains why, despite his unabashed evil, Menashe was still able to repent, and his repentance accepted by the Almighty. This makes our original question concerning Yosef even stronger. Why did Hashem seal the Heavenly gates to Yosef’s prayers? Why was his mother helpless in her ability to help him?

Horav Yitzchak HersHKowitz, Shlita (Nitzotzos) quotes *Chazal* in *Meseches Berachos* 5a, “If a person sees that *yissurin*, afflictions, are befalling him, he should investigate his deeds (to determine which sin he may have committed that would be the catalyst for such suffering). If he examines his deeds and finds nothing inappropriate, he should attribute his afflictions to *bitul* Torah, neglect of Torah study. If he still has found nothing to which to attribute his suffering, it can be assumed that they are *yissurin shel ahavah*, afflictions of love. (This is not the place to discuss the concept or purpose of “afflictions of love,” other than to say that it enhances the sufferer’s Heavenly reward. The dynamics of this phenomenon are discussed by the various commentators.) The *Talmud* teaches us that two varied forms of affliction may strike us. One is for deserved punishment; the other is out of Heavenly love, in order to bring the person close to his spiritual mission.

Yosef was destined to achieve *tzaddik* status, to become the righteous person who would lead the Jewish community through the Egyptian exile. He would set the tone and enable *Klal Yisrael* to look forward to their liberation. To achieve such distinction one must undergo trial by fire, to suffer in the crucible of pain, loneliness and suffering. Yosef had to experience his own personal exile in order to have the personal spiritual endurance and stamina to weather what was in store for his family. This is why Hashem did not answer his prayers (positively). Hashem answers every prayer. His took a little longer to realize the meaning of – and reason for – the response.

Everyone has his individual mission in life for which he is uniquely suited. At times, achieving successful fruition involves experiencing triumph over adversity. We must remember that Hashem does not give us anything that we cannot handle. If it is on our plate, then we should be able to eat it – and *bentch* afterward!

The following vignette buttresses this idea. Dr. Albert Einstein, the distinguished physicist, was traveling by train from Princeton, New Jersey, when the conductor came down the aisle of the car, punching each passenger’s ticket. When he came to Einstein’s row, Einstein reached into his vest pocket to retrieve his ticket. He could not find it, so he searched his jacket pocket, with the same result. He checked his other pockets, with no luck. Finally, he pulled down his suitcase and opened it and rifled through his clothes, but had no success in locating the ticket. The conductor calmed him saying, “Don’t worry,

we know who you are. I am certain that a man of your integrity purchased a ticket before alighting the train.”

The conductor moved down the car punching tickets. As he was about to enter the next car, he turned around and was startled to see the great physicist down on his hands and knees, searching between the seats for his ticket. The conductor rushed back and said, “Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, please do not worry. I know who you are. There is no problem. I am sure you bought a ticket.”

Einstein looked at the conductor and said, “Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don’t know is where I am going.”

Do we know where we are going? Do we even care? We have goals, objectives, plans, missions, but do they coincide with Hashem’s designated destination for us? A person goes through life: does well financially; is generous with his charitable gifts; sets aside time to study Torah; is involved in reaching out to others; is involved in his community. He has been a good Jew all of his life, but was he fulfilling Hashem’s purpose for him? Did he “travel” to the wrong city?

When Yosef *HaTzaddik* did not receive the positive response for which he was hoping, he realized that Hashem had different plans for him. What are Hashem’s plans for us? While we do not know, we should at least give the question some thought.

וַיְהִי בַעַת הַהִיא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוּדָה מֵאֵת אֶחָיו

It was at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers. (38:1)

Rashi explains that the juxtaposition of Yehuda’s brothers deposing him and the loss of his wife and two sons upon the story of Yosef (in fact, it is placed right in the middle of the Yosef incident) teaches us that one who commences a *mitzvah* (Yehudah undertook to save Yosef, but did not complete his mission), but does not complete it, will bury his wife and children. It seems like a harsh punishment. After all, at least he started the *mitzvah*, while others did not even bother to get involved. Yet, he is punished; they are not. What is even more surprising here is that had Yehudah not intervened, his brothers would have killed Yosef. Apparently, the punishment for commencement without conclusion is greater than for one who did not even commence the *mitzvah*. Why is this?

Horav Yerucham Levovitz, zl, explains that one who embarks on a *mitzvah* and does not complete it is compared to one who forfeits his children. In his commentary to the beginning of *Parashas Noach*, *Rashi* explains that the primary offspring of the righteous comprise their acts of lovingkindness. Thus, a person should be acutely aware that one who performs an act of lovingkindness creates spiritual merits for himself. Therefore, one who initiates a *mitzvah* has already earned his merit by virtue of its initiation. He now has a Heavenly *z’chus*, merit, in his corner. According to *Rashi*, this is considered as if he has brought a child into the world. Now, if he does not complete the *mitzvah*, what happens to the *z’chus*/child? I will leave the reader to fill in the blanks. This is a frightening and quite sobering lesson concerning our *avodas ha’kodesh*, service to the Almighty. We must learn to acknowledge that the performance of every *mitzvah* is like giving birth to a child.

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לע"נ

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