



BS'D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>

I was recently in Antwerp (2017) to speak at a dinner there. Antwerp is a very interesting community. Today, it is a small community with a very interesting mix. It was decimated during the Holocaust. As much as the Holocaust is in the recesses of our memory in America, there, it is still such a reality. They told me that there are very few Jews over the age of eighty in Antwerp, because there is a gap until the end of the 1940s. Most of the people there in the beginning of that decade were killed. The Nazis cleaned out Belgium in general and Antwerp in particular.

Yet, if you look around today, you will see that it is once again a beautiful community. Who would have anticipated...? The school I spoke for is 120 years old. But there was a certain period in its history when there was no one there.

This year (2017) is the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. The same (Who would have anticipated...?) can be said about the developments in Eretz Yisrael. Who would have believed that what we witnessed there this past century would have happened? I am not a historian, and I don't remember all the things that expert Jewish historians have said, but for the Balfour Declaration to have been issued, so many historical precursors had to occur that anyone contemplating its issuance only a decade or so earlier would have had to be crazy to expect it to be issued. Not the least of which was that the Ottoman Empire, which had been in business for three or four hundred years, would collapse at the end of World War I. Who would have believed it?

The simple reading of this Medrash is that "Who would have anticipated (what happened with all these Biblical personalities)" foreshadows the unpredictability of all of Jewish history.

However, I saw a schmooze from Rav Elya Svei, z"l, in which he said that the message of this Medrash is more than just this lesson. In each one of these cases of "Mi haya mechakeh?", the answer was: "Yes, there was someone who was mechakeh!"

For example, when the Medrash says "Who would have been mechakeh that Yosef, who experienced all these trials and tribulations would eventually become the viceroy," there was indeed someone who anticipated it. Who was it? Yosef anticipated it! Yosef never gave up. He was keenly aware that all the trials and tribulations he experienced were the "Yad Hashem" (Hand of G-d) and that all these things were happening for a purpose!

The Medrash says that when Yosef heard the dream of the sar hamashkim (wine butler) regarding the three clusters of grapes, he saw in it an allusion to the three future redeemers of Klal Yisrael from Mitzrayim: Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. This sar hamashkim is dreaming about idle grape vines, but Yosef sees within it a matter of Divine prophecy. Yosef is constantly waiting and thinking – how is this going to pan out?

"I know this looks impossible now. I am currently sitting in a dungeon with a bunch of lowlives – but one day I am going to get out of this!" Or, when Yosef speaks of "kos Pharaoh" (Pharaoh's goblet), "kos Pharaoh," "kos Pharaoh," "kos Pharaoh" (repeating the term kos Pharaoh four times), the Medrash states that Yosef intuited four nations that would enslave Klal Yisrael and that the Ribono shel Olam would provide Klal Yisrael with four kosos of salvation.

The answer to the question "Who was anticipating?" is "Yosef himself was waiting and never gave up!" Just like the pasuk says, "And his father guarded the matter" (Bereshis 37:11) when Yosef related the dream that the sheaves would all bow down to him, Yaakov did not reject the dream as a crazy vision, so too Yosef himself guarded the matter and never gave up!

Another example – Who was waiting for Moshe? The answer to that question is that Miriam was waiting for him. She never gave up hope. Chazal say on the pasuk "And his sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen with him" (Shemos 2:4) that she was waiting in anticipation. What was she waiting for? Chazal say that she had a prophecy that her mother was destined to give birth to a son who would save Klal Yisrael. The fact that he was as an infant floating aimlessly down the Nile River in a basket with minimal chances for survival did not faze her. When Moshe was born, the room filled with light and Amram also rejoiced over the apparent omen that Miriam's prophecy would come true. However, when Moshe had to be cast

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYEISHEV & CHANUKAH - 5786

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 30th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io. Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com. A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net>. It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov.

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@gmail.com (proceeds to tzedaka)

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

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Dec 11, 2025, 10:40 PM

Parshas Vayeishev

Don't Give Up Hope

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1360 – Showing Favoritism Amongst Your Children

Good Shabbos!

Don't Give Up Hope

There is an interesting Medrash in Parshas Vayeshev which, in effect, asks: "Mi haya mechakeh?" – Who would have waited or thought or anticipated that Avraham and Sora would ever have a son? Who would have ever anticipated that Yaakov Avinu, who crossed the Yarden with nothing more than his walking cane, would eventually return a wealthy man, with a large encampment of family members? Who would have ever anticipated that Yosef, who had all these trials and tribulations, would become the viceroy of Mitzrayim? Who would have ever anticipated that Moshe, who was thrown into the Nile River as an infant, would become the great teacher of Klal Yisrael, the master of all prophets? Who would have anticipated that Rus, who was a lowly convert, would become the matriarch of monarchy in Klal Yisrael? Who would have ever anticipated that Dovid the shepherd would become the king whose descendants would rule until the end of all the generations? Who would have anticipated about Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya...? Etc., etc., etc.

The simple message of this "Who would have anticipated..." Medrash is that these are comforting and encouraging words to Klal Yisrael. If we examine the history of the Jewish people – who would have ever anticipated it?

Who would have believed that eighty years after the Holocaust, Torah study would reach the magnitude it has reached today? Who would have believed in 1941, when Rav Aharon Kotler started the Lakewood Yeshiva with six talmidim or in 1933, when Rav Yaakov Ruderman started Ner Yisrael with four talmidim, who would have believed that today these yeshivos would have thousands of talmidim? This is a nechama to Klal Yisrael: Don't give up hope!

away into the river, Amram chastised his daughter for conveying false hope to the family. However, Miriam yet waited in anticipation.

So in each of these cases, there was someone who still believed.

Furthermore, as with the case of Yosef, Moshe also waited for himself.

Moshe was out of Mitzrayim for a minimum of sixty years. There is a machlokes how old he was when he had to flee Mitzrayim, whether it was twelve or twenty. He returned at age eighty. In sixty years, the distant past becomes forgotten.

The pasuk says that Moshe saw a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. The Medrash says that he saw in that imagery the fact that Klal Yisrael was going to be saved. Klal Yisrael? That was ancient history. He left Klal Yisrael sixty years ago! The answer is that Moshe Rabbeinu never gave up hope. He knew that Klal Yisrael would eventually leave Mitzrayim. How would it happen? That he didn't know. But he sees this burning bush sixty years later and he thinks "Aha! This is a sign from Heaven!"

The same can be said of all these examples: Yosef was waiting. Miriam was waiting. Moshe was waiting. And so too, all the others were waiting. They had emunah that eventually the Ribono shel Olam is going to bring the geulah and save us.

Transcribed by David Twersky; JerusalemDavidATwersky@gmail.com

Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayeshev is provided below: # 034 – Chanukah Licht on Erev Shabbos # 076 – Katanis: The Twice Widowed Woman # 125 – Ha'Malbin P'nei Chaveiro: Shaming Another # 172 – The Complex Issue of Child Custody # 218 – Grape Juice and Yayin Mevushal # 262 – Yichud and the Open Door Policy # 308 – Secular Studies # 352 – "Chamar Medina" — Used for Kiddush? # 396 – Artificial Insemination Before Chemotherapy # 440 – Third Night of Chanukah but Only Two Candles # 484 – The Ubiquitous Donor Plaque # 528 – Sending Someone on a Fatal Mission # 572 – Determining Paternity # 616 – Chanukah – Women Lighting for Husbands # 660 – Birthdays – A Jewish Minhag? # 704 – Sparing Someone's Humiliation # 748 – The Menorah – Inside The House or Outside? # 792 – Observing Shiva for Grandparents? # 836 – Katanis: A Third Marriage # 880 – Lying For The Sake Of The Truth # 924 – Bitachon Vs Hishtadlus # 967 – Can Older Brother Object to the Younger Brother's Engagement? #1011 – Davening with a Minyan on Chanukah vs Lighting On Time #1055 – Can You Kill Someone Who Hashem Doesn't Want To Die? #1098 – Doing A Mitzvah in Face of Sakana #1141 – Business Partnerships With Non-Jews #1184 – Holding the Kiddush Cup – Exactly How? Always? #1228 – Saved Miraculously from a Car Accident? Special Bracha? #1272 – V'sain Tal U'Matar: Some Fascinating Shailos #1316 – Endangering Oneself To Perform The Mitzvah of Kibbutz Av #1360 – Showing Favoritism Amongst Your Children #1404 – Is Grape Juice As Good As Wine For Kiddush And Other Halachos? #1448 – MaOz Tzur and Its Traditional Tune – Not as Kosher as You Might Think #1492 – Zerizus vs Hidur: What's More Important Doing Mitzvos Promptly or Beautifully? #1536 – Using Jelled Olive Oil for Chanukah – Not as Simple as You May Think (2022) – Why Should You Always Light the Shul Menorah Every Year? A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Do you have a question or comment? Feel free to contact us on our website. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

date: Dec 11, 2025, 10:39 PM

subject: **Parashat VaYishev and Chanukah**

Light After the Shortest Day

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Avodah Zarah 8a records: "Rav Chanan Bar Ravah says: When are these pagan festivals celebrated? Kalenda is celebrated during the eight days after the winter solstice, and Saturnalia is celebrated during the eight days before the winter solstice.

With regard to the dates of these festivals, the Sages taught: When Adam the first man saw that the day was progressively diminishing, as the days become shorter from the autumnal equinox until the winter solstice, he did not yet know that this is a normal phenomenon, and therefore he said: Woe is me; perhaps because I sinned the world is becoming dark around me and will ultimately return to the primordial state of chaos and disorder. And this is the death that was sentenced upon me from Heaven, as it is written: "And to dust shall you return" (Genesis 3:19). He arose and spent eight days in fasting and in prayer.

Once he saw that the season of Tevet, i.e., the winter solstice, had arrived, and saw that the day was progressively lengthening after the solstice, he said: Clearly, the days become shorter and then longer, and this is the order of the world. He went and observed a festival for eight days. Upon the next year, he observed both these eight days on which he had fasted on the previous year, and these eight days of his celebration, as days of festivities. He, Adam, established these festivals for the sake of Heaven, but they, the gentiles of later generations, established them for the sake of idol worship.

The Sages taught: On the day that Adam the first man was created, when the sun set upon him he said: Woe is me, as because I sinned, the world is becoming dark around me, and the world will return to the primordial state of chaos and disorder. And this is the death that was sentenced upon me from Heaven. He spent all night fasting and crying, and Eve was crying opposite him. Once dawn broke, he said: Evidently, the sun sets and night arrives, and this is the order of the world. He arose and sacrificed a bull whose horns preceded its hoofs in the order that they were created, as it is stated: "And it shall please the Lord better than a bullock that has horns and hoofs" (Psalms 69:32). This verse is referring to the one particular bull whose horns preceded its hoofs".

Light after Dark

We can glean manifold lessons from this Gemara. First, Hashem embeds great light emerging after a period of great darkness into the very fabric of Creation. Rav Nachman of Breslov famously teaches that where there is darkness, light will inevitably arise.

Rav Asher Weiss stated publicly after the viciously evil Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, that something great will inevitably emerge. He noted that the Mishnah and Gemara emerged in the wake of Churban.

After the immense havoc wrought by the Spanish Inquisition came the Shulchan Aruch's composition and the emergence of the Chachamei HaKabbalah. After the Shoah came the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over part of Eretz Yisrael for the first time in nearly two thousand years. Rav Asher Weiss predicted that following this pattern, a similar great result would arise in the wake of October 7.

However, the emergence of light after dark not only depends on Hashem. The responsibility to bring it about devolves us as well.

Avodah Zarah's Origin

Another point is that our Gemara supports the Rambam's account of Avodah Zarah's development (Hilchot Avodah Zarah Perek 1). Originally, all humanity served Hashem until it deviated and descended into Avodah Zarah. Binyamin notes that our story teaches us to uphold tradition and reject the false notion that we can improve our Mesorah. Avodah Zarah's originators thought they had devised a better way to serve Hashem, but this led to awful results.

The Gemara presents the origin of the Roman pagan holidays of Calanda and Saturnalia, observed at the winter solstice. The subsequent, semi-Pagan holidays celebrated at these times emerge from these two ancient pagan holidays. This is an example of what Rashi to BeMidbar (13:27) teaches: a lie that does not begin with a bit of truth does not last.

The Pagan and semi-Pagan winter solstice observances stem from a legitimate beginning - Adam HaRishon's eight-day celebration of light after steadily increasing darkness - but severely deviate from the truth.

Chanukah

Yisrael notes the obvious parallel to Chanukah with its eight-day celebration of light after a period of great darkness, observed near the winter solstice. Yet, the parallel goes unstated. This omission might be explained by the fact that it would degrade Chanukah by noting its similarity to a holiday that descended into the abyss of Idolatry. Perhaps the unstated parallel points to Chanukah redirecting mankind to Hashem's light.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik points to Shabbat 21b, referring to the Chanukah lighting time, which lasts until the Tirmodai leave the market. Rashi explains that Tirmodai are non-Jews who sold firewood at the end of the day. Thus, the Chanukah lights are directed at all of humanity to serve Hashem, as did our common ancestor, Adam HaRishon.

Conclusion

Atarah wonders what would have happened if Adam had not fasted, cried, and prayed so that the world would not be destroyed. Did Adam HaRishon err in his assumption that his sin caused the world to end, or did his Teshuvah reverse Hashem's decree? Adam remarking that the cycle of light and dark is the "Minhago Shel Olam" indicates that he made a mistake at first. However, Hillel suggests that just as the Midrash (BeReishit Rabbah 3:7) records that Hashem destroyed prior worlds, perhaps Hashem intended

to destroy this world were it not for Adam HaRishon's Teshuvah and Tefillah.

Binjamin adds that we find in numerous Torah sources that Hashem empowers us to change the world's course, most prominently with Yehoshua prolonging the day with his proclamation of "Shemesh BeGivon Dom VeYarei'ach Be'emek Ayalon," "may the sun remain still above Givon and the moon above the Ayalon Valley" (Yehoshua 10:12). Such is the power of earnest fasting, Teshuvah, and Tefilah.

from: YUTorah <cyutorah@comms.yu.edu>
date: Dec 11, 2025, 6:02 PM

Seeing Our Brothers' and Sisters' Plight

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

Chanukah lights placed higher than 20 cubits (about 9 meters or 30 feet) above the floor of a dwelling do not fulfill the holiday's mitzva, proclaims Rav Kahana in the Talmud (Shabbat 22a), quoting Rav Natan bar Manyomi in the name of Rabbi Tanchum. This rule parallels the religious laws concerning the maximum height of sukkot and a mavoi, crossbeam of an eruv used to mark off an area in which it is permitted to carry objects on Shabbat, because all of these cases depend on a normal human line of sight. If the lights, or the sukkot or eruvin, are too high, they are not easily visible. When it comes to Chanukah there is also deeper symbolic significance for this theme of visibility and sight, which is part of the festival's larger moral message and is especially relevant for our own turbulent times.

The discussion regarding the height of the Chanukah lights appears in its natural context, amid the laws of the holiday in Tractate Shabbat. However, the Talmud then seems to take an abrupt turn, again quoting Rav Kahana, Rav Natan bar Manyomi, and Rabbi Tanchum, expounding on a verse in our parsha concerning the pit into which Yosef was thrown by his brothers: "The pit was empty; there was no water in it" (Bereishit 37:24). The Talmud asks: If we know that the pit was empty, then why do we need to be informed that there was no water in it? It responds that the verse implies that while there was no water in the pit, it did contain dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions.

Why does the Talmud place this homiletic interpretation of the text in the middle of a discussion of Chanukah? Is it simply that once one relevant statement is mentioned in the name of certain rabbis, the Talmud included unrelated teachings handed down through the same sages?

It is much more than that. If we look closely, we can discover in the seemingly random position of these two teachings a thematic connection between Chanukah and this week's parsha —and between spiritual illumination and brotherly love. Parshat Vayeshev is always read either on the Shabbat before Chanukah or on its first Shabbat, hinting at a deep conceptual relationship between this Torah portion and the festival of lights. The main idea of Chanukah is the spiritual illumination of the public sphere; hence the requirement to place the lights in a place and at a height that is visible to the public, and at a time when people are present. Parshat Vayeshev, on the other hand, revolves around the idea of brotherly loyalty and betrayal, exemplified by the casting of Yosef into the pit and his sale into slavery.

The message found in these two pronouncements of the Talmud is that these two themes are interdependent. If we wish to dispel societal darkness – wickedness, injustice, oppression – we must begin by focusing on our own sense of empathy and identification with our brothers and sisters, the very foundation of any community striving to bring the Torah's light into the world. If we are willing to sell out those dearest to us for personal gain, or – worse – to do so in God's name, if we are able to blind ourselves to their pain, to prey on them and humiliate them, then the holiday of Chanukah cannot realize its goal.

Thus, the insertion of this teaching about Yosef immediately after the law of the menorah's height is not an accident due only to the coincidence of its authorship. On the contrary – the Talmud is highlighting the interdependence of ethical responsibility and personal and communal decency. We must keep our brothers and sisters constantly in our line of vision – in our sights and in

our minds. It doesn't matter if our fellow Jews act or observe Judaism differently than we do, our responsibility toward every Jew is sacrosanct and sealed in the blood of our collective covenant. This responsibility is what ultimately enables us to illuminate the public sphere.

The holiday of Chanukah is about correcting the evils of history described so luridly in Parshat Vayeshev. The light of Chanukah is the light of empathy, of brotherhood, of loyalty. It is the conviction that every Jew, and every human being, deserves to be seen.

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
date: Dec 11, 2025, 9:31 PM

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Perfect Timing, Then and Now

I was once asked by an illustrious rabbi, "Who is the most unsung hero in Parshas Vayeshev?" After reflecting, I answered Reuven, for the Torah testifies on his behalf that he had the best of motives to save Yosef from his brothers, though he tragically never carried out those intentions. The correct answer the Rabbi gave me, however, was nothing short of astonishing: the fly. He proceeded to explain the precise, split-second timing of that fly. Had the fly plunged into Pharaoh's cup one second earlier, while it was still in the butler's hand, Yosef would have remained in prison, as the butler would simply have removed the insect. Had the fly appeared a second after the butler handed the cup to Pharaoh, Yosef would likewise still be imprisoned, for all present would have seen that it was Pharaoh's fate, not the butler's error, that caused the mishap. Instead, the fly arrived at the exact moment the butler presented the cup to Pharaoh. The timing was so razor-thin that the "umpires" could not agree on whether the butler was guilty. Pharaoh himself was unsure and decided, perhaps, a short prison term was warranted. And the rest is history. While this hero might be the most unexpected, its "nomination" teaches a profound lesson: Hashem runs the world.

This theme continues in next week's parsha. When Pharaoh dreamed and none of the proposed interpretations satisfied him, the butler suddenly remembered: "The Hebrew youth, the slave of the chamberlain of the butchers, was with us in jail and interpreted our dreams." And again - the rest is history. The Torah tells us (Breishit 41:14), "So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon." Every word in the Torah is exact. Why emphasize that Yosef was rushed? The Seforno explains that the Torah is teaching not only a historical detail but a timeless principle: Divine salvation always comes hastily and unexpectedly. So it was in Egypt, as the passuk says (Shemos 12:39), "Because they were thrust out of Egypt," and as we recite in the Haggadah: their dough had no time to rise, for the King of Kings revealed Himself and redeemed them. And so it will be in the future redemption, as Malachi (3:1) teaches, "And the Lord Whom you seek will suddenly come to His Temple." Mashiach will come unexpectedly - "in the blink of an eye."

History is filled with such examples of Hashem orchestrating events with split-second precision.

At the beginning of the sixth chapter of Megillas Esther we read, "That night, sleep eluded the king." Does it matter which night Achashveirosh had insomnia? Yes, because we again see yeshuas Hashem keheref ayin, the salvation of Hashem comes faster than the blink of an eye. Rashi explains that this was the night after Esther invited the king and Haman to her banquet. The paranoid Achashveirosh feared Esther and Haman were plotting against him. Meanwhile, Esther, while walking to the throne room, prayed, "My G-d, my G-d, why have You forsaken me?" Hashem did not merely respond quickly; He responded immediately.

Similarly, why does the Torah (Shemos 14:21) note, "And Hashem moved the sea with a strong east wind all night"? Who cares about the weather? Because skeptics might claim that the wind alone split the sea. Yet the Torah highlights the wind's perfect timing: it blew just long enough for over two million Israelites to cross. Only once the last Jew stepped onto dry land did the wind cease, causing the waters to drown the Egyptians. Timing is everything.

In Parshas Toldos, the Torah states (27:30), "And it was that when Yitzchak finished blessing Yaakov, and Yaakov had scarcely left his father's presence, Eisav his brother came from his hunt." Rashi notes that as one left, the other entered—another example of divine orchestration down to the second.

Likewise, in this week's parsha, the Torah describes the cargo of the caravan transporting Yosef to Egypt (37:25), "Their camels bearing spices, balsam, and lotus." Does this really matter? Rashi, citing Bereishis Rabbah, teaches that Hashem intervened for Yosef's comfort; Ishmaelite caravans typically carried foul-smelling goods such as tar and naphtha. Hashem arranged that this caravan be an exception. Perfect timing.

This background helps us better appreciate Chanukah. Each night, we recite the blessing "She'asah nissim la'avoseinu" - that Hashem performed miracles for our ancestors. The plural "nissim" refers both to the miraculous military victory and to the miracle of the oil. But why was the second miracle necessary? Was it not enough that the assimilationist decrees of the Greeks were overturned, that Hashem delivered the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton into the hands of the Torah-faithful?

The Maharal (Chiddushei Aggados, Shabbos 31b) explains that one might mistakenly attribute the military victory to natural causes, such as familiarity with the terrain, strategy, or luck. Therefore, Hashem provided an unmistakably supernatural miracle - the oil burning eight days - to demonstrate that the victory, too, was entirely supernatural. And the timing is no coincidence - the war ended on the twenty fifth of Kislev, and the miracle of the oil began that very night. A Divine wink.

Finally, returning to the second Chanukah blessing: we thank Hashem for the miracles He performed "bayamim hahem," in those ancient days, "bazman hazeh," at this time. "At this time" refers not only to the season - the darkest nights of the year when we light the menorah - but also to His extraordinary timing throughout history. It reinforces our belief in the twelfth of Rambam's Thirteen Principles: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Mashiach, and though he may tarry, I await his arrival every day." As Malachi promised: Mashiach will come - suddenly.

© 2025 by TorahWeb Foundation. All Rights Reserved

from: TorahLectures <torahlectures@pb04.wixmails.com>

subject: Torah Lectures - Rav Meilech Biderman, shlit'a

... At the end of the parashah, it states (40:5-6) of two The ", them dreamt a dream on the same night; each one according to the interpretation of his dream..." Chazal explain that in addition to their dreams, each one dreamt the explanation of their fellow man's dream. The Sar HaMashkim saw in his dream that the Sar Ha'Ofim would be killed in three days, and the Sar Ha'Ofim saw that the Sar HaMashkim reinstated be would "Yosef came to them in the morning and he saw that they were aggrieved." The Pnei Menachem asks why the Sar Ha'Ofim was sad? He saw the meaning of the Sar HaMashkim's dream, that he would live and work again for Pharaoh. Perhaps this was a sign that his dream was also positive.

Why was he downcast? ,state it does Why 'they were aggrieved'? The Pnei Menachem answers that the Sar Ha'Ofim was sad to see that his partner in prison would go free and attain a highranking position. He was upset that good was coming upon another. Due to his ayin ra, his evil eye, he wasn't saved.

The Severity of Embarrassing Others Most importantly, we have to be careful never to cause embarrassment to one's fellow man. Tamar didn't want to embarrass [Yehudah]...

Rather, she said, 'If he admits it on his own, then so be it, and if he doesn't, I will be burned. But I won't embarrass him.' Chazal learn from this that "It is better for a person to be thrown into a fiery furnace and not to embarrass his fellow man in public."

Pnei Yehoshua proves from the Gemara (Bava Metzia 58b) that embarrassing one's fellow man is worse than murder. This is because the **כל הירידן ליגנום**, says Gemara **יעוליהם**, "Whoever goes to Gehinom will leave Gehinom." This applies to all aveiros, including murder, r'l. Gehinom isn't forever. Reshaim suffer in Gehinom for twelve months, but afterwards, their

neshamos are brought to Gan Eden. So, even for murder, the baalei aveirah will eventually leave Gehinom. However, the Gemara says that there are three exceptions, those go to Gehinom and never leave. Among those who never leave Gehinom are those who embarrass their fellow man in public and those who call their fellow man by a degrading nickname. Embarrassing one's fellow man is worse than murder.

The Ostrovtza ztl explains that Tamar was pregnant with twins. If she were burned, three souls would die. Nevertheless, Tamar understood that this was better than embarrassing one's fellow man in public.

In contrast, we understand the great reward for those who give chizuk to their fellow man. The Imrei Emes ztl said that sometimes you can't offer advice, and you are unable to help someone in different ways. But you can listen to the person, as he pours out his heart before you and tells you of his tzaros. Sometimes it's sufficient, and he is relieved afterwards. This is hinted in the words (37:21) Reuven^o heard, he listened to someone pour out his bitter heart, and that brought salvation. The person feels understood, and he feels that others have compassion for him, and this can help him endure the difficult test he is going through.

The Maharil teaches that the shamesh should be placed above the other chanukah lech. This hints that when one shines and gives light and hope to others, he is above all.4

The Candles' Message

The Kav HaYashar (96) writes, "We have several sources that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves lamps of a mitzvah, for it states (Yeshayah Honor ', 24:15), 'כבוד את ה' Hashem with lamps.' Every candle lit for a mitzvah has immeasurable holiness. If we had ruach hakodesh, we would be able to see the future when lighting these lech because the candles of a mitzvah tell prophecies, just like a navi giving over what he heard from Hashem's mouth."5

At this point, the Kav HaYashar tells a story: "The gaon, the Maharshal z'l, writes in the introduction to his sefer Yam shel Shlomo, 'Once, with a candle of a mitzvah, heaven encouraged me and opened the gates of light. Heaven told me, "Study Torah... Be like a lion in his den. Write sefarim... And after I received this message, I couldn't abstain from writing sefarim."

Hashem told the Maharshal, through holy candles, that Hashem loves his sefarim, and that encouraged him to continue doing so. What was the story? The Kav HaYashar heard it from his rebbe, the Yesod Yosef, who heard it from scholars:

"One night, Reb Shlomo Luria (the Maharshal) was studying and writing his sefer Yam Shel Shlomo with only a small candle before him, and it was about to go out. The candle remained lit for several hours – as if he had three or four complete candles... He understood from his candle that Hashem was with him." The miraculous candle told him that Hashem loves his Torah learning and chiddushei Torah, that Hashem wants him to continue learning and writing his chiddushim, and that encouraged him. The miracle that happened to the Maharshal is similar to the miracle of the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash on Chanukah" (Kav HaYashar). One night, Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg zy'a was learning Torah by candlelight, and a gust of wind blew out the candle.

He didn't have a match or a stone to light his candle, so he went onto the porch to see if a passerby could light it. A man passed by, lit his candle, and Rebbe Shmelke returned to study Torah.

Rebbe Shmelke later thought, "How did he light my candle? I was on the porch of the second floor, and the man was on the street!" He realized that Eliyahu HaNavi had come to light his candle so he could continue learning. The Alter of Novardok ztl would study Torah and mussar in a small hut in the forest. One night, his lamp blew out, and he needed more oil. The Alter of Novardok told himself, "Hashem can do everything; Hashem can send me oil.

He opened the door of his hut to do his hishtadlus.

Just then, a man came by. "Do you have oil?" the Alter asked. He did. The Alter was able to study Torah and mussar for the rest of the night. In the morning, the Alter took the remaining oil and stored it, so he would never forget the miracle that Hashem performed for him.

Once, there was a fire in his home, and the jar of oil was consumed in the fire. The Alter said he was happy this happened because "Why should I remember this episode more than all the other miracles Hashem performs for me? Every moment of life is filled with miracles."

As we wrote from the Kav HaYashar, the lamps tell prophecies, like a Navi relaying what he heard from Hashem. We don't have ruach hakodesh to understand the prophecies, but one message comes through clearly: The lecht tell us that Hashem loves us, and He wants our Torah and mitzvos. That is the message of the Chanukah lecht. Regardless of our spiritual level, Hashem loves us and wants our avodah

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu> date: Dec 11, 2025, 6:02 PM A

Tale of Two Tunics

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Dec 11, 2025, 6:02 PM

Our Struggles, Our Triumphs

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In Parshas Vayeishev, the story of Yosef and his brothers begins to unfold in full force. Yaakov has returned home to Canaan, where - contrary to his longing for some tranquility and peace in his life - the troubles with his sons begins. At the age of seventeen, Yosef - the favorite son - dreams of sheaves in the field, and heavenly bodies, all bowing down to him. These dreams are the brothers, who increase their hatred and jealousy of him.

When, one day, Yaakov sends Yosef to check on his brothers and the flocks, the brothers see Yosef approaching, and plot against him. Ultimately, he is sold to Egypt and bought by Potiphar, Chief Executioner to Pharaoh (Bereishis 37).

The next perek moves to the topic of Yehuda and Tamar, from whose union, ultimately, Melech Ha'Moshiach will be born (Bereishis 38).

In the house of Potiphar, Eishes Potiphar tries to seduce Yosef, until he finally resists, leaving his cloak in her hand and running outside to escape her seduction. She frames Yosef, claiming he tried to seduce her, and Potiphar has Yosef thrown in jail (Bereishis 39). After a decade in jail, he meets the Butler and Baker, both of whom are disturbed by their respective dreams. Yosef correctly interprets their dreams, and asks the Butler to remember him, and not to forget him. The Butler gets out of jail and promptly forgets Yosef (Bereishis 40).

Whereas Yaakov thought his troubles were finally over - the trouble of Eisav, the trouble of Lavan, the abduction and violation of Dina, and the death of Rachel - his most significant trouble - that of Yosef and the brothers - had only just begun.

It is the sons of Yaakov who presented their father with Yosef's cloak that they dipped in goat blood to trick him into thinking Yosef was torn to shreds by a wild animal. And when all of Yaakov's children arise to comfort him, the pasuk tells us: and he refused to be comforted, and he said: For I will descend on account of my son as a mourner to the grave (37:35). Of all the avos - and despite the fact that Avraham was tested with ten tests - Yaakov had the most turbulent life. As the angel attests when he renames Yaakov to Yisrael: for you have striven/wrestled with G-d and with man, and you have prevailed (32:29).

Yaakov had to deal with struggles and strivings practically his whole life. He had his external enemies - Eisav, Lavan, Shechem; the abduction and violation of his daughter, Dina; his troubles in the home between his children - Yosef and the brothers; the disappearance of Yosef for over twenty years; and his move - out of necessity - to Egypt - for the last seventeen years of his life. Moreover, these struggles are not just relevant to the life of our forefather, Yaakov, they are the blueprint of the lives of all of us, his children, Am Yisrael. For, as the Sages teach us: kol mah she'eirah la'vos, siman la'banim - all that happened to the patriarchs is a foreshadowing and omen for future generations.

From the life of Yaakov the Torah is teaching us how we can traverse the highways of life, and emerge triumphant. As he was limping, we may in fact be wounded - and often are, may Hashem have mercy on us - but as our

nation as a whole always prevails, so can each one of us, as individuals. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks points out that the Torah portrays the avot and imahot as very real personalities, with all of their human complexities, so that we can relate to them, take strength from their lives and learn from them (Covenant and Conversation, Genesis, p.230) (In his commentary to Sefer Bereishis, this is also the consistent approach of Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch). Had our avot and imahot been portrayed, for posterity, as angelic, superhuman, or as demigods, chas v'shalom, we could not learn from, nor emulate, them or strive to better ourselves.

After Yaakov wrestles with the angel on the shores of the River Yabok, and the angel asks Yaakov to free him, Yaakov replies: I will not send you off until you have blessed me (32:27). Rabbi Lord Sacks writes, "I will not let you go until you bless me: These words of Jacob to the angel lie at the very core of surviving crisis. Each of us knows from personal experience that events that seem disappointing, painful, even humiliating at the time, can be the most important in our lives. Through them we learned how to try harder next time; or they taught us a truth about ourselves; or they shifted our life into a new and more fruitful direction. We learn, not from our successes but from our failures. We mature and grow strong and become more understanding and forgiving through the mistakes we make. A protected life is a fragile and superficial life. Strength comes from knowing the worst and refusing to give in. Jacob/Israel bequeathed us many gifts, but few more valuable that the obstinacy and resilience that can face hard times and say of them: 'I will not let you go until you bless me.' I will not give up or move on until I have extracted something positive from this pain and turned it into blessing.

"... What Genesis [Sefer Bereishis] tells us is that the heroes of our faith did not live charmed lives. They suffered exiles, knew danger, had their hopes disappointed and the expectations delayed. They fought, they struggled, but they neither gave in nor gave up... Sometimes they laughed in disbelief; there were times when they feared, trembled, wept... They were human beings, not angels; they were people with whom we can identify, not saints to be worshipped. Jacob taught us that we cannot preempt crisis, nor should we minimise it, but we can survive it, thus becoming worthy of bearing the name of one who struggled with G-d and with men and prevailed" (Covenant and Conversation, Genesis, p.232-233).

May we be graced with the courage and strength, faith and trust, perseverance and fortitude, to extract blessing from all times in our lives, b'ezras Hashem. Though at times this may be of supreme difficulty, and require us to find the light even when we are limping, may Hashem - in His great mercy and compassion - guide us on the path of triumph and success.

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Dec 11, 2025, 3:02 PM

subject: **Tidbits • Parshas Vayeishev 5786**

In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZT"L

This week is Shabbos Mevorach Chodesh Teves. Rosh Chodesh is next Shabbos & Sunday, December 20th-21st. The molad is early Shabbos morning at 2:22 AM and 10 chalakim.

Chanuka

On Sunday, Erev Chanukah, December 14th, Tachanun is omitted at Mincha. Tachanun and Lamenatzei'ach are omitted throughout Chanukah, as well as Kel Erech Apayim before Krias Hatorah, and the Yehi Ratzons that follow. Fasting and hespedim are generally prohibited. Al Hanisim is said in Shemoneh Esrei and Bircas Hamazon. The omission of Al Hanisim does not need to be corrected. However, if one remembers before completing Bircas Hamazon he may recite the compensatory Harachaman at the end of Bircas Hamazon, followed by Bimei Mattisyahu. Similarly, one can add this compensatory Harachaman at the end of Eloki Netzor, followed by Bimei Mattisyahu.

Each day of Chanukah, the complete Hallel is recited during Shacharis. The Krias Hatorah of each day of Chanukah corresponds to the day of the bringing of the Korbanos Ha'nesiim (Naso 7). Some congregations recite

Mizmor Shir (Psalm 30) after the Shir Shel Yom. A woman should recite Hallel.

The Achronim agree that there is a mitzvah to gather at a meal and give thanks to Hashem; through this we publicize the Chanukah miracles. Singing and saying words of praise to Hashem renders the meal a Seudas Mitzvah. There is a minhag to eat dairy foods in commemoration of Yehudis's defeat of the enemy general by feeding him dairy items. The practice of eating latkes, doughnuts and fried foods commemorates the miracle involving oil (Rabbeinu Maimon, Ibn Ezra).

There is a praiseworthy minhag of giving gifts to the melamdim of one's children (R' C. Palaggi zt"l). This sets an example of hakaras hatov for your child and displays the importance of their chinuch. A gift accompanied by warm words of thanks is a tremendous source of chizuk for our Rebbeim and teachers.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 90 • Yerushalmi: Yoma 51 • Mishnah Yomis: Bechoros 5:2-3 • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 8a-10a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 32:8-15

Chanukah begins Sunday night, December 14th.

Summary

VAYEISHEV: Yosef, the favorite son, is gifted the kesones pasim shirt • Yosef's dreams • The brothers plan to kill Yosef • Reuven persuades them to put him in a pit instead • While Reuven is away, Yosef is sold to merchants descending to Egypt • Yehuda and Tamar • Tamar bears Yehuda twins, Peretz and Zerach • Yosef is sold to Potiphar and rises to become his trusted advisor • Potiphar's wife tempts Yosef, Yosef resists ("Vayima'ein!") • Yosef is wrongfully accused and imprisoned • Yosef is given responsibilities in the prison • Yosef correctly interprets the dreams of the wine steward and the baker • Yosef is forgotten and remains in prison.

Haftarah: The Navi Amos (2:6-3:8) warns that although Hashem may have mercy for three sins, there is a fourth sin which will bring about certain Divine wrath. The Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer says that this fourth sin is related to the brothers' selling of Yosef. As even if it was necessary for Yosef to be distanced, using the profits to purchase shoes demonstrated a level of indignity and insensitivity.

For the Shabbos Table

"And their camels bearing spices, balsam and lotus" (Bereishis 37:25)

Rashi explains that the Yishme'elim would generally transport goods that had a foul-smelling odor. However, when Yosef was sold and transported to Mitzrayim, he merited that the caravan in which he was transported carried goods with a pleasant aroma. But what is the significance of this small 'comfort' when one is being carted off to servitude?

The Telzer approach, attributed to Rav Mottel Pogremonski zt"l, explains this with a parable. Both a surgeon and a murderer bring a knife to the skin. Yet the distinction between the one that seeks to heal and the one that seeks to injure is observed in the surgeon's meticulousness and delicate approach. Although Yosef was being cast away, it was ultimately for the later good; a "Refuah Kodem L'makkah". This small detail of the pleasant aroma despite the circumstances demonstrates that the master plan was perfect and meticulous.

In a similar vein, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that this pleasant aroma was Hashem's message to Yosef that He is with him in his suffering. On Chanukah we recognize and express our gratitude for the miracles performed. Along with the great miracles of the times of the Chashmonaim, we also need to recognize the many smaller miracles that take place in our times and get a good 'scents' of all the everyday blessings in our lives.

from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

date: Dec 11, 2025, 11:40 AM

Daf Yomi Zevachim 88 and VaYeshev: What Can be Done About Lashon Hara and Humiliation?

A Special Convergence and the Unique Power of Learning Kodshim
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The Daf Yomi and the weekly Torah reading converge today in a manner that conveys the unique value of learning kodshim, even, and perhaps especially, in the modern era.

The transgressions of Lashon Hara and of humiliating others in public both feature prominently in Parashat VaYashev (as discussed in this week's previous posts) and both of them are discussed in today's daf (Zevachim 88) which teaches that the priestly vestments can atone for both of them, although in one case some explanation is needed.

We learn that the vestments can atone for Lashon Hara and for murder. In the latter case, however, Tosafot (Arakhin 16a, s.v. ha d'ahani) point out that this does not seem to be the case, as there are a number of indications that an actual murder would not receive atonement through such methods. Instead, they suggest the reference here is to humiliating others, which is equated with murder.

Considering this idea together with that regarding Lashon Hara yields a fascinating insight together with a tremendous overlooked opportunity. The notion of an atonement coming from priestly garments, or from the sacrifices, or from the Temple vessels is not simply a supernatural concept. It teaches that sin often results from a misalignment of perspectives and priorities. The sacrifices and related aspects are loaded with symbolic elements. The attention given to these elements when the sacrifices are offered, or the garments are worn, calls attention to the messages represented by these elements. As a result, the deficiencies in perspective may be corrected, and thus atonement and redemption flow naturally.

If this is indeed the methodology, a tremendous potential emerges. In the modern era, the sacrificial order is not practiced, and instead, we must suffice with a study of its concepts, which we are taught is credited as practice (Menachot 110a). Here again, this need not be limited to the realm of supernatural grace. If sacrifices effect their atonement, at least to some extent, through realigning perspectives, then studying their details can actually accomplish the exact same thing. The study of Kodashim can accomplish a crucial component of what the sacrifices themselves could accomplish, even in the modern era. Indeed, the Talmud elsewhere (Yoma 72b) indicates that the priestly vestments continue to effect atonement even today.

In that light, one can consider how the priestly vestments serve as atonements for these specific transgressions. The Torah stresses that these garments serve as a source of honor and glory ("kavod u'tiferet"). Extended attention to their details forces an appreciation for the value of such honor. One who would humiliate others displays a deficient appreciation for the importance of dignity in the individual, and the focus that the priestly garments gives to that attribute can correct this. The study of its concepts can do this as well (R. Yaakov Emden alludes to this idea in his writings). While the rabbinic teaching that Lashon Hara is addressed through the affliction of tzaraat is well known, the Talmud also identifies another atoning element for lashon hara: the special coat worn by the priests in the Temple. This coat, fitted with small bells, produced sound during the service. An item that generates sound is thus invoked to atone for a transgression that itself involves sound.

The Talmud states that the affliction of tzara'at and the priestly coat correspond to two different forms of lashon hara: the affliction is directed at one who has caused actual harm through negative speech, while the coat atones for a case in which no concrete harm has occurred.

This distinction is qualitative rather than quantitative. One who speaks negatively without causing direct damage has nonetheless engaged in an act that corrupts his own character and spiritual posture. The symbolism of the coat is therefore an appropriate corrective, aimed at addressing the internal mindset that produces such speech. One who has in fact harmed others and introduced division into the community, however, requires the more forceful, outwardly oriented corrective of tzara'at.

R. Moshe Shtembuch, in his Taam VeDaat, suggests—homiletically—that the various tzara'at afflictions symbolize the internal traits that give rise to lashon hara. The Torah uses the term se'eit, related to "to lift," representing an arrogant individual who elevates himself above others and thus demeans

them. Another term, *baheret*, is related to “clear,” representing one who views matters as so obvious and unambiguous that he judges others without considering broader context or complexity.

R. Shneur Kotler (*Kol HaTorah* 61, p. 47) notes additional symbolism inherent in the priestly coat. It incorporated *tekhelet*, the particular blue wool also found in the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. The Talmud describes *tekhelet* as recalling the sea, which reflects the sky, which reflects the heavenly throne. The imagery conveys the need to look outward and upward, to broaden one’s perspective and see beyond the narrow confines of one’s immediate judgments. The flaw of one who indulges in *lashon hara* is precisely this shortsightedness. The coat and the *tekhelet* woven into it thus serve as a corrective toward greater expansiveness of vision.

(The Talmud also mentions another atonement for *lashon hara*: the incense. It suggests that the coat atones for *lashon hara* spoken in public, while the incense atones for *lashon hara* spoken in private. Regarding this distinction, see *Torat HaOlah* of the Rama, 3:7, and *Shemirat HaLashon*, II, 20:9. For discussions of the symbolism of the incense as an atonement for *lashon hara*, see R. Avigdor Nebenzahl, *Sichot LeSefer Shemot*, pp. 325–328; *Sichot LeSefer Bemidbar*, pp. 156–15; *BiYad HaLashon*, pp. 153–154 and 367–370 (by R. Michel Zilber); R. David Kronglass, *Sichot Chokhmah uMussar*, 20; *Shmuot Chaim*, *Arakhin* ch. 3, p. 128.

For further observations regarding both the coat and the incense, see *VaYita Eishel* to *Arakhin*, 100; and, at length, *Emek HaLashon*, *Kuntres Leket HaMe’il*, pp. 170–190.

Note also the *Yerushalmi* (*Yoma* 5:3), which implies that the coat atones for all forms of *lashon hara*. See *Emek HaLashon*, p. 17, for analysis of the difference between the two formulations.

See also R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Choski, *Lev Aryeh*, Gen. p. 109, who suggests that Joseph’s special coat was given by Jacob as a countermeasure to the negative speech Joseph had previously relayed about his brothers.) In the modern era, when we lack both the priestly garments and the affliction of *tzara’at*, we nonetheless retain the ability to connect to their messages through study. In fact the Talmud (*Arachin* 15b) identifies Torah study as effective in its own right against the impact of sins such as *Lashon Hara*. However, as is clear from the discussion there and many later commentaries, this is subject to a number of conditions and limitations. Every additional tool in service of this goal is a gift. It may not be automatic; but with the proper awareness, it is available, and that is a precious opportunity.

RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack is free today. But if you enjoyed this post, you can tell RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack that their writing is valuable by pledging a future subscription. You won’t be charged unless they enable payments.

----- Morals and Meanings

Parsha Reflections for Living

Chanukah

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

Chanukah: In those Days – In our Times

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

From Greece to Rome

The Festival of Chanukah celebrates our ideological war against – and victory over – the oppression of the Greek Empire. And indeed, the Greek Empire is no more. However, the philosophy which they preached and the culture and lifestyle that it promoted outlived them and continue to influence the world around us until our time.

To frame this in terms of our national experience, this idea expresses itself in the fourth exile in which we find ourselves – the exile of Rome, which continues until Mashiach comes. Although politically the Roman Empire replaced Greece as the dominant world force, it nevertheless adopted the basic tenets of Greek philosophy and outlook. In a conceptual sense, therefore, we would be correct in saying that Greece was never fully conquered; rather, it merely transferred its power base to Rome.

Thus, we find that our Sages refer to Rome as “Italy of Greece,”^[1] reflecting the idea that the essential philosophy of Rome was effectively bequeathed to them by their Greek predecessors. The full implication of this idea is that the

third exile will not fully end until the fourth one does. And indeed, basic Greek ideas such as the primacy of man’s intellect, as well as ascribing central value to the temporal world as the arena for man’s highest achievements, continue to exert their influence until our time.

Yet if the ideas of Greece continue to fill the world – and in so doing, likewise continue to assail the Jewish People and our Godly way of life – to what end do we celebrate Chanukah as “the victory over Greece”? The answer is that we do not celebrate Chanukah as the final victory over Greek ideas; rather, we celebrate it as the initial formative victory, which can be accessed and emulated in any and all subsequent confrontations. As we have noted throughout this book, the word “Chanukah” means initiation, and implies the beginning of a process. In terms of our present discussion, we may say that the process into which we were initiated on Chanukah was the war itself with Greece, which would continue in different forms and under different guises in the centuries that would ensue. The crucial implication of this idea for the Festival of Chanukah is that its goal is not only to commemorate the initial victory “in those days”, but to perpetuate it as long as continues to be required “in our times.” Every year on Chanukah, the spiritual light, energy and inspiration which illuminated the way to that initial victory return to be taken up anew.

Greece inside the Sanctuary

A central part of the Chanukah story relates to how the Greeks breached the Sanctuary and defiled all the oil.^[2] Rav Kook explains^[3] that this event paralleled what was happening within the Jewish people themselves. As a location, the Beis Hamikdash is the holiest place in the world. Within the Jewish people, the mikdash represents their inner value system and everything they hold holy and dear. If Greece has breached the Mikdash and has contaminated the oil, then to proceed to use that oil to light the Menorah will compromise the purity of its illumination. Likewise, if Greek notions have gained entry into our value system, then even our illumination cannot be assured of being authentically Jewish! At that point, we risk substituting the Torah’s eternal message as a response and guide to the times with one that is simply an expression of the times. Needless to say, this is not to imply that every idea currently in the world is instantly to be branded as false. What it means is that it should be considered carefully and not simply swallowed whole.

The miracle of the Menorah began with the small jar of pure oil bearing the seal of the Kohen Gadol. This too, explains Rav Kook, resides within each person. The Kohen Gadol has the ability to enter the Holy of Holies in the Beis Hamikdash, a place known as “inside the inside,” and this core likewise lies at the innermost point of the Jew. It partakes of the timeless quality of the Torah’s message and cannot be swayed by whatever value happens to be on special offer for that month. Accessing this element within ourselves was the basis of our victory. In military terms, it was not until we had gone to war and retaken the Beis Hamikdash that we found the jar of oil buried there; but in experiential terms, it was that jar of oil that lies within us which prompted us to go to war in the first place.

Chanukah and the Ohr Haganuz

Chanukah is celebrated by kindling lights, and indeed, this is most appropriate, as it celebrates the victory of light over darkness. However, the idea of light can itself express many things, some of which are completely disconnected from – and perhaps even antithetical to – the light of Torah. Let us not forget that Greece also saw themselves as bestowers of light, something that made their darkness all the more menacing. As such, on Chanukah, even the concept of light requires illumination! In this respect, the integrity of the light in our menorah and its message need to be preserved and protected, as surely as was the case with the oil in the Sanctuary.

Perhaps this will give us some insight into an idea mentioned by one of the early Kabbalists, the Rokeach^[4]: The Sages inform us that the light with which we see is not the original light that Hashem created. There was a prior, supernal light, known as the Ohr Haganuz (“Concealed Light”), which Hashem then concealed, leaving us with the light that we have now. The Midrash further states that this original light burned for thirty-six hours before it was concealed.^[5] The Rokeach writes that the original light which

burned for thirty-six hours illuminates every year from within the thirty six candles that are lit over the course of Chanukah.[6]

What is this “Concealed Light” and how does it emerge through the Chanukah lights? Without a doubt, this mystical statement can be understood on many different levels. However, let us consider what it might mean for us on an experiential and ideological level.

If we wish to attain some understanding of what this “Concealed Light” is, we first need to find out where it is concealed — if we can. Perhaps once we know where to find it, we can get a glimpse of what it looks like. The answer here is provided by the Zohar,[7] which states that Hashem concealed this light within the Torah. Of course, this idea too can be understood on many levels, but on a basic level it means the following:

Different forms of light do not create new things for us to see; they provide a new means through which to view that which is already in front of us. There are many ways in which we can view life, establishing certain goals as paramount, seeing certain values as inviolable, ascribing significance to some things while denying it to others, seeing some pursuits as worthwhile and others as worthless. The Original Light was a means through which to survey the world through the perspective of Absolute Truth, with knowledge of how to define value, importance, and success.

When the Zohar says that the original light was then concealed in the Torah, it means that through learning Torah, one can access the light through which to view the world as it should be viewed. He may discover that some things which people tend to view as of extreme importance are not actually that important at all. Conversely, he may discover that there are certain things which are of utmost importance that are commonly overlooked. In the most profound and meaningful of ways he comes to see the world in a different light.

Given that we are enjoined to learn Torah, which houses this light, we are forced to conclude that although Hashem concealed it in the Torah, He wants it to be uncovered! Moreover, not only is this light meant to be uncovered within the Torah, it is further meant to become the light in which we view the world.

The question of in which light one views the world was never more hotly contested than during the confrontation between Israel and Greece, for it was the very basis of that conflict. The Chanukah lights with which we celebrate our victory thus contain an element of the Ohr Haganuz, encouraging us not only to choose light over darkness, but also to be able to tell the difference between the two.

May the light and message of our Menorahs burn steady, bright and strong during these eight days, may their illumination spread outward to the entire year ahead, and may they ultimately light the path forward toward our final redemption!

Chanukah Sameach

[1] Shabbos 55b. [2] Shabbos 21b. [3] Commentary Ein Aya to Shabbos ibid. [4] Hilchos Chanukah sec. 225. [5] Bereishis Rabbah 12:6. [6] See at length Bnei Yissaschar, Kislev maamar 2. [7] Zohar vol. 1 p. 264a and Zohar Chadash p. 103b. Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein Born and raised in London, Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein came to Israel following high school, where he studied for a number of years in Yeshivas Ateres Yisrael in Jerusalem, receiving Rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Chaim Walkin in 2001. Rabbi Bernstein is a distinguished author of both Hebrew and English books, publishing many works on Chumash, Talmud,...

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Dec 12, 2025, 1:19 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Chanukah: The Single Light of Chanukah**
Chanukah: The Single Light of Chanukah

Before lighting the Chanukah lights, we recite the blessing, “Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.”

Why does the blessing refer to a single light - “the Chanukah light”? We light several candles each night; why not say “the Chanukah lights”? Chanukah and Chinuch The word “Chanukah” means “dedication,” referring to the re-dedication of the Temple after its desecration by the Seleucid

emperor Antiochus IV. “Chanukah” shares the same Hebrew root as chinuch — “education.” But chinuch is the masculine form of the word while chanukah is the feminine form. Why?

Rav Kook explained that the goal of education is to nurture the student to grow and develop by inculcating good habits and proper conduct. Education develops their innate talents and natural integrity, and has a positive influence over the years to come. Therefore the word chinuch is in the masculine form, as it indicates a process of striving and developing inner potential.¹

The dedication of the Temple, however, was a greatly different situation. From when it was first established, the Temple already encompassed all of its greatness and holiness. Future times will merely reveal the holiness that it always contained. Thus the Temple’s dedication is called chanukah. The feminine form of the word is used, denoting a state of intrinsic holiness and completeness.

The Lights of Israel The lights of Chanukah are a metaphor for the blessings of enlightenment that the Jewish people bestow to the world. All of the nation’s potential spiritual gifts are included in the dedication of Chanukah: Torah and wisdom, prophecy and morality, justice and compassion, and so on. Like the Temple, these are qualities inherent in the people of Israel — so the word chanukah is appropriate.

Sometimes these ‘lights’ emphasize their distinct nature in order to make their full contribution, even at the expense of other ideals. Such divisions, however, can lead to internal strife. Those who stress one particular ideal may look upon those who promote other ideals as detracting from a more important value. In truth, when each individual advances that light that corresponds to the inner makeup of his soul, the entire people of Israel is enriched.

But these conflicts will not exist forever. As long as there is strife and dissension, holiness cannot be properly established. In the future it will become clear that all of the different lights share a common root, and are really one single light. Therefore, the blessing of Chanukah, which also encompasses the future potential, speaks of a single “Chanukah light.” (Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 118-119. Adapted from Olat Re’iyah, pp. 433-435.)

1 The Kabbalists described the active sephirot as “masculine,” and the receptive sephirot as “feminine.”

Fragrant Havdalah By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Perfume Reuven asks: May I use perfume for havdalah?

Question #2: Hadasim Freidel queries: If I use hadasim for havdalah, what beracha should I recite prior to smelling them?

Question #3: Fragrantly Distant Yael ponders: If someone is distant from the besamim at the time that havdalah is recited, what should they do?

Question #4: No Smell Yehudah questions: I have no sense of smell. Does that mean that someone else in the family must recite havdalah?

Question #5: No Fragrance Zevulun asks: I am on the high seas and have no besamim with me. Does that mean that I cannot recite havdalah until I locate some fragrance? Introduction In a different article, I discussed the order of the four berachos that we recite weekly when we make havdalah. In that article, I mentioned that we smell fragrances on motza’ei Shabbos to console our souls over the loss of the neshamah yeseirah -- the extra aspect of the neshamah that we receive when Shabbos arrives that helps us appreciate the cholent, the kugel and the other Shabbos delicacies -- that departs when Shabbos ends. This article will emphasize the halachos regarding the fragrances that we smell as part of the havdalah procedure.

I. Which fragrances warrant a beracha? In general, when we smell pleasant fragrances, we are required to recite a beracha before smelling them. However, we do not recite a beracha on just anything that has a pleasant smell. Pleasant fragrances upon which one may not recite a beracha fall under four general categories:

A. Forbidden fragrances, such as that used in idol worship or sorcery, or the perfume of an ervah (Rambam, Hilchos Berachos 9:7, based on Berachos 53a). Even if a small amount of a forbidden fragrance is mixed into a potpourri of other fragrances, one does not recite a beracha before smelling the blend (Biur Halacha 217:8).

B. Fragrances whose purpose is not for pleasurable smelling (Berachos 53a; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 217:2 and 297:2). These include: Deodorizers and other fragrances meant to neutralize bad odors; fragrances not meant for their aroma, but for other purpose, such as to add taste to food; items with only subtle fragrance that most people do not appreciate; items that most people do not consider fragrances, such as shampoos, essential oils, lotions or even fresh bread.

C. Fragrances whose source no longer exists, such as when you can still smell the residual aroma in the air or when you enjoy the smell of an empty besamim or esrog box.

D. Some recent authorities suggest that we should not recite a beracha on a synthetically created fragrance (Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah, Vol. 2, Pg. 263 note 32). Synthetic fragrances are very common in perfumes, colognes, aftershave lotions etc., since synthetic aromas are frequently less expensive and their scent is more predictable than natural perfumes.

However, other authorities dispute this ruling, contending that fragrance should not be different from “synthetic food” made from a non-food substance, such as alcohol, vinegar, candies or flavoring whose source is petrochemical -- which is very common today.

Perfume Our opening question, from Reuven, was: May I use perfume for havdalah? I presume that Reuven was asking whether it could be used for the besamim of havdalah. (If he meant to ask if perfume can be used instead of wine, then the answer will have to wait for a future article that I am planning to write.) As we have seen, there may be several reasons why perfume should not be used: 1. It might be included under perfumes of ervah. 2. According to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, it does not warrant a beracha since the flavor component might be synthetic.

II. Hadasim Several early sources, both halachic and kabbalistic, mention a preference to use hadasim as the fragrance for havdalah (Zohar; Tur, Orach Chayim 297). The various reasons cited also relate to the hashkafic reasons and lessons attached to the role of hadasim on Sukkos. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 297:4) rules that it is customary to use hadasim as besamim for havdalah. However, this sometimes created two difficulties, one, halachic, and the other, practical.

First, the halachic issue: The Gemara and halachic authorities note that there is not just one beracha to recite on pleasant smelling fragrances, but five different berachos, just as there are six different berachos recited on different types of food: hamotzi, mezonos, hagafen, ha'eitz, ha'adamah and shehakol. The five “fragrant berachos” are:

1. Borei shemen areiv, “Who creates pleasant oil,” is recited only before smelling the oil of the balsam tree (see Mishnah Berurah 216:22).
2. Hanosein (or, according to many opinions, Asher nasan) rei’ach tov ba’peiros, “Who bestows (or bestowed) pleasant fragrances in fruits,” is recited before smelling edible fruits and other foods (Shulchan Aruch 216:2; Rema 216:14). In the context of this beracha, peiros means not only what we usually call “fruit,” but anything usually considered edible. We will explain this a bit more shortly.
3. Borei atzei besamim, “Who creates fragrant wood (or fragrant trees).” One recites this beracha before smelling fragrant woody plants and trees or their leaves, seeds, flowers, wood, or oils. Hadasim are certainly in this category, since they grow on a woody branch and bush.
4. Borei isvei besamim, “Who creates fragrant grasses.” We recite this beracha before smelling non-woody plants, their parts and extracts. We will shortly note a point regarding whether a particular plant is called “woody” or “non-woody.” (The technical term for “non-woody” is “herbaceous.”)

5. Borei minei besamim, “Who creates different types of fragrances.” This is the “catch-all” beracha for all fragrances, the equivalent of reciting a shehakol on food. Sometimes, it is the preferred beracha, such as when the fragrance is not of any of the above sources, such as musk, which is of an animal source. It is also used when smelling a blend of several pleasant-smelling substances that have different berachos, such as, if someone mixed hadasim with esrogim. Other times, it is the beracha used to resolve uncertain cases, as we will see shortly.

However, since it can be used successfully on any fragrance, if someone, in error or without knowing, recited it before smelling balsam oil, esrogim, hadasim or mint, they will have fulfilled the beracha requirement and should not go back and recite the correct beracha.

Hadasim At this point, let us address Freidel’s question, the second of those beginning our article: “If I use hadasim for havdalah, what beracha should I recite prior to smelling them?”

As mentioned above, the beracha before reciting hadasim is borei atzei besamim. However, the Shelah rules that, when reciting havdalah, one should always recite borei minei besamim because not everyone knows the halachos of what berachos to recite on fragrances, and yet everyone is required to recite havdalah. On the other hand, there are other early authorities who clearly do not hold like the Shelah, and contend that lechatchilah one is always required to recite the correct beracha when smelling a fragrance, even for havdalah, just as one is always required to recite the correct beracha when eating. In their opinion, when smelling hadasim for havdalah, one should recite borei atzei besamim (Rabbeinu Yerucham, quoted by Magen Avraham, introduction to 297). The Mishnah Berurah (297:1) quotes the Shelah’s opinion as the primary one, but recommends avoiding the shaylah by using for havdalah something upon which the beracha is borei minei besamim. Among the possible choices is using a blend of fragrances that each alone requires a different bracha, or an item upon which there is a safek as to what its beracha is. The result of this discussion is that, according to the Mishnah Berurah, it is not ideal to use exclusively hadasim for besamim in havdalah, but it is preferred to mix hadasim with something that requires a beracha other than borei atzei besamim.

Above, I mentioned that some halachic and kabbalistic sources express a preference to use hadasim as the fragrance for havdalah (Zohar, Tur, Orach Chayim 297). Aside from the halachic issue just explained, there was also a practical problem in that the hadas, called myrtle in English, does not grow in cold climates. Jews in central and eastern Europe were able to get hadasim for Sukkos only with tremendous difficulty, and they were often dried out and without fragrance by the time they arrived. Although crushing the dried hadasim releases some of the fragrance, they were certainly not as fragrant as fresh hadasim or as other varieties of fragrance that were available. For this reason, there is discussion, already in the rishonim, whether to use hadasim for besamim. The conclusion of the Rema (Orach Chayim 297:4) is to take fragrant items available in the area and add some dried hadasim to them. The common practice in Ashkenaz was to use cloves as the fragrance for havdalah, presumably because they have a pleasant odor when dried and were readily available. A clove is the dried flower bud that grows on a tree. The clove is consumed only as a spice, but is not eaten on its own. Among the halachic authorities, we find four opinions which beracha to recite before smelling cloves:

- A. Hanosein rei’ach tov ba’peiros The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 216:2) rules that Hanosein rei’ach tov ba’peiros is the correct beracha to say before smelling cloves, contending that this beracha is recited on anything that is consumed, even if only as a seasoning.

- B. Borei atzei besamim Many authorities rule that we recite Hanosein rei’ach tov ba’peiros only on items that are eaten on their own, but not if they are solely a flavoring. Cloves are, therefore, discounted as a food item and treated exclusively as a fragrance. Since the clove grows on a woody stem, these authorities rule that we should recite Borei atzei besamim before smelling cloves (Yalkut Yosef 216:4).

- C. Borei isvei besamim Some contend that Borei atzei besamim is recited only on a fragrance that grows on what is considered a tree for all other halachos. The stem of a clove tree is hollow, which, according to some opinions, precludes it from being considered a tree. Therefore, some consider it an herbaceous plant, upon which the correct beracha is Borei isvei besamim. Apparently, this is the common custom among Yemenite Jews (Ohr Zion Vol. 2 pg. 136; Vezos Haberacha, pg. 174).

- D. Borei minei besamim Because of the disputes quoted above, many rule that one should recite Borei minei besamim on cloves, to avoid any halachic issues (Elyah Rabbah 216:9; Mishnah Berurah 216:16). This is the accepted practice among Ashkenazim and by many Sefardic poskim (Birkei Yosef 216:5; Kaf Hachayim 216:34; Ohr Zion Vol. 2 pg. 136).

In accordance with the custom cited by the Rema and to avoid any shaylos, this author makes a mixture of cloves, cinnamon and dried hadasim for havdalah and crushes the hadasim prior to reciting havdalah, to release their fragrance of the hadasim.

III. Take time to smell the cloves! Yael asked: What should someone do if he is distant from the besamim at the time that the havdalah is recited?

It happens that not every individual has an opportunity to smell the besamim at the time the beracha on them is recited. In such situations, they should not smell the besamim while the other berachos are recited, but should wait until after the havdalah wine is drunk and then they may recite a beracha and smell the besamim.

IV. No sense of smell At this point, let us analyze the fourth of our opening questions: “I cannot smell. Does that mean that someone else in the family must recite havdalah?”

In general, someone cannot recite a beracha of benefit, such as a beracha on food or beverage, for another person, unless the person reciting the beracha is also benefiting from the food or beverage and is required to recite a beracha before he may partake in the food or beverage. The exception to this rule is when the beracha is required in order to fulfill a mitzvah. For example, someone who has already fulfilled the mitzvah of kiddush may recite kiddush for someone who has, as yet, not fulfilled the mitzvah. Similarly, someone who has already fulfilled the mitzvah of havdalah may recite havdalah for someone who has, as yet, not heard havdalah.

Why is wine different? In both of these instances, the person reciting kiddush or havdalah may recite the beracha of *hagafen*, even though he will not be drinking the wine and someone else will. Why can he recite a beracha on the wine, when he is not partaking from it? The answer is that, in these instances, the beracha on the wine is also considered a *birkas hamitzvah*, a beracha recited upon performing a mitzvah, and not merely a beracha of benefit. When assisting someone else to perform a mitzvah, I can recite a beracha on the other person’s behalf, and that includes even the beracha recited on the wine as part of performing the mitzvah.

There is one other exception to this rule: I may recite a beracha of benefit to teach my child how to recite it (for the purpose of *chinuch*), notwithstanding that I am not benefiting at the moment and would otherwise be unable to recite the beracha. As we will see shortly, reciting a beracha on fragrances is not a requirement on *motza’ei Shabbos*, but simply a consolation to the *neshamah yeseirah*. As such, if I cannot smell the fragrances, I cannot recite the beracha on them. If I have children who are old enough to be responsible to recite berachos but are not yet halachically adults, I can recite the beracha on *besamim* for them and have them smell the fragrances. Otherwise, someone who cannot smell fragrances may not recite the beracha of *besamim*.

V. No fragrance At this point, let us analyze the last of our opening questions: Zevulun asks, “I am on the high seas and have no *besamim* with me. Does that mean that I cannot recite havdalah until I locate some fragrance?”

Regarding the beracha recited on a flame as part of havdalah, the Gemara states, “We do not search to find a flame as we search to observe a mitzvah” (*Berachos* 53b), meaning that there is no requirement to hunt for a flame in order to recite the beracha of *borei me’orei ha’eish*. Regarding someone who has no fragrance available, the Rosh reasons that the same law applies, since the rationale for the beracha on a flame on *motza’ei Shabbos* is stronger than that for reciting a beracha on fragrances. Therefore, once the Gemara rules that there is no requirement to search for a flame, there is certainly no requirement to look for fragrances; thus, it is better to recite havdalah when all are assembled than to delay. This ruling is accepted by the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 297:1) and all later authorities.

Conclusion In a monumental essay, Rav Hirsch (*Bereishis* 8:21) explains that the expression *rei’ach nicho’ach*, usually translated as “a pleasant fragrance,” should more accurately be rendered, “an expression of compliance.” He demonstrates that the word *nicho’ach* means “giving satisfaction” and the concept of *rei’ach* is used because fragrance implies receiving a very slight impression of something that is distant. Thus, when a korban is offered as a *rei’ach nicho’ach*, it means that it shows a small expression of our fulfilling Hashem’s will. Similarly, our observing all the details of the laws of *Shabbos*, down to the minutia of the halachos on fragrances, demonstrates our praising Hashem for even His small kindnesses.

<https://www.bircas.org/chanukah-5786/>

Chanukah 5786

A Springboard to Thanking Hashem

By Rabbi Moshe Krieger, Yeshivas Bircas HaTorah (www.bircas.org)

Throughout Chanukah, we say in our prayers and in *bentching* the *Al Hanissim* prayer, which relates in detail the miraculous military victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greeks. Also, in *haneiros halalu*, we say that we are lighting the candles as a remembrance of Hashem’s great redemption of the Jewish nation at that time.

However, when the Talmud discusses the reason why the Sages enacted the holiday of Chanukah (*Shabbos* 21b), the military victory is barely mentioned, and the sages focus only on the miracle of the flask of oil, which

had enough oil to light only for one day, yet it remained lit for eight days until new, pure oil could be brought to the Beis Hamikdash.

There are clearly two main themes to Chanukah, the miraculous military victory and the miracle of the oil. Why is only one element present in our prayers, and the other present when discussing the basis for the *yom tov*? Rav Chaim Friedlander answers that the miraculous victory over the Greeks is for us the main miracle of Chanukah, because without that, the Jewish People could have been brought to extinction, *chalila*. As impressive as the miracle of the oil was, that alone would not have stopped the gentiles from making edicts against us, nor would it have ended the war. We praise Hashem on Chanukah for the fact that we’re still here, as a nation keeping His mitzvos!

However, for the Sages to institute that the days of Chanukah be special days of *Hallel* and *hodaah* (giving thanks to Hashem), this required a much stronger revelation than a military victory. This is because when considering the Chashmonaim’s victory over the Greeks, it could look as though in some small way, their going out to the battlefield to fight was what led to victory. Even though all could see that the Chashmonaim were a handful of kohanim and the Greeks were the most trained and equipped army of that era, still, whatever efforts the Chashmonaim made were enough to make the victory appear less than 100 percent miraculous. The miracle of the oil, however, was something that no human being could claim a part of. For such a miracle, the Sages decreed special days of *Hallel* and *hodaah*, but their intent was that this serve as the basis to recognize that just as the flask of oil was purely miraculous, so was the war. We’re expected to thank Hashem for the victory against the Greeks, but in order for us to recognize that this victory was Hashem’s alone, we first need the miracle of the flask of oil, which brings us to recognition and *hodaah*.

Rav Friedlander goes on to say that just as the miracle of the oil was intended to help us see that the war was purely a miracle, so too all of the miracles of Chanukah (war and oil alike) are expected to open our eyes to the fact that all of our lives are really miracles. Every day, the fact that we wake up in the morning, get out of bed unassisted and resume a day full of Torah and mitzvos — are these not open miracles? How many people don’t get up in the morning, *chalila*, or require assistance to do so? How often in our history were Jews unable to keep mitzvos due to religious persecution? Rav Friedlander bases this idea on the Ramban (*Shemos* 13:16), who states that from the great and grandiose miracles, we are expected to learn that all of our lives are miracles, and to thank Hashem for all of them.

The Alter of Kelm would say that this recognition of miracles answers the famous question of the Beis Yosef (*Orach Chaim* 670): Why do we light Chanukah candles for eight days? Is it because one day’s worth of oil in the Beis Hamikdash lit for eight days? If so, we should light for only seven days, because only after that first day could the burning of the oil be called a miracle!

The Alter of Kelm would say that we light for eight days because that first day was also a miracle — because nature is a miracle. In fact, there is no such thing as “nature,” meaning some natural flow of events that follows a charted, predictable course. There is no such thing! All of life is miracles! When we light the menorah that first day of Chanukah, this is recognition and a *hodaah* that what the gentiles call “nature” we also call “a miracle” and thank Hashem for!

Indeed, the misconception that there are “forces of nature” that act independently of a Creator — this was the heretical philosophy of the Greeks. Whatever we do to strengthen our emuna that all of our lives are miracles, particularly during Chanukah, is a new victory against the Greeks.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein points out that we should devote time to thinking into the details of our lives to see just how many things that happen to us can qualify as miracles. If we’re married, that didn’t just happen. If we have children, that too was a miracle. And livelihood? The Sages say that a man’s livelihood is no less a miracle than the Splitting of the Red Sea! (*Pesachim* 118a). How often were we suffering from ailments that one day disappeared? Did we thank Hashem for that? If not, let’s do it now!

And even before thinking about personal redemptions, what about the miracles that happen daily? As we mentioned, we woke up this morning, opened our eyes and could see. We were able to stand up straight, get dressed and walk on solid ground. Shouldn't we thank Hashem for all of these things? Each one of them merits a separate blessing in the *birchos hashachar*. Shouldn't we put more *kavana* into these brachos?

Moreover, let's talk openly with others about the miracles of our lives. If something good happens, publicize it! Tell your children: "Daddy was almost late for an appointment, but he made the bus!" If you felt *siyatta deShemaya* in finishing all of the Shabbos preparations on time, share this with the family. The more we speak about Hashem's miracles, the more a sense of gratitude and *hodaah* becomes a part of us.

When at a seuda together with the family, say: Where did this food come from? How many miracles did it take for us to have *challa*? First, the ground required rain, and then wheat kernels sprouted in the moist soil. Slowly, growth began emerging, a stalk and more wheat kernels. And how did it get to us? Hashem gave us money, etc...

Take a visit to the zoo with your family and speak about the wonders of Hashem and the myriad, picturesque creatures He gives life to!

Once, Rav Zilberstein paid a visit to a renowned talmid chacham who was suffering from cancer. The man was writhing in pain, yet he managed to greet Rav Zilberstein with a smile, and it was clear that despite his physical pain, he was in good spirits.

Rav Zilberstein asked him how he was able to withstand his pain so heroically, and the answer he received was a lesson in *hodaah*:

"It's true that I'm in pain, but I keep thinking, look at how much Hashem gave me throughout my life. I merited to spend many years studying Torah in good health. During those years, I married and merited a family, and I have nachas from all of them, even now, despite my illness. Yes, I'm in pain, but after all Hashem did for me, how can I complain? How can I just forget all the good I received already?"

"And what about us?" Rav Zilberstein would ask, as he recounted this incident to others. "How many times is everything going well, but one little thing goes wrong and we feel as if everything is bad? Do we even think about thanking Hashem at that time, for all the many good things that continue to happen?"

May we recognize Hashem's miracles and thank Him for them!

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiiy@theyeshiva.net> info@theyeshiva.net
date: Dec 11, 2025, 10:57 PM

How to Deal with Temptation & Toxic Thoughts

by Rabbi YY Jacobson

A Rare Musical Note in the Torah Captures the Struggle and how to Overcome It
Biblical Music

The Torah is well known as a book of words. Less known is the fact that it is a book of tunes. Each word of the Torah contains a musical note with which it is read and sung in synagogues whenever the Torah is read publicly.

This is what makes the reading of the Torah a challenging task. Since these notes are not transcribed in the Torah itself—they were transmitted orally from generation to generation—the person reading the Torah must memorize the appropriate note for each word.

These musical notes, passed down from Moses through the generations, are extremely meticulous and significant. They often expose us to a word's or a sentence's depth that we would never have appreciated from the word or sentence itself.

One of the rarest and most unusual musical notes in the Torah is known in Hebrew as the "shalsheles." No other written musical note of the Torah is rendered in a repetitive style except the shalsheles, which stubbornly repeats itself three times. The graphic notation of this note, too, looks like a streak of lightning, a "zigzag movement," a mark that goes repeatedly backward and forward. This unique musical note appears no more than four times in all of the Torah, three times in Genesis and once in Leviticus[1]. One of them is in this week's portion, Vayeishev, at a moment of high moral and psychological drama.

The Refusal

Here is the story:

Joseph is an extremely handsome teenager and his father Jacob's favorite child. He is sold into slavery by his brothers, who loathe him. Displayed on the Egyptian market, he is bought by a prominent Egyptian citizen, Potiphar, who ultimately chooses the slave to become the head of his household. There, Joseph attracts the lustful imagination of his master's wife. She desperately tries to engage him in a relationship, yet he steadfastly refuses her.

Here is the Torah's description[2]:

"Joseph was well-built and handsome in his appearance. After a while, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, 'Come to bed with me.' But he refused.

"He said: 'With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against G-d?'

Over the verb "but he refused," tradition has placed a shalsheles, the thrice-repeated musical note.

What is the significance of this rare note on this particular verb, so rare in the Torah?

There is one more intriguing detail in this narrative, concerning Joseph's response to the woman's proposition. When his master's wife asks him to lie with her, we would expect Joseph to first explain to her why he cannot accept her offer, and then conclude by saying "no." Yet the Torah tells us that the first thing Joseph did was refuse her. Only afterward does he justify his refusal. Why?

I will offer two fascinating interpretations. One comes from the 13th-century Spanish sage and commentator, Rabbi Yosef Ibn Caspi (1280-1345), in his commentary on this verse. The other comes from one of the great Polish Chassidic masters, Rabbi Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam (1815-1898), known as "the Shinever Rav," in his work *Divrei Yechezkel*.

The Struggle

According to Joseph Ibn Caspi, the musical note captures Joseph's inner doubt. The shalsheles is an unusual note. It goes up and down, up and down, as if unable to move forward to the next note, and it was meant to convey a psychological state of uncertainty and indecision. The graphic notation of the shalsheles itself looks like a streak of lightning, a "zigzag movement," a mark that goes repeatedly backwards and forwards. It conveys frozen motion, in which the agent is torn by inner conflict. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks defines it in an essay as "the music of ambivalence."

We can imagine, writes Rabbi Sacks[2*], the conflict in Joseph's mind at that moment. On the one hand, his entire moral sense said No. It would be a betrayal of everything his family stood for: their ethic of moral propriety and their strong sense of identity as children of the covenant. It would also be, as Joseph himself says, a betrayal of the Creator, and of Potiphar himself: "With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

And yet the temptation, tradition tells us[3], was intense. Joseph is a 17-year-old slave in a foreign country. He does not even own his body; his master exercises full control over his life, as was the fate of all ancient slaves. Joseph has not a single friend or relative in the world. One could only imagine his loneliness. Joseph would not need to return home in the evening to face a dedicated spouse or a spiritual father, nor would he have to go back to a family or a community of moral standing. His family's reputation would not be besmirched. He would remain alone after the event, just as he was alone before it.

In addition, we must recall the power possessed by this Egyptian noblewoman who was inciting Joseph. The Talmud[4] describes the techniques she used to persuade Joseph. "Every day," the Talmud says, "the wife of Potiphar would attempt to seduce him with words. Cloth she wore for him in the morning, she would not wear for him in the evening. Cloth she wore for him in the evening, she would not wear for him in the morning. She said to him, 'Surrender yourself to me.' He answered her 'No.' She threatened him, 'I shall confine you in prison... I shall subdue your proud stature... I will blind your eyes,'" but Joseph refused her. She then gave him a huge sum of money, but he did not budge.

At the end, she followed through on her threat, having him incarcerated in prison in an Egyptian dungeon on the false charges that he attempted to violate her. (At the end, he was freed after 12 years.)

The Talmud[5] gives a graphic description of his inner torment:

"The image of his father appeared to him in the window and said, 'Joseph, your brothers' names are destined to be inscribed on the stones of the [high priest's] apron, and you will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased? Do you want to be called an adulterer?'"

The shalsheles is an elegant commentary on Joseph's struggle. A slave, with no realistic hope of rescue, was he to become an Egyptian, with all the promiscuity that implied? Or would he remain faithful to his past, his conscience, his identity? In the end, Joseph refuses, but not without deep inner struggle.

Rabbi Joseph Ibn Caspi, writing in the 13th century, adds a vulnerable comment about himself: It is quite possible, he writes, that someone else with the same name would have chosen another path... He is referring to himself, as his name was Yosef, suggesting that he might have failed under those circumstances.

A Thundering No

How did Joseph overcome the enormous challenge?

This too is captured (according to the *Divrei Yechezkel*) by the rare musical note of the Shlasheles. Joseph may have suffered internally from ambivalence. But once he made the decision, he was all in.

Aware of the danger in front of him, Joseph presented the woman with a thundering "no." As the thrice-repetitive "shalsheles" note suggests, Joseph, in unwavering determination, declared three times: "No! No! No!" Forget about it, I will not do this! No buts, ifs, or maybes. Once Joseph decided on his course of action, there was no negotiation, no giving in. Only afterward did Joseph allow himself the indulgence of the rational argument against adultery.

When it comes to temptation, addiction, and toxic cravings and thoughts, you can't become a negotiator, because then you will remain in the obsessive loop of anxiety and addiction. You must be determined, ruthless, and single-minded. You must, with calm conviction, repeat the same "no" over and over again. Never allow room for nuance, negotiation, or ambivalence. The moment you begin explaining and justifying your behavior, you are likely to lose the battle. Only after an absolute and non-negotiable "no" can you proceed with the intellectual argument behind your decision.

The Push

There is an insightful expression about the way a person should deal with immoral and destructive thoughts, impulses, and fantasies. "You must push them away with both of your hands," says the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi in his *Tanya*[6].

What does it mean to push away a thought "with two hands?"

At times, you can push away a negative thought with one hand only. By fighting and arguing with the thought and the impulse, you give it validation. In effect, while pushing it away with one hand, you are inviting it to return with your second hand.

If you engage in these types of internal arguments and debates, you always lose. It is exactly what these thoughts hope for: To keep you locked into an endless loop of self-criticism, guilt, shame, and anxiety.

Pushing an impulse away with two hands means that you simply and silently dismiss it from your brain. Without argument, fanfare, or drama, you let it go. You make it very clear that you will not be going down that rabbit hole, and you must move on to alternative thoughts and actions. You do not validate it in any way, not even by arguing against it. You simply do not attribute any power or significance to it. That is what we call pushing it away "with both hands."

You do it without guilt or shame, without blaming yourself for how bad and sick you are. You do it with regulation and calmness, knowing who you really are at your core, and how you want to show up to life right now. From a regulated space, you allow these thoughts to pass through you, like the black clouds in the sky, so the sun can begin shining.

At a later point, you will have the serenity and mental bandwidth to discover the origin of these thoughts, why and how they developed, and how to unburden them from their need to drive you mad. For those of us who deal with anxiety and an inner critic who never goes on vacation, we will have to take time to address the origin of these thoughts, so that we do not suffer endlessly. But right now, in the heat and anxiety of the moment, learn how to let go of these nasty thoughts with a quiet grace, and without an argument, coming from your inner self-respect and clarity.

That is why the Hebrew word, "and he refused, Vayemaen," is the same letters as the Hebrew word "and he believed, Vayaaman," because the power to refuse these thoughts with such calm and conviction comes from your deep faith in G-d and in your own Divinity. You have an inner knowing that this action and these thoughts are a betrayal of G-d and of your own deepest truth. That faith allows

you to avoid the confusion of not knowing who you are and how you want to proceed. You can just say: "This is not what I want for my life."

In this story of Joseph, then, we are given a timeless lesson of how to deal with disturbing, immoral, and debilitating thoughts and inclinations. Do not try to strike deals with them, or to convince them otherwise. They are fighting for their life, and will do anything to keep you stuck. Just say: No! No! No! We are not going down this path.

They will accuse you of being ignorant, dishonest, and stupid. So what? You will come out with a happier marriage and a meaningful life.[7]

(Please make even a small and secure contribution to help us continue our work. Click here.)

[1] Genesis 19:16; 24:12; 39:8; Leviticus 8:23. [2] Genesis 39:6-9. [2*] <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayera/the-music-of-ambivalence/> [3] In the continuation of the narrative, the Torah states (Genesis 39:11-12): "There was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work, and none of the household staff was inside. She grabbed him by his cloak and pleaded, 'Lie with me.' He ran away from her, leaving his cloak in her hand, and he fled outside." What is the meaning of the phrase that Joseph "entered the house do to his work, and none of the household staff was inside?" What type of work did Joseph come to do? The Midrash suggests that the "work" Joseph came to do was to yield to the advances of his master's wife. After all of her unceasing pleas, Joseph finally succumbed. Only at the last moment did he abstain (Bereishis Rabah 87:7. Tanchumah 8-9. Zohar Vayechi 222a. See also Sotah 36b, quoted in Rashi to Genesis ibid). [4] Yuma 36a. [5] Sotah 36b. [6] Tanya chapter 12. [7] This essay on based on *Divrei Yechezkel* by the great Chassidic master Rabbi Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam, known as "the Shinever Rav," as well as *Tanya* chapters 27-28.