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date: Dec 20, 2023, 4:55 PM
subject: Insights into Halacha - Fasting on Friday

Fasting on Friday

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Asarah B'Teves: Not Your Ordinary Fast Day

One of the fascinating characteristics of 5784 is that the Taanis Tzibbur of Asarah B'Teves (the 10th of Teves) will fall out on Friday. Or to be precise, this Friday. This remarkable status of a 'Friday Fast' is actually exclusive to Asarah B'Teves – as it is the only one that Klal Yisrael actually observes as a communal fast on a Friday.[1]

Although to many the only notable aspect of Asarah B'Teves is that it is by far the shortest fast day in the Jewish calendar for anyone in the Northern Hemisphere (my heartfelt sympathies to the South Americans, So'Africans, Aussies, and Kiwis), nonetheless, it turns out that the Fast of Asarah B'Teves is actually quite unique.

Indubitably, to maintain this distinction of being the only Taanis Tzibbur that we actually do observe on Friday, there is much more to the Fast of Asarah B'Teves than meets the eye. Indeed, upon closer examination, Asarah B'Teves has several exceptional characteristics that are not found in any other fast day.

Why This Fast?

The reason given for fasting on Asarah B'Teves is that it is the day that the wicked Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar started his siege of Yerushalayim,[2] foreshadowing the beginning of the end of the first Beis Hamikdash, which culminated with its destruction on Tisha B'Av several years later. Therefore, Chazal declared it a public fast, one of four public fast days that memorialize different aspects of the catastrophes and national tragedies associated with the destruction of both Batei HaMikdash.[3]

A Friday Fast

However, of these four public fast days, as mentioned previously, only Asarah B'Teves is actually observed on a Friday. Proof to Asarah B'Teves' exceptionality can perhaps be gleaned from the words of Yechezkel HaNavi referring to Asarah B'Teves, that the siege of Yerushalayim leading up to the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash transpired "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh – in the middle of this day,"[4] implying that the fast must always be observed on that exact day, no matter the conflicting occurrence. This would help explain why it is fully observed on Friday, with no dispensation given.[5]

Yet, this uniqueness is fairly interesting, as there is a whole debate in the Gemara about how to conduct fasts on a Friday, when we must also take kavod Shabbos into account,[6] implying that it is a common occurrence. However, according to our calendar, a communal Friday fast is only applicable with Asarah B'Teves, and it actually does occur quasi-frequently. The last few times Asarah B'Teves fell out on a Friday were in 1996, 2001, 2010, 2013 (the latter of which, quite appropriately, coincided with a "Yerushalmi Blizzard"[7]), and 2020.

Asarah B'Teves is actually next expected to occur on a Friday next year – in 2025 (5785; meaning a rare back-to-back occurrence),[8] followed by a nine-year gap, occurring again in 2034 (5795), and then 2037 (5798). In another interesting calendrical twist, but not the Jewish calendar, due to the differences between the Jewish lunar-based year and the Gregorian solar-based year, this fast, curiously (and perhaps quite appropriately) fell out on December 25th[9] the last time it was observed on a Friday, several years ago, back in 5781/2020.

Halachos of a Friday Fast

The halachos of a Friday fast generally parallel those of a regular fast day; including Aneinu, Selichos, and the Kriyas HaTorah of "Vayechal"[10] twice (along with the haftarah of

“Dirshu” at Mincha), albeit with no Tachanun or Avinu Malkeinu at Mincha, as it is Erev Shabbos.[11] Another practical difference is that even those who advise not to bathe on a regular fast day, nevertheless maintain that one should do so on a Friday fast L’Kavod Shabbos, with hot water as usual.[12]

Until When?

On the hand, even though there is some debate in the Rishonim as to the Gemara’s intent with its conclusion that “Halacha – Mesaneh U’Mashlim, a Friday fast should be completed,” even though it means one will enter Shabbos famished (a situation that is normally disfavored), and hence, whether or not one may be mekabel Shabbos early and thereby end the fast before nightfall,[13] nonetheless, the halacha follows the Shulchan Aruch and Rema that since Asarah B’Teves is a public fast (Taanis Tzibbur) and not a Taanis Yachid, one must indeed fast the whole day and complete it at nightfall (Tzeis HaKochavim) before making Kiddush.[14]

Although most fasts can be broken immediately after the Taanis ends, nonetheless, due to a separate halacha – that of any food and drink, even water, being proscribed on any Leil Shabbos until Kiddush is performed,[15] this Tzom actually only concludes with Kiddush.

As fasting into Shabbos is discouraged, many Poskim maintain that it is preferable to daven Maariv somewhat earlier than usual on this Friday night, to enable making Kiddush, and breaking the fast exactly at Tzeis HaKochavim.[16] Even those who maintain that one should wait until Zman Rabbeinu Tam (Shiur Arba Mil, commonly observed as 72 minutes after Shkiya) to break one’s fast, are of the opinion that one should still daven Maariv earlier this Erev Shabbos Asarah B’Teves than usual, in order make Kiddush immediately at this Zman.[17] Some advise that it is preferable to begin the Leil Shabbos Seudah directly with Kiddush and only recite Shalom Aleichem and Eishes Chayil after being somewhat satiated and relaxed.[18]

Three Day Fast?

Another fascinating and unique aspect of this fast, is that according to the special Selichos prayers recited on Asarah B’Teves, we are actually fasting for two other days of tragedy as well; the 8th and 9th of Teves.[19] In fact, and although in his Beis Yosef commentary the great Rav Yosef Karo notes that he has never seen nor heard of anyone fasting on these days, nevertheless, both the Tur and in his own later Shulchan Aruch, Rav Karo asserts that it is proper to try to fast on all three days.[20] However, it is important to note that of the three, only Asarah B’Teves was actually mandated as a public fast day.[21] As we are essentially fasting on Asarah B’Teves for two other fasts as well, this may be another reason why Asarah B’Teves is observed on a Friday as well, as opposed to other fasts.

The 8th of Teves

On the 8th of Teves, King Ptolemy II (285-246 B.C.E.) forced 72 sages separately to translate the Torah into Greek (the Septuagint a.k.a. ‘The Targum Shivim’). Although miracles guided their work and all of the sages made the same slight but necessary amendments, nevertheless this work is described as “darkness descending on the world for three days,” as it was now possible for the uneducated to possess a superficial, and frequently flawed understanding of the Torah, as well as providing the masses with a mistaken interpretation of true morality.[22] Hence, a proper day to fast.

The 9th of Teves

Although several decisors, following the Megillas Taanis, write that the reason for fasting on the 9th of Teves is unknown,[23] nonetheless many sources, including the Kol Bo and the Selichos recited on Asarah B’Teves, as well as many later authorities, explain that this is the day on which Ezra HaSofer, as well as possibly his partner in rebuilding the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael after the 70 year Galus Bavel, Nechemiah, died. Ezra, the Gadol HaDor at the beginning of the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash, had a tremendous impact upon the nascent returning Jewish community of Eretz Yisrael. He drastically improved the spiritual state of the Jewish people and established many halachic takanos, many of which still apply today.[24] With his passing, the community started sliding from the great spiritual heights Ezra had led them. Additionally, since Ezra was the last of the prophets,[25] his passing signified the end of prophecy.

Other sources attribute fasting on this day to the passings of other specific Tzaddikim on this day, including the enigmatic Shimon HaKalphus and Rav Yosef HaNaggid, or to the birth of ‘Oso HaIsh’, the founder of Christianity, in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were R”l murdered.[26] [27] The Sefer HaToda’ah posits that it’s possible that Chazal’s expression of “darkness descending on the world for three days” alludes to the triple woes of these three days: the 8th, 9th, and 10th of Teves.[28]

A Shabbos Fast?!

The third and possibly most important attribute of Asarah B’Teves is that according to the Abudraham, if Asarah B’Teves would potentially fall out on Shabbos, we would all actually be required to fast on Shabbos![29] (Notwithstanding that with our calendar this is an impossibility.[30]) He cites proof to this from the words of Yechezkel referring to Asarah B’Teves that the siege transpired “B’Etzem HaYom HaZeh,” implying that the fast must always be observed on that exact day, no matter the conflicting occurrence – not only Friday, but even on Shabbos.

Yet, the Abudraham’s statement is astounding, as the only fast that halachically takes precedence over Shabbos is Yom Kippur, the only Biblically mandated fast. How can one of the Rabbinic minor fasts push off the Biblical Shabbos? Additionally, Asarah B’Teves commemorates merely the start

of the siege, and not any actual destruction. How can it be considered a more important fast than Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the actual destruction and loss of both of our Batei HaMikdash, which get pushed off when it falls on Shabbos?[31]

In fact, the Beis Yosef questions this declaration of the Abudraham, stating that he “does not know how the Abudraham could know” such a ruling. As an aside, this does not seem to be the actual halacha, as although we find that many defended this logic, nonetheless other Rishonim, including Rashi and the Rambam, as well as the Tur and Shulchan Aruch and later poskim explicitly rule that if Asarah B'Teves falls out on Shabbos it does indeed get pushed off.[32] [33]

Commencement Is Catastrophic

Several authorities, including Rav Yonason Eibenschutz and the Bnei Yissaschar,[34] understand the Abudraham's enigmatic statement as similar to the famous Gemara in Taanis (29a) regarding Tisha B'Av. It seems that historically the Beis HaMikdash only started to burn toward the end of the 9th of Av (Tisha B'Av) and actually burned down on the 10th. Yet, Chazal established the fast on the 9th, since “Aschalta D'Paranusah Adifa,” meaning that the beginning of a tragedy is considered the worst part. Likewise, they maintain that since the siege on Asarah B'Teves was the harbinger to and commencement of the long chain of tragedies that ended with the Beis HaMikdash in ruins and the Jewish people in exile, its true status belies the common perception of it as a minor fast, and potentially has the ability to push off Shabbos.

Indeed, the Midrash Tanchuma[35] teaches that it was already fitting for the Bais HaMikdash to actually be destroyed on Asarah B'Teves, but Hashem, in His incredible mercy, pushed off the destruction to the summertime, so that Klal Yisrael would not have to be exiled in the cold. Hence, Asarah B'Teves's role as the ‘beginning of the end’ underlies the severity of this fast day.

The famed Chasam Sofer[36] takes this a step further. He wrote that the reason Chazal established a fast for the siege on Asarah B'Teves, as opposed to every other time Yerushalayim was under siege over the millennia, is that on that day in the Heavenly Courtroom it was decided that the Bais HaMikdash was to be destroyed a few years hence. There is a well known Talmudic dictum that any generation in which the Beis HaMikdash has not been rebuilt is as if it has been destroyed again.[37] Therefore, he explains, every Asarah B'Teves the Heavenly Court convenes and decrees a new Churban. He adds though that, conversely, a proper fast on Asarah B'Teves has the potential to avert future Churbanos.

Accordingly, we are not fasting exclusively due to past calamities, but rather, similar to a Taanis Chalom, a fast for a dream, we are fasting to help prevent a tragedy from occurring. The Chasam Sofer even refers to such a fast as an oneg, a

delight, as our fasting will help stave off potential future catastrophes. That is why the fast of Asarah B'Teves, even though it is considered a minor fast, nonetheless has the potential to possibly override Shabbos. These explanations would also certainly elucidate why we would fast on a Friday specifically for Asarah B'Teves, while pushing off other fasts that do.

The Rambam famously exhorts us to remember the real meaning underlying a fast day. It's not just a day when we miss our morning coffee! The purpose of fasting is to focus on the spiritual side of the day and use it as a catalyst for inspiration towards Teshuva.[38]

Perhaps, with the observance of a quasi-rare Friday fast, this may be a bit easier to do than usual. In this merit, may the words of the Navi Zechariah, “The Fast of the Fourth (month, 17th of Tamuz), the Fast of the Fifth (month, Tisha B'Av), the Fast of the Seventh (month, Tzom Gedalyah), and the Fast of the Tenth (month, Asarah B'Teves) shall be (changed over) for celebration and joy for the household of Yehuda”[39] be fulfilled speedily and in our days.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of M'Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Halacha and ‘Insights Into Halacha,’ serves as the Sho'el U'Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please e-mail the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

Rabbi Spitz's recent English halacha sefer, “Insights Into Halacha - Food: A Halachic Analysis,” (Mosaica/Feldheim)

contains more than 500 pages and features over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing a myriad of halachic issues relating to food, in an engaging manner. It is now available online and in bookstores everywhere.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5784-vayigash/>

Parshas Vayigash

“No Man” Signifies That It Was All Part of a Divine Plan By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Posted on December 20, 2023 (5784)

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1274 – Honoring Grandparents Revisited. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Vayigash must be one of the most dramatic parshiyos in the Torah. Yehudah pleads one final time “How can I go back up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father!” (Bereshis 44:34). The pasuk then says “And Yosef could not endure in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, ‘Remove everyone from before me!’...” (Bereshis 45:1)

Even though throughout all these parshiyos, Yosef has been giving the impression that he is not Yosef and he had been

making his brothers really sweat, he can no longer do that. The viceroy of Mitzrayim certainly always had attendants, staff and servants in his presence. He had not been alone with his brothers. He ordered everyone other than his brothers to leave the room. Then the pasuk concludes: "...Thus no man stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers." (ibid.)

But this conclusion of pasuk 45:1 is redundant! The beginning of that pasuk already says that Yosef ordered everyone out of the room. Why do we need the end of the pasuk to restate the fact that no man stood with Yosef when he made himself known to his brothers?

I saw a beautiful answer given to this question, written in the name of Rabbi Shmuel Brazil. In order to appreciate this answer, I will give you an analogy:

About a year-and-a-half ago (on the first day of bein hazemanim before Pesach), I was working at my desk, and I had some errands to run. I knew I had to go, but I decided that I wanted to finish something first. I stuck around for a couple of minutes longer. I finished what I had to do. I then drove down Mt. Wilson Lane, making a right turn onto Reisterstown Road, as I must have done thousands of times in my life. I was turning by the green light and suddenly, the next thing I knew a car flew into me. I wound up in the corner of that little shopping strip on the corner of Mt. Wilson and Reisterstown Road. I didn't know what happened. I asked myself "Did I go through a red light? What just happened to me?"

Within several minutes, I found out exactly what had happened: There was a fugitive of justice who was wanted for kidnapping and attempted murder in Washington D.C. He crossed state lines, making it a federal case. The United States Marshall Service was chasing after him. The marshals went up Reisterstown Road and this fugitive went down Reisterstown Road. He must have been going 70 or 80 miles per hour. The cops were in hot pursuit. This fugitive came to the red light on Mt. Wilson Lane and Reisterstown Road. After kidnapping and attempted murder, a red light was not about to stop him. He plowed into one car, plowed into a second car, and then plowed into my car before plowing into a truck which finally stopped him from going any further.

He got out of his car and started running towards the woods. The marshals ran after him and beat him to a pulp. In the meantime, my car was totaled. I am thinking in my mind that I should be suing the United States Government: Frand vs. the United States of America. I was disabused of that notion because a person cannot sue the U.S. Government when they are after somebody. At any rate, Baruch Hashem, I walked away from the incident without a scratch, despite the fact that my car was totaled. The insurance gave me a nice settlement, v'nomar Amen! But my initial thought was that had I gotten up from my desk when I had originally intended (two or three minutes earlier), this would have never happened to me. It was

only because I left my house when I did, and because I was at Reisterstown Road at that specific time, that I was involved in this multiple vehicle traffic incident.

Such a thought is kefira (heresy). For whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam wanted me to get into that accident. The reason is between me and the Ribono shel Olam. The way to look at what happened is not that because I waited the few extra minutes, I was involved in an accident. Rather, the proper perspective of the matter is that it was decreed in Heaven that I should be involved in that accident, and consequently, I hesitated leaving home for a few extra minutes so that I would be in that place at that time to be involved in that accident. This is the way a person must look at life.

We see this many times with elderly parents. I knew a very elderly gentleman who was living with one of his daughters in New York. He decided to come down to live with his daughter in Baltimore, and not long afterwards, he died. Everyone's reaction is "If he would have stayed in New York, this would not have happened. The schlepping and the effort of the relocation were too much for him. That is why he died." No. That is not true. He died then because when he was born, it was decreed upon him exactly when he would die and where he would die.

That is the way a person needs to look at life. We should never engage in "What if?" scenarios. We believe in Hashgocha Pratis (Personal Divine Providence). We wind up in a certain place at a certain time because the Ribono shel Olam wants us there at that time.

Rav Shmuel Brazil says beautifully: "Yosef ordered all the people out of the room 'v'lo amad ish ito' (and no man remained with him)." Who was this "v'lo amad ish ito"? Who was this man?

Before answering this question, consider another pasuk all the way back in Parshas Vayeshev. Yaakov tells Yosef to go and check out where his brothers are. Yosef starts wandering and he can't find his brothers. The pasuk says, "And a man found him, and behold he was blundering in the field; the man asked him 'What do you seek?'" (Bereshis 37:15) Rashi there says this man was the Angel Gavriel. The Ribono shel Olam put Gavriel over there in order that he should meet Yosef and direct Yosef to Dosan, where he would meet up with his brothers.

That, says Rav Brazil, is the man the pasuk is referring to here in Parshas Vayigash where it says "And there was no man that stood with him." Yosef did not say "You know what? If I would not have met that man all the way back then, I would have come home to my father and said to him, 'Guess what? I can't find my brothers.'" Yosef did not let the thought enter his head that had he not met that man, he would not have met his brothers, and the brothers would not have sold him as a slave, and he would not have gone down to Mitzrayim, and he would not have been in the dungeon, etc., etc., etc.

The pasuk says “the man was not standing with him” to emphasize that Yosef realized that what happened to him was not at all attributable to the chance appearance of “that man,” but rather, it was all part of a Divine plan. The Ribono shel Olam wanted this entire long and difficult story to occur.

A Simple Pshat in the Wagons Rejuvenating Yaakov

I was recently sitting at the same table as Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer at a wedding. Rabbi Hopfer told me the following vort:

After Yosef revealed his true identity to his brothers, Yosef instructs them to bring their father, Yaakov, down to Mitzrayim. The brothers returned to Canaan and told Yaakov the whole story: “Yosef is still alive and he is the ruler over the entire land of Egypt; but he had a turn of heart, for he did not believe them. And they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived.” (Bereshis 45:26-27)

The sight of those wagons rejuvenated Yaakov, causing him to realize that Yosef was still alive.

We spoke in the past of the Medrash quoted by Rashi that the wagons (agalos) were a special sign that Yosef sent to his father, reminding Yaakov that the last Torah section they had studied together before they were separated for so many years was Eglah Arufah (the decapitated calf). The hint was based on the similarity between the word eglah and the word agala.

However, there can also be a p’shuto shel mikra (simple reading of the text): When Yaakov saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him and his family to Mitzrayim, his spirit returned to him. Why?

This can be understood with an analogy:

There is a fine pious Jew who lives in Brooklyn. He has a son who is “more modern,” who does not exactly follow in his father’s footsteps. The son goes off to college, which does not do much for his ruchniyus. He is still an Orthodox Jew, but not exactly on the same spiritual level as his father. He meets a girl. The father is not so happy with whom his son married. Then the son and his wife decide to move to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The father in Brooklyn misses his son. He calls him up and says “Son, it has been so long since I have seen you. I want to come visit you in New Mexico.” The son says, “You will schlep all the way to Santa Fe?” “Yes. I want to see you.” The last thing in the world this son wants is for his father from Brooklyn to come and see how he lives in Santa Fe. The father will see so many things which will displease him: How the house is run, how the wife dresses, how she acts. He will look in the refrigerator and see who knows what.

Seeking any way to avoid his father coming to Santa Fe, the son says to the father, “Dad, it is too big a deal for you to come from Brooklyn to Santa Fe. I will come to see you!” Why does he suggest that? It is because the last thing he wants is for the father to see how he lives in his new location. (I actually was

in Santa Fe and saw the Chabad of Santa Fe, but it is far from an established Jewish community.)

Yosef was in Mitzrayim. He was away for so many years. He was cut off from any type of support system. There wasn’t even a Chabad of Mitzrayim! Yaakov could have thought “Who knows what could have happened to Yosef? What does he look like? What does his house look like?”

But what does Yosef do? He sends wagons to Yaakov to bring him to Mitzrayim so he can see how Yosef is living there! Yaakov felt, if Yosef is ready for me to see him and how he lives in his home territory, then I know one thing – he is still Yosef, my son. He is still Yosef haTzadik. Once Yaakov perceives that, his spirit is rejuvenated.

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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 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.

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Feeling the Joy and Pain of Others

The moment Yosef has been dreaming about for twenty-two years is about to occur. Yosef goes out to greet his father with great anticipation. Rashi comments that he even prepared his own chariot rather than delegating the task to others because of his intense enthusiasm. One can understand the source of these intense feelings. Having been forcibly removed from his father's loving home and not knowing if his father was still alive had caused him such personal suffering for so long. It was only natural for this long-awaited reunion to be a great source of personal joy for Yosef. Yet, when the Torah describes the actual moment they meet, the phrase that is used is, "vayera eilav" - Yosef appeared to Yaakov. Rather than focusing on Yosef seeing his father, the emphasis is on his being seen by Yaakov. At the greatest moment of personal joy Yosef realized how much Yaakov had been dreaming about possibly seeing his beloved son again. Yosef immediately changed the focus of the moment to how he can bring joy to his father rather than focusing on his own personal happiness.

Yosef's ability to focus on others even at times that were meaningful to him is alluded to earlier in the parsha. As he cries tears of joy upon revealing himself to his brothers, and reuniting especially with Binyamin, Chazal saw a deeper meaning in those tears. As he embraced his younger brother Binyamin he shed tears for the Beis Hamikdash that would one day be destroyed. Yosef saw the world as being greater than

himself. Even during intense personal moments, he sensed the national suffering that would result from the churban. Yosef felt the joy of others and cried for the pain of others.

Yosef learned this trait of selflessness from his mother. Rochel had waited for seven years to marry Yaakov, but at the moment that would have been her greatest joy she realized that her sister Leah would be subject to suffering tremendous embarrassment. Rather than enjoy her own moment of joy, she sacrificed everything for her sister. Many centuries later Rochel would once again turn her concern toward others. After the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, Rochel approaches Hashem to cry for her children. Actually, most of the exiles at this time were Leah's descendants. Rochel's son Yosef's children had gone into exile long ago. It was primarily the tribe of Yehuda who was suffering at this time. Yet, in Rochel's eyes if any Jew was suffering it was as if her own were in pain.

This Friday, Asara B'Teves, is an opportune time to focus on the pain of others. The Rambam describes one who doesn't feel the suffering and join in the fast days of the community as one who has completely distanced oneself from the Jewish People. During these very difficult times, we must constantly remind ourselves of the pain of our fellow Jews.

Chazal teach us that only those who cry for Yerushalayim will merit to rejoice in its rebuilding. May the time of tears come to an end for the Jewish people and may we very soon rejoice together. We look forward to the day that Asara B' Teves, together with the other days of national tragedy, will be transformed to become days of joy and celebration.

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<https://jewishlink.news/silent-heroes-sacred-callings/>

Silent Heroes, Sacred Callings

By Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Jewish Link | December 21, 2023 Heroes everywhere.

During our nation's war against evil, heroes have emerged from every sector of our people. Soldiers, reservists, first responders of Oct 7, wives of soldiers, volunteers from across the world, and simple people of faith. Among all these brave warriors one quiet group of heroes stands out. Those who attended the slain victims of this massacre endangered their lives as well as their mental well-being in providing honor to those from whom it was so violently taken. As the horrific images so brutally demonstrated, many victims were badly mutilated and, in some cases, burned beyond recognition. The silent and strong heroes who identified and buried the victims afforded one final semblance of dignity to the dehumanized bodies which had once cradled human souls.

The silent courage of these heroes showcased how deeply we value the dignity of a human body even after life has departed from it. Showing final respects and honoring the dead is deeply rooted both in the ethics of Torah and in our life-revering culture.

The mysterious ceremony of “egla arufa” typifies the care and dignity we afford the dead. If a dead and unattended-to body is discovered, it isn't quietly buried. Instead, the public ceremony of egla arufa is conducted which includes confessionals by the leaders of the local towns. Leaders of nearby villages are held “accountable” because a person died on their watch, even though they were not directly culpable for the death. Tragic death cannot simply be ignored.

You would think that an anonymous John Doe discovered in a barren field would not justify a public response. Typically, unidentified bodies belong to people who inhabit the margins of society. When established members of society go missing, family members and neighborhood friends conduct a search. Presumably, the unidentified corpse described in the Torah is a homeless person without much family, who has long ago fallen off the social radar.

Yet, it is precisely when the dignity of human life is most vulnerable that it must be strongly reinforced. Specifically at this moment, when life can be easily taken for granted, the shared sanctity of every human being must be underscored. The public ceremony of egla arufa demonstrates that every human being is created equal in the eyes of Hashem, and each possesses divine dignity. By burying the unidentified corpse, we honor the imprint of Hashem within each human being.

Surprisingly, the midrash asserts that Yosef, in his first correspondence to his father, alluded to the egla arufa ceremony, reminding Ya'akov that decades earlier, they had jointly studied this topic. Evidently Yosef's referencing of egla arufa delivered an important message to his father. Though initially Yosef was tragically ripped from his family and sold into slavery, he had now emerged as the second most powerful man on earth and was single-handedly steering a hungry world through a nightmarish famine. Joseph's prescient wisdom and tireless dedication saved millions of lives. By preserving life and protecting human dignity, Joseph was, in effect, implementing the doctrines of egla arufa.

The vicious assault of October 7 included numerous acts of horror and barbaric indecency. One of the most repulsive aspects of this massacre was the manner in which human bodies were treated. As if torturing and murdering in cold blood weren't sufficiently nauseating, the terrorists mutilated and dismembered lifeless bodies. Pure and unadulterated evil, destruction and violence for absolutely no purpose. Their grotesque crimes demonstrated how little they regard human dignity and how cheap life is in the eyes of Islamic terrorists.

Their dehumanizing crimes made our own response and our own gentle treatment of dead bodies even more critical. Our silent heroes, including soldiers, Zaka volunteers and countless others who spent weeks identifying and burying victims, solemnly restored dignity to those who had been twice victimized—in life and in death. In providing this honor, many subjected themselves to hideous sights and unforgettable

images which will forever mar their inner conscience. These heroes of human dignity paid a steep price in their sacred calling of providing honor to those beyond the veil of life. In many instances they operated under fire, risking their lives to restore dignity to lifeless bodies.

This quiet heroism underscores the clash of ideologies within this military war: a battle is being waged between a culture of death and a culture of human dignity. Between a culture which cheapens human life and one which treasures it. Our war isn't merely a military encounter but a clash of cultures between competing value systems.

Though these murderers speak in the name of religion they are nothing more than brutish atheists masquerading as religious people. They describe a god who doesn't exist. Denying the traits of God is tantamount to denying His presence.

We believe that all powerful Hashem lovingly created Man and endowed him with Divine-like traits of free will, consciousness and creativity. Our respect for every human being acknowledges Man as the masterpiece of creation. We respect this Divine masterpiece even when life has departed from it. Hashem's Divine image isn't limited to our souls but to the bodies which once cradled divine essence.

By defiling human bodies these charlatans scorn any notion of tzelem Elokim, image of God. These violent beasts fictionalize a god of bloodlust and of anger, not one of compassion and mercy. By mutilating dead bodies, they mutilate the image of Hashem in our world. By mocking human dignity these violent murderers haven't just committed a grave theological sin but have also doomed themselves and their cultures to failure and futility. Belief in human dignity isn't just a religious value but powers human achievement and human progress. Through our God-given creativity we believe that we are empowered to improve our world and redeem it for Mankind. If Hashem is compassionate, he desires human prosperity. If Hashem covets well-being, we must be His agents to advance and improve our world. Prolonged human suffering isn't consistent with a merciful Hashem who crafted human beings in His image. A culture which reveres human dignity is religiously driven to improve and advance the human condition.

A culture with no concern for human dignity provides little incentive for change, growth or progress. When life is cheap, suffering is acceptable. When suffering is acceptable, progress is stunted. By mutilating bodies these barbarians don't just disfigure Hashem. They maim their own society and dismember themselves of any real progress or advancement.

It is tragic but ironic that terrorists spent billions of dollars building machineries of death. Terror tunnels have absolutely no ulterior purpose of function other than havoc and death. Instead of investing in human beings, these bloodthirsty terrorists invested in death. How much potential and how much human capital was completely wasted in the pursuit of blood and revenge? How many lives could have been

improved had the monies been spent on life rather than on death.

Our battle continues. They viciously defile life, and we gently protect it. They dehumanize and we revere. They holler over corpses while we honor the stillness of the departed. They will sink into their own tunnels of hatred while we build towers of achievement. There is only one winner in this clash of cultures.

Afterward

On my recent trip to the USA, I was deeply impressed by the profound engagement of Jewish communities in the war in Israel and how deeply sorrowed people are about the ongoing tragedy. I was also often asked how overseas Jewry could better identify with the suffering of Israelis. Perhaps the Shabbat prayers on behalf of IDF soldiers should be prefaced by a brief eulogy of a soldier who fell in battle. Additionally, this brief eulogy could be coupled with one of the many stories of heroism of the fighters valiantly defending our land and people. Personalization of the war may help people more deeply feel the joint pain of our people who have made such selfless sacrifices.

The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has semicha and a bachelor's in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York.

<https://www.ou.org/asara-bteves-us-and-them/>

Asara b'Teves, Us and Them

By Rabbi Moshe Hauer

21 DEC 2023

Fast days such as Asara b'Teves are opportunities to remember the past so that we will not be condemned to repeat it, moving us to recognize that our current challenges come from being stuck in past failures. As Rambam wrote (Hilchos Taanis 5:1):

"There are days when the entire Jewish people fast because of the calamities that occurred to them then, to awaken hearts and initiate the paths of repentance. This will serve as a reminder of our own bad behaviors and of the behavior of our ancestors which resembles our present behavior, bringing calamity upon them and upon us. By reminding ourselves of these matters, we will repent and improve."

This year's commemoration of this tragic anniversary comes during our own profoundly difficult period of darkness, moving us to consider how our own bad behavior resembles that of our ancestors and how we can fix it through a serious teshuva that will spare us from perpetuating our current state of churban.

Elementary, my dear Watson. There is no mystery here.

We are still in mourning over the Bais Hamikdash that was destroyed due to sinas chinam, the spiteful hatred and internal discord that we continue to stubbornly embrace, "the behavior of our ancestors that resembles our present behavior."

The months preceding the attack of Simchas Torah were marked by fracture and division within the Jewish people. The battle over judicial reform in Israel quickly morphed into an existential struggle over the character of the state, pitting Jew against Jew with a startling level of rancor and bitterness. It was winner-take-all, with precious little in the way of apparent consideration of the needs and sensitivities of the other side. Sinas chinam was so alive and so well that we would have been far less surprised had it been civil war that broke out in Israel on October 7th.

As believing Jews, we respond to tragedy spiritually, trying to hear and to respond to God's voice in current events. Those spiritual responses can assume many forms, all of which are of immeasurable value. There is only benefit to the Jewish people when we turn to God in prayer, say more tehillim, intensify our efforts at Torah study, and engage in charity and good deeds. But this is generic teshuva and it does not address the issue at hand. As the Talmud (Yoma 9b) describes, sinas chinam destroyed the second Bais Hamikdash despite the Jewish people's significant engagement in Torah, mitzvos and gemillus chasadim. If those good deeds were unable to prevent the calamity, they will not fix it either. They are valuable, they must be done, but they alone are not what God is waiting for. And given the shambles we were in before October 7th, it is hard to imagine that all God seeks is for us to recite Psalms 79 and 121.

On October 7th, God grabbed us by the lapels and shook some sense into us, helping us realize who our real enemies are and how much all Jews need each other. Today, two and a half months later, on Asara b'Teves, we must painfully recall that the explosive fracture that destroyed the Bais Hamikdash was well on its way to destroying the State of Israel internally on October 6th, "the behavior of our ancestors which resembles our present behavior, bringing calamity upon them and upon us." The repentance and improvement that this moment demands of us requires us not just to pray more, learn more, and give more, but to address this issue head on, committing to substantive attitudinal and behavioral change that will withstand the curse of sinas chinam and never again separate Klal Yisrael into "us and them."

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>
 reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net date: Dec 21, 2023, 2:50 PM
 subject: Letting Go of My Expectations - Essay by Rabbi YY
 A Brother's Identity Disclosed

The story of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers after decades of bitter separation is one of the most dramatic in the entire Torah. Twenty-two years earlier, when Joseph was seventeen years old, his brothers loathing their younger kin, abducted him, threw him into a pit, and then sold him as a slave to Egyptian merchants. In Egypt, he spent twelve years in prison, from where he rose to become viceroy of the country

that was the superpower at the time. Now, more than two decades later, the moment was finally ripe for reconciliation.

Genesis chapter 45 described the emotional reunion: Joseph could not hold in his emotions, he dismissed all of his Egyptian assistants from his chamber, thus, no one else was present with Joseph when he revealed himself to his brothers. He began to weep with such loud sobs that the Egyptians outside could hear him.

And Joseph said to his brothers: 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond.

Joseph said to his brothers, 'please come close to me'. When they approached him, he said, "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt."

"Now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourself for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you... G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance."

Analyzing the Encounter

There is something amiss here. Joseph reveals his identity, saying, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond, the Torah says. Then the narrative continues: "Joseph said to his brothers, 'please come close to me'. When they approached him, he said, "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be distressed..."

Ostensibly, he is trying to bring them solace and offer them comfort. Yet his words to them after they are horrified seem to have the opposite effect: "I am Joseph your brother – the one you sold into Egypt." He now makes it clear that they are the ones who committed this heinous crime. Why would he do this at this point when he's attempting to relax them? (Especially considering that Benjamin perhaps did not know what they did to him; and now for the first time he was shaming them in front of Benjamin!)

Besides, he already said to them, "I am Joseph." Why the need to repeat it: "I am Joseph your brother – the one whom you sold into Egypt."

What is more, did he think that they forgot that they sold them into Egypt? Did they have another brother Joseph?! And even if he felt compelled to share this piece of evidence to prove that he was indeed Joseph, for no one else would know the story, why didn't he say this the first time around when he revealed his identity to them?

Remorse

It was the second Rebbe of Ger, Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah Leib Altar (1847-1905), known as the Sefas Emes, who presented a moving explanation.[1]

When Joseph revealed his identity, the brothers realized that all this time they were only seeing the external Joseph, not the true one. They thought they were interacting with the gentile Prime Minister of Egypt when in reality he was their brother.

Suddenly they realized that their vantage point of reality was external. They were completely deceived by their eyes.

This opened them up to yet a deeper painful truth: They never knew their brother. Even when they saw him, they never really knew him.

"Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him," the Torah states. The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) explains it thus: Joseph easily identified the holiness within his brothers. They lived most of their lives isolated as spiritual shepherds involved in prayer, meditation, and study. Yet these very brothers lacked the ability to discern the moral richness etched in Joseph's heart. Even when Joseph was living with them in Canaan, they saw him as an outsider, as a danger to the integrity of the family of Israel. Certainly, when they encountered him in the form of an Egyptian leader, they failed to observe beyond the mask of a savvy politician the heart of a soul on fire.

But when Joseph declared "I am Joseph" it was not merely a revelation of who he was on the outside, but also of who he was on the inside. They suddenly realized how both of his dreams materialized, and how indeed he was destined to influence the world and save so many from famine. For the first time in their entire lives, Joseph's brothers saw the greatest holiness in the world emerging from the face of an Egyptian vizier.

"His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond," relates the Torah. What perturbed the brothers was not only a sense of fear. What horrified them more than anything else was the inner remorse and brokenness, that they can cause so much pain to such a beautiful soul.

Imagine you were married to the most beautiful, amazing woman in the world. But due to your own horrific traumas, you mistreated her emotionally. After years of all forms of healing, your brain is cleansed, and you discover what you did to your innocent spouse. How do you feel about it? The pain is far deeper than the punishment and consequences that might come your way; it is more than guilt. The inner devastation you experience when you realize what you have done to such a good person is agonizing.

Imagine that due to emotional dissociation caused by your own painful past, you neglected your children. They did not have an emotionally present father, or mother, and then after profound inner work you discover your core, untarnished self, and you discover the pain you caused (even if unintentionally). The sense of remorse is heart-wrenching.

That is what the brothers felt like at that moment—they discovered what a tragic error they have made. They were locked in their own orbit, deaf to the cries of their brother, oblivious to the horizons that extended beyond theirs, incapable of appreciating his true soul. The sense of a profound crime and an irreplaceable loss tormented them.

They were crushed because of the pain they caused their holy brother; the pain they caused their holy father--and the pain they caused the world: separating Joseph from Jacob for 22 years. Who knows, they thought, how much light they deprived the world of by separating the son from his father?

It was at this moment when "Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come close to me'." Joseph wanted them to approach even closer and gaze deeper into the divine light coming forth from his countenance.

"When they approached him," relates the Torah, "He said, 'I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt.'" Joseph was not merely repeating what he had told them earlier ("I am Joseph"), nor was he informing them of a fact they were well aware of ("It is I whom you sold into Egypt"), rather, he was responding to their sense of tormenting pain, guilt and irrevocable loss.

The words "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt" in the original Hebrew can also be translated as "I am Joseph your brother – because you sold me into Egypt." What Joseph was stating was something incredibly powerful. I am the person I am today only because you sold me into Egyptian slavery.

The brothers were trying to harm him, they separated him from his beloved father and family, he endured much torment and pain. Yet at this profound moment of healing Joseph can look at his life and say to his brothers: "Now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourself for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you... G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance."

The powerful trials and adversity he faced in the spiritual jungle of Egypt are precisely what unleashed the atomic glow the brothers were presently taking in. They have made him the person he was now. Their mistakes have allowed him to become an ambassador of light, hope, love, and healing to the world.

Had Joseph spent the two decades voyaging with his father down the paved road of spiritual serenity, he would have certainly reached great intellectual and emotional heights. But it was only through his confrontation with the abyss that gave Joseph that singular majesty, which turned him into one of the greatest leaders of the time, responsible for saving much of humanity.

Joseph was not indifferent to his pain. He cries more times than anyone else in the Tanach. He did not repress or deny his agony and torment. But as he gazed into the pain and sobbed, and as he surrendered his ego, expectations, and dreams of what life must look like, to G-d's will, he discovered profound meaning and purpose in his journey, one that he could have never planned on his own.

שפת אמת ויגש תרמ"ג: בפסוק אשר מכרתם אותי. כמו שאמרו חז"ל אשר שברת יישר כחך. כן ניחם יוסף אותם כי זכה לכל זה על ידי המכירה.

(The Sefas Emes movingly interprets the Hebrew phrase used by Joseph “asher mechartem,” as “thank you for selling me.” “Our sages offered another take on the verse[2] “on the first tablets that you broke (al haluchot harishonim asher shibarta),” namely, “congratulations for breaking the tablets,” yashar koach she’shibarta.[3] So too, here, Joseph comforted his brothers with the words, “that you sold” (asher machartem oti), the deeper meaning of which was “congratulations for selling me (yashar koach asher machartem oti). By doing so, I was sent to restore life, save the world from famine, and save the Jewish family from death.)

If Only...

Just as the brothers, many of us, too, live our lives thinking “If only...” If only my circumstances would have been different; if only I was born into a different type of family; if only I would have a better personality. If only I would have treated my spouse or children differently; if only I would not have been abused; if only I would not have this mental or emotional challenge; if only I would not have this insecurity.

Yes, you may sob. It is painful. Sad. Tough. But then take a deep breath. Surrender your expectations. And allow yourself to entertain the idea that the individual journey of your life, in all of its ups and downs, is what will ultimately allow you to discover your unique mission in this world and impart your singular light to the cosmos. Can you discover deep in your heart that the mistakes you made are somehow part of a plan that will allow more light to come into the world?

A Struggling Boy

It was 1986. There was a young man suffering from homosexual tendencies. In utter despair, he penned a heart-wrenching letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe responded with a three-page correspondence.[4] One point startled me.

The Rebbe told this boy, that he does not know why he needed to endure this profound challenge, it was surely one of the mysteries of Divine providence. But then he added this: Sometimes, a person possesses an incredible inner light that can change the world. There is no way for this person to discover that secret power within themselves and call it his own, without being compelled to overcome a major life challenge.

Some would look at this young man and sadly feel disdain; many more would feel empathy. But it was the Rebbe, the teacher of oneness, who saw his crisis as an opportunity. There was pain here, but no tragedy here. The dark challenge was a catalyst for this person to touch his own infinity. He was not a victim of an unfortunate condition; he was a Divine ambassador sent to places most people are not sent to because his potential was of a different magnitude.

This does not ease the pain or minimize the difficulty. But it allows me to remain present in my life, look at my story in

honesty, and grow from my past and my experiences in extraordinary ways.

I can’t always figure out how it will work out. That’s fine. I need not wrap my brain around my life story. But I must surrender my expectations of what life is supposed to look like; I need to open myself up, with profound humility, to G-d’s plan for me and my loved ones.

Dancing at MetLife

On January 1, 2020, a short time before the Corona outbreak, I attended a gathering of 90,000 fellow Jews, at MetLife Stadium, in New Jersey. They all united to celebrate the completion of a seven-year cycle of studying the 2,711 pages of the Talmud, known as Daf Yomi.

At the mass event, I noticed Jews, men, and women, of all ages. But my heart swelled with tears and pride as I noticed one Jew, close to 100, an Auschwitz survivor, who attended the celebration together with four generations of descendants. I noticed some other twenty Holocaust survivors dancing together in MetLife. It was the classic Jewish “revenge” against Nazi Germany.

The chairman of the event, Mr. Sol Werdiger, shared with me an incredible story. Sol is the Founder & CEO of Outerstuff, the leading designer, manufacturer, and marketer of children’s sports apparel for the major sports leagues in North America. Sol is a well-known activist and philanthropist in New York, who also serves as chairman of Agudath Israel of America and of the Siyum Hashas.

“I never knew why G-d put me into this type of business, when I have no interest in sports, and can barely name ten players of the major sports leagues.

“But nine years ago, we needed a location to house 90,000 Jews who study Talmud over seven years. And that is when the idea popped into my mind: Let’s do it at MetLife.

“MetLife Stadium is an American sports stadium located at the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, New Jersey, 8 miles west of New York City. It is the home stadium of two National Football League (NFL) franchises, the New York Giants and the New York Jets, as well as the New York Guardians of the XFL. At an approximate cost of \$1.6 billion, it was the most expensive stadium ever built at the time that it opened, in 2010.

“My friends thought I was crazy, but I called the owners of Metlife, some of them nice Jewish boys (Mr. Tisch and Mr. Johnson), and they agreed to give it to us for the Siyum Hashas.

“We came to a final meeting, where we would sign the contract and finalize the deal. At the meeting, a man stood up and said he wants to say a few words. He introduced himself as the man who designed and built the stadium for Mr. Tisch and Johnson, a project which cost them 1.6 billion dollars.

“It took me ten years to design and build MetLife. As I got older, I began to become more introspective. And I started to ask myself what the purpose of my life was, what did I achieve in all my years. A sense of emptiness came over me. I dedicated ten full years to building a stadium, for what? What was its ultimate meaning? Is this the reason my soul came down to this world? Was this worth ten years of my life and 1.6 billion dollars?

“But when I hear today that my stadium will be used to house 90,000 Jews, praying and learning Torah together, dancing, and celebrating their Judaism, uniting together against anti-Semitism and bigotry, committing themselves to bring the light of Torah into the world—I say: Ah, now I know why I spent ten years and 1.6 billion building this gigantic stadium!”

Footnotes [1] The perspective was explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during his address on 5 Teves, 5747 (1987), and a Chassidic discourse presented on Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim, 13 Iyar, 5721 (1961). Likkutei Sichos vol. 30 Vayigash. Sefae Haamarim Melukat vol. 5. [2] Exodus 34:9. [3] Shabbos 87. [4] Lubavitcher Rebbe's Letter on Homosexuality & Transgender

The issues of Parsha Potpourri in 2023 are generously dedicated to יצחק מנחם בן t; לז; ולז; נ; אסתר בת ניסים יצחק ושמחה & ש יהודית יוכבד בת שרה; ot ניסים דוד ויהודית יוכבד & ; ל; ולרפז

1

וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי יִדְבָּר נָא עִבְדְּךָ דְּבַר בְּאֲזֵנֵי אֲדֹנָי וְאֵל יִחַר אָפֶךָ
Parshas Mikeitz concludes with Yehuda meekly accepting Yosef's decision to sentence them to slavery for stealing his goblet, acknowledging that Binyomin had been caught red-handed and they deserved to be punished (44:16). It is therefore surprising that just two verses later, Parshas Vayigash begins with Yehuda harshly questioning Yosef's authority and fairness (Rashi 44:18). What happened in the interim that caused Yehuda's attitude to change so drastically? Rav Shimon Schwab explains that Yehuda's initial reaction when Yosef's goblet was found in Binyomin's sack was sincere. He was genuinely troubled that his brother had

ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי
 When Yosef's brothers came to Egypt to
 purchase food during the years of famine, he was able to
 recognize them immediately, but after 22 years of separation,
 they were unable to identify him. As a result, he was able to
 subject them to a dramatic and frightening series of events.
 After accusing them of being spies, he incarcerated Shimon to
 force them to return with his maternal brother Binyomin. After

confusing them by inviting them to join him at a banquet, Yosef had his goblet planted in Binyomin's sack to frame him for stealing. Finally, when Yehuda pleaded for mercy, explaining how much their father Yaakov would suffer if they failed to return with his beloved Binyomin, Yosef was unable to hold himself back anymore. He ordered all the Egyptian officers and servants out of the room and revealed his true identity to his brothers, telling them, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" The entire episode and ordeal of the brothers' encounter with Yosef appeared so illogical and nonsensical that it seemed more like a bad dream than reality, yet in one split second, in just two words, אני יוסף – I am Yosef – suddenly the entire cacophonous picture became crystal clear. All the seemingly inexplicable events and details fell into place, and everything made perfect sense. The history of the Jewish nation has been fraught with lofty highs and terrible lows. The life of every individual Jew follows a similar pattern. Many happy events seem too good to be true, while countless struggles seem too great to bear. Certainly, there seems to be no rhyme or reason to them, no interconnecting links weaving them together as part of a larger picture and greater plan. The Chofetz Chaim writes that just as with Yosef's brothers, there will come a time when we merit Hashem's revelation in all His glory and splendor. Upon hearing just two words Ani Hashem – I am Hashem – everything will immediately fall into place, and all our questions and difficulties will vanish into thin air, may it happen speedily in our days.

וְאֵת יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לִפְנֵי אֵל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לִפְנֵי גִשְׁנָה (46:28) After a tumultuous roller-coaster of events, Yaakov's sons returned to Canaan and informed him that his beloved son Yosef, who he had assumed was dead for 22 years, was alive and prospering in Egypt. Astonished by the remarkable turn of events and despite his advanced age, Yaakov prepared himself and his family for the lengthy journey to Egypt to be reunited with Yosef. As they drew near to the section of Egypt called Goshen, our verse tells us that Yaakov sent his son Yehuda ahead of him to prepare for him the way. Rashi explains that "preparing for him the way" refers to Yaakov's instructions that Yehuda establish a house of study where he would be able to learn and teach Torah. Considering Yaakov's age and all that he had recently experienced, did this need to be his highest priority? Shouldn't he have first focused on getting reunited with Yosef and comfortably settling his family into their new homes? The Shelah HaKadosh derives from Yaakov's actions and priorities that wherever a person goes, he should first ensure that his spiritual needs are in place and afterward attend to his more mundane concerns. Although Yaakov had many important tasks to attend to on his momentous journey, the Torah records his focus on establishing a house of study prior to his arrival to show us his true priorities so that we may learn from them. Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that the biggest

mistake made by the early immigrants to America was that they were so focused on trying to make a living that they neglected to make time to set up schools to provide religious education to the next generation. As a result, thousands of Jewish children were not given an opportunity to be properly educated about their religious heritage. Now that we understand the value of taking spiritual considerations into account when making life decisions, we can appreciate the following anecdote. The Stropkover Rebbe was once purchasing an apartment and narrowed the choices down to two. Each of them had various aesthetic and practical pros and cons, and it was difficult to decide which of them was superior. Ultimately, he chose the apartment that had exactly 26 steps (the numerical value of Hashem's Name) ascending to it, as that would allow him to remember Hashem every time he entered or exited his home. Although the level of spiritual sensitivity depicted in this story is clearly beyond us, its lesson is still relevant. We all make daily decisions concerning our families, our homes, and our jobs. As we evaluate our options, we should learn from Yaakov to view the world through a more spiritual lens and take that perspective into account when making our decisions.

From: Rav Immanuel Bernstein

<ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com> Thu, Dec 21, 6:59 AM (18 hours ago)

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vayigash

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְעֻקֵּב God spoke to Yisrael in a night vision and said: "Yaakov, Yaakov". (46:2) Day and Night Receiving Divine communication through the medium of a prophetic vision was something that was experienced by each of the Avos. However, the fact that the vision took place at night is an aspect that is emphasized specifically in the case of Yaakov's visions. His first vision, experienced upon leaving home as described in the beginning of Parshas Vayetzei, took place in a dream during the night.[1] The vision described by our pasuk is likewise introduced as taking place at night. What is behind the timing of these visions? The Meshech Chochmah explains that in both these situations, Yaakov is about to go into galus (exile). Hashem thus appears to him at night prior to these two journeys, in order to reassure him that even as he moves into a state of exile – which is characterized by night – the Shechinah is with him, guiding him and protecting him. This concept is expressed by the Gemara,[2] which states that "In every place to which the Jewish People were exiled, the Shechinah was exiled with them." Thus, we see that the Av who represents this connection during the dark times of exile is Yaakov. This special association is also expressed in a pasuk in Tehillim[3] that we recite regularly, which reads: יַעֲנֵךְ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה וְשֹׁגֵבְךָ שָׁם May Hashem answer you on the day of distress, may

the Name of the God of Yaakov protect you. When we call out to Hashem on “the day of distress,” we are looking to invoke a connection that He first established with Yaakov and hence He is referred to in this situation as “the God of Yaakov”. The Order of Prayer The Meshech Chochmah proceeds to explain that the specific experiences of Yaakov are reflected in the prayer which he instituted. The Gemara[4] cites a tradition that the three daily prayers were originally instituted by the three Avos: Avraham instituted the morning prayer of Shacharis, Yitzchak instituted Mincha for the afternoon and Yaakov instituted Maariv – the evening prayer. Since so much of what Yaakov experienced is represented by night, it is only fitting that the connection with Hashem that he established through the prayer also takes place at night. With this in mind, the Meshech Chochmah refers to a parallel tradition cited by the Gemara[5] regarding the basis of the three daily prayers: Shacharis and Mincha correspond to the daily morning and afternoon tamid offerings, while Maariv corresponds to the burning of the leftover fats and limbs of the day’s korbanos, which took place at night. Although the Gemara cites these two traditions as distinct explanations of the background to the daily prayers, the Meshech Chochmah explains that they are ultimately connected with each other. For there is something about the avodah which took place at night in the Beis HaMikdash which parallels the exile experience of the Jewish People represented by Yaakov. Prophecy Begins at Home The Gemara[6] states that, in principle, prophecy is something which can only be experienced in Eretz Yisrael. The unique and elevated nature of the land provides the conditions necessary for the special connection with Hashem that is expressed through prophecy. Having said that, the Gemara notes that there were certain individuals who experienced prophecy even while in exile. A classic example is the prophet Yechezkel, whose sefer beings with the words: הִזֵּה הָיָה דְבַר ה' אֶל יְחֶזְקֵאל בֶּן בּוּזִי הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים עַל נְהַר כְּבָר The word of Hashem came to Yechezkel son of Buzi, the Kohen, in the land of the Kasdim, by the River Kvar.[7] The land of the Kasdim refers to Babylon. How is Yechezkel able to receive prophecy there? Have we not stated that prophecy is something that is restricted to Eretz Yisrael? The Gemara explains that the answer lies on the double expression used by the pasuk: “הִזֵּה הָיָה.” The first terms refers to the prophecy he had already received in Eretz Yisrael prior to being exiled, while the second term refers to his subsequent prophecy in exile. The meaning is that having established a “prophecy connection” in Eretz Yisrael, Yechezkel was able to continue to enjoy that connection even when he was in exile.

From the Prophet to the People This idea, stated with regards to Yechezkel’s prophetic connection, is true in a general sense regarding our national connection with Hashem in exile. Exile is not a setting conducive to initiating a connection with the Shechinah. However, a connection established in Eretz Yisrael

can be maintained even in exile. This brings us back to the two traditions regarding the basis of the Maariv prayer. On the one hand we are told that it was instituted by Yaakov, while on the other hand, we are told that it corresponds to the burning of the fats and limbs on the Mizbeach. In fact, says the Meshech Chochmah, these two traditions converge over this idea. Korbanos themselves are not offered at night. This means that night-time has no “new” avodah. The only avodah which exists at that time is a continuation of the avodah which began during the day, i.e. burning the fats and limbs of korbanos that had been offered that day. So, too, the connection between the Shechinah and the Jewish People which continues even when they are in exile, represented by the night-time prayer instituted by Yaakov, is a function of continuing the connection which existed when we were in Eretz Yisrael. Foundations upon Which to Build There is a pivotal message to be gleaned from this passage of Meshech Chochmah, and it is expressed by R’ Meir Simcha himself: “There is a clear exhortation that emerges from this idea. When Yisrael keep hold of their authentic tradition and go in the ways of their forbears, then Yisrael is a strong nation, rooted in antiquity, to whom Hashem was revealed when the Beis HaMikdash was standing. This can then allow the Shechinah to continue to dwell among them even in the “night” of the exile in the diaspora. However, if they should forget the covenant of their forbears and neglect to follow in their ways, they then become a nation that is by itself, for the Shechinah does not come to reside in Chutz la’Aretz. Under these conditions, the Shechinah will depart from them and they will find themselves susceptible to subjugation and degradation, for they do not view themselves as an ancient nation who had ‘already received’ the word of Hashem.” [1] Bereishis 28:11-12. [2] Megillah 29a [3] 20:2. [4] Berachos 26b. [5] Berachos ibid. [6] Moed Katan 25a. [7] Yechezkel 1:3.

Drasha - Destiny Today

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Wed, Dec 20, 12:15 PM (2 days ago)

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Vayigash

Destiny Today

The plot thickens. At the end of last week’s portion, Yoseph accused the brothers of stealing his magic goblet. Yehuda, in charge of the troupe, denies even the remotest possibility that any one of the brothers could be a thief. So confident was Yehuda that he pre-ordained the would-be thief to a death penalty and offered the remaining group of nine brothers as slaves were if the egregious accusations proved correct. Unfortunately, Yehuda was unaware of Yoseph’s precontrived ruse of planting the goblet in Benjamin’s sack. This week’s portion begins as Yoseph wants to keep Binyamin, and only Binyamin, as a slave, something that Yehuda will battle to the very end to prevent. Yoseph and his brothers confront each other. In a mixed array of rage, fury, and emotional pleas, Yehuda bargains

with Yoseph. Almost threatening war over the matter, Yehuda explains that “Benjamin cannot be taken as a slave as he has left an old father who awaits his return. If he will not return to his father, the old man will die of grief and aggravation. After all, he already lost one son to a terrible accident.”

After seeing the concern that Yehuda has for his younger brother, Yoseph makes the startling revelation. “I am Joseph Is my father still alive?” (Genesis 45:3) Yoseph then forgives the brothers and tells them that his episode was divinely preordained. It set the path as a lifeline from the ensuing famine. He then sends his brothers back to Canaan to bring his father, but before doing so he presents each of them with a set of clothes. However, Yoseph gives his youngest brother Benjamin five sets of clothing and three hundred pieces of silver (Genesis 45:22). The Talmud (Megillah 16b) asks a very poignant question. How is it that Yoseph, a victim of jealousy, provoked his brothers by favoring Benyamin? Didn’t jealousy spur the hatred that led to the original calamity? Why didn’t he learn from past experience, not to show favoritism? The Talmud explains that Yoseph was very calculated in his actions. He was alluding to a similar event that would occur in the future. After being saved from the gallows, Mordechai, a descendent of Benyamin, miraculously rose to power and prestige. He was gifted with five changes of clothing as he left the palace of Achashveirosh. Benjamin’s five changes of clothing were symbolic of a future sartorial gift that Benyamin’s descendent would one day receive. Some commentaries ask a powerful question. Obviously, Yoseph did not explain the deep meaning of his actions to his brothers. What then was gained by favoring Benjamin in front of them? Would the symbolic reference negate any ill feeling? Would some mysterious token resolve a problem that may have been simmering? Why does Yoseph, in the midst of the turmoil of his startling revelation, decide to make a ceremonial gift that favors one brother over the rest, in order to foreshadow an event destined to occur in more than 1,000 years in the future? Could he have not saved symbolism for a more complacent setting?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells this beautiful tale in his latest work, *Along the Magid’s Journey*:

In 1939, the Nazi Gestapo shut down Rabbi Moshe Schneider’s yeshiva in Frankfurt, Germany. With tremendous effort and support from the English community, he was able to relocate the school to England. Survival during that horrific period was both a tremendous spiritual and physical challenge but two boys in the Yeshiva helped meet that challenge. They both were named Moshe. One Moshe would rise in the early hours of the morning and pick up leftover bread from a generous bakery. Carrying the bags of bread and leftover rolls while walking through the bitter cold was not easy, but Moshe never missed his duties. In fact, he often took the place of other boys who were supposed to do the chore.

The other Moshe also woke up early. He led a special learning session before dawn. He encouraged his friends to make the extra effort – which they religiously did.

After years of uninterrupted efforts, one day the boys got public recognition. Rabbi Schneider blessed them in front of the entire school. “Moshe who shleps the bread is not only schlepping today’s bread. One day, he will help distribute bread for thousands of people. And the Moshe who is concerned with spirituality of others will

continue to do so in years to come,” announced the Rosh Yeshiva. “Their actions today are only seeds of the future.”

His words proved true. Moshe, the bread-shlepper, became Moshe (Paul) Reichman, one of our generation’s most benevolent philanthropists. Moshe, the young teacher, became Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, Rav in Johannesburg, South Africa and Har Nof, Israel, an author of prestigious books on Jewish Law, and a teacher of thousands.

Perhaps Yoseph is telling us the secret of our people. Moments earlier Benyamin stood in shackles. He was accused of stealing a magic goblet and was humiliatingly sentenced with life-long enslavement to Pharaoh. Moments later he was not only liberated, but identified with honor and integrity as the blood brother, from both mother and father, of the most powerful man in the world. Yoseph gives the former slave-to-be a special five-fold gift as an announcement to the world. With Benyamin, he declares the destiny of his people. Yoseph declares through Binyamin that today’s events are our manifest destiny. Due to the courageous actions of Yehuda, Binyamin, the slave-to-be, walked away triumphantly, not with one change of clothing but with five. This was not a symbolism for thousands of years to come, but rather a symbolism of the ever-present character of the Jewish people.

The events of Benyamin in Egypt manifested themselves in almost direct comparison and beautiful symmetry with events that occurred centuries later in Persia. Mordechai the Yehudi, a descendant of Benjamin and by many accounts Yehuda, stood his ground under the greatest threats of death and humiliation. He defied the prophets of doom and walked away with glory and splendor.

Yoseph’s message was no riddle, it was no illusion, and it was no mystical prophecy. It was our destiny. Courage in the trying times yields greatness. It was not a message only for the future. It was a message of the future – for today. That was a message all the brothers could appreciate — at that moment. It is a message we too, can appreciate –right now.

Drasha is sponsored this week by David Samet in memory of his grandmother Gittel Bas Yitzchok Dovid Haleyvei a”h, whose yahrtzeit is the seventh day of Chanukah. Please study this class in her memory.

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