

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
VAYEISHEV

Modern writers and commentators have found the biblical narratives of the book of Bereshith irresistible in their penchant for psychoanalyzing people described there in terms of modern understanding and current correctness. In so doing they do a great disservice to Jewish tradition and present a distorted picture of the message that the Bible is attempting to convey.

The narrative regarding Joseph and his brothers has engaged mankind for millennia. In it is represented all of the personality characteristics of nobility, self-justification, blindness and deception throughout history. The narrative stands by itself and needs no "deeper" exposition or analysis. It is what it is and that is how Jewish tradition has always viewed it.

The tendency to "understand" the characters of the people presented in the Torah narrative leads to all sorts of weird ideas that serve to undermine Jewish values and traditions instead of strengthening them. In all of the narratives that appear in this holy book the unseen hand of Heaven, so to speak, is present and active. And that part of the story is not subject to any psychological or personal analysis or perspective.

Rashi points this out in his opening comment to this week's Torah reading. The plan of Yaakov is to enjoy a leisurely retirement in his later stage of life but Heaven interferes as the story of Yosef and his brothers unfolds. No matter how you will analyze the motivations of the characters in this biblical narrative, we still will not know the entire story. It is always the inscrutable hand of Heaven that governs the story and mocks our pretensions.

One of the great differences between the traditional commentators and the more modern versions of this genre is this God factor. Midrash, Talmud and the great medieval and later commentators that created the framework for understanding the narrative of the Torah, also delved deeply into the personalities and motives of the people represented in the Torah narrative. However, they were always careful not only to include but also to emphasize that ultimately it was the will of Heaven that was guiding events towards Divine purposes.

The Bible is not a psychodrama or rebuke of history and psychology. It is a book of fire and holiness and one has to be careful in handling it. But modern commentators – even those who are observant and scholarly – many times insert currently faddish values and interpretations into its eternal words. Keeping this in mind in dealing with the great narrative regarding Joseph and his brothers, one of the key narratives in the entire Torah, we should do so with caution and tradition.

To do otherwise, is a great disservice to the text of the story itself and to the value system that Jewish tradition has assigned to it. The dispute between Joseph and his brothers has heavenly and historic consequences and still hovers over Jewish life today. To treat it as a matter of sibling rivalry is a misunderstanding of the entire purpose of the Torah narrative.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
CONSISTENCY

Consistency, like many other character traits in life that are primarily positive, can turn into a negative trait if carried to an extreme. We are all aware that consistency is essential to good parenting, meaningful education, business and commercial success, as well as to political and governmental stability.

Consistency is not necessarily doing things by rote. It is rather the reinforcement of good habits and wise policies, by repetition and emulation. Judaism, by the nature of its commandments, ordinances and customs, champions this trait of consistency. Daily prayer, constant attention to detail in all facets of life, the rhythm of the Sabbath and the holy days of the Jewish calendar, all combine to create a lifetime and a community of consistency and stability.

Jewish consistency spans millennia and the entire geographical space of our earth. Even when in doubt, for instance, if one is alone on a desert island without a sense of calendar and time, one should revert to consistency and establish for one's self a seven-day week with either the first day or the seventh

day being the day of Sabbath. The lesson here is clear – when in doubt, at least be consistent.

All psychologists and educators agree that children in their formative years crave discipline and consistency no matter how much they may apparently disdain those traits. Life, to be meaningful, must have a rhythm. That rhythm can only be provided by consistent behavior and the creation of good and healthy habits and characteristics.

However, consistency can be overdone. Many have defined insanity as repeating the same behavior over and over again even though it has been proven to be ineffective in the past. To be consistently wrong is not a virtue nor is it something that we should admire and adhere to. If it were not for innovation, creativity and the search for something new and different as part of human nature, civilization would have remained in the Stone Age.

It is only when one breaks the chains of consistency and experiments with the new and the unknown that human progress develops and expands. Judaism and Jewish life recognize this necessary truth and we have proven to be resilient and adaptive to all of the events – both good and better – that have occurred to us over the many millennia of our existence as a people.

We have achieved the paradoxical situation of being both consistent and creative at one and the same time, which is apparently the secret of our survival and success over the long years of our bitter exile. Constant change leads only to uncertainty and chaos, losing generations yet unborn in terms of Jewish life and practice. Being only consistent and not allowing for new tactics and adjustments as times and circumstances dictate, only dooms our society to becoming old and weathered and eventually irrelevant and weak.

There naturally is a great balancing act necessary to navigate the paradox of consistency and innovative creativity. Here lies the challenge of Jewish life for every generation and every location.

Both politically and religiously our generation is trapped in the midst of this paradoxical situation. Those that advocate radical change, whether in politics, diplomacy, commerce and other realms, have been proven to be not only overly optimistic but also very wrong in their policies and agenda. Repeating these mistakes and policies seems to be a clear indication of wrong thinking and blind expectations.

Yet there are many amongst us who still maintain that somehow these policies regarding the future of the State of Israel and/or "improvements" and reform to Judaism and Jewish values should be consistently followed and implemented. The fact that none of this works in the real world is of no consequence, because the ideologue is always trapped in the realm of unchanging and unbending consistency.

This is true of those who are on the other end of the political and religious spectrum, who are also consistent to the end and to a fault. Without tempering consistency with necessary adaptability and creativity to meet the different requirements of each and every generation, atrophy in Jewish political and religious life will certainly set in.

Holding on and preserving the baby while allowing the bathwater to drain away is really the great talent necessary in today's Jewish life. This requires wisdom and fortitude, courage and foresight. Even though these are rare and difficult commodities to acquire, we have no choice but to try to be certain that they exist within us and that they govern the direction of our future.

Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

Rav Shlomo Aviner
Shehechyanu on F-35 Stealth Fighter Jets

Question: With Hashem's kindnesses, the State of Israel received F-35 Stealth Fighter jets. Should the blessing of Shehechyanu be recited, or is it not recited because the fighter plane is a weapon of war? If it should be recited, who recites the blessing?

Answer: War indeed causes distress, but for now we are obligated to wage war. The Rambam calls one of the books in the Mishneh Torah Hilchot Melachim U-Milchamot - Laws of Kings and Wars. The censored edition calls this book "Laws of Kings and Their Wars", as if the Nation of Israel only waged wars in the past but no longer does so. This is not true. There is no free nation without war. To our great distress, we therefore must wage war, but we can take pride in the power of the deterrence of Tzahal. How fortunate are we to have merited these planes!

Regarding which blessing to recite: the blessing of "Shehechyanu" is recited over an object acquired by one person, while the blessing of "Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Meitiv" is recited over an object acquired for the benefit of more than one person: Hashem is good to me and does good

for others)Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 223:2). In this case, the Stealth Fighter jets are obviously for the benefit of the entire Nation of Israel!

Many years ago, I wrote a long Teshuvah that one should recite such a blessing over the acquisition of a pistol (in this case "Shehechyanu". See Shut She'eilat Shlomo 3:87). This is true all the more for the F-35 jets!

There were Gedolei Yisrael who disagreed with my Teshuvah on the pistol for various reasons, including that it is a weapon of destruction. These included the former Chief Rabbi of Tzahal, Ha-Rav Brigadier General Avi Ronski, Ha-Rav Dov Lior, Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef and Ha-Rav David Cohen, Ra"m in our Yeshiva (brought in the book "Ke-Chitzim Be-Yad Gibor Vol. 1, pp. 131-133). Perhaps the four Rabbis who disagreed with me regarding the blessing over a pistol would agree, however, regarding a fighter plane. In any event, I discussed this issue with the current Chief Rabbi of Tzahal, Ha-Rav Brigadier General Ha-Rav Ayal Krim, and he agrees that the blessing of "Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Meitiv" should be recited over the fighter jets. And as the Torah says: And come to the Chief Rabbi of Tzahal who will be in your days (play on the verse "Come to the judge who will be in your days" - Devarim 17:9), and the Chief Rabbi of Tzahal is the halachic authority of the army.

The blessing should be recited by the head of the Israeli Air Force.

And we can add (somewhat in jest) that if the head of the Air Force wants to be strict, and follow all of the opinions, he can buy a new shirt to be worn by a few people and recite the blessing "Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Meitiv" over the \$25 shirt while also having the 90 Million Dollar F-35 Stealth Fighter jet in mind... This reminds us of the story that when Ha-Rav Shlomo Goren was Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, he recited Shehechyanu on the night of Yom Ha-Atzmaut in Shul as was his opinion. One of the people there questioned it, and Rav Goren waved his tie, as if to say that he was wearing a new tie, and so the blessing was on it. After the davening, Rav Goren scolded the man: It is obvious to you that one says Shehechyanu on a new tie, but not on a new State?!

Non-Edible Oils for Lighting the Menorah

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

On the website RabbiKaganoff.com you can find other articles about Chanukah, titled Some Lite Chanuka Questions, Does Olive Oil Require a Hechsher? and Kindling in Shul.

How is olive oil produced?

There are approximately seven hundred olive varieties, or cultivars, whose distinctive tastes and aromas are developed and marketed, just as viticulture develops distinctive varieties of fine wine. Specialty olive oil producers have mastered the methods whereby they breed, grow, and produce their oil. The highest quality olive oil is produced by painstakingly harvesting the fruit by hand to assure that it is not damaged, even though this method drives up the cost tremendously. Olives for quality oils are picked and milled within hours, to minimize oxidation and enzymatic reactions, which leave unpleasant tastes and odors in the oil and decrease its fragrant qualities. These bouquet oils, like vintage wines, compete among connoisseurs for their taste. These oils are the Rolls-Royce of the olive industry and are sold privately or in gourmet shops, similar to the way one would acquire vintage wines.

Olives are almost unique among oil sources, in that olive oil can be consumed in its crude form without refining. Almost all other edible oils: soy, canola, corn, cottonseed, peanut, palm, etc., require extensive refining using heat and chemicals to make the oil palatable. Furthermore, unrefined olive oil conserves most of its nutrients, whereas refining often destroys them.

What is extra virgin oil, and what is virgin oil? Oil produced without refining is called virgin or cold-press oil. The term cold press can have many meanings, but in common parlance it refers to oil that is extracted without heating the olives or the use of chemicals. However, one should bear in mind that the term "cold press" actually has no legal meaning. Someone selling refined oil as cold press would be violating an industry standard, but cannot be prosecuted for violating the law. It is also important to note that the term virgin oil has no legal meaning in the United States, although there are many countries in the world where the term has a legal meaning. In those countries, someone selling refined olive oil as virgin oil can be prosecuted. However, someone selling refined oil as virgin olive oil in the United States is exempt from prosecution, either civil or criminal.

There are four categories of virgin oil: extra virgin, virgin, ordinary virgin and virgin lamp oil.

Extra virgin oil

The official Italian standard for extra virgin oil is that its taste is excellent and has no defects, and that the oil has an acid content of less than 1%. The lower the acid content, the better the taste. Extra virgin oil is the Cadillac of the olive industry.

Virgin oil is not required to meet as high a standard for taste, but still has a positive taste profile, and can have an acid content of up to 2%.

Ordinary virgin oil

Never heard of this? There is a reason why – either its taste is considered inferior or its acid content is greater than 2%. These are the Cheviets of the olive industry. Usually, this oil undergoes further processing, which is called refining, to remove the excess acid and make it more palatable, and the resulting product should not be called virgin oil, but should be sold as "refined olive oil" or "olive oil" missing the adjective "virgin." This is the type of olive oil that is used in canned sardines packed in olive oil.

Technically, if the oil is exclusively refined olive oil it may not be sold as "olive oil," but if it is a blend of "refined olive oil" and "ordinary virgin" oil it can be called "olive oil."

Virgin lamp oil

The most inferior category of cold press or virgin oil is called virgin lamp oil, or sometimes by its Italian name – lampante. This is oil whose taste is considered inedible, and therefore will probably not be used for food, but more likely for kindling or other non-food use. This raises a very interesting observation, since the Torah was more concerned that the oil used for kindling in the Menorah in the Mishkan should be only of the highest quality and was less concerned about the quality of oil used to produce the korbanos mincha, the meal offerings. This curiosity is not lost on the Midrash:

In the custom of the world, if someone has bad oil, he kindles it, and his good oil he cooks with. In the Ohel Moed and the Mikdash, one did not do this. Only the purest oil went for lighting, and the second quality went for the menachos (Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 6).

Olive oil for kindling

Olive oil for kindling is usually refined from inferior oil not considered acceptable for human consumption. Is there any halachic problem with use of this oil for kindling Chanukah lights?

The earliest authority that I found who discusses this issue is the Rashba, in his Toras Habayis (Bayis IV, Shaar I, page 28), the work he wrote, as the title suggests, as a handbook for proper household mitzvah observance. In his discussion about kashrus, he mentions the case where someone discovered a mouse in the oil he had intended to use for food, and whether this oil can now be donated to illuminate a shul. The Rashba compares this to the Talmudic discussion that results from the prophet Malachi's (1:8) derisive rebuke: "And when they offer a blind animal as an offering, have they perpetrated no evil? And when they offer a lame or sick animal, is this not evil? And if they offered it to their idol, would he accept it or view it favorably?" We see from this verse that it is unacceptable to offer an inferior item in the Beis Hamikdash. The Gemara then derives from this verse that one may not use inferior items for Kiddush or to perform other mitzvos. One should use only quality items for serving Hashem, not items for which one has no other use. The Pri Megadim (Eishel Avraham 154:19) specifically includes the oil one uses for Ner Chanukah under this prohibition.

Regarding our mouse in the cooking oil, the Rashba concludes that if the oil is halachically not kosher, one may not use it to illuminate the shul, similar to the prohibition against use of a sick or otherwise inferior animal as a korban. However, if the oil is halachically permitted to eat, such as when the rodent parts can be filtered out, one may kindle this oil in shul. The rationale appears to be that one is not attempting to pawn off inferior items by using them for a sacred purpose, which is the despicable activity that Malachi decried. When one could use the item for oneself, but chose not to, it is appropriate to use it for a mitzvah.

Other authorities prohibit lighting shul lamps with this contaminated oil, even when it is halachically kosher and one could eat it (Magen Avraham 154:19, quoting several earlier authorities). These authorities contend that serving Hashem with an item that one personally considers disgusting is prohibited.

Based on the above discussion, I have heard people say that one may not use oil that one cannot or would not eat, either because of kashrus concerns or because of health concerns, for Chanukah lights. It is very common to find olive oil sold as "not for human consumption," or "for kindling only," either because the solvents or other chemicals used to extract or refine the oil were not food grade, or because this oil was produced from inferior olives or in such a way that the oil tastes bitter, or the oil was prepared in a less than sanitary environment. Are we indeed required to purchase the far more expensive food-grade olive oil for the menorah?

One may argue that, in this case, the oil does not have a disgusting appearance, as opposed to Malachi's lame and blind animals. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 154:12) implies that it is a concern only if the oil appears to be disgusting: If you found a mouse in the oil meant for synagogue use, if it is disgusting, one may not kindle it in the synagogue.

In addition, Malachi's lame and blind animals would be unable to be worked and therefore may have no suitable use other than being offered as korbanos -- and perhaps this is exactly the prophet's concern.

Several authorities permitted kindling Chanukah lights with oil that is too bitter for consumption (Ben Ish Chai, Vayeishev 12; Kaf Hachayim 673:11). It seems to this author that our case is comparable to their ruling, and that it is permitted to purchase lamp oil for one's menorah.

Conclusion

Whereas Shabbos and most of our holidays include festivities that we celebrate with the use of wine, on Chanukah, we celebrate the miracle that happened with the olive oil in the Beis Hamikdash. Many of our customs, including the consumption of doughnuts and latkes, are to remind us of the miracle of the oil. It is interesting to note the many comparisons made between olives and grapes, and this also has halachic overtones. Both vineyards and olive groves are called *kerem* in Tanach and Mishnaic Hebrew (see Berachos 35a). Wine and olive oil are the only fruit products used in korbanos on the *mizbeiach*. They are the only liquids whose *brocha* is not *shehakol*, but is *ha'eitz* in the instance of olive oil, and *hagefen* for wine or grape juice. They both have the halachic distinctiveness of being the only fruit with a Torah requirement of separating *terumos* and *maasros*; and they are the only fruits that may be squeezed for their product when they have *terumah* sanctity.

On the other hand, there is an interesting technical difference between grapes and olives, one with major hashkafic ramifications. Whereas it requires much tending to coax the vine to produce quality wine grapes, the olive tree requires relatively little attention to produce quality olive oil. Once one has chosen the proper site for planting the trees, the main efforts required to produce quality oil are to harvest the olives exactly when they are ready and to crush them immediately without damaging them. Any delay reduces significantly the quality of the oil extracted. This is also reflected in the halacha, which rules that one may harvest and process olives on *Chol Hamoed*, when work is usually prohibited, because delaying causes major loss (Mishnah, Moed Katan 11b).

The root of the word Chanukah is the same as that of *chinuch*; both instances include the concept of training or the beginning of performing *mitzvos*. Thus, the true, correct translation of *chinuch* is not education, but training. Similar to the grape, some children require constant involvement in their education. If you take your eyes off their *chinuch* for a moment, they will be in trouble. However, when you attend to them carefully and constantly, they'll produce high quality wine. Other children resemble the olive. They require less overseeing. Once they are planted correctly, they will do fine if left to grow on their own. This is indeed a manifestation of the other aspect of *chinuch/Chanukah*. As parents and teachers, it is our task to understand our children and apply the correct approach to maximize the potential of each child. As *Mishlei* (Proverbs) tells us, *chanoch lanaar al pi darko*, each child needs to be trained according to his own specific requirements.

May the lights of Chanuka symbolize for us the dedication of our ancestors to guiding their children and students in the way of Torah, and serve as a beacon for us to continue in that mission.

Rav Yochanan Zweig Weekly Insights FOR THE LOVE OF G-D

And they sent the *Kesones Pasim* (Yosef's coat), and they brought it to their father; and said, this have we found; do you recognize whether or not it is your son's coat? And he (Yaakov) recognized it and said, it is my son's coat; an evil beast has devoured him; Yosef is without doubt torn in pieces (37:32-33).

The brothers of Yosef, having sold him into slavery, devise a ruse to mislead their father and explain Yosef's "disappearance." They stripped him of the unique coat gifted to him by his father and dipped it into the blood of a male goat (which according to Rashi 37:31 is similar to human blood). Yaakov recognizes the bloody coat and comes to the (mistaken) conclusion that Yosef has been attacked by a wild animal.

Rashi (37:33) informs us that Yaakov unknowingly made a prophetic statement. The "wild animal" that Yaakov assumes attacked his son actually refers to the wife of Potiphar who would later in the parsha (39:7-16) actually "attack" Yosef; literally grabbing him in an attempt to force him to be with her. Potiphar's wife is thus referred to as a "wild animal."

Yet, paradoxically, Rashi (39:1) explains that the Torah juxtaposes the story of Potiphar's wife with that of Tamar (the righteous daughter-in-law of Yehuda who deceives him into impregnating her) to teach us that both of these women acted *L'shem Shomayim* - "for the sake of heaven." In other words, both righteous Tamar and the wife of

Potiphar were trying to do the right thing for the sake of Hashem. If this is true, how can Potiphar's wife be called a wild animal?

Understanding why we do what we do - the motivations behind our actions - is a very complicated process. By way of example: Korach, who created a painful rift in Bnei Yisroel by contesting Moshe's authority, could have easily deluded himself to believe that he was acting for the sake of Hashem. After all he had a multitude of "complaints" against Moshe and Aharon. In fact, Chazal teach us that Korach was a great man; he must have at least convinced himself that his cause was just. However, the Mishna uses Korach as the quintessential example of an argument that is not "for the sake of heaven." Rashi explains that Korach lacked self-understanding because he was driven not by the worthiness of his cause, but rather by jealousy.

But still, Chazal certify that Potiphar's wife did in fact "act for the sake of heaven." How is it possible to act with the right intention and yet still do the wrong thing? The Torah is teaching us an incredible life lesson, one that should reverberate in our mind whenever we are trying to figure out what is the right thing to do.

In every relationship, there comes a time when we want to do something for our beloved, even if we are unsure whether it's something they desire. We are so convinced that it is good for them that we neglect the essential foundation of the relationship - respect. In other words, if I do something with the right intention but against the wishes of the person I am supposedly doing it for, I may love them but I don't respect them. Real love is built first and foremost on respect; otherwise the love is unbalanced and self-centered.

Potiphar's wife was trying to do something for Hashem, but she neglected to ask the most important question; is this what Hashem really wants? Am I supposed to act in an adulterous manner and force Yosef into doing something that he feels is wrong? If she had honestly asked herself those questions she would have known that while her intentions were proper, the act was absolutely wrong and abusive. She is therefore likened to a "wild animal."

Analogous to this are the movements that decided to "improve" on the traditional Halachic Judaism. Without a doubt, when they decided to bring "innovation" to the synagogue, like incorporating music into the service, encouraging families to sit together, moving the service to Sunday, and permitting driving to shul on Shabbos, their intentions were, undoubtedly, "for the sake of heaven." Clearly, they felt that their "innovations" would enhance the synagogue experience and attendance.

But they forgot the critical question; is this really what Hashem wants? Is this what the synagogue experience was destined to be? Does Hashem want us to violate Shabbos or other Torah laws to improve the synagogue experience? Sadly, had they looked at the question honestly they would have had to answer "no." This lack of vision led to the disappearance of many Jewish communities and to the assimilation of many millions of Jews. We have to always remember that doing something out of love requires us to first ask, "What does our beloved want?"

EARNING ENTITLEMENTS

And he (Yosef) said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed" [...] And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us, shall you indeed have dominion over us?" And they hated him even more for his dreams, and for his words (37:6-8).

The brothers' reaction to Yosef is difficult to understand. Why would their reaction to him be one of hatred? After all, there are only two options: 1) The dreams are true and Yosef will indeed rule over them and they owe him their loyalty and obedience or 2) His "dreams" are the rantings of a delusional person with a megalomaniacal complex and they should be making an appointment for him with the local psychiatrist while feeling sorry for him. In either case, their resentment of him hardly seems to be the appropriate reaction. How are we to understand their resentment?

Dreams are, in fact, a method by which Hashem reveals what events may come to pass. Similar to prophecy, dreams come in a sleep state and can predict the future. The difference between the two is that prophecies, particularly positive ones, will absolutely come to pass.

Dreams merely describe a possibility of what may happen. The difference between them is, as Rashi (37:10) points out, "There is no dream without some senseless matters in it." In other words, the way to tell the difference between a dream and a prophecy is that a dream contains something that is certainly not possible to happen.

Yosef presumed the dreams to be an indication of his leadership. Yaakov had already given him a royal tunic and his dreams, in his mind, confirmed that he was going to be their king. He therefore assumed an air of superiority over them. The brothers did in fact understand that the dreams were a portent of what might come to be; but they felt that Yosef had done nothing to deserve a leadership role. In their minds, Yosef had to earn the right to their fealty, and his ascension without any actual merit merely fueled their resentment. While it may be true that some day he could become their leader, they felt he needed to earn the title.

In our society we also make the same mistake. Students are often lauded for achievements earned not by hard work, but rather because they were gifted by Hashem with superior intellect. We often overlook the hardworking student who overcame many obstacles to achieve a high grade yet is all but ignored because his grade was half a point lower than first place. In fact, much of society's obsession with famous "stars" is an idolization of a G-d-given unique ability (e.g. natural beauty) not personal achievement. This is, obviously, a terrible mistake because it reinforces the artificial perception of what achievement is, and also discourages the ethic of striving for personal growth.

The brothers' message to Yosef was that leadership isn't a divine right. While it is true you have to have the innate ability for leadership, it doesn't get bestowed upon you until you earn it.

Rav Frand - Parshas Vayeishev

The Danger Of Not Realizing When One Is A "Nogeah B'Davar"

The story of Yosef and his brothers is one of the most troubling stories in all of Chumash. The pasuk records:

And one man said to his brother, "Look! That dreamer is coming! So now, come and let us kill him, and let us throw him into one of the pits; and we will say 'A wild beast devoured him.' And we shall see what will become of his dreams." [Bereshis 37:19-20]

Reuven heard and he rescued him from their hand; he said, "We will not strike him mortally!" And Reuven said to them: "Do not shed blood! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but send no hand against him." [Bereshis 37:21-22]

(Rashi explains that Reuven's intention was to come back and save Yosef, but as circumstances would have it Yosef was sold into slavery before Reuven had a chance to rescue his brother.)

As the well-known story develops, in Reuven's absence...

Yehudah said to his brothers, "What gain will there be if we will kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites – but let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." [Bereshis 37:26-27]

Reuven returned to the pit (intending to rescue Yosef and return him to his father, as Rashi explains) and tore his clothes in anguish at the thought of facing his father Yaakov's grief over the loss of his beloved son.

Rashi fills in an additional detail regarding the whereabouts of Reuven when the fateful removal of Yosef from the pit and subsequent sale to the Ishmaelites took place: He actually offers two interpretations. His first interpretation is "He was not there at Yosef's selling for his day had come to go and serve his father." Alternatively Rashi suggests "he had been busy with his sackcloth and with his fasting (in repentance) for having rearranged his father's couches."

In last week's parsha, we learned that after Rochel (who was Yaakov's favorite and prime wife) died, Yaakov moved his bed, which had been in Rachel's tent into the tent of Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah. Reuven, offended at the insult to his mother Leah, moved his father's bed from Bilhah's tent into Leah's tent. "It is bad enough that my mother should have been treated as a second class wife compared to her sister Rachel, but that she should also be treated as a second

class wife even in comparison to Rachel's maid servant is intolerable!"

Chazal say that this was a serious sin on Reuven's part. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu alludes to this fact in his blessing given to the Tribe of Reuven before he died. It is for this sin, Rashi says, that Reuven was doing Teshuva, and hence was not present when the other brothers pulled Yosef from the pit and sold him into slavery.

I saw an interesting observation in a sefer called Avir Yaakov: When did this incident with the switching of the beds happen? It happened when Rachel died, which was when Yosef was eight years old. Yosef was sold when he was 17 years old. In other words, the incident for which Reuven is now suddenly doing Teshuva occurred 9 years earlier. We must ask the question – what was Reuven doing for the last nine years that he suddenly wakes up and runs off to do Teshuva (fasting and wearing sackcloth according to Rashi) for that prior sin, in the middle of this major family crisis? Why now?

The Avir Yaakov says that we see from here that Reuven had a sudden epiphany of sorts. The realization that the brothers want to kill Yosef, their own brother had a major effect on him. He realized that they had rationalized this act because they were jealous of Yosef. Their jealousy blinded them to the extent that they did not see themselves as being involved in fratricide (killing a brother). Rather, they thought they were actually doing a mitzvah by killing him because they considered Yosef a rodef [pursuer], so they believed were actually doing it in self-defense.

They convened a Beis Din (Court) against him and ruled that he was deserving of death. How did that happen? Reuven suddenly realized that it happened because their jealousy blinded them. In Hebrew, there is a term called "noge'ah b'davar" [personal bias]. Through the blinding effect of being "nogeah b'davar," a person can mistake an act that is the equivalent of murder for a mitzvah.

One of the greatest challenges in life is that a person must be able to look at himself, overcome his biases, and ask himself "am I doing this for the right reason or do I have some kind of personal agenda?" One of the most common expressions we hear is "I know I am nogeah b'davar BUT NEVERTHELESS..." That expression and that phenomenon reeks of self-deception and denial. If someone is "nogeah" he cannot see straight. If someone has an agenda, he cannot judge accurately.

Once it dawned on Reuven that the brothers were so blinded by their jealousy that they could make a mitzvah out of potential murder, he thought about his action in Bilhah's tent nine years prior. He realized that he was not as "pure of heart" as he thought he was at the time. He was finally able to recognize that perhaps there was also a personal agenda involved. He began to think, "Maybe I was just sticking up for my mother; and I did not see the incident accurately."

When he saw the extent to which jealousy and hatred can affect a person, the light went on vis a vis his impudent movement of his father's bed nine years earlier. He now looks back at the earlier incident and says "You know what? I may be guilty of the same thing." That is why he was now doing Teshuva.

The truth of the matter is that we see a similar concept elsewhere in this week's parsha. When the incident of Yehudah and Tamar occurred and unbeknownst to him he fathered a child (actually a set of twins) with his daughter-in-law, Tamar presented him with the evidence. She does not publicly humiliate him but she says "The man who owns these items is the man who fathered the child(ren) with whom I am now pregnant." What does Yehuda do? He says, "She was more righteous than I." [Bereshis 38:26]

Put yourself in Yehuda's shoes. He is the most prestigious amongst the brothers. His father has gone through a very difficult life. Now, Yaakov needs this additional family scandal that his most prominent son has this relationship with Tamar?" It is easy for someone who wants to sweep this indiscretion under the rug to find half a dozen or more rationalizations why Yehuda should have kept quiet at the very least: It is a Chilul Hashem; my father will have a heart attack; he will not be able to take this; I will be humiliated; father will be humiliated.

However, would Yehuda allow an innocent woman to be executed for his action? No. He could have done what every leader does in such situations. He could have "called for an investigation". "We will

convene a 'Blue Ribbon Panel' to determine what really happened here." Nine months later, when everyone has almost forgotten the story, the panel will issue an inconclusive report that there was some DNA evidence that was somehow lost and close the case. Excuses could have been found to avoid confessing.

The LAST thing most people would do is to say "She is right and I am wrong". Every personal "negius" [bias] would cause a person to say, "I cannot admit this in public". The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel says that this is why Yehuda was eventually chosen to be the house of royalty (Malchus) in Israel. The Targum comments on the pasuk in Parshas VaYechi: "Yehuda – you your brothers will acknowledge..." [Bereshis 49:8] as follows: "Yehuda, do you know why you are going to be the head of Klal Yisrael? Do you know why Jews are going to be called Yehudim (from the name Yehuda)? You merited all this because of the fact that you admitted the incident with Tamar. You were able to say that she was right and you were wrong. That is the marking of true leadership – the ability of a person to overcome his own personal agenda, to stare the truth in the face and say, "I was wrong." This type of person can be the Jewish King.

In Judaism, the king is empowered with powers that in the hands of the wrong person could be disastrous. The king can order the execution of someone he senses is rebelling against him. There is no requirement for witnesses or Beis Din. He may usurp property. He has absolute power. How can a monarch be entrusted with that kind of power? How do we know he will not use his powers for his own aggrandizement and personal agenda? The answer is the king needs to be a special person, who can overcome his own negius. This is what Yehuda demonstrated in the incident with Tamar.

This is one of the great challenges of life and in my opinion this is what separates the rest of us from true Gedolei Yisrael. For me, the mark of leadership and the mark of a true Gadol is this ability to raise himself above his own agenda. True Gedolei Yisrael cannot be bought for anything – not for money, not for power, not for personal pride, not for family reasons, not for anything. They need to be above it all.

The rest of us should struggle to meet this challenge as well.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeshev
For the week ending 24 December 2016 / 24 Kislev 5777

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com
Insights

A Problem of Peace

"And Yaakov dwelled..." (37:1)

The Midrash explains that Yaakov wanted to "dwell" in tranquility, and so G-d sprang upon him the troubles of Yosef.

What was this tranquility that Yaakov wanted, and why was he prevented from having it?

The Talmud (Berachot 64a) describes the different expressions appropriate for taking leave from the living and the dead. When one leaves a dead person, one should say "Go with peace!", but one should say to a living person, "Go to peace!"

The English translation of the word for "peace" — "shalom" — doesn't capture the nuance of one of shalom's most important meanings, which is "completion" or "perfection".

The blessing that we give a living person is that they should "go to shalom". Because their life is still storm-tossed with the challenges of this world; challenges that are necessary for them to achieve their shleimut, their perfection, we bless them they should achieve this. That they should go "to" peace.

A person who has left this world has already garnered up as much perfection as he was able, and thus our blessing is that he should take that perfection with him: "Go with shalom!" Go with the peace that you have already achieved in this world.

Yaakov Avinu thought that after all the stress and problems of his life, G-d would not challenge him further, and he looked forward to dwelling in tranquility with the fruits of his efforts in this world.

The troubles of Yosef were sprung upon him to teach him that he had still more to achieve here in this world. He was still going "to peace" and not "with peace."

Sources: Rabbi Yehoshua Malko on the Rambam as seen in "Shollal Rav"
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OU Torah

Vayeishev: Fostering Resilience

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

It helped him through the horrors of the Holocaust. It helped his children adapt to life in the newly established State of Israel and gave them the courage to fight heroically in its War of Independence. His grandchildren used it in their struggle to retain a religious lifestyle in the face of the challenges of modernity. His great-grandchild had anticipated using it at his bar mitzvah.

"It" was a pair of tefilin, of phylacteries. The original owner was able to take the tefilin with him when he fled the ghetto of the small town in Poland in which he was raised. He held fast to the tefilin wherever he found refuge and clung desperately to them in a series of Nazi labor camps. He even found a hiding place for them in Auschwitz and guarded them until he was finally liberated.

He bequeathed them to his sons, and his sons to their sons. He passed away a few short years ago, but on his deathbed, he charged his then nine-year-old great-grandson with the mission of putting on these tefilin at his bar mitzvah. The little boy promised that he would do so. But it was not to be.

Several weeks ago, a frightening outburst of wildfires decimated many forests and destroyed many homes in Israel. Some were attributable to the dire dry spell that Israel had been experiencing just then. Some were attributable to arson, fires kindled by our enemies. The home of the little boy's parents, in which the tefilin were placed for safekeeping, was destroyed in one of those fires. Lost along with the other contents of that humble home were the tefilin.

Tefilin are sacred objects, and like all such objects, the destruction is cause for sadness and even mourning. But this particular pair of tefilin served more than just a ritual function. They were the means by which a Holocaust survivor was able to survive. They enabled him to retain a measure of resilience in the face of unbelievable torture and the constant threat of instant death. When he passed them down to subsequent generations, he was providing them with more than a religious heirloom. He left them a heritage more valuable than gemstones. He left them a symbol that could serve them as a key to one of life's most precious treasures: the ability to remain resilient in the face of adversity.

In this sad instance, the symbol that helped foster resilience was a sacred object. Other objects that can and have served as such symbols are books, photographs, and coins. A measure of resilience can also be achieved through intangible symbols. Thus, anecdotes abound about melodies, prayers, poems, and even memories of acts of kindness that preserved the power of resilience in the face of trials and tribulations.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeishev (Genesis 37:1-40:23), we read the story of Joseph. Joseph is an example of a person who was subject to horrific trauma. Joseph was snatched from his position as a favorite son of a prestigious family and sold into slavery. He was delivered to an alien environment and imprisoned there. How did he remain sane, let alone resilient? What enabled him to remain hopeful? What was the secret of his capacity for resilience?

An answer to this question has been suggested by one of the past generation's most insightful spiritual masters, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, of blessed memory.

Reb Chaim began one of his famous discourses by focusing on a text that does not seem to provide the basis for a homiletic masterpiece. After Joseph's brothers cast him into the pit, we read, "Then they sat down to a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt." (Genesis 37:25) The Midrash wonders about this cargo of fragrant spices and perfumes: "Desert Bedouins generally carry cargoes of hides, tar, and naphtha. Observe the favor that The Holy One, Blessed Be He did for Joseph. He made sure that in his journey into captivity, Joseph would be accompanied by fine fragrance and not by foul odor." (Yalkut Shimoni, 142)

Reb Chaim expresses astonishment. Here is a very young man about to descend into the depths of a decadent society. What lies ahead for

him, at best, is a life of servitude, if not outright slavery. Could it possibly matter to him whether he was exposed to tar and naphtha or to delightful perfumes?

Reb Chaim answers that in moments of great darkness and despair, one requires some ray of hope, some small reminder of Divine Providence, some indication that all is not lost. For Joseph, that ray of hope came in the form of his memory of the pleasant fragrances that escorted him to his desperate circumstances. Isolated, wrongly accused of adultery, flung into a dungeon with criminals for company, he could yet take solace in the recollection of the fragrant spices. He could contemplate that the good Lord did not abandon him even in his journey into captivity, but rather sent him a sign of His grace in the form of “gum, balm, and ladanum.”

This is all he needed to remain resilient. He could anticipate the words of one heroic Holocaust survivor who, when taunted by a Nazi guard who told him that God had abandoned him, responded: “Not totally, and not forever.”

Reb Chaim helps us understand what fosters resilience. It is the ability to retain hope by feeling connected to either a significant object, such as the pair of tefilin, or a significant memory, akin to Joseph’s recollection of the fragrances that surrounded him during the earliest days of his captivity.

There are two lessons here. One is to learn to cope with despair by recalling objects or memories to serve as links to a lost past and a hopeful future. The other lesson is to learn to give others symbols they may one day need in difficult times: gifts of a pair of tefilin, a photograph, an ornament, an encouraging smile, an embrace, a farewell kiss.

The weekly portion of Vayeishev usually precedes the holiday of Hanukkah. Hanukkah celebrates a military victory of the few against the mighty. While we express our gratitude to the Almighty for this victory with appropriate prayers, hallel vehoda’ah, the central symbol of Hanukkah is the Menorah.

In no way does the Menorah symbolize the wondrous military victory that restored our religious freedom. Rather, it recalls the miraculous event of a lamp with oil sufficient to burn for only one night, which lasted for eight.

Whereas the victory over our persecutors was the plot, the miracle of the oil was but a subplot.

If the victory was high drama, the oil was the Almighty’s way of giving us a warm embrace, an encouraging smile, a loving kiss.

It was His way of providing us with a simple but unforgettable image to foster our resilience.

We pray that during this Hanukkah, we will all be able to illuminate our private, communal, and national darkness by remembering the symbol of the Menorah, which is nothing less than a call to resilience in the face of challenge.

Shabbat Shalom, and Happy Hanukkah.

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The Times of Israel

Hanukkah: kindling fire and kindling light

The Blogs :: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Thursday, December 22, 2016 Kislev 22, 5777

Efrat, Israel — “For the candle is the commandment and the Torah is light.” [Prov. 6:23]

As we prepare for the festival of Hanukkah – which commences at the conclusion of the upcoming Sabbath – it behooves us to revisit the significance of the lights of the hanukkiyah, as well as the Al Hanissim and Hallel praises that mark our eight-day celebration.

Based on the text of the prayer of Al Hanissim (lit. “for the miracles”), which appears in the thanksgiving blessing of the Amidah and the Grace after Meals throughout the festival, it would appear that the essential miracle of Hanukkah is the military victory of a ragtag militia of Judeans over a vastly larger fighting force, the army of the Greco-Syrian Kingdom.

However, another source, first found in the late Tannaitic work Megillat Taanit and cited by the Babylonian Talmud [Shabbat 21b], emphasizes an altogether different miracle only hinted at in the Al Hanissim prayer. According to this source, which barely even

mentions the military victory, the main miracle was a single cruse of oil sufficient for one day lasting for eight days.

Faced with this apparent dispute within our own tradition, which, then, is the primary miracle of the holiday? If both, why did the Almighty have to perform the second miracle of the cruse of oil at all? The military victory would have been sufficient to restore Israeli sovereignty, and the Maccabees could have waited eight days to secure new oil before lighting the menorah! Moreover, it would have been halakhically permissible to use ritually defiled oil if no other oil was available.

In order to understand the significance of each miracle, we must review a famous dispute concerning the proper manner of kindling the hanukkiyah: Beit Shammai maintains that we are to begin with eight lights on the first evening and descend to one on the last evening, while Beit Hillel argues that we begin with one and ascend to eight.

Rabbi Yosef Zevin, z”l, 20th century sage of Jerusalem, suggests that the basis for the disagreement is what we are kindling: ur (fire) or ohr (light). According to Beit Shammai, the main struggle and miraculous victory was against an implacable enemy who wished to destroy us. We thus had to counter fire with fire (“You shall destroy with fire the evil within you”, as the Torah states numerous times). It is the way of fire to begin with a great blaze and then diminish as it devours whatever is in its midst (hence, eight to one). This is akin to the military battle in which the victorious Judeans triumph and trounce those who would destroy ethical monotheism.

According to Beit Hillel, however, the main struggle—and miraculous victory—was the victory over the false ideology of Greco-Pagan Hellenism. The battle of ideas is won with better ideas, in this case, the light of Torah knowledge: “For the candle is the commandment and the Torah is light.” Since knowledge is cumulative, developing as text is joined to text, so, too, ideas are built upon ideas, and hence, the progression from one light to eight, an ideological and spiritual victory of Mount Sinai over Mount Olympus.

We can understand the essence of the miracles that we celebrate by considering the fact the Maccabees were fighting against not one, but two destructive enemies. On the one hand, they were battling the Greco-Syrian military forces that were physically threatening Judean independence and freedom in our homeland. And on the other hand, they were combatting the Greco-Syrian ideology that was spiritually threatening the Torah’s message of commitment to a God of peace, compassionate righteousness and moral justice.

The Al Hanissim prayer and our Hallel praise emphasize the military victory that brought us independence; the kindling of the Menorah (in accordance with Beit Hillel) emphasizes the ideological, spiritual victory of a religiously committed Judea against the pagan-secular Hellenism that had dominated the entire civilized world at that time. Both victories and each miracle were crucial in order for Israel’s legacy not only to survive but to prevail.

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The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Vayeshev: Clueless Joseph?

Thursday, December 22, 2016 Kislev 22, 5777

Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm. — Graham Greene

Joseph recounts to his brothers his fantastical dreams which seem to imply that he will rule over them. The brothers don’t take this well at all. If they detested him before for being their father’s favorite, now they outright hate him.

After this episode their father Jacob orders Joseph to meet up with his brothers who are tending their sheep far to the north, around the area of Shechem. Joseph appears to go without hesitation or concern.

Rabbi Hirsch on Genesis 37:13 explains that Joseph had no fear of his brothers because he had no ambition whatsoever to rule them. His dreams were just dreams; not anything that he planned or foresaw might come to fruition. Therefore, in his innocent mind, he had nothing to fear from his jealous brothers.

The brothers, on the other hand, took his dreams very seriously. They believed that the apparently chosen son did intend to rule over them and saw him as a clear and present danger to themselves and how they hoped to conduct their

lives, free of tyrants or rulers. Hence, the acts they took, first of planning to kill Joseph and then the decision to sell him as a slave, stemmed from purely defensive motives. They were protecting themselves from the mortal threat of Joseph the tyrant. The fact that this was the furthest thing from Joseph's mind did not have one iota of effect upon the brothers' fears or actions.

Joseph, though he did suffer over the prolonged enslavement and separation from his family, always seemed to have God with him, and the very actions the brothers took are what eventually lead Joseph to rule over them, thereby inadvertently fulfilling his prophetic dreams.

God often protects the innocent, but it doesn't hurt to be less naïve.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To all the subscribers and those that have encouraged and promoted the launch of my Daily Torah Tweets. Thanks!

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The Jerusalem Post

Parashat Vayeshev: A sin against man and God

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

This week's parasha of Vayeshev deals mostly with the story of Joseph, Jacob's favorite son. Joseph, the handsome youth, gets preferential treatment from his father, leading to his brothers' feelings of jealousy and hatred.

At the end of the first part of the story, we read about the brothers selling Joseph into slavery. Joseph is taken as a slave to Egypt, where he is sold to serve in the house of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's ministers.

The Hebrew slave proves himself to be a success with a golden touch in Potiphar's house. This pleases his master who decides to put the running of his house and business in Joseph's hands.

We can already discern a central theme in the story: Joseph's fall from the peak of success to the depths of despair, with the next stage again being his rise in status, again his fall into the abyss, and again rise to greatness – with the end of the story becoming clear only at the end of the Book of Genesis. Joseph ultimately dies as the assistant to Pharaoh, and the leader of the entire family.

But let's get back to where we are in the story. Now Joseph – still a slave – is running Potiphar's home and business. The handsome and successful Joseph's control of his master's house is described in the Torah as complete: the master is unaware of what is happening in his house other than what is served to him at mealtimes.

We will soon see why this is such an important detail.

Conditions are ripening for the next stage: The master's wife desires Joseph. She harasses him day after day, prodding him, flirting with him, tempting him – but Joseph rejects her advances.

Before we try to understand how Joseph explained his refusal, let's complete the story of the parasha: The temptress is deeply hurt by Joseph's rejection, and after a short physical altercation between them, she makes up a story saying that he tried to rape her, which leads to him being thrown into an Egyptian prison. Don't worry, he'll come out of there victorious, but we won't hear about that this week... So what did Joseph say to his master's wife when he rejected her vehement flirtations? Let's read his words: "Behold, with me my master knows nothing about anything in the house, and all he has given into my hand. In this house, there is no one greater than I, and he has not withheld anything from me except you, insofar as you are his wife. Now, how can I commit this great evil, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39, 8-9).

Joseph offers a lengthy explanation of the moral principle that motivates him. The master was good to him, gave him status, honor, control. How could he betray his trust? How could he, the slave that rose to greatness, harm his benefactor in such a heinous manner? This is Joseph's claim, but not in its entirety. At the end, he adds two words that shed a different light on what he means. He ends with the words "...how can I commit this great evil, and sin against God?"

Joseph is patiently explaining that the moral iniquity he is being asked to commit is not only a sin against man but is also one against God. As opposed to those who might think that morality falls into the category of atheism, as opposed to those who might see moral rationales as separate from religious ones, Joseph believes otherwise. Joseph, who merited the name "Joseph the Righteous" because of these words, understands that harming a person is harming God, that

betrayal of his benefactor is a betrayal of God's values. This he will not do.

Before we do anything, we must first try to ascertain what God wants. We must distance ourselves from sinning against any man, because that is a sin against God as well.

The writer is the rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.

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Can a tzaddik retire?

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Kislev 22, 5777, 12/22/2016

Our parasha begins with Jacob reaching "retirement age," after surviving extended periods of self-sacrifice and imminent danger to his and his family's lives. He is now well over 100 years old, having brought into the world the sons from whom will descend the 12 tribes of the future Am Yisrael, and has returned to reclaim possession of Eretz Yisrael for the Jewish nation.

Rashi quotes the Midrash that Hashem was "unhappy" with Jacob's choice of retirement. "Is it not sufficient for a tzaddik to have his reward of pleasure in the eternal next world, that he wishes to be rewarded also in this world," declared Hashem, and brought about in Jacob's waning years the loss of his beloved son Joseph.

Are you a Jew or Jewish?

A while back, I chanced upon a group of non-Jewish American tourists enjoying the Old City's atmosphere.

As is my habit, I greeted them and asked where they were from. They replied that they were from Texas. "Then we have something in common," I said. "We both have a lone star on our flags."

They were impressed that an Israeli should know of the 'Lone Star State'. Then one of the women asked me if I was Jewish.

I said, "I am not Jewish". They were all bewildered by my response. I explained that a color which is not really red but tends to be so is described as reddish, and a color that tends to brown is described as brownish. Since I am a total, absolute Jew, I cannot be described as Jewish.

I am quite certain that none of them understood what I was talking about. Let me explain:

Our people can be divided into two categories - Jews and those who are Jewish.

Non-Orthodox Jews, who live happily among gentiles in the galut, are barely Jewish. Being "Jewish" means that there is a smattering of Judaism in one's life, from enjoying a good piece of Levi's Jewish rye bread on Pesach to serving as a dedicated Orthodox rabbi 24/7 in a large galut community when the gates of Eretz Yisrael are wide open. In the galut, the vast majority of highly respected and learned rabbis and heads of ultra-Orthodox yeshivot are Jewish but not necessarily Jews.

Being a Jew means total commitment to whatever Hashem has dictated to us without pilpulistically rounding the corners and smoothing over the uncomfortable, unpleasant, rough edges of living the total life of a Jew.

What is the litmus test that differentiates one who is Jewish from one who is a "Jew"?

The formula is explicit in the Hagadah of Pesach when discussing the evil son.

The Hagadah states that in view of the evil son's attitude and beliefs, it would be correct to assume that, had he been in Egypt at the time of the exodus, he would not have been liberated.

What does this statement mean?

During the final year of our sojourn in Egypt, Paro and his government were unable to enforce slavery on the Jews, because they had ceased working and were now viewing with pleasure the sweet revenge of the ten plagues Hashem was bringing upon the Egyptians.

The 15th of Nisan - Pesach - was approaching. It was the day Hashem had established to be our national day of liberation from Egyptian bondage and the fulfillment of what Hashem had told Avraham in the "brit baiyn habetarim" (the covenant of the severed pieces) that his descendants from Sarah would be slaves in a foreign land.

Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) announced that the next stage in the liberation process would be to leave the impure land of Egypt and enter into the desert towards the Red Sea and Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, prior to entering the holy land. The people were told to bake bread, take water with them and trust that Hashem would provide for all their needs in the hostile desert.

After Moshe's announcement, the nation divided itself into two camps. Despite the obvious perils inherent in entering the desert without proper preparation, the camp comprising only 20% of the population believed in Hashem and in His messenger Moshe.

The larger camp of 80% adopted a "logical" approach. They rationalized that, for all intents and purposes, Egypt no longer existed as a united nation. The economy was in shambles. The religious principles of the ruling establishment were proven to be sterile and false. Every Egyptian family was emotionally demoralized at the loss of a family member. The Jews now ruled over the Egyptian empire, so why leave?

They presumed that they could establish a Torah empire on the ruins of ancient Egypt with all the wealth of the land. The Egyptians were now the slaves. Former taskmasters were "licking the boots" of their once Jewish slaves. It made no sense to start a war with the giants, Og of Bashan and Sichon of Emory. And, furthermore, who said that Hashem had even spoken to Moshe?

The rational and Torah-based approach captured the hearts and minds of the vast majority who saw the great financial benefit of remaining in Egypt.

These rational Jews died during the week of the plague of darkness. We are the descendants of the irrational 20% who survived.

The Hagada states emphatically that, had the evil son lived at the time of the exodus, he would certainly have been among the rational 80% and would not have followed Moshe into the wilderness.

To be Jewish means to pick and choose those aspects of Judaism that appeal to one logically, financially, socially, politically. To be a Jew means to travel the "high road" of the Torah, accepting the self-sacrifice it demands.

In our time, the litmus test is the same as it was in the generation of the exodus and the generation of Ezra the scribe. It is to live in Eretz Yisrael without hollow rationalizations to justify remaining in the galut: we must wait for the mashiach; I can't make a living in Eretz Yisrael; I'm waiting for my children to finish high school; and best of all, if my rabbi doesn't go to the holy land, why should I?!

Hashem demanded that the Jews in Egypt trade the good life there for an unknown destiny in the wilderness. He severely punished those who did not live up to His expectations. In our time, the call from Heaven is to leave the galut for a modern, highly developed country on the cutting edge of all human endeavor, where food is abundant, and the roads are crowded with the most modern and expensive vehicles. Even more compelling is that fact that we are the acknowledged Torah center of the world, with second place too far behind to be seen.

A friend told me that if he sells his beautiful home in Florida on an acre of land, he would only be able to purchase a three-bedroom apartment in Yerushalayim.

Granted that living here has its challenges. But that's what this world was made for, as Jacob learned when he thought he could live the good life after all his challenges.

So, the choice is up to every individual to be Jewish or to live the life of a Jew.

Look into the mirror and ask yourself: "Had I lived at the time of the exodus, would I have been with the doomed 80% who chose to remain in the galut or with the 20% who established the foundation for Hashem's chosen people?"

Will you and your children stay in the galut and eventually disappear, or will you come to Eretz Yisrael and be part of the foundation stone of our future?

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Vayeishev: The Special Teshuvah of Reuben "Reuben returned to the pit, but Joseph was no longer in the pit. He tore his clothes [in grief]." (Gen. 37:29)

Where was Reuben coming from? Why wasn't he together with the other brothers?

According to the Midrash, Reuben was "occupied with sackcloth and fasting," as he repented for changing his father's sleeping arrangements. (The word *vayashov* ("he returned") can also mean "he repented.")

The Midrash continues:

"The Holy One said: No one has ever sinned before Me and repented, but you [Reuben] are the first to repent. As you live, one of your descendants will stand up and be the first to urge repentance. And who was this descendant? Hosea, who called out, "Return, Israel, to the Eternal your God" (Hosea 14:2)."

This Midrash is quite difficult. There were a number of individuals who repented before Reuben's time, such as Adam and Cain. Also, why does the Midrash state that Hosea was the first to exhort the people to repent? We find that the mitzvah of teshuvah is already mentioned in the Torah (Deut. 30).

It must be that Hosea informed the people regarding some aspect of teshuvah that had not been taught before.

Internal and External Consequences

The impact of sin is in two areas. Sin darkens the soul's inner holiness. But it also has a negative impact on the world at large. "When the people of Israel do not fulfill God's Will, it is as if they are weakening the great strength of Heaven" (Eichah Rabbah 1:33).

With teshuvah we repair the soul and restore its original purity. But the damage caused in the world at large — this is only repaired through God's kindness. "I, yes, I am the One Who erases your transgressions for My sake" (Isaiah 43:25). The corrective power of teshuvah is a joint effort — partly by us, partly by God.

Nonetheless, it is possible for an individual to also repair the external damage. When one's goal is to elevate all of society, and one's teshuvah is focused on preventing one's own mistakes from harming and misleading others — such an individual increases light and holiness in all of creation.

Reuben's Teshuvah

Reuben attended to both of these aspects in his teshuvah. First he occupied himself in fasting and sackcloth, repairing the damage to his own soul. But his teshuvah did not end there. He then "returned to the pit." An open pit in the public domain — "bor b'reshut harabim" — is a metaphor for a situation likely to lead to public trouble and suffering.

After repairing his soul, Reuben returned and looked at the pit. He examined the damage that he had caused outside himself, in the public domain. He then worked to rectify his actions so that they would not be a stumbling block for others.1

That is why the Midrash states that Reuben was the first to "sin before Me and repent." He was the first to repair not only his soul, but also that which is "before Me," i.e., everything that God created. In the words of the Midrash, what made Reuben's teshuvah unique was that he "started with teshuvah." Reuben aspired to correct the external damage ordinarily repaired by God's kindness.

Israel Alone

Now we may understand the special level of teshuvah mentioned by the prophet Hosea. In the Torah it says, "You will return to God... and the Eternal your God will accept your repentance" (Deut. 30:2-3). This is the common level of teshuvah. We work to repair the damage in our soul, while God corrects the damage we caused in the world. Hosea, however, spoke of a higher form of teshuvah. He described a teshuvah like that of Reuben — an attempt to repair all the repercussions of one's errors. Therefore he called out, "Return, Israel, to the Eternal your God." Hosea encouraged a complete teshuvah, performed by Israel alone.

(Adapted from *Midbar Shur*, pp. 191-194)

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Rav Kook Torah

Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Bava Metzia 89 - 95

The Sages say, "But we teach him (the worker who is permitted to eat from food with which he is working) to not eat more than the amount of his wages so that the 'door should not be closed in front of him' (so that his excessive eating should not cause him to be undesirable to hire as a worker — Rashi)." Bava Metzia 92a

This statement is part of a three-way dispute in the mishna regarding how much a worker may eat from the food with which he works. The gemara explains that the Tana Kama permits him to eat as much as he wants without any requirement to advise him to limit the amount for his own benefit; Rabbi Elazar Chasma permits him to eat only up to the value of his wages; and the above-quoted opinion of the Sages is that he may eat as much as he wants, but we advise him to not overdo it, and not eat more than his wages in order to remain a desirable person to hire. The halacha is in accordance with this opinion.

The right of a worker to eat from the food with which he works is taught in the Torah (Devarim 13:15): "When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you desire, until you are sated, but you shall not put any into your vessel." The gemara explains earlier (87b) that this verse is speaking about a worker who enters his employer's vineyard to work there. And it is important to note that just as an employee has certain rights, he also has responsibilities to his employer. The Rambam codifies the responsibility of the employee toward his employer as follows: "He must not deprive the employer of the labor due him by idling a bit here and there, thereby dishonestly wasting the day, and he must also work with all his might. The saintly Yaakov said of his service to his father-in-law 'I served your father with all my might.' He therefore gained his reward in this world as well by being blessed with great wealth." (Laws of Hiring 13:7)

Rava said, "A person who wants to borrow an object and be exempt from payment if something happens to it should say to the lender: 'Please bring me some water'; thus it would be considered as 'borrowing it with the owner'; and if the owner is smart he will first bring the water and only afterwards lend the object." Bava Metzia 97a

Rava is giving advice to both a borrower and a lender as to how they can each legally benefit in the case of a loan of an object. A borrower ('sho'el) of an object is one of the four types of shomrim or guards: An unpaid guard, a paid guard, a renter and a borrower. A borrower is normally responsible to pay compensation in any event that he cannot return the object intact since "all the benefit is his" — i.e., he receives use of the lender's object without paying any rent. One case in which the borrower is exempt, however, is if the object "dies while doing its job".

Rava's statement above is another example of a borrower's exemption from paying for the loss of the borrowed object. The Torah states (Ex. 22:14), "If the owner is with him (the borrower) he will not be responsible for payment (if the object 'dies')." A borrower's exemption from payment, as well as any other type of guard, is often referred to as "ba'alav imo" — the owner is with him — as is the wording in the verse. The Torah does not explain the reason for the guard's exemption from payment when the owner is in the borrower's employ or service. Of course, this mitzvah, as well as every other Torah mitzvah, should be viewed as a Divine decree that does not require our understanding its reason. Nevertheless, many commentaries offer reasons for this seemingly mysterious exemption.

One reason suggested is that if the owner of the object feels so close to the one borrowing it from him that he has placed himself at his service, we can assume that he expects the borrower to return the object only if it is intact when the term of borrowing has concluded, and waives any claim for payment if the object is no longer returnable for any reason. (Seforno)

Rava in our gemara teaches what appears to be an application of this halacha. The borrower would be "smart" to ask for the owner to bring him some water, and while the owner is involved in bringing the water the borrower takes the object that the owner has agreed to lend him. Since the owner was "with him" in serving him at the time when the borrowing began, the borrower would be exempt for any loss that might occur to the borrowed object. If the owner is "smart", however, he will make sure to finish bringing the water before he gives the object to the borrower of his object, since in this manner the owner is no longer "with him" when the borrower actually becomes a borrower, and the borrower will therefore have all of the normal responsibilities of a borrower.

Although the halacha of the exemption from payment in the case of "ba'alav imo" was established and well known before Rava's statement, it is opined that Rava is teaching that even performing a relatively easy task as bringing a glass of water is considered "ba'alav imo", and qualifies for the exemption of the borrower that is taught in the Torah. (Ritva)

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Tonight, immediately after the Sabbath is over, we shall be confronted with the observance of two precious mitzvot: the kindling of the Hanukkah candles, for Hanukkah begins tonight; and the Havdalah, which marks the end of Sabbath. The question of which shall be performed first is one which engaged the attention of some of the most illustrious latter-day talmudic sages, and the solution most Jews have accepted is one which, implicitly and indirectly, expresses a great idea in Jewish ethics and moral philosophy.

The Shulhan Arukh and Rama (R. Moshe Isserles, the chief commentator on it) record with approval the custom of kindling the Hanukkah light first, and only then reciting the Havdalah (Orah Hayyim 681:2). Other authorities, such as the author of Turei Zahav (Taz), and many others, emphatically disagree. They insist that we ought to recite the Havdalah first and only afterwards light the Hanukkah candles.

While the controversy involves a large number of proofs and counter-proofs of halakhic dialectic, which are too involved to present completely at this time, it will, however, be worth our while to examine the basic ideas involved in this controversy.

The Shulhan Arukh, Rama, and all those who insist upon the precedence of Hanukkah candles over Havdalah base their verdict largely upon the principle of pirsumei nissa, the "publicizing of the miracle." The Hanukkah candles, after all, are reminders of the miracles God performed for our ancestors ba-yamim ha-hem bazeman ha-zeh—"in those days, at this time": the cruse of oil that lasted eight days, the victory of the sainted few over the diabolical many, and so on. Basic to the mitzvah of ner Hanukkah is this concept of pirsumei nissa—to make the divine miracle known amongst all peoples. That is why we are to place the Hanukkah candles in a conspicuous place—windows, doorways, and so on. Therefore, since pirsumei nissa is basic to the whole festival of Hanukkah, it requires of us to proclaim the miracle of Hanukkah as soon as the holiday begins—before any other activity, sacred or profane, is undertaken. Before eating or drinking, or even Havdalah, we are to light the Hanukkah candles, and by this act of performing the mitzvah before any other, we achieve pirsumei nissa. We let everyone know the greatness of the miracle, one which causes us to hurry and rush to perform the commandment.

The Taz and other posekim, however, require Havdalah before kindling the Hanukkah lights because they make use of a different and, they maintain, more fundamental principle, and that is the talmudic rule of tadir ve-she-eino tadir, tadir kodem: if I have before me two mitzvot to perform, and one is tadir, or constant, namely a frequent mitzvah—salient, observed regularly and periodically at set intervals, while the other is eino tadir, an irregular mitzvah, performed infrequently, at only rare times, then tadir kodem—the usual, regular, more frequent mitzvah comes first. Hence, since Havdalah is tadir, because it is observed every single week of the year, whereas kindling the Hanukkah lights is eino tadir, for it is observed only during the eight-day period of the year, Havdalah takes priority over Ner Hanukkah.

Reduced to its essentials, then, this halakhic controversy is based upon a clash of two principles: pirsumei nissa, the dramatization and publication of the unusual, the supernatural; and tadir kodem, the precedence of the regular, the constant, the usual, and the well-known.

It is remarkable that in our current practice we reflect both contradictory opinions. Faced with these two opposing decisions, the great majority of observant Jews have reconciled the two views by distinguishing between the synagogue and the home. In the synagogue we follow the practice of the Shulhan Arukh and Rama, and we light the Hanukkah lights first, thus emphasizing the principle of pirsumei nissa; and at home we usually follow the verdict of the Taz, making Havdalah first, and thus giving greater weight to the rule of tadir ve-she-eino tadir, tadir kodem (that is, the usual, the regular, the periodic is more important and thus comes first).

It is amazing how, in deciding between two technical halakhic opinions, the Jewish masses of men, women, and children have

indirectly and perhaps unconsciously expressed a whole view of life, a substantial philosophy of Judaism in its public and private aspects. For the concepts of *pirsumei nissa* and *tadir kodem* are two fundamental approaches to life—on the one hand, the need for *pirsum*, for publicizing, for the demonstration of the unusual, the dramatic, and the record-shattering; and on the other hand, the transcendent importance of constancy, of *tadir*, of the prosaic, regular, and bland routine of the religious life. What our people did by its reconciliation of these two opposing views is to say that each one is valid, each one has its importance, but each has its own place: in the synagogue, in the public domain, in the open arena of Jewish life, there we kindle Hanukkah lights before Havdalah; there we recognize the value of *pirsumei nissa*, of emphasizing the dramatic, the unusual, the outstanding, the miraculous. But at home, *be-tzin'ah*, in the privacy of one's hearth and family, there, while *pirsum* is recognized as important, the value of *tadir* is far more significant and necessary. There we must first be sure that our daily lives, in both ritual and ethics—*bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam lahavero*—are regulated by the divine word through the wisdom of Torah. There we need not and ought not play up the spectacular and the dramatic; that can wait for later. First, one must be a good Jew in the daily, ordinary, and therefore realistic and reliable sense.

This is a rewarding thought that Hanukkah teaches us by taking second place to Havdalah in our homes tonight. It reminds us that we ought not to feel disappointed if we do not experience the kind of unusual sensation or uplift at home that we do when we attend rallies. It encourages us to continue on our modest paths of *tadir*, quietly observing God's Torah, of developing nobility of character, of building a family and serving our fellow man, of bringing even a little light into the lives of our loved ones and into the heart of the stranger. It reminds us that if we dedicate ourselves to the sacred pattern of the Torah's mitzvot, then surely the *pirsumei nissa* will come eventually, for there is a heroism in this modesty of daily Jewish life, a heroism and a poetry and a dramatic quality that makes itself felt not in a momentary clap of thunder, not as an extraordinary revelation, but as a long and slow but beautiful symphony that we first begin to appreciate as we go on with the accumulation of years of such harmonious living *tadir* in the service of God and man. Then, when Havdalah gives way to Hanukkah, does the miracle of the commonplace become evident, then do we realize that there is a heroism in modesty, that the ordinary possesses its own kind of extraordinary music of the soul, and that silence can be more meaningful than the most persuasive oratory.

“Not by power nor by might, but by the spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

Then we discover that ultimately Havdalah yields to Hanukkah.

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Making a Miracle Great: Rabbi Soloveitchik on the Miracle of Chanukah

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

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Nes gadol hayah sham, “A great miracle happened there.” These beloved words are symbolized by the four initials nun (נ) gimel (ג),

heh (ה), shin (ש), which appear on the dreidel, referring of course to the miracle of Chanukah.

Moses stands at the burning bush and observes a miracle. The bush is on fire and astonishingly the leaves and branches are not consumed. Moses witnesses his first miracle. In response he says, “I see a great sight” (Exodus 3:3).

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik asks: “Why did Moses not call it a *nes*, a miracle? Why did he simply say, ‘I see something great’?”

Although Moses was aware that he was witnessing a miracle, that is not what intrigued him. Rather, what riveted Moses was the message that he heard. It was a great sight for one reason: because Moses responded to the call of God.

Simply seeing something supernatural did not impress Moses. The burning bush was “great” in his mind and heart because in that extraordinary interaction, Moses took on a new challenge and charted a new course in his life. The moment was transformative. Moses accepted a new mission.

Rabbi Soloveitchik taught, “It is not always necessary for an event to be miraculous in order to be great, and not every miraculous event is a great event.” An event is great only if the following things occur: it fosters change, it impacts the person, it ushers in a new era, and it produces great things. Whether or not the event was miraculous or natural is not critical. No matter how miraculous an event is, it is very “small” if it is wasted.

This teaching speaks directly to the great miracle of Chanukah. These events were great because they produced a transformation of the Jewish people. The Jews proved that not only could they defeat a fierce enemy on the battlefield, but they could also purify the spiritual defilement of a whole population, a nation that overwhelmingly had sunk deeply into the impurity of the soul and contamination of the spirit.

The events witnessed during the days of Chanukah inspired change. Life did not remain the same as before. During the days of Chanukah, the Jews took advantage of the new opportunity that was offered to them: a spiritual revival and a rededication to religious values and to a committed life – truly a great thing.

The Jewish people engaged in a national rededication to the Torah and tradition. “Rededication” is the very meaning of the word Chanukah. The Sages waited a full year before they declared Chanukah a holiday. Why did they not establish the holiday immediately after the great miracles of the disproportionate battle and the eight-day burning of the one flask of pure oil in the Menorah?

The Sages waited to see whether the change was lasting. Had the Jewish people truly transformed their lives? Only then, when the Sages saw the life-changing impact, did they consider this story to be great, worthy of celebration for all time.

The Jewish people, in the days of Chanukah, acted heroically, not only on the battlefield, but also in renewing and strengthening their allegiance to God and to the Torah.

As we celebrate these events each year, we should also aspire to emulate this remarkable kind of heroism in our own lives.

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider has published a new book on Chanukah, “The Light That Unites” (Halpern Press). His best selling Haggadah, “The Night That Unites” was published in English (Urim Press) and Hebrew (Yediot Achronot Press).

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In dedication of Mr. Emilio Goldstein נ"ע