

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI YAAKOV HABER**

### TorahWeb

**A**fter Yehuda's tragic loss of both his wife and two of his children, the Torah describes his encounter with Tamar, his former daughter-in-law- whom he refused to allow to marry his third son, Shaila-disguised as a harlot. Midrashim and commentaries offer widely diverse interpretations of this apparently unseemly act. (See Rambam (Hilchos Ishus 1:4) and the classic Mikra'ot G'dolot commentaries.) One famous Midrash posits that Yehuda instinctively turned away from this mysterious woman, only to be drawn back by a supernatural desire placed within him in order to set the stage for the birth of two children who would, by their peculiar birth, be a harbinger for the eventual redemption of Israel (see 38:28-30 and Rashi there), and one of whom would be the ancestor of the Melech HaMashicach, the anointed redeemer of B'nai Yisrael.. In the words of the Midrash (B'raishis Rabba 85):

"R. Yochanan stated: He wanted to pass [her] by, but Hashem placed sent him the angel appointed over desire. He [Hashem] said to him: 'Where are you going, Yehuda? From where will kings arise? From where will redeemers emerge?' 'And he turned to her on the road...'-against his will and better judgment."

On a simple plane, the Midrash describes how, often unknown to us, Hashem guides us on the correct path toward our destiny, even if sometimes in mysterious ways. In light of the fact that Yehuda's act, before the Torah was given, was permissible (see above cited Rambam) even if unseemly, the utilization by Hashem of this encounter for producing righteous children from two righteous parents from the seed of Yehuda who was to father the Davidic dynasty-once Yehuda refused to allow Tamar to marry his son, Sheila- is understandable.

On a metaphorical plane, perhaps this Midrash informs us of a deeper lesson as well. R. Bachya ibn Pakuda, in his classic Chovot Ha'L'avot (Sha'ar 'Avodas Ha'Elokim 2) describes the tension of body and soul. The soul, from a higher, spiritual world, where it only cleaved intensely to its Creator, strives to separate itself from all physicality and leave the mundane, disappointing, shallow, dark world behind. The body does not allow it to do so. It craves this world, its physical pleasures and its mundane pursuits. These physical desires, states R. Bachya, assure that Man will

survive on this world by pursuing his craving for food and will produce additional generations by pursuing marriage. We can expand on R. Bachya's approach. Many sources indicate that the whole purpose of the soul's descent to this world is the creation of this tension between body and soul. To be holy in an all spiritual environment is easy. To engage a physical world masking a deeper reality and sanctity and elevate every mundane desire and activity by using them as a vehicle to connect to one's Creator is the supreme calling of the combined soul-body entity. Perhaps the above Midrash highlights this same theme. "Yehuda," Hashem calls out, "do you seek to divorce yourself from the physical aspects of the world? Can you realize your mission solely with spiritual contemplation?" To this question, the Midrash answers a resounding: No! The human being must engage the world and elevate its passions and drives for a higher calling.

Another R. B'chaye (ben Asher), in his commentary on the Torah, makes a related statement. On the passage "v'ahavta eis Hashem Elokecha"-and you should love Hashem, your G-d" (D'varim 6:5), he asks why the Torah did not use the more intense "v'chashakta BaShem Elokecha"-and you should crave (or desire) Hashem, your G-d". To this question, he answers that cheishek leaves no room for any other desire or love. Ahava allows for other loves as well. Since Man, in order to survive and serve Hashem with every aspect of his existence, must also pursue food, money, and marriage, he must "make room" for other loves in his life besides G-d and love G-d above all of them. This statement is truly shocking! In light of the above, I believe R. B'chaye's remarks can be amplified by stressing that it is precisely through these vehicles of engaging the world in a pure, dedicated way geared ultimately toward Divine service that one arrives at the ultimate, unadulterated love of G-d. Rav Soloveitchik once stated in a lecture that it is through the love of a spouse that one ultimately comes to the love of G-d. Through the finite one arrives at the infinite!

Another Talmudic passage (Kiddushin 30b) also sheds light on this same broad theme. "Barasi yeitzer hara, barasi lo Torah tavlin"-I created the Evil Inclination; I create the Torah as its antidote!" Whereas the word tavlin is usually translated as antidote, its literal meaning is "spice or flavoring." How is the Torah the spice for the Yeitzer Hara?! A Chassidic giant explained that the "ikkar is the Yeitzer Hara; the Torah

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guides its application!" In other words, human drives, desires, and ambitions cause the person to engage the world, strive for greatness, yearn for goals and aspirations. The Torah informs us as to how to channel these same urges for a higher purpose.

The upcoming festival of Chanuka is normally associated with the victory of the spirit over the physical, the family of Kohanim over the paganistic Greeks, the Torah outlook over the diametrically opposed Hellenistic outlook. Indeed, Levush explains why the Shulchan 'Aruch (670:2) rules that festive meals eaten during Chanuka do not have the status of se'udot mitzva. Since the danger was a spiritual one and the victory was of a spiritual nature, we celebrate in a purely spiritual way with the lighting of the menorah symbolizing the light of Torah. In the events leading up to Purim, by contrast, the danger was physical, and the salvation was a physical one. Hence, we celebrate in a physical way through a meal of thanksgiving. However, other pos'kim quoted by Rema maintain that meals eaten during Chanuka do have the status of se'udot mitzva and certainly if shirot v'tishbachot are sung and offered at these meals. Perhaps our approach above helps explain this view. The Jews rising up against the Hellenistic Greeks-famous for their glorification of the body alone and for the hedonistic pursuit of bodily pleasure for the sake of pleasure itself-were fighting to reestablish the message of a Torah lifestyle in Israel. This lifestyle urges us to elevate the physical by channeling all aspects of life for a higher calling which is exactly the message of a se'udat mitzva. Perhaps this also explains the practice of eating latkes and sufguniyot, or, more generally, foods cooked in oil. By using food to commemorate the miracle of the oil of the menorah and express our thanksgiving to Hashem, we elevate the most basic of human activities- eating-and inject it with additional meaning. May the renewed sensitivity which Chanuka brings to kiddush hachomer-sanctifying the material- remain with us throughout the year! © 2005 The TorahWeb Foundation & Rabbi Y. Haber

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

It is well known that on the first day of Chanukah one candle is lit. On each successive night, one more is kindled. This in fact is the view of Beit Hillel as

recorded in the Talmud. (Shabbat 21b)

Beit Shammai dissents. His position is that on the first night eight candles are lit. On each successive night, one less light is kindled.

The Talmud explains the reasoning behind each view. Beit Hillel bases his view on Ma'alim Bakodesh, holiness moves in ascending order. Since lighting the Chanukah candles is a holy act, each night requires an additional candle to be lit.

Beit Shammai sees it as corresponding to the sacrifices offered on the Sukkot festival. As they were offered on successive days in descending order, so, too, the Chanukah lights. For Beit Shammai the descending order also reflects the amount of oil remaining as the miracle unfolded. On the first night there was enough oil for eight days, on the second night there was left enough for seven days until the eighth night when only the amount for that night remained.

Yet there is another way to look at this disagreement. Chanukah is a two dimensional miracle. On the one hand, we were victorious over the Syrian Greeks who were prepared to annihilate our religion. This miracle is spelled out in the Al Hanisim prayer. In it we say that on Chanukah G-d "gave the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few."

There is also the miracle of the lights. There was enough oil for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight. This miracle is alluded to in the Haneirot Halalu which is recited after the candle lighting.

In one word the Al Hanisim celebrates the physical miracle of overcoming the Syrian Greeks. The Haneirot Halalu, the spiritual miracle of retaining our belief system even in the face of powerful assimilationist forces.

Could it be that Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree concerning which miracle is paramount. For Beit Shammai it was the physical military victory. Hence, the candles are lit in descending order. Such is the way of military victory. At first, it looms large, all eight candles are lit. But, while physical victory is important, if it does not lead to a meaningful message, it quickly fades and diminishes in power.

Beit Hillel is of the opposite opinion. For Beit Hillel, the miracle is spiritual. The way of spirituality is to begin modestly almost unnoticed. In time, the spiritual power expands and becomes larger and larger. Hence Beit Hillel insists the candles be lit in increasing numbers - each day the power of the spirit becomes stronger and stronger.

This is an appropriate message on Chanukah when in Israel - despite what we may read in the press - soldiers display important physical power and do so with a sense of deep ethics. This is known in the Israeli Defense Forces as tihur haneshek, purity of arms. In this sense our soldiers reflect the words of Zechariah read this week: "Not by might nor by power but by My

spirit says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) This does not mean that might and power are not important. Indeed, some commentators understand this sentence to mean "Not only by might nor only by power, but also by my spirit says the Lord of hosts." Power and might are crucial when infused with a spirit of G-d.

And so it is with our holy soldiers. On this Chanukah may they all be blessed. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Reuvein returned to the pit" (Beraishis 37:29). Where had Reuvein been that he had to "return" to the pit he thought Yosef was still trapped in? Rashi says that "when [Yosef] was sold he (Reuvein) wasn't there because it was his day to go and help his father" back in Chevron. Which leads to an obvious question: If the brothers took turns going back home to help Yaakov, why did he send Yosef to Shechem to find out how they (and the flocks) were doing? As each brother came home, he could get updated on how he and the others were!

One possibility presented (see Anaf Yosef) is that they didn't start taking turns until they realized that without Yosef no one would be there helping their father. However, if they first started visiting and helping Yaakov after Yosef's mysterious disappearance, wouldn't it be plainly obvious that they had something to do with it? A closer look at the midrashic sources will also show that this rotation began before circumstances allowed the brothers to try eliminating Yosef.

When the brothers first plotted to kill him, we are told that "Reuvein heard [about it] and he saved him (Yosef) from their hands" (37:21). Here too it seems that Reuvein was not initially with his brothers, leading the Midrash (Rabbah 84:15) to ask where he was. Three approaches are given, the first being that "each one of them helped his father [on] his day, and that day was Reuvein's [turn]." If the reason Reuvein wasn't there when they were first *plotting* to kill Yosef was because he it was his turn, then obviously they were returning home even before Yosef was missing, and Yaakov could have asked them then how things were.

Even though Rashi makes his comment on Reuvein's return after the sale (so theoretically could be of the opinion that this rotation didn't start until after Yosef was no longer home), his comments on the Midrash Rabbah show that it began earlier. (See footnote.)

There are numerous other approaches that try to explain why Yaakov had to send Yosef to check on his brothers if they came back to Yaakov on a regular basis, but they all have certain weaknesses.

Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf ("Maharzo") suggests that each "turn" was not literally for a day, but for a longer

time period, and during that long stretch Yaakov wanted to find out how things were. However, if it were Reuvein's turn to go (and/or return) at the time of the sale, then either it wasn't a long period of time, or it occurred during a switch in shifts, so Yaakov wouldn't have needed to send Yosef then.

Moshe Aryeh Mirkin explains that each brother was essentially on his own, so couldn't report on the others. Yaakov sent Yosef so that he could report on all of them. It would seem, though, that as each of them took their turn helping at home Yaakov could ask them how they (and the animals in their care) were. Why would Yaakov put Yosef at risk rather than hearing directly from each of them, even if the reports would be staggered?

The Nachalas Yaakov provides an answer that he admits is a reach: Yes, Yaakov could have asked the (returning) brothers how things were, but didn't trust their answers. He doesn't explain why Yaakov didn't believe them.

The Oznayim LaTorah says that Yosef's initial reports about his brothers (37:2) were that they were mistreating the animals. They were only interested in what they provided for them, and if they could accomplish that while compromising the comfort of the animals, they weren't interested in doing anything extra. (He contrasts this with the leaderships qualities of Moshe and Dovid that became apparent from the way they treated the animals in their care, and adds that the accusations that they ate "the limbs of a living creature" were not based on actually seeing them do so, but on their indifference to the pain and comfort of the animals, which led him to believe they could conceivably do this as well.) Therefore, Yaakov wanted to know if they were treating the animals any better, and sent Yosef to find out. Nevertheless, this still implies that Yaakov didn't trust them enough to ask them directly how they were treating the animals.

One of my chavrusas, Rabbi Aryeh Weiss, suggests that it wasn't that Yaakov didn't trust *them* to provide accurate answers as much as not trusting *himself* to properly assess them. His father, Yitzchok, had overestimated his brother, Eisav, even though he (Yaakov) saw who he really was. Therefore, he wanted to get Yosef's perspective on how his brothers were doing, rather than relying on his own observations during their visits.

Another possibility might be that Yaakov wanted Yosef's perspective on the whole picture, whereas the brothers could only provide their individual perspectives on the pieces they dealt with. Much like a CEO oversees the various departments of an organization, and can provide a more comprehensive picture than each department head can, Yosef was the "lead shepherd" (see 37:2, where "he shepherded his brothers regarding the flocks" rather than "shepherded the flocks along with his brothers"), and Yaakov wanted

Yosef's take on how all the pieces were fitting together. Even if each of the brothers were treating the animals properly, did they form a cohesive unit? Was it the optimal environment for the animals? How were the brothers themselves getting along? Was it only with Yosef that they couldn't get along, or did they quarrel amongst themselves even when Yosef was far away? These were questions that Yaakov couldn't get the full answers to from each of his sons individually, but may have felt that Yosef could get a better handle on.

Footnote: Rashi understands the first approach in the Midrash to be that Reuvein was afraid to leave Yosef with his brothers (to go back home) because he knew what they wanted to do. He therefore first convinced them to put Yosef in the pit (intending to rescue him later) and then went to help Yaakov, only to "return" to find that Yosef was sold during his absence. The term "heard" doesn't mean that he hadn't *heard* them talking about it until now, but that he "realized" and "understood" what would happen. This would make all three approaches in this midrash consistent, as the second approach is that he "realized" that he would be blamed for Yosef's absence and the third is that he "realized" that Yosef still considered him a brother despite his earlier sin, as there were 11 stars in his dream, not just 10 (so how could he not save him). The bottom line, though, is that (according to Rashi) Reuvein couldn't leave to take his pre-existing turn at home until he made sure Yosef was safe. If the rotation didn't start until after Yosef was missing, there wouldn't be any "turns" yet requiring him to leave! © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**his weeks parsha deals with the temptations of human beings. The brothers of Yosef are mightily displeased with his attitude and behavior towards them. They choose to overlook the fact that he is only seventeen years old, orphaned from his mother and overly favored and protected by his father. When he arrives alone and vulnerable at their camp, he is an inviting target for their frustrations and wrath. Thus they are tempted by the obvious opportunity presented to solve the Yosef problem. In giving in to this temptation and not assessing correctly the consequences of their so doing they are dooming themselves to being haunted by this fatal impulse of theirs all of their remaining lives. All sins and temptations require opportunity to be actualized. Human social existence by its very nature provides opportunity and our own innate character supplies the temptation. Thus the contest between right and wrong, good and evil, the moral and the despicable, is a never ending one as far as our lives are concerned. This is the basis for Judaism's posit of free will and freedom of choice as being the ultimate arbiter of our physical and spiritual existence and

immortality. We are always tempted but we are bidden not to give in to temptation. Our ability to control ourselves in the face of temptation is the battlefield of our lives. It is no wonder therefore that the rabbis in Avot declared that the truly strong hero in life is the one who can deal with and overcome temptations. He is the one who captures the city.

Yosef is also sorely tempted by opportunities that arise in his life. Alone and in servitude, he is seemingly easy prey for the jaded wife of Potiphar. Yet at the last moment he resists the passion and temptation of the moment and realizes the destructive consequences of immoral behavior. At great risk and danger he resists the temptation of the flesh and through that act of momentary self-denial attains for himself the title of Yosef hatzadik Joseph the righteous. The Torah and the Midrash in recounting this tale of Yosef's temptation and triumph point out the strengths that allowed Yosef to resist the advances of the wife of Potiphar. They included, but are not limited to, the upbringing and education he received from his father, his own visions and dreams and ambitions in life, his inherent holy nature and its ability to clearly identify right from wrong and his refusal to sin against G-d. All of these and other factors as well, for human beings are very complex creatures, combine to allow Yosef to resist the temptation of the moment. The opportunity is present but the choice regarding that opportunity is left to each one of us to exercise. The factors that came to aid Yosef in avoiding the temptation to do wrong a sense of family, a vision of the future and how we would wish ourselves to be remembered by later generations, and an innate fear of G-d are present within all of us. Temptations to do wrong will always abound. The ability to deny victory to those temptations becomes the hallmark of true Jewish living. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### **DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

### **What's Bothering Rashi?**

**T**he following three parshiyot tell us the ever-fascinating story of Joseph and his brothers. The drama is played out on two planes: the human and the Divine. While our parsha says "And he (Jacob) sent him out from the valley of Hebron" (Genesis 37:14) later Joseph states it otherwise when he says (Genesis 45:8) "It was not you who sent me here, but G-d." We see the two parallel perspectives-the human actions are but a shadow of the Divine will. The following verse illustrates this same idea. We will see how Rashi, Ramban and Ibn Ezra interpret the verse.

"And a man found him and he was wandering in a field and the man asked him 'what are you seeking?'" (Genesis 37:15)

"And a man found him"-RASHI: "This is [the angel] Gabriel, as it says (Daniel 10:21) 'and the man Gabriel.'"

Can you see why Rashi comments here? What is bothering him?

An Answer: An important assumption of Torah interpretation is that while the Torah records historical events, it does not record every detail. If a detail is indeed recorded, no matter how trivial it may appear at first glance, we assume that it is significant.

That is what's bothering Rashi here. Why mention the incidental event that Joseph got lost and a man found him? It would seem that what is important in this story is just the fact that he, Joseph, came to his brothers and they sold him into slavery and he ended up in Egypt. This was the beginning of the Egyptian Exile. Why the need to tell us about "the man who found him"?

How is Rashi's comment an answer to this question?

An Answer: Rashi's comment that this stranger was the angel Gabriel informs us that the Divine hand was at work here. Joseph wasn't just strolling along on his own-a Divine angel was guiding him, guaranteeing that he would, in fact, reach his brothers and not return home to Jacob.

Two other major commentaries voice their opinion about this "man" who helped Joseph reach his brothers.

IBN EZRA: "According to p'shat, this was a passerby."

We see how the Ibn Ezra stresses that the simple p'shat is that this was an ordinary human being passing by, not an angel.

But then we can ask what Rashi implicitly asked: Why does the Torah need to tell us such a trivial piece of information?

RAMBAN says the following: "...Scripture mentions this at length in order to relate that many events befell him (Joseph) which could properly have caused him to return, but he endured everything patiently in respect for his father. It also informs us that the Divine decree is abiding, while man's efforts are worthless. The Holy One, blessed be He, sent him (Joseph) an unwitting guide in order to bring him unto their (the brothers') hands. It is this which the Sages intended when they said that these "men" (Hebrew "ishim") were angels, for these events did not occur without purpose but rather to teach us that "the counsel of Hashem will endure."

The Ramban has deepened our understanding with this comment. His comment is, in a way, a brilliant combination of both the Ibn Ezra and of Rashi's

comments. It also offers an important insight into the Sages' statement that these men were angels.

The Ramban explains that the man here was an ordinary man (a passerby) yet he was unwittingly fulfilling G-d's design. He was actually "sent" by G-d to guide Joseph, though he himself was not aware of the significance of his actions. In Hebrew the word "malach" means both angel and messenger. Because every "malach," human or supernatural, is G-d's messenger activated to implement His will on earth.

The Ramban's comment gives us an insight into Rashi's simple one-word comment "Gabriel." It is quite possible that Rashi, as the Ramban, saw this man as a human messenger of G-d, but in order to convey the Divine significance of his actions, Rashi calls him Gabriel-an angel. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

### RABBI LABEL LAM

## Dvar Torah

**T**he Chamberlain of the Bakers saw that he had interpreted well, so he said to Joseph, "I too! In my dream-behold! Three wicker baskets were on my head. And in the uppermost basket were all kinds of Pharaoh's food- baker's handiwork-and the birds were eating them from above my head." Joseph responded and said, "This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will lift your head from you and hang you on a tree: birds will eat your flesh from you." (Breishis 40:16- 19)

How did Joseph know that "the baker" would be put to death? What in the dream indicated that this would be his ill-fated end? The Dubner Maggid, with one of his famous parables, gives us what may be the key to Joseph's unerring analytical processes.

There was an artist so talented that could paint a picture with such realism that it was often impossible to distinguish it from actual life. Once he drew a scene that portrayed a man standing in an open field with a basket of bread on top of his head. The painting was so life-like. He presented it to the king. The king, so proud of his new acquisition, offered a handsome reward for anyone who could find any fault in the painting. The painting was so real that actual birds were swooping down to try to eat the bread in the painting.

Many challengers came and tried to earn the prize money but no one was successful in finding a single flaw in the painting. It was too-too perfect. Then a wise old man approached the painting. He observed the phenomena of the birds trying to eat the bread pictured atop the head of the man portrayed in the painting. In a moment, he had discovered a serious problem with the realism of this painting and it was he who won the prize.

He simply pointed out that if the birds are trying to eat the bread atop the man's head then there is something wrong with the picture of the man. He reasoned that if the birds would perceive the portrait of

the man as being true to life, then they would be too scared to approach the bread. Whatever the fault may be, it is unknown but the birds do not take this man to be real.

So it was that Joseph had noticed that the birds were eating off the basket in the dream of "the baker" and if the birds are eating from his bread basket then he is no longer to be considered alive. © 2005 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**A**t first glance, the question in the title of this article seems to be trivial, since the answer is given explicitly. "And men who were Midyanite merchants passed by, and they raised Yosef up from the pit. And they sold Yosef to the Yishmaelites." [Bereishit 37:28]. (See Rashbam.) But if it was the Midyanites who sold Yosef to the Yishmaelites, why are Yosef's brothers considered guilty of the crime? After all, that is what Yosef said to them, "I am your brother Yosef, whom you sold to Egypt" [45:4].

This matter can be clarified by a proper understanding of the sequence of events when Yosef was sold. At first, the brothers wanted to kill him, but two of them objected to the murder. The first one to object was Reuven, who was against any violence, saying to his brothers, "Do not spill any blood, throw him into this pit in the desert, but do not harm him" [37:22]. The Torah testifies what his real intention was, "in order to rescue him from their hand and to return him to his father" [ibid]. Later on, Yehuda understands the seriousness of throwing Yosef into the pit, even if the brothers would not kill him, and he proposes a different solution. While this also is a grave suggestion, it is not as serious as killing Yosef. "What good will it do to kill our brother and to cover up his blood? Let us sell him to the Yishmaelites and not harm ourselves, for he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." [37:26-27].

But neither brother succeeded in saving Yosef. Reuven, who wanted to rescue him from the pit, is shocked to discover that Yosef has been removed. And Yehuda, who wanted to sell Yosef, is preceded by the Yishmaelites, who make the sale on their own. What is the significance of these failures by Reuven and Yehuda?

Evidently the objective of the Torah is to point out the problematic aspects of the approaches of the two brothers, Reuven and Yehuda, even though their attempts were better than what the other brothers wanted to do. Reuven, who wanted to prevent any harm to Yosef, wanted to avoid open confrontation with the brothers and acted in front of them as if he also hated Yosef. It is true that his real intention was to prevent any harm to Yosef, as he claimed to his brothers at a much later stage-"Did I not tell you not to

sin with the youth? But you would not listen!" [42:22]. However, we see in this week's Torah portion that he never explicitly said this, and instead he tried to fool his brothers. Thus, the Torah teaches us that somebody who is not ready to stand up courageously for his principles might eventually be forced to pay a price. In the end, Reuven's actions led to Yosef being sold and not returned to his father.

The events with Yehuda are similar, but to a lesser degree. He wanted to sell Yosef, but only after he had already been thrown into the pit. We can assume that Yehuda changed his mind as a result of Yosef's pleading from the pit (as the brothers described years later, "We are guilty with respect to our brother, since we saw his suffering when he begged us, and we refused to listen" [42:21]). But the problem started when Yosef was first thrown into the pit, and by the time Yehuda decided to improve the situation there was not much he could do.

In summary, then, Yosef's claim that the brothers had sold him was only partly true. It was sharp criticism of Reuven, who wanted to rescue Yosef but in the end caused him to be sold. With respect to Yehuda, on the other hand, Yosef's comment pointed out an improved situation, since Yehuda had originally meant to kill him but changed his mind and tried to have him sold, even though when he finally acted it was too late.

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

**I** always felt that one of the most inane messages printed on the casual shirts worn by many of our high-school students is "Don't worry, be happy." Perhaps these words reflect the desire of a grazing cow, but they certainly ought not serve as the wish of a serious human being. Our Psalmist, on the other hand, teaches us that "Happy is the individual who is constantly concerned," and a truly religious personality is called a haredi, one who "trembles" in his desire to properly serve G-d and in his struggle to overcome evil. Indeed, the very name Yisroel-given by G-d to father Jacob and the brand name by which our unique nation is called-means, "he has fought against G-dly and human powers, and has emerged victorious" (Gen. 32:29) I can still hear the words of my maternal grandmother ringing in my ears: "There is plenty of time for rest and tranquility after one-hundred-and-twenty years in the cemetery; this world is a place in which we must work and struggle." How can we possibly expect to "perfect the world in the kingship of the Divine" without waging war against evil and inhumanity?

From this perspective, one of the most well-known commentaries of Rashi to this week's Biblical portion of Vayeshev seems perplexing: "Jacob wished to live in tranquility (Hebrew, Shalvah); there sprang up against him the anger (Hebrew rogez) of Joseph. The righteous wish to dwell in tranquility. The Holy one,

blessed be He, says, 'Is what is being prepared for them in the world to come not sufficient that they also wish to dwell in tranquility in this world?'"

How can the Almighty fault Grand-father Jacob for desiring to live in tranquility? Did he not take on the battle for the birthright with "both hands" against Esau because he realized the tremendous importance of the leadership of the clan of Abraham? Did he not labor against Laban in order to escape the seduction of assimilation? Certainly Jacob's life would have been far more tranquil and perhaps his beloved Rachel might not ever have suffered such a premature death-had he remained with the hedonism of his herds and not undertaken the difficult and dangerous journey back to his father's home! It was not "Stalbet" but rather struggle which was the hallmark of Jacob's life, whose fundamental prayer was much more in line with Rav Nahman's, "Dear G-d, I do not ask you to make my life easy, I only implore you to help make me strong" rather than with the public relations emblem of "Make me happy, devoid of worry." And strength in the face of struggle is what has characterized the righteous of Israel throughout our ideal-driven and blood-soaked history!

Furthermore, why does Rashi (in citing the midrash) refer to the anger (rogez) of Joseph rather than the tragedy of Joseph, a most beloved son literally torn away from his father's loving embrace for a 22 year period in which he was thought to be dead? The argument and language of Rashi seems counter to what Judaism really stands for!

I believe that the answer lies in our understanding of the Hebrew term "shalvah", as in "Jacob wished to dwell in "shalvah", which I translated as tranquility. The Book of Proverbs (17:1) takes the Hebrew shalvah as specifically referring to household peace and harmony: "It is better to have a hard, dry crust of bread in an atmosphere of tranquility (shalvah) rather than a full table of roasted meats with familial strife."

Our righteous are prepared to conduct battles and wage wars against the likes of Laban and Esau, those enemies who would destroy us with their hatred from without and who would attempt to undermine our ideology from within; they well understand that such is the mission of Israel, the mandate of being a 'holy nation, a Kingdom of priest-Kohanim, a light unto the nations of the world.'" What they seek to avoid are the petty jealousies and trivial tensions which often take place within the Jewish family itself-strife which emanates not from our struggle for survival or our message for messianism but rather from individual ambitions and personal pique.

Jacob understood that he would have to wage combat against the likes of Esau and Laban in order to protect the birthright of Israel; such a struggle is built into the key name Israel. What he resented was the

anger against him felt by his beloved Joseph for his having blatantly favored the son who deserved-by virtue of his gifts of character and universal vision-to have been favored; It was after all this paternal favoritism which aroused the petty sibling rivalry which almost led to Joseph's death. And tragically it is such paltry and picayune enviousness which can be most devastating and destructive. Hence it becomes at least as critical to extend as much time on familial harmony as we expend on maternal survival and ideological influence. What we must learn from the Joseph stories is that the family feeds into-and ultimately determines-the status of the nation.

I recently led an Ohr Torah Stone Rabbinical Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, for our fifteen rabbis serving in South America. I learned there of the amazing accomplishments of Rav Millevsky, the towering, scholarly presence in the first half of the twentieth century whose influence is still felt in Montevideo. He left his first pulpit as the result of a bitter feud with the butchers and ritual slaughterers, after which he built a second Synagogue where he remained for several decades. At the dedication of the second Synagogue, he declared, "Let it never be said that this newly-established congregation was born out of strife (mahloket); let it rather be known that it was born out of war (milhamah). Strife is engendered by petty individuals in search of personal gain: war is fought by generals on behalf of great ideals." Father Jacob, like Rabbi Millevsky, was a great general prepared, if necessary to wage a fateful war, but had little patience for the jealous strife of picayune personalities. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah sensitizes us to the severity of injustice. The prophet Amos begins by informing us of the limits of Hashem's tolerance. Hashem says, "I can be patient over the three offenses of the Jewish people, but the fourth is inexcusable. Namely, the sale of the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. They anticipate the dirt placed on the head of the impoverished." (2:6, 7) Amos admonishes the Jewish people here for their insensitivity towards injustice. He complains about the judges who would bend the law for nominal sums and exchange justice for an inexpensive pair of shoes. They would discriminate against the poor and even drag the impoverished through the dirt when they refused to comply with their unjustified sentence. Over these Hashem expresses serious disturbance and declares them unforgivable.

The Radak, in explanation of the above passages, magnifies this disturbance and interprets the three offenses mentioned here to be the three cardinal sins- idolatry, incest and murder. Hashem explains that

the most cardinal sins do not receive an immediate response from Above. For these Hashem is somewhat patient and allows the offender the opportunity to repent and correct his outrageous behavior. But the injustice shown to the poor evokes Hashem's immediate response. Rabbeinu Bachya (see introduction to our Parsha) explains the basis for this and reminds us that the poor place their total trust in Hashem. Their financial resources do not command any respect or assistance from others which forces them to place their total trust in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem pledges to come immediately to their defense and responds harshly to any injustice done to them.

The Pirkei D'Reb Eliezer (Chapter 38) sees in the above passages a reference to the infamous sale of Yoseif Hatzaddik by his brothers, the tribes of Israel. Chazal explain that the brothers sold Yoseif for the equivalent of twenty silver dollars and that each brother purchased a pair of shoes with his portion of the money, two silver dollars. According to R' Eliezer, this is the incident Amos refers to when reprimanding the Jewish people for selling the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. The prophet tells us that this sin was unforgivable and was viewed with greater severity than every cardinal offense. With this statement the prophet alludes to the fact that the greatest scholars of Israel, the ten holy martyrs would be brutally murdered in atonement for this sin. Hashem said that the sale of Yoseif, unlike all other sins, could never be overlooked and that one day the greatest Tannaim (Mishnaic authors) would suffer inhuman torture and be taken from us in atonement for this sin. No offense of the Jewish people ever evoked a response so harsh as this one and the torturous death of the ten martyrs remains the most tragic personal event in all of Jewish history.

This week's haftorah shares with us an important perspective regarding the offense of Yoseif's sale by focusing on a particular aspect of the offense. As we glean from the prophet's words it was not the actual sale that aroused Hashem's wrath, rather the condition of the sale. Amos refers to the indignity shown to Yoseif and the insensitivity towards his feelings, being sold for an inexpensive pair of shoes. When lamenting the ten martyrs during the liturgy in the Yom Kippur service we accent this dimension and recount that the wicked Roman ruler filled the entire courtroom with shoes. This was his fiendish way of reminding the martyrs about their indignant behavior and insensitivity towards their brother.

The upshot of this is that there was some room to justify the actual sale of Yoseif. The Sforno (37:18) explains that the brothers truly perceived that their life was in serious danger as long as Yoseif remained in their surroundings. After closely following his actions and anticipating the outcome of his inexcusable attitude and behavior the brothers found it necessary to protect themselves from his inevitable attack of them. Although

they totally misread the entire situation from the start it can be argued that their precautionary measures were somewhat justified and permissible. However, Sforno draws our attention to their insensitivity during these trying moments. The brothers are quoted to have reflected on their decision and said, "But we are guilty for observing his pain when he pleaded with us and we turned a deaf ear to it." (Breishis 42:21) Even they faulted themselves for their insensitivity towards their brother. When he pleaded for his life they should have reconsidered and adjusted their harsh decision. It is this insensitivity that the prophet refers to when focusing upon the sale for shoes. Apparently, they purchased these shoes in exchange for Yoseif to indicate that he deserved to be reduced to dirt. Their statement reflected that whoever challenged their authority deserved to be leveled and reduced to nothing. (see Radal to Pirkei D'R'Eliezer)

This expression of indignation was inexcusable and required the most severe of responses. Hashem chose the illustrious era of the Tannaim to respond to this offense. During those times a quorum of prominent scholars presided over Israel which personified the lessons of brotherhood and sensitivity. An elite group was chosen for the task, including: the Prince of Israel, the High Priest and Rabbi Akiva who authored the statement, "Love your friend as yourself" is the fundamental principle of the Torah." In atonement for the inexcusable sale Hashem decreed upon these martyrs the most insensitive torturous death ever to be experienced. The Tzor Hamor (see Seder Hadoros year 3880) explains that the lesson this taught the Jewish people was eternal. After this horrifying experience the Jewish people were finally cleansed from all effects of the infamous offense done to Yoseif. From hereafter they could be authentically identified as a caring and sensitive people.

From this we learn how sensitive we must be and even when our harsh actions are justified we must exercise them with proper sensitivities. As difficult as the balance may be we must always feel for our Jewish brethren and show them the proper dignity and compassion they truly deserve. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org



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