

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**T**he Torah provides three reasons for the brothers' hatred towards Yosef; his telling Yaakov when they did something wrong (Beraishis 37:2, see Rashi), the favoritism Yaakov showed towards him (37:3-4), and the dreams of royalty that he had (37:5-11). After telling them his dream about their sheaves bowing down to his, which indicated that he would rule over them, "they hated him even more, because of his dreams and because of his words" (37:8). Which words? Since the "dreams" were already mentioned, the "words" must refer to the things Yosef was telling Yaakov about his brothers (see Rashi and Rashbam).

However, it seems odd that Yosef snitching on his brothers should be referred to again after the dream, as this implies that it bothered them even more now than it had before. Why would this be considered worse after the dream? We can understand why his dreams bothered them, and could make them hate him more, but how could his dreams have made his telling on them a bigger factor than it had been previously?

What was the underlying cause of their hatred towards Yosef? They considered him a "rodef," a pursuer trying to kill them (spiritually and/or physically, see Sefornu on 38:18). Therefore, they intended on killing him as a preemptive measure, but decided that selling him as a slave in Egypt would also prevent his intentions from coming to fruition. But how was he trying to kill them? And how was snitching on them or dreaming about ruling over them (or being Yaakov's favorite) a part of this plot?

Avraham had two children, Yitzchok and Yishmael, but only Yitzchok became his spiritual heir. Similarly, Yitzchok had two children, Yaakov and Eisav, but only Yaakov carried on the Abrahamic mission. The brothers were afraid that Yosef was trying to set things up in the same way so that only he would be the continuation of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and that they would be excluded just as Yishmael and Eisav

were. Rav Aharon Kotler, z"l (Mishnas Rebbe Aharon) says that there was a basis for their fear, as it would have been appropriate for Yosef to father 12 Tribes, just as his father did (see Soteh 36b). But there's even more to the story.

"Just as [G-d's] name rested on Yaakov, so was it (originally) appropriate that it should rest on Eisav" (Midrash Zuta Shir Hashirim 1:13). The Midrash then goes on to describe what would have happened had Eisav actually fulfilled his potential, and the Nation of Israel descended from both brothers: "Eisav would have had kings descend from him, and Yaakov would have had Priests come from him. The first blessings (the ones that Yaakov "took" from Eisav) were meant for Eisav, and the latter ones (given before Yaakov fled, 28:3-4) for Yaakov. Leah and Zilpa were meant [to be married to] Eisav and Rachel and Bilhah were meant for Yaakov. [But] all of these presents were taken from [Eisav]. He sold the birthright to Yaakov, [and] he removed the yoke of heaven from upon him[self]. The Name was [therefore] taken [from Eisav] and rested on Yaakov twofold."

Even after it was clear that Eisav was not very religious, Yitzchok hoped that he would at least support Yaakov's spiritual pursuits, which is why he had wanted to give Eisav the blessings for material wealth (see [www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/toldos.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/toldos.pdf)). Leah (and Zilpa) would still have married Eisav, and although not part of the Nation of Israel, would have had the role of providing the material needs for Israel to focus on spirituality. When Yaakov "stole" the blessings, he took over the responsibilities of both, and therefore married Rachel and Leah (and Bilhah and Zilpa). All 12 Tribes came from him and were included in the "Children of Israel" (see [www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/vayeitzei.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/vayeitzei.pdf)).

But were the roles of the children of Rachel and Leah the same now as they would have been had Eisav still been in the picture? "And Yaakov loved Yosef from all of his sons because he was his best student" (Unkules' translation of 37:3). They had a special relationship because of it, and Yaakov taught him things that he didn't share with the others (see Rashi). It sure seemed as if Yosef, the son of Rachel, was taking on the role that focused on the spiritual. Which would leave Leah's children the role of providing the things Rachel's children needed, including being the government leaders (i.e. kings) that would build the society within which the Torah would flourish.

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated  
in honor of my father and teacher  
Cantor Oscar M. Lavinsky**

עד מאה ועשרים

**by Rabbi Arthur Lavinsky, Phoenix, Arizona**

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE  
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).  
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL [YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG](mailto:YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG)**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL  
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL [YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG](mailto:YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG)**

When Yosef tattled on his brothers, his intentions were to allow Yaakov to correct them and help them become better. They thought it was an attempt by Yosef to exclude them from the spiritual picture by painting them as sinners. But was his intention to exclude them completely, the way that Yishmael and Eisav were excluded, or only to exclude them from what was originally supposed to be just Yaakov's role, including them as part of the Nation of Israel in the role that Eisav would have had had he stayed within the fold?

Once Yosef shared his dreams of royalty, they felt that it had to be the former. Why would Yosef be dreaming about being the king if he didn't want that role or intend on taking it? If he thought he was the prized student who would also be the king, where would that leave them? They were therefore convinced that his bad reports to Yaakov were intended to get them to be excluded completely. "And they hated him even more because of his dreams and because of his words," as they attributed a more sinister intent to his words after hearing about his royal aspirations. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

In the "Al HaNissim" ("for all the miracles") prayer which we recite during every Amidah and Grace after Meals prayer during all eight days of Hanukkah, our praise to G-d opens, "In the days of Mattathias son of Yohanan High Priest Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Greek Kingdom rose up against your nation Israel to cause them to forget your Torah..." Why the seemingly superfluous words, "and his son's"? We have identified the period by mentioning the name of the High Priest: is that identification not sufficient?

We have previously explained that the major war which was fought between the Hellenists and the Hebrews began not as a fight between the foreign Greek Syrians and the Judeans but rather as a Civil War within Judea, an internecine battle between the more traditional Jews who remained faithful to the Jewish laws of Kashrut, circumcision and the Sabbath sanctity and the more "enlightened" and sophisticated "Grecophile" Jews who wished to transform Jerusalem into a Greek city-state (Polis) and bring into the Holy

city the Olympic Games dedicated to a G-d of Greek mythology.

Now it might have been thought that while the older generation remained true to Torah-Judaism, the younger generation was seduced by the more modern attraction of Greek philosophy, Greek theatre, Greek art, and Greek hedonistic pleasures. This was not the case, insists our Al HaNissim prayer; the children of the High Priest remained together with their father in their joint battle against the Hellenistic heresy. That is why the addition of "and his sons" is so significant to the prayer! It is as if we are being told that the younger Hasmoneans as well clung to the eternal truths and values of our G-d-given religion and national life-style; the fathers and sons fought side by side to purify our menorah. And when the traditionalists seemed to be emerging victorious, the Greek-Syrians were brought in by the assimilationist ruling-class of priests in the false hope of turning the tide.

This special religious relationship between father and son is most poignantly expressed by a famous Talmudic Commentary on a critical moment in the life of Joseph in Egypt, described in this week's Biblical reading. The young and handsome Joseph, having been sold into Egyptian slavery by his jealous brothers, is purchased by Potiphar, the Egyptian Minister of Culinary Arts, who quickly appoints the Hebrew his steward, in charge of all internal and household affairs. The minister's wife, obviously attracted by Joseph's ability and charm, attempts to seduce him. "And (Joseph) refused" (Gen. 39:8), cries out the Biblical text - but with the drawn out and multi-trilled cantillation known as the shalshet. This is explained by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his nineteenth century Biblical commentary to imply that Joseph took a long time in refusing, that it was difficult for him - a stranger in a strange land - to resist the advances of such a beautiful and powerful woman. What gave him the inner strength to resist? "The persona of his father (Jacob) appeared to him in his mind's eye", suggest our Talmudic Sages (Rashi on Genesis 39:11, citing B.T. Sotah 3).

Rav Haim Sabbato, well-known Talmud teacher and author, recounts that once, when lecturing to a non-religious kibbutz, he mentioned this incident regarding Joseph, and the response was cynical disbelief. At such an intense, erotic moment, the very last image in Joseph's mind would be his aged father, his audience insisted. Rav Sabbato suggested to them what I believe was an ingenious interpretation. In Biblical times, only the very rich had mirrors, and then only in the bed-room. Hence Joseph had never seen how he himself actually appeared. When ushered into Mrs. Potiphar's boudoir, he saw his image for the first time in the mirror hanging on her wall - and Joseph was the exact physical replica of his father Jacob (Rashi on Genesis 37:3). Now Joseph did know how his father

looked - and at this point of his life and suffering, he most probably had a beard which was turning grey if not white. In other words, Joseph thought he was actually seeing his father Jacob in the mirror of Mrs. Potiphar's boudoir; and he immediately sensed hearing his father's teachings of morality and ethics. Because of this he found the moral strength to resist temptation.

There is a great literal truth to the picture I have attempted to verbally communicate. We are our parents and our parents are us - genetically, historically and culturally. If not, there is no historical continuity and there is no palpable tradition. This is the real meaning behind giving our children ancestral names; Jacob's blessing to his grandchildren, "they shall be called in my name and in the names of my ancestors," refers not merely to a name but also to a life-style, not merely to a calling card but also to a set of immutable values. This indelible relationship between the generations is the deepest expression of our eternal covenant.

In this way we also understand even more profoundly the commitment of "Mattathias the son of Yohanan High Priest Hasmonean and his sons "to fight unto death for a Jewish future based upon a Jewish past. The entire focus of the Jewish family has always been the transmission of our sacred tradition of values and life-style from generation to generation, father to son, mother to daughter. And that is why we celebrate the miracle of the cleansing of the menorah first and foremost within the context of the Jewish home rather than the Jewish synagogue, "a candle lit by each individual within the familial home" (ner ish u-veito).

© 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**he dreams of the butler (sar ha-mashkim) and baker (sar ha-ofim) seem quite similar. Each of their dreams contain food (grapes, bread), the relinquishing of the food (grapes to Pharaoh, bread eaten by the birds) and the number three (three branches, three baskets). (Genesis 39:9-11, 16-17) If so much alike, what prompted Yosef (Joseph) to offer such divergent interpretations? The butler, Yosef proclaimed would be restored to his post, while the baker would be hanged. (Genesis 39:12, 19)

Some suggest that Yosef knew the interpretation, for he was keenly aware of the political workings of Pharaoh's kingdom. In other words, he knew that the butler was worthy and the baker was not. Others suggest that it was pure ruach ha-kodesh, a revelation from heaven that directed Yosef's interpretation.

However, the commentator Benno Yaakov says that the text itself indicates that despite the similarities, there was a fundamental difference between the butler's and baker's dream. The butler describes himself as being active-"I took the grapes,

pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup into Pharaoh's hand." (Genesis 40: 11) Here, there is a preponderance of words of action.

The baker on the other hand, was completely passive. Three baskets were on my head, he said, and the birds were eating from the baked goods. (Genesis 40:17) Here, there are no verbs descriptive of what the baker did in his dream.

Dreams reveal much about character. In fact, they often express one's deepest subconscious feelings. The butler's dreams showed he was a doer, a person of action. Observing this phenomenon, Yosef concluded that the butler was worthy of returning to Pharaoh's palace. This is in contrast to the baker's dream, where he describes himself as a man who is sitting back and doing nothing. Therefore, Yosef concluded, he was unworthy of a reprieve.

A story: an artist was selling a picture of a person with bread on his head. As the potential buyer negotiated the price, birds flew down and began to eat the food. "This piece is so good," the artist said, "the birds believe the baked goods to be real."

Replied the buyer: "The birds may believe the bread is real, but clearly they do not believe the person you've drawn is real, alive - or they would have been frightened away."

The baker is the person in our story. Being still as the birds ate bread from atop his head, the birds thought he was dead.

The message is clear. Good things invariably result from action. Doom and disaster are products of inaction. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

### **DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

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

**T**his week's parsha tells of the trials and tribulations of the sons of Jacob and how their anger towards Joseph brought them to sell him into slavery in Egypt. This was the beginning step leading towards the first exile of the people of Israel.

After selling Joseph, the sons lead their father Jacob to believe that Joseph was accidentally torn apart by a wild animal. Jacob mourns his son inconsolably.

We read: "Jacob rent his garments and placed sackcloth on his loins. He mourned his son for many days." (Genesis 37:34)

"Many days"-Rashi: "There were twenty two years from the time he (Joseph) left him (Jacob) until Jacob went down to Egypt (and saw Joseph again). [Rashi then makes the calculation of years.] These correspond to the twenty two years that Jacob did not fulfill the mitzvah of 'honoring your father and your mother.' [Rashi then shows that Jacob also had

remained away from his parents twenty two years, when he fled to Laban's house]."

Rashi shows the eerie correspondence between the number of years that Joseph was away from Jacob his father (which caused Jacob so much distress) and the number of years that Jacob himself had absented himself from his parents, Isaac and Rebecca. The 22 years of Joseph's absence were Jacob's punishment for his 22 year absence from his own parents. What would you ask on Rashi? Do you see what is bothering him?

An Answer: It seems that Rashi feels that the words "many days" are superfluous. Anyone could make the same calculation that Rashi made and figure out that Jacob was not to be reunited with his beloved son Joseph for another twenty two years. The number of years are all derived from verses in the Torah. So why does the Torah have to add the words "many days"? How does his comment deal with this?

An Answer: Rashi shows us that the words "many days" are intended to draw our attention to the significance of these "many days." They weren't just "a long time." These "many days" were to spark an association and a contrast in our mind with the similar but opposite words that we find in the Torah when Jacob left his parents. His mother told him to flee to Laban her brother for a "few days" (Genesis 27:44). And Jacob himself felt the years he worked for Laban were but a "few days" (Genesis 29:20). These "few days" were paid back as "many days" because of his not fulfilling the mitzvah of "honoring his father and his mother."

But a deeper look should lead to a deeper question. When you compare Jacob's absence from his parents with Joseph's absence from his father, do see anything strange about the comparison?

A Question: Jacob's parents told him to leave them. And they knew where he was-with Laban, their relative. On the other hand, Joseph's absence was a complete shock to Jacob and furthermore he had no idea whether he was alive or dead. How can these painful years of mourning be a punishment for Jacob's obedient absence from his parents? A difficult question. Can you think of an answer? Hint: What led to Jacob's leaving his parents?

An Answer: We must remember what led to Jacob's need to flee his brother, Esau, in the first place. He had taken his blessing, had he not? Now let us remember how that came about. Rebecca heard of Isaac's intention to bless Esau. Then she convinced Jacob to deceive his blind father, Isaac, and receive the blessing in place of Esau (Genesis 27:6-8). Jacob was clearly torn between listening to his mother and deceiving his father or not listening to her and not deceiving his father. A real dilemma in how to best fulfill the mitzvah of "honoring your father and your mother."

Jacob chose to listen to his mother and deceive his father. A difficult and fateful decision.

The Torah commands us to listen to both our parents. But what if they command two different things? Then what is one to do? The Rabbis have taught that in such a case, both the mother and the child are commanded to honor the father (see Talmud Kiddushin 31a). So in this case Jacob should have honored his father and not his mother and not gone through with Rebecca's plan of deceiving Isaac.

This is what Rashi means when he says "He did not fulfill the mitzvah of 'honoring your father and your mother'." Meaning, had Jacob refused Rebecca he would have been honoring both of them, since the mother too is obligated to honor the child's father. Had Jacob done that, then he never would have had to flee his brother Esau and stay away from his parents those twenty two years.

We would point another "measure for measure" aspect of this punishment. Not only were there twenty two years of Joseph's absence for twenty two years of Jacob's absence; there was also deception for deception. Jacob had deceived his father, and his sons, in turn, had deceived him, by letting him think a wild animal had ripped Joseph apart.

And so it goes. One cannot escape the consequences of one's actions. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.com

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

Yosef tells his second dream to his brothers and then to his father: "The sun, the moon, and eleven stars, bowed down to me" [Bereishit 37:9]. And Yaacov reprimands him: "What is this dream that you had, will I and your mother and brothers bow down to you to the ground?" [37:10]. What is the meaning of this reprimand? Rashi quotes from the Midrash that the main thing that Yaacov objects to is the implied reference to Rachel-"Your mother is already dead." (A hint of this has been found in the words of the verse, where the phrase "asher chalamta"-that you dreamed-includes within it the letters "Rachel metah"-Rachel is dead.) The answer to Yaacov's complaint could be one of several possibilities: the moon represents Bilhah, who raised Yosef (Rashi), or the other members of the household (Ramban), or that every dream must of necessity be wrong in some details (Rashi, second explanation).

It may be that there is a simpler explanation for the reprimand, in that Yaacov complained about the very idea that Yosef's mother and older brothers might bow down to him, irrespective of whether his mother were still alive or not (Rashbam). But in the end, we can still ask what the response was to his father's question. We are not told about anybody else from

Yaacov's family who bowed down to Yosef, except for his father (47:31) and his brothers (42:6). And Yaacov's bow in front of Yosef before his death cannot be viewed as a sign of servitude but rather as a way of thanking Yosef for his promise to bury Yaacov in the Machpelah Cave. Yosef also bowed to Yaacov at the time (48:12). However, Yaacov and the brothers took the dream very seriously:

"His brothers were jealous of him, and his father took note of the matter" [37:11]. How did Yaacov expect the dream to be fulfilled?

It may well be that the sun and the stars signify something else and not what they seem at first, which as seen above is problematic. In another place in the Torah where the sun, the moon, and the stars appear together, it is written, "Lest you raise your eyes to the heaven, and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, and you turn away and bow down to them and serve them, which G-d has set aside for all the nations under the heaven" [Devarim 4:19]. That is, the heavenly bodies represent the G-ds of the other nations, and they are thus a symbol for the nations themselves. The fact that they bowed down to Yosef in his dream symbolizes not only his own family but all of humanity. This is especially significant when information from outside sources is taken into account, describing sun worship in ancient Egypt, and descriptions of Pharaoh as "the sun." In the end, then, Yosef's dream was fulfilled when he became the ruler of Egypt and in effect of the entire civilized world.

In addition, the sun, the moon, and the stars are mentioned as part of the events of the creation of the world, where it is written, "And G-d made the two large lights: the big light to rule during the day, and the small light to rule during the night, in order to rule day and night, and the stars" [Bereishit 1:16]. From this point of view, the sun and the moon represent not only control over the nations of the world but also ruling the realms of day and night.

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**A**s is well known, our father Yaakov is the prototype for the future generations of the Jewish people descended from his loins. Thus when Yaakov after a long, painful, dangerous and crippling experience in exile returns to his ancestral home he wishes only to dwell in peace and tranquility with himself and his neighbors. But immediately there descends upon him the ongoing tragedy of Yosef and his brothers which will occupy the latter decades of the life of Yaakov.

In fact it will now dominate his life completely, not allowing restful sleep or spiritual growth. In his sadness over the disappearance of Yosef he becomes disconnected from G-d's spirit, so to speak, and is distracted from his vocation and goal of promoting

monotheism and G-dly values in an otherwise pagan world. Returning to the Land of Israel has not solved any of Yaakov's difficulties in life. In fact, it has exacerbated them. It is in the Land of Israel that his beloved wife Rachel dies and it is in the Land of Israel that his beloved son Yosef is sold as a slave by his own brothers.

Yaakov's daughter Dena is assaulted and her brothers Shimon and Levi resort to brutal violence to free her from Shechem and return her home. All of this is in the Land of Israel, the "promised land" of holiness and goodness. How ironic that all of these events and struggles should befall Yaakov in his beloved homeland, the Land of Israel. Having come home at last from decades long exile, Yaakov apparently felt that his troubles were behind him. But in fact they were just beginning.

There is a great parallel in all of this to our current situation here in the Land of Israel and in the Jewish world generally. We thought, that returning to the Land of Israel en masse and establishing a Jewish sovereignty within its borders would solve our problems. Herzl promised an end to anti-Semitism, Ben Gurion promised world acceptance, Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan promised security and safety, Rabin and his successors promised peace. Sadly none of these promises have been realized.

The Land of Israel guarantees us no material benefits. Just as Yaakov did, so too do we face bitter internal divisions, violence, abductions, enmity and tragic deaths. In fact many if not most of the problems that Jews and Jewish society as a whole faced in the Exile are still omnipresent and sometimes even in a more virulent form here in Israel today.

We also wish for peace and tranquility, to dwell peacefully with our neighbors and ourselves. So far this goal has escaped us. But the lesson of Yaakov's life is perseverance and tenacity. That is the lesson and agenda for us as well. The ride may be a very bumpy one but the road, nevertheless, leads to greatness and the ultimate tranquility and peace that we all crave. Yaakov stays the course because he has no other alternatives. That is most probably the lesson and prediction for us as well. © 2006 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).

#### **RABBI ZVI MILLER**

### **The Salant Foundation**

**J**oseph had two prophetic dreams in which he saw himself as a king, "Behold! The sun, the moon, and the eleven stars were bowing down to me." These dreams exasperated his brothers who responded, "Would you rule over us?" However, concerning

Yaacov's reaction to Joseph's dreams the Torah states, "His father kept the matter of the dreams in mind."

While his brothers dismissed the dreams as foolishness, Yaacov realized that the ultimately the dreams would be fulfilled. Most opinions assume that Yaacov was inclined to believe the dream because Yoseph was his most beloved son. However, Yaacov's belief in the dreams was not based on his love for Yoseph.

Rather, Yaacov recognized that Yoseph had the noble character trait of sincerely caring for others. Specifically, Yaacov took note of the way that Yoseph was deeply concerned for the spiritual wellbeing of his brothers. The rare virtue of thoughtfulness is the attribute of a king. Therefore, Yaacov waited for Joseph's destiny to materialize, i.e., he assumed that Joseph would emerge as a king, as revealed in the dream.

In this light, HaShem chose King David to be king because of the sensitivity he showed to the sheep in his charge. When he tended the sheep, he would first send out the young ones to the pasture so that they could eat the soft grass. Afterwards he sent out the older sheep so that they could feed on the middle size grass. Finally, he would send out the strong sheep so that they could graze on the tougher grass.

Similarly, Moshe's worthiness to lead the Jewish people was found in his kindness to his flock. Once, while he was tending Jethro's sheep, a lamb scurried off. Moshe chased after him and found his lamb drinking water from a stream. Moshe then said to his charge, "I didn't know that you ran off because you were thirsty. You are tired." He placed the lamb on his shoulder and carried him back to the flock. HaShem then said to Moshe, "You have shown compassion to your flock. Therefore, you will one day be the shepherd of My flock, the People of Israel."

May we follow the ways of our holy ancestors and act with kindness and compassion in all of our relationships.

Today's Implement: Place an extra level of sincere care in your heart and show compassion to others. © 2006 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Chanukah, teaches us a hidden dimension of Hashem's compassionate ways. The prophet Zechariah opens by announcing prophecies of the arrival of Hashem's presence in the near future. He declares in Hashem's name, "Rejoice and be happy daughter of Zion for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst." These words refer to the sudden erection of the second Temple after seventy dark years of exile. In truth, early construction began earlier but our Jewish brethren slandered to the Persian

government and brought the development to an immediate halt. This led the Jewish people to total despair and to forfeit all hope of experiencing Hashem's return. Suddenly and totally unexpected, the prophet Zechariah announced Hashem's immediate plan to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah the prophet continues and reveals a private discussion between Hashem and the assigned prosecuting angel. The discussion centered around Yehoshua ben Yehozadak who was designated to serve in the new Temple. Hashem defended Yehoshua and said, "Is he not an ember spared from fire? The prophet Zechariah continues, "And Yehoshua was wearing soiled garments and standing before the angel. And the angel responded, 'Remove the soiled garments from upon Yehoshua...and they placed the turban upon his head.'" (Zechariah 3:4-5) This dialogue reflects that the ordained high priest was seriously faulted for an offense to the priesthood. The Sages explain that Yehoshua was judged for failing to involve himself in his children's choice of marriage. Unfortunately, the Babylonian exile took its toll upon the Jewish nation and corrupted their moral fiber. Their constant exposure to the Babylonians broke down basic barriers and numerous intermarriages occurred. Yehoshua's offsprings were party to this mind set and married women forbidden to them according to priesthood standards. (Targum and Rashi ad loc)

Their esteemed father, Yehoshua was unsuccessful in influencing them to choose appropriate wives and was now seriously faulted for this. The prosecuting angel protested Yehoshua's priestly status because of his inability to properly preserve it. Hashem defended Yehoshua and argued that he deserved special consideration because he was an ember spared from the fire. Yehoshua received a second chance and immediately resolved to rectify his fault and terminate these inappropriate relationships. Hashem responded to this sincere commitment and restored Yehoshua to his prestigious position.

This incident reveals a unique dimension of Hashem's judgement and compassion. In truth, Yehoshua was at fault for his children's behavior and conceivably should have forfeited his esteemed position. However, Hashem focused on Yehoshua's outstanding merit as an ember spared from the fire. The Sages (Sanhedrin 93a) explain that the wicked Nebuchadnezar tested Yehoshua's faith and merit and casted him into a fiery furnace. Yehoshua was miraculously spared thereby displaying his supreme level of devotion to Hashem. Hashem argued that every fiber of Yehoshua's being was devoted to Hashem and deserved careful consideration. Although Yehoshua was faulted for his children's behavior he received a second chance and regained his status of the High Priest.

We learn from this Hashem's appreciation and response to devotion. Yehoshua totally dedicated himself to Hashem's service and thereby earned his privileged status. Yehoshua's devotion brought him into Hashem's inner circle and earned him special appreciation. Hashem views His close ones through the perspective of devotion and affords them special privileges. After proving their total loyalty to Hashem their subsequent service becomes invaluable. Such pious people bring credit to Hashem by their mere existence and will undoubtedly increase this credit a thousand-fold through their continuous service to Hashem. Although they may be imperfect their quality of devotion surpasses all and renders them the most worthy candidates for his service.

This lesson repeated itself in Yehoshua's offsprings during the days of Chanukah. In the early years of the second Temple the Jewish people were represented by illustrious high priests such as Ezra Hasofer and Shimon Hatzadik. During that period the Menorah's western lamp burned throughout the day. This constant miracle showed the entire world Hashem's constant presence amongst His people. However, after Shimon's passing this coveted priestly position was periodically neglected. It assumed political status and was obtained, at times, through handsome sums of money. Numerous unworthy individuals served as high priests for brief periods of time. Every year Hashem would display their unworthiness and punish them for entering the Holy of Holies without proper preparation. (Mesichta Yoma 9a) After years of mistreating their Temple privileges Hashem responded to this disgrace and permitted the Greek's to control the Bais Hamikdash. This new development exiled the Jews in their very own land and restricting them for sacrificial service. The Chashmonaim, high priests by rite, took charge of the situation and sacrificed their lives to restore this service. They displayed unprecedented levels of devotion and Hashem responded and returned the Temple to them.

The Chashmonaim overstepped their bounds and declared themselves rulers over the entire Jewish nation a position belonging exclusively to the household of Dovid Hamelech. Although this was a serious fault Hashem focused on their display of devotion and granted them the privilege of the priesthood. (Ramban Breishis 49:10) According to some opinions Yanai (Yochanan) Hamelech served as the high priest for eighty years. (Mesichta Brachos 29a) The Chashmonaim family proved their devotion and deserved to remain in Hashem's inner circle. Their total dedication to Hashem created a relationship of fondness and endearment and establish them the most qualified candidates for his service. (see Malbim, Zechariah 3:7)

The Bach sees this dimension of service as the heart of the Chanuka experience. He explains that the

Jewish people became lax in their service in the Temple Bais Hamikdash. This sacred and precious opportunity became a matter of routine and was performed without inner feeling and devotion. Hashem responded and removed their privileges to awaken them to their shortcomings. The Chashmonaim, descendants of Yehoshua and Shimon Hatzadik understood the message and resolved to restore Hashem's glory to His nation. Following the footsteps of their predecessors they totally dedicated themselves to this service and sacrificed their lives on its behalf. Hashem responded to their devotion and led them to a miraculous victory. We kindle our menorah as an expression of our devotion to Hashem's service and resolve to internalize Chanuka's lesson. After sincerely examining our level of service we dedicate heart, mind and soul to Him and apply our Chanuka experience to our service throughout the year. (comment of Bach O.H. 670)

May Hashem accept our total commitment to His service and grant us the privilege of serving him in His holy abode in the nearest future. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

#### **RABBI BORUCH LEFF**

### **Kol Yaakov**

**D**on't we all crave those moments in life of rest and relaxation? Many of us may even use such times for spiritual meaning and growth. What's wrong with a little peace and quiet?

We would say nothing at all. Yet, in this week's portion, Jacob asks for peace and quiet and G-d does not grant it to him. Instead, G-d criticizes him. Where did Jacob go wrong? What can be wrong with some R(est) & R(elaxation)?

Let us read the Rashi commentary (37:2) where this appears: "Jacob wanted to dwell in tranquility but then the ordeal of Joseph (sale into slavery) came upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility but G-d says 'Is it not enough for the righteous what has been prepared for them (reward) in the World to Come that they need to seek tranquility in this world!'"

Anyone who has ever read this Rashi is always left with a question. Why do righteous people ever seek peace? Is it because they wish to spend their time on the beaches of the Bahamas? Besides, if you want to grow spiritually, don't you need peace and quiet in your life? Is it really possible to contemplate the serious issues of our existence and goals in this world while being bogged down with earthly, physical problems and struggles? We usually need very few distractions in order to grow spiritually. So shouldn't the righteous desire peace and tranquility in order to continue on their path of righteousness?

The solution to this puzzle takes us back to Parshat Vayetzei where we discover that G-d's criticism of Jacob involves a very subtle and specific area.

In 31:3, G-d tells Jacob to "return to the land of your fathers and to your birthplace and I will be with you." G-d does not call the land "Israel," or "the Holy land," but "the land of your fathers." There is something about Jacob's connection to the Land (Israel) that is uniquely expressed through his bond with his fathers. This is what G-d wants Jacob to focus on when he returns.

What's more, Rashi comments, on the verse in Vayetzei, saying, "Return to the land of your fathers and there I will be with you, but as long as you are connected to the impure one (Lavan), it is impossible to rest my Divine Presence, the Shechinah, upon you."

Apparently, not only does G-d want Jacob to focus on his connections to the land of his fathers, but the Divine Presence Itself. G-d's special Providence will not come to Jacob without this special link to the land based upon what his fathers have accomplished in the Land of Israel. Jacob is to build his spiritual growth in the Land of Israel based upon what his fathers have already accomplished.

And this is where Jacob was lacking. Sure, there's no question that Jacob was growing and striving spiritually, especially having returned to the holiest place on earth, Israel. But he was resting and not working within this specific area of building upon what his fathers had already done.

Jacob's resting is reflected in the words of the Torah. The opening verse in our parsha states: "Jacob settled in the land of his father's dwellings, in the Land of Caanan." It is unnecessary to inform us that the Land of Israel was the place where Jacob's fathers lived. We know this from previous readings of Genesis. Rather, the Torah is hinting to us the area in which Jacob was lacking, in his growth of building upon what his fathers accomplished. Jacob may have been creating new paths of spirituality but he was resting and not maintaining the precious old ones of his fathers.

What these paths were exactly is hard for us to decipher from the Torah, but we do see that even when a righteous person seeks peace and quiet for the right reasons, it may not be part of G-d's plan to grant the peace. The righteous person may not be excelling in a specific area that G-d wants him to excel in and therefore may not deserve the tranquility.

Of course, we non-Patriarchal type of people should always ask G-d to grant us peace of mind to be able to grow spiritually because, for us, in most cases, this is exactly what we need. Supremely righteous people, however, may not have the peaceful lives that we would expect that G-d would grant to them. This may be as a result of G-d's expecting a very specific area of growth from them that they may not have as of yet attained.

Rest can be good if used properly. Let us hope that G-d gives us the peace and serenity to reach our maximum potential. © 2006 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

#### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

### Hama'ayan

**W**e read in this week's parashah of Yosef's dream in which he saw his eleven brothers as eleven stars. At the end of the Pesach Seder, we sing of these eleven stars: "Who knows 'eleven'? I know 'eleven!' 'Eleven' are the stars."

We mention these stars at the Seder to remind us, explains R' Elazar Shach shlita (the Ponovezh Rosh Hayeshiva), that even when the brothers sold Yosef, they remained as lofty as the stars. This is so because their act was based upon halachic reasoning and their understanding of how the Torah called upon them to react towards Yosef. Thus, when the brothers stood before Yosef almost 22 years later—before he revealed his identity to them, they were able to say to each other (42:21), "Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed." They did not recriminate over their decision to sell, or even kill, Yosef, merely over the fact that they ignored his pleas for mercy.

From the time that the brothers sold Yosef until the time they stood before him in Egypt, 22 years passed -- 22 Rosh Hashanahs, 22 Yom Kippurs, and 22 months of Elul, i.e., 22 seasons of repentance. Undoubtedly, the brothers constantly revisited their actions and searched themselves for any sin. The only sin that they could identify, the Torah implies, is that they did not answer Yosef's cries.

And yet, when Yosef revealed himself to the brothers (in the parashah read two weeks from now), when they heard the two words, "I'm Yosef," "They could not answer him, for they were shaken before him" (45:3). Why did Yosef's words have such an impact?

R' Shach explains that when the brothers engaged in introspection during those 22 years, Yosef was not before them. Literally or figuratively, his striped coat was before them, but they never saw Yosef as a person. Only when their brother declared "I am Yosef" did they first assess him as a person, rather than because of his outer trappings.

Chazal observe, "If Yosef's brothers could not withstand the two words, 'I am Yosef,' how will we withstand G-d's rebuke after we have lived our lives"? The brothers' mistake is a common one, R' Schach explains, except that we not only judge others, we judge ourselves superficially. What will be, however, when we stand before G-d without our outer trappings?! (Haggadah Shel Pesach Avi Ezri). © 2006 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis