

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Chanukah is taught, in the Mother Goose version of Judaism, as the victory of the Judeans over the Greek-Syrians, the Jews over the Gentiles. We know from the Books of the Maccabees and the great Second Commonwealth historian Josephus, however, that the struggle began as a civil war, as a battle between brothers, waged in order to determine the future direction, the very soul, of the Jewish people. Hellenistic Jew fought Torah-based Jew, assimilationist Jew fought traditionalist Jew, would-be Greek Jew fought old-fashioned, committed Jew. But after the traditionalists won their battle, they did not banish Greek culture completely, never to allow it a foothold in the sacred portals of Judea. Not only have thousands of Greek words (and via those words, Greek concepts) entered the Talmud and the Midrash, but Greek philosophy, science and aesthetics have found a respectable place within the corpus of Jewish literature, especially through the pen of great commentaries and codifiers such as Maimonides. And even a brief comment in the Midrash Shabar should completely mute the idea that Judea rejected Hellas: analyzing the word "Zion (Israel)," the Midrash breaks it into its two components. The first letter, the ...t...z...a...d...i...k, represents the holy righteous Jew, while the last three letters, ...y...u...d, ...v...a...v, ...n...u...n, spell out 'Yavan,' the Hebrew word for Greece. We're being told that at the very heart of everything revered in Judaism - Zion - there must additionally be the beauty of Greece. The question is to what extent, and in which manner it can properly be integrated into Jewish consciousness.

The Talmud-the encyclopedia, the orchard and the safe-deposit vault of Jewish consciousness-cites the verse, "May G-d expand Yefet and may he (Yefet) dwell in the tents Shem" (Gen. 9:27) as proof that the Torah was not permitted to be translated into any language except Greek (Babylonian Talmud Megillah 9b). The verse is Noah's blessing of Yefet and Shem for their modest behavior after he was sexually shamed by their brother Ham, and the Talmud's reading of the verse turns Yefet and Shem into symbolic concepts. Yefet is the forerunner of Greece, and Shem the progenitor of Israel. The expansion of Yefet are its words, the beautiful Greek language, which shall find shelter 'in the tents of Shem' when the Torah is

translated into Yefet's language. The Midrash adds: "Let the beauty of Yefet be incorporated into the tents of Shem," which has come to mean the ability to extract the positive aspects of Greek culture and properly synthesize them with our eternal Torah.

Fascinatingly enough, the Festival of Chanukah always coincides with the Torah portions of the week recording the struggle between Joseph and his brothers. A fundamental parallel can be drawn between Joseph's struggle with his brothers and traditional Judea's struggle with Hellenism.

Joseph's roots were nomadic, his ancestors, shepherds. Pastoral life, as we know, allows the shepherd's soul to soar; he has the leisure to compose music and poetry, as well as to meditate on the Torah and communicate with the Divine.

But even in the pastures Joseph was already dreaming of a new world, a break with the past. His dreams are occupied with agriculture, the occupation which came after shepherding, the more sophisticated development of Egyptian civilization. What upsets the brothers is not just an event in a dream, (their sheaves bowing to his sheaves) but the very fact that sheaves are in his dream to begin with. Sheaves represent not only agriculture, but also modernism, a break with the previous pastoral tradition.

Joseph's second dream is about the sun, moon and stars. Again it isn't so much the event of the dream that disturbs, but its universalistic elements. The brothers could even have understood a dream of the cosmos with G-d as the center, like Jacob's early dream of the ladder. But here Joseph himself is at the center, like the Greek message: "Man is the measure of all things", man and not G-d. Moreover, the Bible glories in Joseph's physical appearance, his being of "beautiful form and fair visage", "yaffeh" (beautiful) like "Yafet", Greece! (Gen 39:6) And as Heinrich Heine said, "for the Greeks, beauty is truth, for the Hebrews, truth is beauty". Everyone loves Joseph-handsome, clever, urbane, the perfect guest dazzling you with his knowledge of languages, including the language of dreams. Joseph is the cosmopolitan grand vizier of Egypt, the universalist, the linguist. Joseph is more Yavanlike than Shemlike, more similar to Greek Hellenism than to Abrahamic Hebraism.

Hence, the tensions between Joseph and his brothers are not unlike the tensions between Hellenism and Hebraism during the period of Hanukkah. But

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Joseph develops, and by the time he stands before Pharaoh he does see G-d as the center "Not I, but rather G-d will interpret the dreams to the satisfaction of Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:15). And Judah will remind Joseph of the centrality of his family and ancestral home, and will establish the first house of study (yeshivah) in Goshen, Egypt (Gen. 49:22, and Rashi ad. loc.). Joseph and Judah will join together, with Judah - symbolizing Torah and repentance - receiving the spiritual birthright (Gen. 49:10), and Joseph receiving the blessings of material prosperity (Gen. 49:22). The two will join together, tzaddik and Yavan for the glory of Zion and Israel. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Yosef's dramatic ascent to power in Egypt is recorded for us in this week's parsha. What is noteworthy is that Yosef does not appear to be at all surprised or amazed by the sudden turn of events in his fortunes. A person who lives by dreams is never surprised when the dream turns into reality.

Yosef always expected his dreams to come true in this world. So did his father Yaakov. And in truth so did the brothers and that is why he discomfited them so deeply. Had they felt the dreams of Yosef to be utter nonsense they would not have reacted as strongly when he related the dreams to them. They were threatened not because the dreams were nothing but rather because they were something.

Their apparent blindness and stubbornness, at not recognizing Yosef standing before them, stemmed from their necessity to deny the validity of his dreams. When Yosef will reveal himself to his brothers they will instinctively believe him because of the stock they subconsciously placed in his dreams all along.

Practical people are afraid of dreamers not because of the dreamer's impracticality but because the dreamer may turn out to be right after all. This has been proven time and again in Jewish history. The holiday of Chanukah, that we are currently celebrating, proves the dreams of the Maccabees overcame the practicalities of the Hellenist Jews who chose to survive by becoming more Greek than Jewish.

Jews over the ages could have reasonably quit and given up the struggle to survive as Jews countless times. It was always the dreamers that persevered and they have always been proven to be right and practical.

The Torah attributes the success of Yosef to the fact that he remembered his dreams. It is one thing to remember dreams of grandeur when one is poor and imprisoned. Then the dream provides hope and resilience to somehow continue. Yosef's greatness lies in his ability to remember and believe those dreams when he has risen to power. He could easily have ignored his brothers and put all of his past behind him. He was now a great success. So why continue to pursue his dreams, which could ultimately sorely endanger his position and achievements? But Yosef doggedly pursues the full realization of his dreams.

Many times in life we are frightened of advancing because we think we might risk what we already have. Judaism preaches caution in tactics and how to achieve certain goals, both spiritual and physical. But it never advocates compromising the great Jewish dreams as outlined in our Torah and tradition.

We are bidden to be prudent about life's decisions but the goal of ascending the ladder of Yaakov is never erased from our consciousness. When seeing his brothers before him, Yosef has the choice to leave everything as it is. But he chooses to pursue his dreams to their fateful end. That has become a lesson for all later generations of Jews as well. The full realization of Yosef's dream is the catalyst for reuniting all of Israel as a nation. © 2007 *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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Although Yosef treated his brothers pretty harshly, it's understandable, based on what they had put him through. Not that he did it to exact revenge, G-d forbid, but, as the commentators (see Abarbanel and Kli Yakar on Beraishis 42:7 and Me'am Lo'ez at the end of the Parasha) explain, he did it to help remove any punishment they would have otherwise received. For example, they couldn't speak peaceably with him (37:4), so he spoke harshly with them (42:7). They thought he was spying on them for his father so he accused them of being spies. Shimon was the one who threw Yosef into the pit, so it was Shimon who was put into prison (which was in a pit). But what about Binyamin? He was only nine years old when Yosef was sold, and was not involved in it at all. How could Yosef have put him through the anguish of being accused of stealing the royal goblet of divination?

And that wasn't the only suffering Binyamin endured because of the goblet being planted in his bag. The brothers initially thought he was guilty and starting hitting him between his shoulders. In this merit (the Midrash Tanchuma 10/13 continues), "G-d's presence rested between his shoulders," i.e. the Temple was built on his portion (see Rashi on Devarim 33:12). However, what "merit" was there? Binyamin didn't do anything; he didn't choose to get hit, the brothers chose to hit him. How can Binyamin be rewarded for something he didn't do, and didn't have a choice whether or not it would be done to him?

When the brothers accused Binyamin of being a thief, he responded by denying it, adding that even if it were true it doesn't compare to selling a brother and dipping his coat in the blood of a goat in order to make it seem as if he had been attacked (Beraishis Rabbah 92:8). However, since Binyamin wasn't involved in the sale, how did he know what they had done? All he should have known is that his brother was presumed to be dead because his blood-drenched coat was found in the desert. Yet here the Midrash indicates that Binyamin knew what really happened. How?

And Binyamin may not have been the only one to know. According to the Sefer Hayashar (quoted by the Me'am Lo'ez), before allowing Binyamin to go to Egypt with his brothers, Yaakov wrote a letter to the viceroy. The purpose of the letter was to help remove any suspicion of his sons being spies, as well as threatening what would happen if Binyamin was not returned. In defending his sons entering Egypt through ten different gates, Yaakov wrote that he had commanded them to do so in order to scour the streets of Egypt to look for his lost son. Evidently, Yaakov was aware that there was a real possibility that Yosef was alive and in Egypt! But wasn't he convinced that his beloved son had been torn apart by a wild animal (Beraishis 37:33)?

It would seem, therefore, that although Yaakov knew that the most rational explanation for the circumstances was that Yosef had been killed, he still held out hope that he was alive. And, in fact, the Midrash (Tanchuma Yoshon 15) says that Yaakov is an example of keeping hope alive until the very end. This would explain when he is quoted as saying (44:28) that "he is surely torn to pieces" he added "and I have not seen him since." If Yaakov was convinced that Yosef had been killed, obviously he hadn't seen him since. If, however, he thought there was a possibility that he was still alive, he was adding that although he thought he might one day see him again, it hasn't happened yet.

Knowing that his brothers hated Yosef, Yaakov may have suspected that they were responsible for his disappearance, a suspicion that grew once Shimon was missing as well. As Rashi puts it (42:36), "he suspected them of perhaps killing Shimon or selling him, as they did to Yosef." When they told Yaakov that

they were accused of being spies because they had entered from ten different gates and had spent time (three days according to the Sefer Hayashar) searching for Yosef before buying grain, it strengthened both his hope of Yosef still being alive and his suspicion that they were responsible for his disappearance. In any case, he included their search for Yosef in his letter to the viceroy as part of his attempt to negate the accusation of their being spies.

After the brothers returned to Egypt (this time with Binyamin), Yosef sat each brother in birth order, grouped together based on their mothers. Binyamin, who didn't share the same mother with any of them, sat with Yosef (see Rashi on 43:33). According to the Sefer Hayashar, Binyamin joined Yosef atop his throne, where they were able to have a private conversation. Yosef brought out a chart of all the heavenly stars, and asked Binyamin if he knew how to read it, Binyamin said that that his father taught him astrology. Yosef then asked him to use the chart to try locating where in Egypt his lost brother was. Binyamin studied the chart, dividing Egypt into four quadrants. After studying it some more, he became quite perplexed. Yosef asked him why he was confused, to which Binyamin responded that according to the chart his brother was sitting right next to him on top of the throne. Yosef confirmed that he was, in fact, his brother, but asked Binyamin not to tell anyone (yet). First he wanted to frame Binyamin by planting his goblet in his bag, in order to see if they would defend Binyamin and fight for him. If they did, he would know that they regretted what they had done to him all those years ago, and he would reveal his identity to them. If they didn't, he would keep Binyamin with him in Egypt to protect him and send them back home.

Knowing this, and his father's suspicions, Binyamin realized what had really happened. Therefore, when they accused him of being a thief, he was able to respond by saying that even though he isn't, they had done something much worse. And knowing beforehand that Yosef was planting the goblet in his bag, Binyamin wasn't concerned when it was found there. When they started hitting him, he could have defended himself and stopped the beating by telling them that their brother Yosef, who was the viceroy, had planted the goblet. Instead, he remained quiet and endured the suffering so that Yosef's plan could play itself out. For doing that, he was rewarded with having the Temple(s) built on his land. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

All eyes stare riveted at the dreidel as it spins round and round, a cylindrical gray blur in the center of the table. Slowly, slowly, the spinning eases. Four flat sides come into view, featuring the

Hebrew letters nun, gimmel, hay and shin. Finally, the dreidel comes to a stop and falls on its side. The letter that is uppermost determines if the one who spun it has won or lost.

This simple game of chance has become so closely identified with the festival of Chanukah that it has practically attained the status of ritual. Indeed, many great sages have been known to give the dreidel a perfunctory spin or two as they sit beside the Chanukah lights. Clearly, there is a deep symbolism to the dreidel that connects to the broader themes of Chanukah. What exactly is this symbolism? And what is the significance of the letters etched into the sides of the dreidel?

Perhaps we can find some enlightenment in this week's Torah portion, which is always coincidental with Chanukah. As the curtain lifts, we find Joseph languishing in a dark Egyptian dungeon, forgotten by his family, seemingly bereft of hope. His life, whatever is left of it, is a miserable shambles. Then suddenly, everything turns completely around. Joseph is taken from his cell, washed and dressed and brought to Pharaoh. He makes such a powerful impression that Pharaoh appoints him viceroy of Egypt. The machinations of divine providence begin to emerge from concealment. One dramatic episode follows another. Joseph and his family are reunited. They settle in Egypt, and the long exile that would mold and shape the Jewish people begins.

During the Chanukah era, the Jewish people experienced a similar turnaround. Alexander's armies had swept away the old order and imposed Greek culture on the conquered peoples. In the face of the crushing power of the Greek empire and the allure of Hellenistic materialism, it seemed that flickering light of Judaism would be engulfed and extinguished. The dream of a special historical role for the Jewish people seemed to be coming to a bitter end. But even in the darkest hours, a few valiant men held fast to their belief in the constancy of divine providence. No matter how hopeless the situation appeared, they were convinced that Hashem's guiding hand was controlling events.

They rose in rebellion against overwhelming odds, and Hashem rewarded them with a stunning victory, the victory of light over darkness.

Here may lie the key to the symbolism of the dreidel. The dreidel has four distinct sides, representing the four directions of the compass and the four basic forms of matter—earth, water, air and fire, in other words, solid, liquid, gas and energy. A turn from above sets the dreidel spinning, and its features are obscured in one dizzying blur. But even as the eye beholds confusion, underneath everything comes together to one focal point, the vortex from which all power emanates, the unifying power of the Creator of the Universe. And then, just when it seems as if the

spinning will go on forever, it begins to slow down and the mysterious Hebrew letters come into view.

What do these letters stand for? Traditionally, they are an acronym for nes gadol hayah sham, a great miracle happened there. The mystical teachers also point out that the gematria, the numerical value, of these four letters is equal to the gematria of Mashiach. Ultimately, when the mad spinning will finally come to an end, when the gray blur comes into focus and the true nature of creation is revealed, the world will be suffused with transcendent illumination of the Divine Presence, and we will enter the Messianic age.

In our own lives, we must all struggle with the trials and travails of daily existence. Life is full of disappointments and disillusionment, and sometimes, it seems beyond our ability to cope. Let us take encouragement from the message of the Chanukah lights. We are not helpless flotsam and jetsam cast helter skelter into the raging ocean of life. At every moment, in darkness and in light, the loving hand of our Father in Heaven is gently upon us guiding us to our destiny and our fulfillment. ©2007 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion, Yaakov (Jacob) hesitates to allow Binyamin (Benjamin) his youngest child, to return with his brothers to Egypt. Reuven, the eldest of the brothers, guarantees he'd bring Binyamin back home—proclaiming, "Let two of my sons be killed if I fail to bring him back to you." (Genesis 42:37) Yaakov rejects Reuven's offer. In the end, Yehuda (Judah) steps forward and declares, "If I do not bring him (Binyamin) back to you...I will have sinned to you forever." (Genesis 43:9) These words are accepted by Yaakov.

One wonders, why? Why does Yaakov embrace Yehuda's argument and not Reuven's?

Ramban notes that Reuven impetuously makes his comment while there is still food left from their trip to Egypt. Yehuda leaves Yaakov alone waiting until all the food is gone to make his plea. Ramban concludes that only after the food was gone would Yaakov be ready. This teaches the importance of timing. What we say and what we do may be rejected at one moment, but embraced at the next.

Another suggestion is in order: It can be posited that the greatest consequence of doing wrong is to be constantly wracked by the sin itself. And so, Yaakov rejects Reuven's argument as he offered a punishment if he fails. Yehuda on the other hand, is saying that his punishment will be his ever-present guilt in having sinned to Yaakov. In the words of Benamozegh (19th century, Italy) "sin itself is its own punishment."

A final thought comes to mind. Reuven's answer displays the assurance of one absolutely certain of success—so certain he offers the precious lives of two of his sons for punishment. Yehuda, on the other hand, recognizes the precariousness of the mission. He understands that he may not succeed. Hence, he argues, "if I fail, I will forever have sinned to you." Yaakov accepts Yehuda's argument and not Reuven's, for, often, greatest success goes to one who understands the danger of the situation and realizes the very real possibility of not succeeding.

Additionally, Yaakov assents to Yehuda precisely because he (Yehuda) was prepared to act even when unsure of success. The real test of commitment is to become involved even when the outcome is unknown. This impresses Yaakov. This idea relates to the Chanukah holiday. Unlike in the Bible, where G-d assures Moshe (Moses) of success in Egypt, the Hasmoneans received no such assurance. Still, against great odds, uncertain of victory, they fought and prevailed. Maybe that is why we use the dreidel on Chanukah. The dreidel spins without knowing where it will land.

The Biblical Yehuda and Yehuda HaMaccabee of the Chanukah story interface. Both were aware of the uncertainties of their mission. Notwithstanding, they went forward.

May we all be so courageous, to do, even when unclear about the outcome. And like Yaakov, may we trust—with the help of G-d—that all will work out. © 2007 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.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This 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 Yehohua'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. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

One of the most perplexing problems of commentary on the Torah appears in this week's Torah portion. After Yosef has his brothers kept in prison for three days, it is written, "And Yosef said to them on the third day, here is what you should do and continue to live... Go and bring to your families the food to break their famine. And bring your younger brother to me, to verify your words so that you will not die. And so they did." [Bereishit 42:18-20]. What does the last sentence mean? Does it mean that they went home and brought Binyamin? In the next verse we are told, "One brother said to another, we are guilty with respect to our brother" [42:21], and only much later are we told at length how the brothers returned home and brought Binyamin back with them, after a long delay. How can it be that this long process is described by the phrase, "And so they did"? (It is surprising that almost none of the commentators discuss this difficulty, except for Chizkuni. He explains that the phrase means that the brothers promised to do as Yosef had said. However, in all other places where it appears in the Torah the phrase refers to immediate action and not a future promise.)

To understand this, we should first note that the repentance of the brothers for the sin of having sold Yosef into slavery is an important feature in all the passages from this point? starting with the words "we are guilty" and continuing to when Binyamin is brought to Egypt (Bereishit 42:21 to 43:14). This is certainly clear in the way they explicitly express regret about the sin of the sale, an event that caused Yosef to weep. But even later on, when Yaacov refuses to send Binyamin to Egypt with the brothers, the fact that the brothers are willing to take responsibility for their younger brother is also an expression of their sorrow for what they did to Yosef. Thus, the main point of these passages is to take note of how the brothers began to repent.

This explains the meaning of the phrase, "And so they did." It is evidently meant to serve as a brief summary of their long journey, leading to the fulfillment

of the promise, when the brothers did in fact bring Binyamin to meet Yosef. In effect, the Torah presents two different scenarios of what happened after Yosef's command: The first one, the short version, indicates in a few short words the brothers' consent to bring Binyamin, without showing their guilt feelings and without taking any responsibility for Binyamin. In this scenario, the brothers did not understand the significance of the events that had occurred, and they were not involved at all in such matters as repentance and recognizing their sin. At the same time, the Torah presents the second scenario at length, showing how the brothers did indeed come to proper conclusions about the spiritual meaning of the events, as explained above.

Why are there two versions in the Torah? It can be assumed that this is a way of indicating the dual approach of the brothers. On one hand, they wanted to quickly fulfill Yosef's command to bring Binyamin, without any hesitation or uncertainty. On the other hand, they felt an inner spark of repentance. By giving us both scenarios the Torah was able to teach us about the two approaches that contended for attention in the minds of the brothers. In the end, they repented fully, as can be seen in the affair of Yosef's goblet and the emotional speech by Yehuda.

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

During most years, the Shabbat of Parshat Mikeitz coincides with the festival of Chanukah. Hence, tens and tens of commentaries have established links and hints between Miketz and Chanukah. But there seems to be a more simple connection as well—Joseph's attitude toward his success.

We read happily of Joseph's release from jail for a crime he did not commit (allegedly seducing Potifar's wife). Joseph was called out of jail to interpret Pharaoh's dream after having a good track record in interpreting dreams for Pharaoh's butler and baker. The narrative continues:

"Pharaoh says to Joseph, 'I dreamt a dream, but there is no one who can interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you hear a dream to interpret it.' Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, 'That is beyond me! G-d will respond to Pharaoh's welfare.'" (Genesis 41:15-16)

Truly amazing! Here, Joseph has his shot at real power. He is standing before the King of Egypt, the world's superpower at the time. And this superpower King needs him! Joseph would be able to request virtually anything he would want. Yet, Joseph risks it all by failing to hide the truth of G-d's support and guidance. Pharaoh could have easily reacted to Joseph by saying, 'Oh, if indeed it is not you, but G-d, that has the dream interpretation, then you shall return to jail.' True, Pharaoh did not react this way but Joseph could

not have known this in advance. Joseph wanted to give G-d His credit, especially before the world's superpower, in order to publicize G-d's power and wisdom—even if this meant the personal risk of being sent back to jail without receiving any recognition or benefits from Pharaoh.

This attitude of Joseph was exactly the attitude of Mattisyahu and the Chashmonaim, otherwise known as the Maccabees, during the time of the Chanukah victory. They could have easily looked at their stunning and unlikely military victory over the Greeks as a reflection of their prowess and brilliant strategy. Didn't a great U.S. army lose a guerilla war in Vietnam?

But the Maccabees understood the true source of their strength and military successes. They didn't react by establishing an annual victory parade, in which they would display their latest technology in weapons. Rather, they reacted by establishing the holiday of Chanukah. They lit the Menorah which publicized G-d's control over the world (in making the miracle of the oil lasting 8 days) and that only He could allow them to defeat the Greeks in battle.

This is reflected throughout the 'Al Hanissim' prayer that we insert in the thrice daily 'Shemoneh Esrai,' during Chanukah. The prayer describes the miracles of war against the Greeks. It does not discuss our strength and power but describes us as weak against a powerful army—G-d delivered 'giborim beyad chalashim' (the strong in the hands of the weak). We end this prayer stating that the entire purpose of Chanukah is that we express thanks and praise to the Almighty—'lehodot u'lehalel LiShimcha Hagadol'—"to express thanks and praise to Your great Name."

We not only defeated the Greeks in the physical battle of Chanukah but we defeated them spiritually as well. The Greek philosophy was to stress the power and wisdom of man. This is why they wanted so much to defeat the Jew. Everywhere else, when the Greek invaded, he was known as kind to his new citizens. He wanted to show his new advances and preach his ideas of the supreme man with science, sports, and statues. Yet, in the Jew, the Greek saw a people who were not interested in attributing their success to themselves, nor worshipping man, but they wished only to worship and thank G-d.

The Greeks could not tolerate this approach to life. It threatened their whole philosophy of existence. So, they were determined to wipe out the Jew and his belief system. Chanukah, therefore, celebrates, not the courage of those who resisted tyrants and not the power of the Jewish army. It celebrates G-d and His dedication to helping the Jewish People against her enemies. It celebrates the defeat of the Greek civilization that wished to wipe the word G-d out of all dictionaries in the world.

Let us not forget that during our current national crisis, against suicide bombers and terrorists,

we must once again pray to and rely on the Almighty. We need a victory over our enemies speedily so that there will be no more cries of orphans and no more blood spilled.

G-d can help us now as He did at the time of Chanukah. We must continuously cry out and beseech Him to send us His help and protection. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

RABBI OSHER CHAIM LEVENE

The Living Law

The festival of Chanukah celebrates the victorious battle of the Maccabees against the Hellenists and how a jar of uncontaminated olive oil miraculously burnt for 8 consecutive days in the Temple.

In what is described as a mitzvah chavivah he ad meod, "an exceptionally beloved mitzvah" (Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 4:12), the universal practice to perform the rabbinic commandment to light the Chanukah lights for 8 days is performed mehadrin min hamehadrin, in the most glorious manner.

The minimal mitzvah, explains the Talmud, is to kindle 1 light each night per household. A more embellished manner (termed mehadrin) is for each member of the household to light 1 candle per night. But the most embellished method (called mehadrin min hamehadrin) is to add 1 light per night. According to the accepted view of Beis Hillel, this means lighting 1 candle on the first night, 2 candles on the second, and an additional light every night, culminating in the last night when a total of 8 candles are lit (Shabbos 21b).

Why this mitzvah is so highly regarded to the extent that it is celebrated in the most beautiful manner possible goes to the heart of what Chanukah commemorates. In the ancient world, the influence of Greek philosophy imposed a new ideology upon human civilization: a homocentric structure. Man's physical body, his physique, his art and culture were adulated. His reasoning and intellect were to be the definer of reality. The cause and effect of the natural, physical world were critiqued according to his rational thinking which defined boundaries.

The Jewish nation agreed the universe "was" about man. Man is not a G-d; he exists in order to relate to G-d. The world has meaning only insofar as man relates his existence to the transcendental dimension to the service of G-d. G-d is the focus of his attention, not himself.

The laws of the natural world are constant, fixed and unchanging. Not so the spiritual world-where man consistently develops and improves his relationship with G-d. In the triumph of Torah living over Greek culture, Chanukah affirms the supernatural existence of the Jewish people that shamelessly refuse to be curtailed by the natural. Their lives and reality are uniquely and forever bound with G-d, as defined by Torah and mitzvos.

Hence it is on Chanukah when Israel's affirmation to the system of mitzvah observance is enthusiastically played out. The mitzvah of Chanukah lights? although a rabbinic mitzvah? is embellished. It is conducted mehadrin min hamehadrin, in the most optimal mode.

Furthermore, the practice of Beis Hillel of increasing 1 candle per night in an ascending order, is symbolic of how the Jew strives to enhance and raise his performance of a mitzvah on every subsequent occasion. Never satisfied to replicate a spiritual level he has already reached, he insists on "ascending" to attain new spiritual dimensions, to add onto his past achievements, to never be content with a constant level? which is symptomatic of the natural? but to supernaturally strive higher and higher. A camera that captures a frozen image in the past is insufficient.

It is this beloved mitzvah that is a reassurance of the Jewish nation's constant mission. It is this light which vanquishes the darkness of our exile. It is the sight of this light that impells us into action-to a renewed vigor in our passionate observance of mitzvos enacted mehadrin min hamehadrin. ©2007 Rabbi O.C. Levene & torah.org

RABBI ZVI MILLER

Parsha Insights

Ripples. Water reacting to a tossed stone. The human personality also has the capacity to react to-and learn from-life's events. In fact, the greater one's spiritual level, the quicker and more accurately will he respond to stimuli. Conversely, the less spirituality one has, the less his capacity to react.

For instance, when Pharaoh had a disturbing dream in which he saw seven lean cows consuming seven healthy cows, he woke up with a start: "What an eerie dream!" Nevertheless, he ignored it so that he could go back to SLEEP.

HaShem had sent him a powerful message, with far-reaching repercussions for his country. Strangely, Pharaoh managed to detach from the intense dream and slip off into oblivion.

Conversely, we find that when HaShem appeared to King Solomon in a dream, he immediately woke up with great excitement and joy. His holy soul quickly responded to the special dream, with great emotion. His spiritual awareness empowered his sensitive reaction.

The occurrences of our lives transmit important messages. Like ripples on the water, may we react to these events so that we glean their hidden fruits. As a result, we will enlighten ourselves and improve our paths so that we are pleasant to both G-d and man. [Based on Lev Shalom of Rav Shalom Shvadron] TODAY: Reflect on one event that happens to you today and discover the "hidden message." ©2007 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation