

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**T**here is a difference—to put it mildly—that is outlined clearly between Yosef and his brothers in this week's parsha. Yosef is the quintessential dreamer, his head in the stars and his youthful exuberance and certainty in the truthful outcome of his dreams becomes very irritating to his brothers.

Since his head is in the clouds in a world of Eisav and Shechem the brothers feel it to be the height of impracticality, if not even irresponsibility. to be a dreamer. The brothers have their feet firmly implanted on the ground, in the reality of the world in which they exist, with clear recognition of the inherent dangers and threats inherent.

Yosef feels the brothers have been unjust for rejecting his dreams immediately and they in turn are convinced that he and his dreaming constitute a veritable danger to the unity and survival of Yaakov's family. It is not only the contents of Yosef's dreams—that he will dominate the family— that disturb the brothers. It is the very fact that he is dreaming that raises their suspicions and fuels their enmity towards him.

In the struggle between Yosef and the brothers, the conflict is between the lofty and inspirational theory of Judaism and its sometime mundane practice of hope and actual reality—of what can be achieved even though it is not exactly what one dreamt of achieving. The conflict between Yosef and his brothers is never really ended. It is compromised by both sides recognizing the validity of the position of the other and living with that reality.

The Jewish people in its long and difficult history have somehow been able to combine the spirit and dreams of Yosef with the hardheaded realism of his brothers. Both traits are necessary for our survival and accomplishments, both as individuals and as a nation. Someone without dreams and ambition, who refuses to reach heavenward and conquer the stars, will never be a truly creative or original person.

But if this drive is not tempered by a realistic

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by **Saba & Savta Weiss**

sense of the situation and the society that surrounds us, then all dreams are doomed to eventually disappoint. Yosef's dreams are realized only after he has been severely chastened by his brothers' enmity, slavery and imprisonment in Egypt. Even after he seemingly has them in his grasp, it is still a contest of wills.

Again, Yosef's dreams are finally realized but only after he has been subjected to many hard years of unpleasant reality. The brothers, realists to the end, are shocked to see that the dreamer has emerged triumphant.

The dreamer saves the world from famine while the realists end up being its customers. Thus the Torah teaches us that we need both dreamers and realists within our ranks. A nation built exclusively on dreams, without practical reality intruding, will find that reality rising to foil the realization of the dream.

A nation that ceases to dream of reaching greater heights will stagnate and not survive. So, both the brothers and Yosef are "right" in their pursuit of building a nation and of spiritual growth. We need a healthy dose of both values and views in our Jewish world today as well. © 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**“A**nd Reuvain returned to the pit [Yosef had been thrown into]" (Beraishis 37:29). Where did he return from? Rashi tells us that he was not present when the other brothers sold Yosef because it was his turn to go take care of his father. When he returned, he went back to the pit in order to rescue Yosef, but he had already been sold to the caravan traveling down to Egypt. As is often the case, Rashi is using Midrashim to explain what was going on "behind the scenes." While numerous Midrashim tell us that Reuvain had to "return" because he had been at home (Beraishis Rabbah 84:19, Midrash Beraishis 84:41, Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 25, Midrash Mishlay 1:18 and Midrash Hagadol 37:29), others (Beraishis Rabbah 84:15, Midrash Beraishis 84:30 and Midrash Lekach Tov 37:21) use it to explain why Reuvain had to

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subsequently "hear" about their original plan to kill Yosef (37:21), implying that he wasn't part of the original discussion. Which leads to a question discussed by numerous commentators: If the brothers took turns going back home to take care of Yaakov, why did he send Yosef to find out how they (and the livestock) were doing? Couldn't he just ask each brother during his visit how things were?

Although I have previously discussed several possibilities ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/vayeshev.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/vayeshev.pdf)), after reading through the story as told by the Sefer Hayashar, I wanted to revisit the issue. First, though, let's go through a bit of the background that led to Yosef being sent to Shechem.

Yaakov buys property in Shechem (33:19), his daughter Dina is kidnapped and taken advantage of (34:2), her brothers Shimon and Levi kill every adult male in Shechem (34:25), and everything else (including the women and children) is taken by the sons of Yaakov (34:27-29). The neighboring cities can't believe that two 13 year olds can wipe out an entire city, and they gather to attack the "Hebrews." G-d intervenes, they are overcome with fear (35:5), and hold off. Yaakov and his family move to Chevron (where Yitzchok is), but several years later move back to Shechem because it is better for grazing. Upon hearing that the "Hebrews" are returning to the repopulated Shechem, the neighboring cities are afraid that they will wipe them out again, and a series of wars break out between the sons of Yaakov (along with their father and their servants) and the people of Canaan. In what seem like comic-book superhero style feats, the sons of Yaakov are triumphant again and again, looting each city after they defeat it. Finally, the Canaanites make a truce with them, and all of the loot and captives are returned. Yaakov and his family live in Shechem peacefully, but after a year return to Chevron. Shechem is not completely abandoned, though, as "their sheep and their cattle and all of their things [still] grazed in Shechem everyday, for in those days there was good grazing in Shechem."

Yosef and Binyamin were not part of the previously mentioned battles, as they were too young, but "Yosef saw what his did and praised their military prowess." Nevertheless, he held himself in higher esteem (possibly viewing them as the physical

providers/protectors while he represented the spiritual wing of the family), and was loved more by Yaakov, which caused the brothers to have animosity towards him. His tattletales and ambitious dreams only made matters worse. Yosef stayed home, studying with Yaakov, while his older brothers would tend the livestock in Shechem. "One day, when the sons of Yaakov went to tend their father's sheep in Shechem, they were delayed and the time to gather in the flocks had passed, [yet] they didn't come [home]. And Yaakov saw that his sons were delayed in Shechem, and thought to himself that perhaps the people of Shechem rose up against them to wage war against them, which is why they were late. And Yaakov called his son Yosef and commanded him, saying, 'your brothers are tending [the livestock] in Shechem today, and behold they have not yet returned. Please go and see where they are and let me know how they and the sheep are doing.'"

There are several things we can take from this description. For one thing, the reason Yaakov was so concerned about the animals may have been because he feared that they were taken as retribution for his sons having looted the neighboring cities years earlier. Secondly, he wasn't sending Yosef to check up on whether they were doing a good job or not (which would have increased the tension between them, since part of the reason they "hated" him was his reporting on them to their father), but to make sure they were safe and sound. Therefore, even if Yaakov were getting daily reports on how things were going, he still would have sent Yosef on that particular day to make sure they were safe. And, even if another brother were home that day, Yaakov would have specifically sent Yosef, since he was not part of the original battles. If one of the "warrior" brothers traveled to Shechem by himself, he would be vulnerable to attack by avengers. Yosef, on the other hand, could more easily go see what was going on and return home safely. If this is true, and it was Reuvain who stayed home, we can understand why he wasn't there when the brothers plotted to kill Yosef. Nevertheless, since Reuvain was there in time to "save Yosef from their hands" (37:21), we would need to say that Reuvain was on his way home (late), crossed paths with Yosef (unknowingly), and came home to find out that Yaakov was concerned enough to send Yosef to Shechem (which theoretically could be what he "heard"). Reuvain then explains to Yaakov that they are late because they had to move to Dosan (see 37:17), and heads back to tell Yosef where the brothers went, or that everything is okay so he can return home. He may even realize that if Yosef finds his brothers he will be in danger, so knows he may have to "save him from their hands."

Although the Nachalas Yaakov (37:19) assumes that Reuvain made several trips back and forth that day (if he was home during the plotting and

then again during the sale), we would have to say that it was either one or the other, as if Reuvain went home again after convincing them to throw him in the pit instead of killing him, what did he tell Yaakov? Had he come across Yosef or not? If so, where was he? If not, why did he return home without him? So either he was home (or on his way home) during the plotting and was still in the area (perhaps doing teshuva, see Rashi on 37:29) during the sale, or was there during the plotting, saved him, then went home before "returning" to find that Yosef was no longer in the pit.

There is still one slight logistical problem though. Shechem is about 48 miles north of Chevron, and Dosan is about 13 miles north of Shechem. It would seem quite improbable that the brothers would commute that far each and every day. [Even if the livestock stayed in Shechem and the brothers traveled back and forth by horseback, it is still quite a distance. After all, the winner of a 26 mile horse marathon goes about 18 miles per hour, meaning that the trip to Shechem was over 2.5 hours each way.] However, with a slight adjustment, we may have a theoretical possibility to answer our original question.

Although they come home every Shabbos, throughout the grazing season the brothers stay in Shechem during the week. At night, the brothers take turns who will make the long trip home to help their father before getting up early the next day to make the trip back to Shechem. Whoever's turn it is doesn't wait till all the sheep are tucked in before leaving, but once they are headed back to the corral starts heading home. Yaakov therefore knows about what time to expect one of the brothers. One day, the brothers are tipped off that the neighbors start plotting revenge against the "Hebrews," so they decide to move from Shechem to Dosan (see Targum Yonasan on 37:17). Or, perhaps the grazing wasn't as good anymore, so decided to move north. Because it takes time to move everything, and the trip home is that much longer, Reuvain, whose turn it is to go home that night, is delayed. Yaakov may have also been tipped off that the Canaanites are considering attacking (see Targum Yonasan on 37:13) so sends Yosef even before Reuvain is expected to arrive, or he waits until Reuvain is late before being concerned enough to send Yosef to make sure everyone (and everything) is safe. Either way, Reuvain is not with his brothers either for the plotting or for the sale because it was his turn to go home that night. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**W**hat is the value of a secular State of Israel for a religious Jew, especially when a largely secular government seems to take lightly the innate sanctity of the Temple Mount and the Machpela Cave?

Our present Festival of Chanukah provides the answer. Despite the fact that Chanukah is "merely" a rabbinically ordained Festival, it has become one of the most popular and visible holidays on the American scene. One possible reason may be that its place on the calendar (though not this year) often coincides with the American Christmas, and the idea of a Jewish 'festival of lights' fits in quite well with the general American "season's greetings" culture towards the end of the month of December.

Chanukah has also emerged as one of the most popular holidays in Israel; undoubtedly the entire school system - religious as well as secular - being closed for the entire week of the festival imbues the Israeli youngster with a boundless love for this mid-winter period when the country is flush with celebrations and special performances, all geared to the child's growing curiosity for the world around him. But there is also the simple, historic element of the Maccabean victory against the Greeks which is so reminiscent of the early struggle for our Jewish State of Israel, allowing Chanukah to take on, for someone growing up in a country that is still surrounded by enemies who would destroy us if they could, a much greater urgency and relevance.

Nevertheless, a case could be made against any Chanukah celebration at all, from a religious perspective. After all, the first Hasmonean Kings (relatives of Judah haMaccabee, hero of the revolt) descended from the tribe of Levi, the tribe of priests, and the Bible insists that kings ought to emerge from the tribe of Judah: "the scepter of rule shall not depart from (the tribe of) Judah" (Gen. 49:10), with the Ramban (ad loc), forbidding a King from any other Tribe, and even Maimonides (Laws of Kings) insisting that a messianic, eternal dynasty can only emerge from Judah.

The historical fact is that the Hasmoneans, priests of the Holy Temple, arrogated to themselves - in defiance of Jacob's tribal blessings and codified Jewish Law - the Kingship of Israel. Not only does this circumvent the Torah, but it also brings an end to the separation of temple and state, a wall which preserved priesthood and royalty as two distinct ideas. And this separation was seen as crucial for two important reasons.

A king's throne may be high, but it dare not be higher than the commandments of the Divine: the same ritual practices which apply to the simplest Jew must also apply to King David. It was deemed important that the King be equal - and not superior to - any other Jew, at least in the realm of religious ritual, and that such equality imbue the King with fundamental humility, enhancing the powerful notion of universal subjection to the King of all Kings (Deut. 17:18-20).

Priests, however, whose relationship to the Divine sets them apart, obligates them to more than the

average Jew and grants them special privileges, entry to parts of the Temple wherein the ordinary Israelite cannot enter, can suggest specialness of persona and higher, Divinely bestowed authority for the king which could spell disaster in the creation of a totalitarian monarchy. Secondly, whereas the King might be forced to make certain ritual compromises in his day-to-day activity with the international community, the Jewish ritual must stand above the exigencies of the moment and express eternal relevance and continuity. Moreover, the ritual authority of the High Priest and the ethical authority of the Prophet - removed, as the Bible sees these functionaries, from the possibility of Kingship, provided crucial checks and balances upon the individual who sat on the executive throne. Hence a King who is also High Priest provides a script for disaster. Therefore, we shouldn't be too surprised that the Hasmonean rule was doomed. True, there were achievements, territorial expansion and great building enterprises, but this couldn't cover up the strife, civil war and internecine conflicts between Hyrcanos II and his brother, or prevent the sad fact that the descendants of the original Hasmoneans ended up on the edge of apostasy, assimilating into the very Hellenistic world their grandfathers fought against so zealously. Subsequent Hasmonean rule was the very antithesis of religious fidelity and commitment.

Given all this, why the eight-day festivities beginning with the Hasmonean victory on the 25th day of Kislev? What about all the dark spots we've just mentioned, the stains on the Hasmonean legacy? Maimonides says it all when he explains our rabbinic festival and its concomitant recitations of the Hallel Psalms of praises to the Almighty "because the Hasmoneans restored Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel for close to two-hundred years!" (Mishneh Torah, beginning Laws of Chanukah.) What we are celebrating is that the Jews were able to wrest power from the Greek-Syrians, and re-store the kingdom of Israel. Yes, absolute power may corrupt absolutely, but what about absolute powerlessness? Having been the victims of so many foreign powers, the Jews know that the impotence of powerlessness leads to the brink of destruction even more readily than corrupt power! Whatever may be the consequences of a corroded Israeli government, they must pale in comparison to the injustices wrought upon our people by the likes of an Egyptian Pharaoh or a mad-man Hitler..

Apparently, driving the Greek-Syrians out of Jerusalem was of such tremendous importance that despite the breakdown of the separation between High Priest and King we nevertheless declared a Festival. All the stains of the Hasmonean dynasty - and there were many transgressions - could not darken the successes of the Maccabees, vital to the future of the Jewish people. The lights of Chanukah had to be lit or the light in the world would have been extinguished forever,

leaving Israel in total darkness. An Israeli government may be far from perfect, but it nevertheless portends "the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption" much more than any foreign ruler can do. And the rest, how we change and develop that government, is largely up to us, residents of the State of Israel. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

### **Legacy**

**D**ivine providence seems to work in strange ways, especially for Joseph languishing in an Egyptian prison. Unjustly accused of making advances to Potiphar's wife, Joseph has been thrown into the dungeon and left there to rot. But destiny requires that he be released and elevated to high office in the royal palace, and to effect this important result, divine providence contrives a very outlandish set of circumstances.

As we read in this week's Torah portion, ten years after his incarceration Joseph meets up with two discredited palace functionaries, the royal cupbearer and the royal baker. One morning, he finds them despondent. He questions them and discovers that they both had disturbing dreams the previous night. He offers astute interpretations of their dreams, and the sequence of events bears out his predictions. Two years later, when Pharaoh has his own puzzling dreams, the cupbearer remembers Joseph's interpretive skills and recommends him to Pharaoh. Joseph is brought to the palace, where his brilliant interpretations and wisdom win him high office, and the rest is history.

This story certainly makes for high drama, but why were all these farfetched developments necessary? Why didn't divine providence manifest itself in a simpler way? Couldn't Joseph's release and rise to power have been effected through more commonplace events?

The commentators explain that Joseph's release from prison is meant to serve as a paradigm of the ultimate in human emancipation. The vicissitudes of life can cause a person to experience confinement of many sorts, not only physical incarceration but also psychological and emotional bondage of the spirit, which can often be far more painful. How is a person to extricate himself from these situations? How can he escape the isolation sometimes imposed by his conditions?

The answer is to focus on the needs of others. As long as a person is absorbed in his own miserable condition, he cannot help but wallow in self-pity to some degree and to walk on the edge of despair. Once he shifts his focus to others, however, his presence in confinement is no longer purposeless and negative. On the contrary, his is a positive presence bringing relief to others and fulfillment to himself. By freeing the spirit, he

will in effect have emancipated himself from the shackles of his condition.

Joseph personified this approach. Unjustly accused and imprisoned, he did not withdraw into himself to bemoan his awful fate. Instead, he immediately became the heart and soul of the prison, always there to help a stricken inmate. In this sense, he effected his own emancipation even as he still remained confined within the prison walls. And to drive home the point, Hashem contrived that his actual physical release should also be the result of the kindness he performed for others.

A prisoner was thrown into a cell with a large number of other prisoners. The walls of the prison were thick and damp, and high up on one side, far above the heads of even the tallest prisoners, was a tiny, heavily barred window that looked out over a barren piece of land. Every day, the new prisoner would drag his bed to the wall under the window. Then he would climb onto the bed, stand on his tiptoes and, stretching, was just able to rest his chin on the stone windowsill. The other prisoners gathered in groups to talk or play games, but the new prisoner never participated. He just stood there all day, staring out the window.

"What do you see out there?" a prisoner asked him.

"Nothing," he replied.

"Then why do you stand there all day?"

"As long as I look out at the world outside," the new prisoner replied, "I still feel a little connection with it. I still have a little bit of my freedom. But once I turn away from this window and look only at the cell and my cellmates, all my freedom will be gone. Once I surrender to my situation, I will truly be imprisoned."

In our own lives, we are often pummeled by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Assailed by financial difficulties, family and childrearing problems, pressure in the workplace and all sorts of other strains and stresses, we can easily find ourselves becoming gloomy and depressed. So what can we do? How can we regain the equilibrium and morale we need to deal with our problems constructively? By throwing ourselves into helping families less fortunate than ourselves or an important community project. For one thing, focusing on others immediately relieves the distress of our own situations. But more important, it elevates us spiritually and allows us to view our troubles in the broader perspective of what has lasting value in the ultimate scheme of things and what does not. © 2007 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**he affair of Yehuda and Tamar begins with his meeting her, after he had first neglected her and hinted that she was responsible for the deaths of

his sons, and ends with Yehuda's repentance for his acts ("She is right, I am responsible" [Bereishit 38:26]). However, in the beginning of the passage there is another issue that should also be studied.

After Eir, Yehuda's firstborn, dies without having any children, his brother Onan does not want to have children in his brother's name, thus refusing to observe the custom of "yibbum," which already existed at the time (see Ramban). Why did Onan refuse to fulfill his obligation? This can evidently be seen in the verses which precede the account of his refusal. In the description of the births of Yehuda's children, it is written that after Yehuda married the daughter of Shua, "She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and he called him Eir. And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son, and she called him Onan. And she once more became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and she called him Shaila." [38:3-5]. Why did Yehuda give a name to his son Eir, while his wife named his two other sons? Ramban noted this distinction, but he writes, "the Torah does not tell us why." Perhaps it implies that Yehuda had a special relationship with his firstborn and that he therefore showed a strong interest in him and gave him a name. His close feeling towards his firstborn is notable in comparison with his attitude towards the other two sons.

The same phenomenon then continues as the children grow. "Yehuda took a wife for his firstborn son Eir, and her name was Tamar" [38:6]. Yehuda shows that he cares about his son's marriage and even finds him his bride. But the Torah tells us that in spite of? or perhaps because of? this preferred attitude that Yehuda gave his son, "Eir, Yehuda's firstborn, was evil in the eyes of G-d, and He put him to death" [38:7]. And after Eir dies Yehuda continues to be involved with his son's memory, and he turns to his younger brother. "So Yehuda said to Onan, go to your brother's wife and take her for a wife in his place, in order to continue your brother's seed" [38:8]. The repeated reference that Onan must do something for his brother is a direct continuation of Yehuda's special relationship with his firstborn son.

However, Onan refuses to cooperate and makes sure "not to provide seed for his brother" [38:9]. He is not described as his brother was, "bad in G-d's eyes," but rather more specifically? "And what he had done was bad in G-d's eyes" [38:10]. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Yehuda's attitude is what led to Onan's behavior. In general, he might have been a better person than Eir, but his feeling of being deprived led to the sin for which he lost his life.

It is most ironic that this affair is described in close proximity to the story of Yosef. Those events also took place at least partially because of the preference that Yaacov showed for Yosef, as is written by the sages: "A man should never give one son preference over his other sons. For a double weight of wool that

Yaacov gave to Yosef... one event followed another and our forefathers were forced to descend to Egypt" [Shabbat 10b]. If our approach is right, Yehuda, who was a central figure in the controversy between the brothers that was caused by preferential treatment, did not learn the lesson from his own experience? and he then paid the price for his own similar mistake.

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**fter Joseph's two dreams his siblings are naturally upset - believing that Joseph had aspirations to control them. The rage turns into jealousy when Jacob seems to give credence to Joseph's dreams. (Genesis 37:11) In response, Joseph's brothers set out to Shechem. This is where, just a few years earlier, two of them killed all of the male inhabitants for the rape of Dinah, their sister. (Genesis 34) According to the Midrash, the brothers again go to Shechem to decide how to, once again, take retribution, this time against Joseph. (Rashi, Genesis 37:12)

This is where Jacob sends Joseph to seek out to his brothers' welfare. (Genesis 37:13) Sforno, the 15th century Italian commentator, explains that, although Jacob could have sent a servant to find out if his sons were well, he purposefully sent Joseph in the hope that he would be able to make peace with them.

This begs the question: With the brothers' enmity towards Joseph so great, wasn't Jacob, who knew of the previous incident in Shechem, placing Joseph in danger?

Indeed, it can be suggested that Joseph felt that his father had set him up. Note that Joseph doesn't contact his father even after becoming second to the King of Egypt. Joseph may have felt that he was being cast aside, just like those who came before him. [Esau was cast aside by Isaac, and Ishmael by Abraham.]

Yet, Joseph, in his feelings of being set up, could have misread his father. Jacob may have sent Joseph to his brothers because of what occurred to him (Jacob) in his younger years. After Jacob took the blessings from his brother Esau, he is advised by his mother to flee to avoid Esau's wrath. (Genesis 27:43-46) In the end, the advice has devastating results as Jacob does not see his family for twenty-two years.

As he has now grown older, Jacob doesn't want to make the same mistake. And so, when Jacob's sons feud, he adopts a plan-one that is the direct opposite of what was suggested to him when he was younger. Rather than have Joseph separate from his brothers, he sends Joseph to his siblings in the hope that they will reconcile. It is often the case that children vow not to make the mistakes of their parents. What is ironic is that even as we try a different path, nothing is a guarantee. Despite Joseph being sent to, rather than from, his brothers, he remains separated from his family for 22 years.

The message: While Jacob should be lauded for trying a new path, it is often the case that no matter what we do or how hard we try, we cannot control everything and, at times "the song remains the same." (aval hamanginah tamid nisheret) © 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 ARON TENDLER**

## Parsha Summary

**1**st Aliya: In the year 2216, Yakov was settled in Canaan. Yoseph was 17 years old and Yakov presented him with the multi-colored coat. Yoseph related his two dreams to his brothers.

2nd Aliya: The brothers conspired to kill Yoseph, but Reuven intervened. He suggested throwing Yoseph into a pit to buy time, during which he would have been able to save Yoseph.

3rd Aliya: During Reuven's absence, Yehudah suggested selling Yoseph into slavery. The brothers presented Yakov with contrived evidence of Yoseph's death, and he was inconsolable.

4th Aliya: The story of Yehudah and Tamar is related. In the end, their first son, Peretz, is the progenitor of Mashiach.

5th Aliya: Yoseph had been purchased by Potiphar and was quickly recognized for his managerial skills and integrity. He was appointed to run Potiphar's household.

6th Aliya: Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Yoseph, but Yoseph withstood temptation and fled his mistress's presence. He was thrown into the royal prison and was soon chosen by the warden to run the prison.

7th Aliya: Due to his managerial position, Yoseph came in contact with the former royal wine steward and baker. He successfully interpreted their dreams and the wine steward was re-appointed to his position. Yoseph asked the wine steward to intervene on his behalf with Pharaoh. In the year 2227, Yoseph is 28 years old.

### Summary of The Haftorah: Amos 2:6 -- 3:8

In this weeks Haftorah, Amos the Navi chastised the Bnai Yisroel [Children of Israel] for the perversion of justice manifest in their behavior toward the widowed, orphaned and the poor. Yoseph's sale for a few pieces of silver is referenced as a prime example of such injustice. Regardless of whatever rationalization the brother's may have used to justify their actions, the money they accepted for the sale reduced their actions to nothing more than selfish and self-serving.

This same theme is repeated in the story of the 10 Martyrs. The Roman Governor accused the brothers of selling Yoseph for money. If their motives were in

fact righteous, they should not have accepted any personal gain from their actions.

The Navi contrasted the injustices against the poor to the three most severe sins of: idolatry, adultery, and murder. Hashem [G-d] is willing to give a second chance when humankind fails due to personal failing; however, when humankind fails in the arena of social justice, there can not be a second chance. Judges are intended to do G-d's work of ministering justice, and the administration of justice should be a primary display of Hashem's manifest presence within society. When a judge perverts the power of his office he compromises much more than justice. He compromises G-d Himself.

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### **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. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & 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. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org