

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said: 'Lie with me.' But he refused, and said to his master's wife: 'Behold, my master, having me, knows not what is in the house, and he has put all that he possesses into my hand' (Gen. 39:7,8).

The great historical event of Hanukkah, the victory of the few Hasmoneans against the mighty Greek-Syrian empire, culminated in the return of the Judeans to the Holy Temple, the purification of the sacred menorah (Al HaNissim Prayer), and the miracle of the small cruse of pure oil - sufficient for only one day - which lasted for eight days, enough time to produce as much pure oil required for the continual ritual kindling of the seven menorah lights.

If so, why do all future generations celebrate the victory by lighting candles in our homes, "ner ish u'veito," in the language of the Talmud (B.T. Shabbat 21). Ought not we commemorate the miracle of the discovery of the pure oil in the desecrated Temple by lighting the menorah in our synagogue, "miniature Holy Temples," rather than in our homes?

Moreover, the Al HaNissim prayer opens with the following words: "In the days of Mattathias the son of Yohanan High Priest the Hasmonean and his children, - when the wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your nation Israel to make them forget Your Torah..." Why does the prayer focus on the children (sons) of Mattathias when it seems more appropriate and logical to list the fellow priest warriors of Mattathias who fought alongside him?

Let us first answer the second question, and once we do, the first question will also be answered.

Generally one thinks of revolutionaries, and especially religious reformers, as being young, the more modern cultural rebels pitted against the elder, more conservative, traditionalists. The Greek Hellenists wanted to turn Judea into a Greek city-state, adopting and inviting the ostensibly more enlightened Greek

philosophy, theatre and literature into the more ancient and, supposedly, outmoded Biblical religion. The Al HaNissim prayer, by mentioning "his children", wants us to understand that the rebellion against Greek-Syria, against Hellenist assimilation, was led not only by the aged scholars but also by the young warriors. Critical is the fact that the younger Hasmoneans clung to the eternal truths and values of our G-d-given Torah and national life-style, together with their elders; the fathers and sons fought side by side to purify our menorah. And when the traditionalists seemed to be emerging victorious, the Greek-Syrians troops 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 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, attracted by Joseph's charm and physical beauty, 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 shalshelet. In his classic 19th century Biblical commentary, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that this cantillation implies that Joseph - a stranger in a strange land - took a long time in refusing, that it was difficult for him 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 during a lecture to members of a non-religious kibbutz his description of the father's face that restrained the son - Jacob appearing to Joseph - was met with cynical disbelief. His audience insisted that at such an intense, erotic moment, the least likely image in his mind would be Joseph's aged father. Rav Sabbato's response was an ingenious interpretation of the narrative. In Biblical times only the very rich had mirrors, and then only in the bedroom. Hence Joseph, a shepherd and the son

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Lillui Nishmas, our dear mother  
Miriam bas Eliyahu Dov A'H  
by Roger Rubin & Family ( Manchester UK)  
and Marion Aarons & Family ( London UK)**

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of shepherds, had never had the opportunity to see how he actually looked since no mirror was available to him. Rav Sabbato directed the imagination of his questioners in the kibbutz audience to imagine that when Joseph entered Mrs. Potiphar's boudoir and for the first time in his life he came across a mirror, the image that faced him shocked him. Since Joseph was the exact physical replica of his father Jacob (Rashi on Genesis 37:3) and he obviously knew what his father looked like, Joseph thought he was seeing his father in the mirror when in actuality he was seeing himself. No doubt this unexpected encounter with his father's 'image' gave him the moral strength to resist temptation.

Beyond the highly descriptive and imaginative scenario of Rav Sabbato, the picture suggested by Rav Sabbato is a metaphor for each of us. Indeed, we do see our parents in the mirror - and they see us.

We are our parents and our parents are us - genetically, historically and culturally. If it were not so, there would be no historical continuity, no palpable tradition. This is the real reason why we give 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 lifestyle, 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 now we also understand why we celebrate the miracle of the pure cruse of oil within the context of the Jewish home rather than the Jewish synagogue. The major guard against assimilation is by a completely traditional Jewish home wherein parents communicate their values and their lifestyle to their children and the children, in turn, reflect the values and lifestyle of their parents in their own lives. Hence, "ner ish u'veito" "a

candle is to be lit by each individual within the familial home." © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

**W**ho was she? We know little about her except her name, Tamar. Judah, fourth son of Jacob, had "gone down" from his brothers—a spiritual as well as physical decline. It was he who had proposed selling Joseph as a slave. Now he has left the family and married a Canaanite woman. He has three sons by her—Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er grows up, Judah finds him a wife. That is how Tamar enters the story.

Tragedy strikes. Er dies. He "was wicked in the Lord's sight." How so, we are not told. Judah—practising a pre-mosaic form of levirate marriage—tells his second son Onan that he must marry his late brother's widow so that she can bear a child. Onan resents the fact that a child of his would be regarded as perpetuating his brother's memory, and he "spills his seed." For this he is punished, and he too dies.

Judah tells Tamar that she must "live like a widow" until Shelah is old enough to marry her. But he delays, fearing that his third son too may die. This places Tamar in a situation of "living widowhood," unable to marry anyone else because she is bound to her remaining brother-in-law, unable to marry him because of Judah's fear.

Taking destiny into her own hands, she seizes the opportunity that presents itself when she hears that Judah is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep. Covering her face with a veil, she dresses herself as a prostitute and positions herself on the route she knows Judah will take. Judah approaches her and sleeps with her. She returns home and removes the disguise. She becomes pregnant. Three months later, her condition is apparent. People inform Judah, who is indignant. She must, he reasons, be guilty of adultery since she is bound to Shelah, whom Judah has kept from her. "Bring her out and have her burned," he orders.

Only then do we realise the significance of one detail in the earlier episode. During the course of her deception, she had negotiated a price with Judah, but first insisted on a pledge: his seal, cord and staff. By the time Judah sent a messenger to pay her and reclaim the pledge, she had disappeared. Now she produces the three items and sends them to Judah with the words, "I am pregnant by the man who owns these." It is a masterly stroke. She has established her innocence without shaming Judah—for he alone now understood exactly what had happened. From this, the sages derived the principle that "One should be willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than shame another person in public."

What was Tamar doing? According to the Midrash, Nahmanides and Hizkuni, she was acting according to the custom of that time, by which levirate

marriage could be practised not only by a brother of the deceased husband, but also by another close relative—in this case, Judah, Tamar's father-in-law. Her act was one of piety, ensuring that her husband's family line would be continued.

Tamar's conduct bears an uncanny resemblance to another biblical personality—Ruth. Both stories begin with an act of descent on the part of fathers-in-law: Judah to the Canaanites, Elimelech to the Moabites. In both, two sons die: Judah's sons Er and Onan, Elimelech's sons Machlon and Chilyon. In each case, the woman concerned has been left a childless widow. In both, the denouement is brought about by a bold act on the part of the woman, Tamar dressing as a prostitute, Ruth lying at night at Boaz' feet. Both times, the man involved (Judah, Boaz) is not the closest in line-for Tamar, that was Shelah, for Ruth the anonymous Pelsoni-Almoni whose claim Boaz has to ask him to forego.

In both cases the heroine is an outsider. Ruth is a Moabite. We are not told Tamar's family background. The sages say she was descended from Shem; Philo says that she was the child of idolaters. Yet it is they who give birth to children "to maintain the name of the dead... so that his name will not disappear," as Boaz says of Ruth. And it is they who are sensitive to the living, Tamar by not shaming Judah, Ruth by not letting Naomi return home alone.

The connection between the two women is stated explicitly at the end of the Book of Ruth. When the elders give permission to Boaz to buy Naomi's field and marry Ruth, they pronounce this blessing: "May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel... May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah." Why this reference to Tamar and Judah?

The answer lies in the genealogy with which the Book of Ruth ends. It lists the ten generations from Perez to King David. The beginning of David's family tree is the son, Perez, born to Judah and Tamar. The seventh generation is the son, Obed, born to Ruth and Boaz. The family tree of Israel's great and future king includes Tamar and Ruth, two women whose virtue and loyalty, kindness and discretion, surely contributed to David's greatness.

I find it exceptionally moving that the Bible should cast in these heroic roles two figures at the extreme margins of Israelite society: women, childless widows, outsiders. Tamar and Ruth, powerless except for their moral courage, wrote their names into Jewish history as role models who gave birth to royalty—to remind us, in case we ever forget, that true royalty lies in love and faithfulness, and that greatness often exists where we expect it least.

Candles in memory of a clash of civilisations  
Credo—The Times—December 2006 Spare a thought for

Chanukah, the festival of rededication and light. It is the simplest of all Jewish festivals. All it requires, other than certain prayers, is the lighting of a candelabrum, the Menorah, in memory of the one that once stood in the Temple in Jerusalem.

We do so for eight days, each day lighting one light more than the day before. We say a blessing, sing a song and eat doughnuts (what would a Jewish festival be without food?). Hardly newsworthy. What could Chanukah possibly have to say to us, here, now?

The answer is that the event it recalls—the Jewish fight for religious freedom under the Greeks 22 centuries ago—was one of the most significant of all "clashes of civilisations". It was a confrontation between the two great cultures that between them gave birth to Western civilisation: ancient Greece in the form of the Alexandrian empire, and ancient Israel.

It may be hard to believe that they were fundamentally opposed. Indeed, Christianity was born in their synthesis, the first Christians were Jews, and the first Christian texts were written in Greek. That synthesis existed in Judaism as well, though it was never mainstream. Its most famous representative was Philo of Alexandria.

But they were opposed. They represented two very different ways of understanding the universe, constructing a society and living a life. Much has been written about one contemporary clash, between "the West and the rest". Far too little has been said about another clash, this time within the West itself. Essentially it is the same clash as the one Chanukah recalls more than two millennia ago.

In his *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) Matthew Arnold differentiated between the world of the Greeks, which he called Hellenism, and that of the Jews, which he called Hebraism. Hellenism was about art and the imagination. Its great ideal was beauty. Hebraism was about ethics and obligation. Its ideal was righteousness.

Arnold's complaint was that in high Victorian England, there was too much Hebraism and too little Hellenism. Today the situation has been almost entirely reversed. Our secular culture, with its abortion and ever louder demands for euthanasia, its cult of the body, its deification of science and scepticism about religion, even its quasi-religious worship of sport, is deeply Hellenistic. Hebraic values such as the sanctity of life, the consecration of marriage, fidelity, modesty, inner worth as opposed to outward displays of wealth and power: all these are in eclipse. Not surprisingly, most philosophers of our time have found inspiration in the sages of Athens rather than the prophets of Israel. Ours is the most Hellenistic age since the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in the 4th century.

Ancient Greece gave the world the concept of tragedy. Ancient Israel taught it hope. In the loose sense in which we use these words today, they are no

more than two different aspects of life. But they are in fact deeply incompatible. The French playwright Jean Anouilh put it best: "Tragedy is clean, it is restful, it is flawless... and the reason is that hope, that foul, deceitful thing, has no part in it."

The fate of the Alexandrian empire should give us pause. It seemed all-conquering but within a few centuries it had been eclipsed. Bertrand Russell explained why: moral restraints disappeared; individualism ruled, and the result was "a rare florescence of genius", but because of the "decay of morals" the Greeks fell "under the domination of nations less civilised than themselves but not so destitute of social cohesion". That is surely a warning for our times.

Tragic cultures eventually disintegrate and die. Lacking any sense of ultimate meaning, they lose the moral beliefs and restraints on which continuity depends. They sacrifice happiness for pleasure. They sell the future for the present. The West's less-than-replacement birth rates and its ecological irresponsibility are just two examples of how it too is going the same way.

Ancient Greece and its culture of tragedy died. Judaism and its culture of hope survived. The Chanukah lights are the symbol of that survival, of Judaism's refusal to jettison its values for the glamour and prestige of Hellenism or what today we call secularisation. A candle of hope may seem a small thing, but on it the very survival of a civilisation may depend. © 2008 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**Y**aakov settles in the Land of Israel, the Land of Canaan, the land of his forefathers. In that first sentence of this week's parsha lies the hope of Yaakov and of all his descendants. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, states that Yaakov wanted to rest from his earlier troubles and remain serene and at peace for the balance of his life. This is a natural human wish and desire. But the troubles of Yaakov are not over by any means.

The incident of the dispute and resultant tragedy of Yosef and his brothers will erase any hope of Yaakov being able to remain serene and at peace with himself. The truth of Jewish history indicates that the years of serenity of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel were relatively few and far between. We always thought that the creation of our national home in the Land of Israel would be the ultimate panacea for Jewish life.

Herzl promised that anti-Semitism would disappear with the creation of an independent Jewish state. Tragically, history has shown the case certainly to be otherwise. In fact, the Jewish state has in many respects exacerbated the campaign of anti-Semitism in

today's world. The longing for serenity oftentimes blinds people to unpleasant realities and forthcoming dangers.

Yaakov is aware of the problem between Yosef and his brothers but he is not proactive in preventing the violence that lies below the surface of this dispute. His desire to rest and settle in peace in the Land of Israel - simply to be left alone by all of his neighbors and potential enemies - essentially prevents him from attempting to prevent the civil war brewing in his house.

The Lord is therefore critical, so to speak, of Yaakov's desire for serenity at all costs. Serenity is in the World to Come and not in this world of problems and challenges.

The Jewish community here in Israel desires peace and serenity at almost all cost. The desire is so strong that it has led to a great dispute between different sections of Israeli society. The desire for peace overwhelms all other issues and creates great rivers of division and even violence amongst us. So, there is really little effort to heal these divisions and concentrate somehow on our own homes and families.

The desire for peace and serenity has sucked all of the oxygen out of all of the other issues of Israeli life. In pursuing a goal that may currently be beyond our abilities we abandon the opportunity to truly achieve success with the more mundane challenges that face us.

Ben Gurion, not noted for his great piety, nevertheless said that there are certain issues that will have to be left to messianic times for permanent solution. Undoubtedly he meant that certain problems do not lend themselves to resolve currently. We are entitled to aspire for serenity and peace, but not at the expense of the realities and dangers that face us. Yaakov's example remains an important lesson for us as well in our present challenges and difficulties. © 2008 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 Reuvein returned to the pit, and behold Yosef was not in the pit" (Beraishis 37:29). Where was Reuvein when the brothers had sold Yosef that he was unaware that he was no longer in the pit? "He was busy with his sackcloth and with his fasting (i.e. repenting) for having mixed up (moved) his father's bed" (Rashi, quoting Beraishis Rabbah 84:19, see also Targum Yonasan).

The incident Reuvein was doing teshuvah (repenting) for occurred after Rachel had died. Yaakov's primary residence was with Rachel, and after she died, it was with Bilhah, who was Rachel's maidservant - until Rachel gave her to Yaakov to be his

(third) wife. Reuvein thought it was an insult that Yaakov did not make his primary residence with Leah (Reuvein's mother and Yaakov's first wife), so took it upon himself to move Yaakov's bed to his mother's tent. It was because of this sin that Reuvein lost the right of the firstborn, which was transferred to Yosef.

Rachel had died after Yaakov left Bais-El (see 35:17-19), towards the very end of his return trip to his father in Chevron, 22 years after he had left Canaan to go to Charan to get married. It was then that Reuvein sinned (35:22), when he was about 14 years old (being born a year after Yaakov married Leah, or after eight years of Yaakov being away). Yosef was born 14 years after Yaakov had left, when the years agreed upon with Lavan to work for the right to marry his wives were over (see Rashi on 30:25), making him eight years old when his mother died (Yaakov worked for Lavan for six more years, and it was another two years until he returned to his father, shortly before which Rachel had died). Yosef was 17 years old when he was sold (37:2), about nine years after his mother died, and nine years after Reuvein had moved Yaakov's bed. Even though Reuvein knew that his brothers wanted to kill Yosef, as he was the one to "save" him by suggesting they throw him into the pit instead (37:21-22), he leaves the vicinity to repent for a sin he had done nine years earlier! Why now? What happened that after nine years Reuvein finally realizes that he had sinned and must do teshuvah, risking Yosef's life in the process?

The Panim Yafos (Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz, author of the Hafla'ah, whom the Chasam Sofer refers to as his "teacher and rebbe") presents an interesting possibility to explain what Reuvein hoped to accomplish by having Yosef thrown into a pit with poisonous snakes. He suggests that although Reuvein agreed that Yosef's words and deeds warranted being punished, he thought that Yosef would not receive any punishment via the snakes because he was less than 20 years old, and a person does not receive any heavenly punishment until they reach the age of 20. This idea comforted him, as it would also leave him off the hook for having moved his father's bed, since he was younger than 20 when he committed his sin too. However, upon returning to the pit and seeing that Yosef was gone, he realized that being younger than 20 wasn't an excuse for them (since they were so advanced for their age), so not only was Yosef punished when he was 17, but he also deserved to be punished for what he had done nine years earlier, even though he was under 20 at the time.

To be honest, though, I don't really understand how this answers the question. According to the scenario presented by the Panim Yafos, it wasn't until after Reuvein saw that Yosef wasn't in the pit that he realized he needed to do teshuvah, while the point of saying that Reuvein was busy repenting was to explain why he wasn't there when the brothers sold Yosef.

Obviously, Reuvein was away doing teshuvah before he saw that Yosef was gone, not afterwards! Additionally, the Panim Yafos doesn't explain why subjecting Yosef to poisonous snakes wouldn't harm Yosef if he was not subject to heavenly punishment, yet the attempt to kill him could have been carried out. Wouldn't they be prevented from killing the underage Yosef just as the snakes would miraculously be held at bay? (If anyone has a way of explaining the Panim Yafos, please email me at [dkramer@compuserve.com](mailto:dkramer@compuserve.com).) Nevertheless, using the Panim Yafos' idea of Reuvein equating Yosef being younger than 20 with his being younger than 20 when he sinned, perhaps we can try understanding what Reuvein may have been thinking, and why he felt he needed to do teshuvah now.

Even though someone under the age of 20 is not considered a "bar onshin" (liable for punishment), that is only insofar as the "bais din shel maalah" (heavenly court) is concerned. After reaching adulthood (bar or bas mitzvah, i.e. 13 or 12 years old), even before the age of 20, one can be brought to a "bais din" (Jewish court) and punished if found guilty. [Based on this, the Or Hachayim, in the beginning of Devarim, explains why Moshe rebuked the generation that would enter the Holy Land for the sins done by the generation that died in the desert, as even though those under 20 by the golden calf survived, those who had reached the age of 13 were also responsible for it. These were the "elders" of the next generation, and were therefore rebuked for their earlier sins.]

Reuvein may have thought that even if he would not be punished by G-d for the sin he committed when he was 14 or 15 years old, his father decided to punish him nonetheless, and took away his firstborn status. A similar thing was happening now with Yosef, as even if he really was trying to convince his father that the other brothers should not be part of the nation of Israel (see [www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/vayeishev.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/vayeishev.pdf)) and therefore deserved to be punished, he was only 17, and G-d would not have punished him just yet. The brothers convened a bais din anyway, and "paskined" (decided) that he should be punished. It was at this point that Reuvein convinced them not to kill Yosef themselves, but throw him into the pit with poisonous snakes and scorpions instead, figuring that G-d wouldn't allow them to harm Yosef. The plan was to bring Yosef back to Yaakov, and explain to him why he was saved; that even though Yosef could be punished by humans, he was spared heavenly punishment based on his age. Hopefully, Yaakov would then reconsider his own decision to punish Reuvein and reinstate him as the firstborn.

But would Yaakov really reconsider Reuvein's status after having already stripped him of the birthright? Reuvein realized that this would only be possible if Yaakov thought he had matured, and was

beyond doing what he had done nine years earlier. Reuvein would have to show Yaakov that he knew he had done wrong, regretted having done it in the first place, and was the kind of person that would never do something like that again. In other words, he would have to do teshuvah for it. So Reuvein went off and "got busy with his sackcloth and fasting," preparing for the next step, bringing Yosef back to their father, who would see that Reuvein was a new person and would no longer hold him accountable for something he had done as a teenager (just as Reuvein didn't allow Yosef to be punished for the "discretions of his youth"). Unfortunately (for Reuvein), the plan was foiled when the brothers sold Yosef to the caravan headed for Egypt.

While this explains why Reuvein decided to do teshuvah now for something he had done nine years earlier, it may explain something else as well. Beraishis Rabbah (84:19) says that G-d praised Reuvein for being the first one to ever repent. The commentators ask how this can be so if both Adam and Kayin had repented many centuries earlier. They also ask how it could be said that Reuvein repented now, if elsewhere it is apparent that he didn't repent until after Yehudah admitted his sin (see Rashi on Devarim 33:7), which (it seems) didn't occur until after the brothers saw how Yosef's disappearance affected their father (see Rashi on Beraishis 38:1). If Reuvein's repentance now was not spurred by a true desire to return to G-d, but as a means for Yaakov to reconsider his punishment, it can be suggested that it was this kind of repentance, done "shelo lishma" because of external factors, that Reuvein was the first to undertake. And it was not until after Yehudah's teshuvah that Reuvein did a full teshuvah, for the right reasons. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**C**hanukah celebrates the miracle of the Hasmonean victory over the Syrian Greeks. What is forgotten is that their dynasty did not last. Why not?

Ramban suggests that the disintegration of Hasmonean rule was due to their usurping too much power. (See Kiddushin 66a) By birth, the Hasmoneans came from the tribe of Levi, and could become priests. In the end, however, Judah Aristobulus, the grandson of Judah Maccabee assumed a second role; that of king. Here the Hasmoneans overstepped their bounds as kingship is confined to the tribe of Judah. (Genesis 49:10)

There is much logic to the idea that priest and king remain separate. Kingship deals with the politics of running the state, taking into account aspects of civil administration and international relations. Priesthood on the other hand, focuses on spirituality; on how to connect to G-d. Of course, the teachings of the priest

give shape and direction to the state. Still, it can be suggested that kingship and priesthood should remain apart, in order to separate religion and politics.

The distinct responsibility of king and priest is part of a larger system of Jewish checks and balances. The prophet for example, served as the teacher of ethical consciousness rooted in G-d's word; and the Sanhedrin was the judicial/legislative branch of government.

Not coincidentally, in the same week in which we begin celebrating Chanukah, we begin reading the Biblical narrative of Yosef (Joseph) and his brothers. Yosef dreams that he will rule over the family. Yehuda (Judah) leads the brothers in removing this threat by selling Yosef. In this sense, each seek to become the sole heir of Yaacov (Jacob). (See Sforno, Genesis 37:18)

Indeed, up to this point in the book of Genesis, the Torah deals with the message of choice-that is, individuals were picked and others were excluded. For example, of the children of Adam, only Seth, from whom Noah came, survived. Of the children of Noah, Shem is singled out, as Avraham (Abraham) the first patriarch, comes from him. Yitzhak (Isaac) is chosen over Yishmael (Ishmael), and it is Yaacov, and not Esav, (Esau) who continued the covenantal mission.

The Joseph story breaks this pattern in that, in the end, all of Yaacov's children were included. No wonder, Yosef and Yehuda and for that matter, all of the brothers are blessed by Yaacov. Indeed, their descendents form the tribes of Israel, each included in the community of Israel while having distinct roles to fulfill.

One of the challenges of Chanukah is to learn from the mistake made by the Hasmoneans; to understand that attempts to usurp the roles of others are counter productive. Crucial to the continuity of Judaism is for each of us to make space for the other and recognize the respective roles every individual plays-as reflected by Yaacov's sons and ultimately the tribes of Israel. © 2008 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.

**MACHON ZOMET**

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg*

**T**he Patriarchs encompass the traits of the entire nation of Yisrael in their personalities. The separate tribes, on the other hand, represent different sections of the nation, which can be compared to various "organs" within the overall structure of the nation. The differences between the tribes can be seen throughout the succeeding generations in such elements as the banners in the desert, the division of

the land, the split of the kingdom into two separate entities, and in the two messiahs? from the descendents of Yosef and from the descendents of David. Those who have knowledge of the mystical aspects of the Torah talk of twelve different gates in heaven, each one serving as the gateway for the prayers of a specific tribe, which differs from that of the other ones.

In this week's Torah portion, we learn that the different sectors of the nation didn't always maintain a proper bond with each other. We might be surprised to see how far this can reach, with the brothers performing the terrible act of rising up against a specific brother and selling him into slavery.

If we look at the overall picture with a discerning eye, we can see a reason why Leah's sons were suspicious of Yosef. The family of Yisrael had terrible experiences in the two previous generations, and twice the family was split up in a painful and destructive way. Avraham asked, "Let Yishmael live before you" [Bereishit 17:18], and the result was that his descendents were given the power to harass us to this day. Yitzchak was about to give the blessing "Your mother's sons will bow down to you" [27:29] to Eisav, and if not for Rivka we would all be under his rule to this very day. Even so, we still suffer from one verse that Yitzchak said to Eisav: "And when you humble yourself you will be able to remove the yoke from your neck" [27:40]. How much blood was spilled on the cursed land of Europe as a result of this phrase!

This can explain the fears of the brothers. Just look at Yosef: he was the son of a different mother, he acted in a different way, he bonded with the sons of the maidservants, and he described the sons of Leah in a bad light. Could it be that history was repeating itself? Was this a new case of a foreign element within the nation, something which might lead to disaster? Surprisingly, Yaacov's special love for Yosef only served to strengthen the brothers' feeling that they were right. This could easily be seen as *deja vu*, a repeat of the earlier scenes of love by Avraham and Yitzchak for their wayward sons.

However, the main question is not why the brothers suspected an impending disaster, it is why the Almighty hid from them the fact that this time things were different, that the sons of Rachel and Leah should work together to build up the nation of Yisrael, each one contributing his own unique traits to the overall mix?

The true answer to this question is that every stage in the development of the nation must pass through its full process. It is necessary to see the contrast not only between absolute evil and good, as in the days of Yitzchak and Yaacov, but also between the different organs in the structure of the nation. In order that every organ will be completely formed its position must first of all be strengthened and clarified. But in the

end, as a result of the clarification of the differences, the result will be a true link and real brotherhood.

### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**“W**hat gain/betza shall we have if we kill our brother?" (37:26) -- from here we see that Yosef's brothers prayed daily.

The word "betza"—spelled bet-tzaddi-ayin—is the acronym of "boker, tzaharayim, arrev"/"morning, afternoon, evening." These are, of course, the three times for prayer. Yehuda said to his brothers in the above verse:

"What gain will we have if kill our brother? -- our prayers will no longer be accepted!"

Why? Because the prophet Yeshayah states (1:15), "When you spread your hands [in prayer], I will hide My eyes from you; even if you intensify your prayer, I will not listen—your hands are full of blood." From here we learn that a murderer's prayers are not heard.

Besides alluding to the three prayer times, the three letters of "betza" allude to the three prayers in another way: the letter "bet" is the second letter of Avraham's name, the letter "tzaddi" is the second letter of Yitzchak's name, and the letter "ayin" is the second letter of Yaakov's name. These men were the innovators of the morning, afternoon and evening prayers, respectively. (Binat Nevonim) © 1997 Rabbi S. Katz and torah.org

### RABBI YAAKOV KAMENETZKY

## Purpose of Mission

**O**ften, it is hard to discern between acts of good intent, and of good intent mired with selfishness. This week we read two similar stories that are very different and have very different endings.

Tamar was the wife of Yehudah's son, Er. When he died, Yehudah gave her his next son, Onan. Tamar knew that she was destined to mother the seed of Yehudah, and that seed would eventually father King David. But Onan died too. And Yehudah refused to give her his last son Shailah. The custom in that day was that as long as the widow was not totally relinquished from the deceased's family, she would not be allowed to marry an outsider. Tamar was desperate for Yehudah's seed. She hid her face, dressed as a prostitute, and seduced Yehudah himself. Yehudah, unaware of who his courtesan was, reacted in horror when he was told that Tamar was with child. "Take her and have her put to death," he ruled. Tamar's plans were almost for naught. She would never bear the seed that she envisioned.

The wife of Potiphar also had a vision. She saw in the stars that she and Yoseph would breed

greatness. She tried to seduce him. She too wanted to fulfill her vision. But Yoseph refused time and time again. He finally fled together with her visions.

Rav Yeruchom Levovitz<sup>1</sup> asks a powerful question. Both of these women had visions, and though their methodology was unconventional, why is there so much disparity as to their status.? Tamar is viewed as the righteous woman who desperately wanted a child from Yehudah. She is known as the Mother of The Kingdom of David. Yet the wife of Potiphar is treated as an adulterous two-timer who tries to seduce Yoseph and then throws him into jail. In what way is she so different than Tamar?

*Rabbi Boruch Ber Lebowitz<sup>2</sup>, Rosh Yeshiva in Kaminetz, Poland, had a difficult time getting his older daughter married. When an outstanding student of his accepted a marriage proposal, Reb Boruch Ber was overjoyed. He knew this young man to be a both a scholar and gentleman. As engagements would endure for quite a while, he suggested to the young man that he continue his studies, uninterrupted, in a distant city.*

*One could not imagine the shock Reb Boruch Ber had when two months later a package arrived. In it was the watch and other gifts that Reb Boruch Ber had given the young man on his engagement. An enclosed note tersely stated that for personal reasons the engagement was off. The bride and her parents were both devastated.*

*A few years later Rabbi Lebowitz called in three of his closest students to a private meeting. "I'd like you to read this letter and tell me if I have infected it with my personal pain," he told them. The students read the letter and stood in awe. A community was seeking a recommendation concerning an applicant for a rabbinical position there. The scholar had learned in Kaminetz and asked Rabbi Lebowitz for a letter of recommendation. The candidate was none other than the formerly engaged student. Rav Lebowitz wrote a beautiful letter, flowing with praise, but was worried that perhaps his personal bitterness may have dulled the response. He called his best students to approve. They knew of the incident and were amazed by the praises Rabbi Lebowitz had written.*

Rav Yeruchom explains: every action has a litmus test that reveals true intentions. Failure. When one fails does one look to heaven and say, "G-d, I tried to do the job my way. I failed. Now it is up to you. "Or does one scream and curse and perhaps even maim

<sup>1</sup>Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz (1874-1936) was the Mashgiach (Dean of Ethics) of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Poland.

<sup>2</sup>Rabbi B. Lebowitz, (1870-1941) a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik, was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Kaminetz Yeshiva in Poland.

and destroy to get his way? Many people begin noble missions, but when they fail, personal vendettas arise.

Tamar failed, and when Yehudah sentenced her for becoming pregnant from out of the family she did not embarrass him by pointing an accusatory finger. She just showed two items he left behind and said, "I am pregnant from the owner of this staff, seal and wrap." Fortunately, Yehudah admitted his folly, and she was spared. Her children were King David's grandparents.

Potiphar's wife's vision ended as Yoseph fled. She could have said, "G-d, I tried, now it's up to you." (It actually was, as Yoseph married her daughter!) She didn't. She reacted with a vengeance and accused him falsely. Yoseph was sent to prison. Potiphar's wife is forever branded as an evil temptress.

Sometimes the experience of failure destroys the nobility of mission. Only those acts that are bred with purity of purpose remain unscathed. They continue to flourish with honor in the face of adversity. Ultimately, they succeed, and we reap the fruits of that success for many years to come. © 1995 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

#### YITZ WEISS

## A Matter of Perspective

**W**hen Yosef's brothers conspired to kill him, Reuven convinced them to do otherwise. Reuven said, "Throw him into this pit." Rashi explains that although the pit was devoid of water, it contained scorpions and vipers. Yehuda later saved Yosef's life by persuading his brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and sell him to the Ishmaelites.

The halacha tells us that if a person falls into a pit which contains scorpions and vipers, he may be assumed dead and consequently his widow can remarry. Interestingly enough, the Torah credits Reuven with saving Yosef. Yehuda, who removed Yosef from the peril, is spoken of critically in the Gemara. What's the explanation for this apparent contradiction?

According to Rav Chaim of Volozhin, even though Reuven's suggestion placed Yosef in mortal danger, Yosef still physically remained within the borders of Eretz Yisroel. The most perilous of circumstances are survivable in Israel. However, Yehuda sold Yosef into slavery in Egypt, and even a secure location outside of Israel is more hazardous than the most dangerous of conditions in our Holy Land. (Adapted from *Twerski on Chumash* by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD)

