

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he deception has taken place. Joseph has been sold into slavery. His brothers have dipped his coat in blood. They bring it back to their father, saying: "Look what we have found. Do you recognise it? Is this your son's robe or not?" Jacob recognised it and replied, "It is my son's robe. A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces." We then read:

"Jacob rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned his son for a long time. His sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, 'I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.'" (37:34-35)

Why did Jacob refuse to be comforted? There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief-shiva, sheloshim, a year. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. The Gemara (Moed Katan 27b) says that G-d says to one who weeps beyond the appointed time, "You are not more compassionate than I."

A midrash gives a remarkable answer. "One can be comforted for one who is dead, but not for one who is still living." Jacob refused to be comforted because he had not yet given up hope that Joseph was still alive. That, tragically, is the fate of those who have lost members of their family (the parents of soldiers missing in action, for example), but have as yet no proof that they are dead. They cannot go through the normal stages of mourning because they cannot abandon the possibility that the missing person is still capable of being rescued. Their continuing anguish is a form of loyalty; to give up, to mourn, to be reconciled to loss is a kind of betrayal. In such cases, grief lacks closure. To refuse to be comforted is to refuse to give up hope.

On what basis did Jacob continue to hope? Surely he had recognized Joseph's blood-stained coat and said, explicitly, "A wild beast had devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces"? Do these words not mean that he had accepted that Joseph was dead?

The late David Daube made a suggestion that I find convincing. The words the sons say to Jacob-haker na, "do you recognise this?"-have a quasi-legal connotation. Daube relates this passage to another, with which it has close linguistic parallels: "If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to his neighbour for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or

is taken away while no one is looking, the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbour did not lay hands on the other person's property... If it [the animal] was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring the remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal." (Shemot 22:10-13)

The issue at stake is the extent of responsibility borne by a guardian (shomer). If the animal is lost through negligence, the guardian is at fault and must make good the loss. If there is no negligence, merely force majeure, an unavoidable, unforeseeable accident, the guardian is exempt from blame. One such case is where the loss has been caused by a wild animal. The wording in the law-tarof yitaref, "torn to pieces"-exactly parallels Jacob's judgment in the case of Joseph: tarof toraf Yosef, "Joseph has been torn to pieces."

We know that some such law existed prior to the giving of the Torah. Jacob himself says to Laban, whose flocks and herds have been placed in his charge, "I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself" (Bereishit 31:39). This implies that guardians even then were exempt from responsibility for the damage caused by wild animals. We also know that an elder brother carried a similar responsibility for the fate of a younger brother placed in his charge (i.e. when the two were alone together). That is the significance of Cain's denial when confronted by G-d as to the fate of Abel: "Am I my brother's guardian [shomer]?"

We now understand a series of nuances in the encounter between Jacob and his sons, when they return without Joseph. Normally they would be held responsible for their younger brother's disappearance. To avoid this, as in the case of later biblical law, they "bring the remains as evidence." If those remains show signs of an attack by a wild animal, they must-by virtue of the law then operative-be held innocent. Their request to Jacob, haker na, must be construed as a legal request, meaning, "Examine the evidence." Jacob has no alternative but to do so, and in virtue of what he has seen, acquit them. A judge, however, may be forced to acquit someone accused of the crime because the evidence is insufficient to justify a conviction, yet he may hold lingering private doubts. So Jacob was forced to find his sons innocent, without necessarily believing what they said. Jacob did not believe it, and his refusal to be comforted shows that he was unconvinced. He continued to hope that Joseph was still alive. That hope was eventually justified.

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Joseph was still alive, and eventually father and son were re-united.

The refusal to be comforted sounded more than once in Jewish history. The prophet Jeremiah heard it in a later age: "This is what the Lord says: / 'A voice is heard in Ramah, / Mourning and great weeping, / Rachel weeping for her children / And refusing to be comforted, / Because her children are no more.' / This is what the Lord says: / 'Restrain your voice from weeping, / And your eyes from tears, / For your work will be rewarded,' says the Lord. / 'They will return from the land of the enemy. / So there is hope for your future,' declares the Lord, / 'Your children will return to their own land.'" (Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Why was Jeremiah sure that Jews would return? Because they refused to be comforted—meaning, they refused to give up hope.

So it was during the Babylonian exile, in one of the great expressions of all time of the refusal to be comforted: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept, / As we remembered Zion... / How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land? / If I forget you, O Jerusalem, / May my right hand forget [its skill], / May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth / If I do not remember you, / If I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy." (Psalm 137:1-6)

It is said that Napoleon, passing a synagogue on Tisha B'Av, heard the sounds of lamentation. "What are the Jews crying for?" he asked one of his officers. "For Jerusalem," he replied. "How long ago did they lose it?" "More than 1,700 hundred years ago." "A people who can mourn for Jerusalem so long, will one day have it restored to them," he is reputed to have replied.

Jews are the people who refused to be comforted because they never gave up hope. Jacob did eventually see Joseph again. Rachel's children did return to the land. Jerusalem is once again the Jewish home. All the evidence may suggest otherwise: it may seem to signify irretrievable loss, a decree of history that cannot be overturned, a fate that must be accepted. Jews never believed the evidence because they had something else to set against it— a faith, a trust, an unbreakable hope that proved stronger than historical inevitability. It is not too much to say that Jewish survival was sustained in that hope. Where did it come from? From a simple-or perhaps not so simply-

phrase in the life of Jacob. He refused to be comforted. And so—while we live in a world still scarred by violence, poverty and injustice—must we. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**M**uch confusion surrounds the selling of Yosef to Egypt. While his brothers first notice a caravan of Yishmaelim coming from Gilad (Beraishis 37:25), Yosef is sold to these Yishmaelim (37:28), and it was from Yishmaelim that Potifar buys him in Egypt (39:1), somehow it is M'danim who sell Yosef to Potifar (37:36), and Midyanim who pass by right before he is sold to the Yishmaelim (37:28). If they are the same people, why are they referred to in different ways, and if they are not the same, who actually bought and sold Yosef?

Rashi (37:28) explains that the Midyanim are not the same group as the Yishmaelim, and the Torah is telling us that Yosef was sold several times; the brothers sell him to the Yishmaelim, who sell him to the Midyanim (or M'danim according to Yalkut Shimoni, one of the Midrashic sources for this explanation), who finally sell him in Egypt. However, this still leaves us with several problems.

First of all, if the point of the story is how Yosef gets to Egypt, does it matter who brought him down? Why does the Torah have to let us know that there were several parties involved? Also, Rashi (37:25) tells us that the Torah describes the cargo carried by the Yishmaelim (pleasant-smelling spices) in order to show us that Yosef's trip was made more bearable than it would have been had it been the regular foul-smelling goods that caravans usually carry. However, if the Yishmaelim sold Yosef to the Midyanim, who make the long journey to Egypt, then the cargo of the Yishmaelim is irrelevant. And if it was the M'danim who sold Yosef to Egypt, why are we later told that Potifar bought him from the Yishmaelim?

Who are the M'danim and the Midyanim? After Sarah died, Avraham married Keturah (25:1), who, Rashi explains, was Hagar (Yishmael's mother). Two of their sons (25:2) were M'dan and Midyan, and before Avraham passed away he sent them "eastward, to the Eastern Land" (25:6). This was near Padan Aram, which is described as "the Land of the Eastern People" (29:1). Yishmael's descendants lived nearby as well, as they "dwelled on the face of all of [their] brothers" (28:18). Since Padan Aram was in what is now Syria (northeast of Israel), this was the general area where these three nations lived. The caravan came from that direction, as Gilad is on the way from Padan Aram to Israel (31:23). It would seem that this caravan, while made up primarily of Yishmaelim (see Ramban), was also comprised of Midyanim and M'danim. (It is possible that the M'danim lived in Midyan, and were therefore described as "people of Midyan" (37:28), so that only

one group besides the Yishmaelim-the M'danim-was in the caravan.) Rashi (37:28) does say that the Midyanim were a separate caravan, but since these individuals were "merchants," they likely traveled close to the Yishmaelim in order to take advantage of their travel experience and the business opportunities each of their stops along the way provided. Borrowing additional pieces (or similar ideas) from some of the commentators, we can try to reconstruct what might have occurred.

Although originally the brothers (sans R'uvein and Binyamin) had decided to let Yosef die in the pit, upon seeing a caravan of Yishmaelim approaching, they decided to sell him to be a slave in Egypt. Before the caravan approached, the merchants who traveled along with it and were scouting out possible business opportunities came upon Yosef and the brothers, and wanted to buy Yosef as a slave. However, since their objective was to make money, there was no guarantee that these merchants wouldn't sell Yosef before the caravan reached Egypt (see the glosses of Rabbi Yitzchak Katz, Maharal's son-in-law, on Pa'anayach Raza), which would allow Yosef to remain near his family, thereby defeating the purpose of selling him. Therefore, in order to ensure that Yosef would be brought all the way down to Egypt, the brothers structured the deal in a way that Yosef was sold to the Yishmaelim, who would retain ownership until the caravan reached Egypt, whereby the Midyanite merchants would take over and be able to sell him in Egypt. It was the Midyanite merchants who sold Yosef in Egypt, but only after they bought him from the Yishmaelim in Egypt itself. Whether it was because of the role the Yishmaelim had in the sale (see Or Hachayim), because they had to vouch for the validity of the ownership of the Midyanim (see B'raishis Rabbah 86:3), or to make sure we knew that it was the Yishmaelim who brought Yosef all the way down to Egypt (on their caravan), not a separate group, when the Yosef narrative resumes, it is the Yishmaelim who are mentioned in regards to the sale.

This approach explains the verses, and works with Rashi's assertion (37:28) that the brothers sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim who sold him to the Midyanim who sold him to Potifar. It assumes that the "M'danim" and the "Midyanim" are the same people (at least for this transaction), and also that "Midyanite men who were merchants" (37:28) describes just one group, a group comprised of "men," i.e. individuals, not part of the caravan; "Midyanim," not Yishmaelim; who were "merchants" by trade, and therefore the ones who brokered the deal. We are taught about this multi-layered transaction in order to maintain accuracy, as well as to inform us that Yosef was not mistreated along the way, as he wasn't owned by the Midyanim until they reached Egypt, and the Yishmaelim were only his caretakers, not his masters. He was with them for the entire trip down to Egypt, so their pleasant-smelling

cargo was relevant, but they couldn't do anything to him that would negate the second half of the deal-his being sold to the Midyanim once they reached Egypt. However, earlier (37:3), Rashi referenced a Midrash that the word PaSIM (ibid) was an acronym for those who bought Yosef; Potifar, the merchants ("Socharim"), the Yishmaelim, and the Midyanim. If the Midyanim weren't the merchants, it is fair to assume that the M'danim were. Based on this, the group that "passed by" the pit Yosef was in (37:28) was comprised of "men," i.e. individual Yishmaelim who were looking to do some business besides their normal "transportation business" (the caravan), Midyanim, and merchants, i.e. M'danim. Although we can still fit the bulk of the above explanation with this (the brothers structuring the deal so that no businessmen could take ownership of Yosef until they reached Egypt), we would need to understand why it is important for us to know that there were several groups of businessmen who were interested in buying Yosef, with at least two of them, the M'danite merchants and the Midyanim, owning him before he was sold to Potifar.

When explaining why G-d dispersed the nations into separate lands with distinct languages and cultures (11:7-8), the M'or V'Shemesh writes that because the 70 nations would have constant battles with each other, they wouldn't unite to try and destroy the Jewish people. Perhaps just as G-d arranged for the caravan that brought Yosef to Egypt to be carrying pleasant-smelling cargo, He also made sure that there were several parties in the caravan who would be interested in owning Yosef. The differences between the peoples create a kind of rivalry among them, and owning this 17-year-old attractive slave (with the rights to sell him once they reach Egypt) was important enough that the discussions (and possibly bickering) between them prevented them from treating him harshly. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

“**J**udah said to his brothers: What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites...” (Gen. 37:26,27)

We have just concluded the Biblical account of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau for the birthright-blessings, the momentous conflict regarding the heir to the mission and covenant of Abraham. We now enter the next generation, Jacob-Israel and his twelve sons. A small, nuclear family is now emerging as an incipient nation. The question is upon whose shoulders will the mantle of future Hebraic leadership now devolve?

We are no longer dealing with one individual like Abraham standing alone against an idolatrous and immoral world; we are now speaking of twelve brothers, potentially twelve tribes, and the heir-apparent must

have the requisite strength, courage and wisdom to unite them to convey ethical monotheism to the entire world. The task is daunting and the very future of humanity is dependent upon the proper choice for leader.

Even though Jacob's sons are still young and the "tribes" they will one day represent have yet to emerge, our Biblical portion, Vayeshev, introduces us to the major contenders. From Jacob's perspective, the heir has already been chosen: "These are the generations of Jacob; Joseph was seventeen years old..." (Gen 37:2). It is the beautiful, clever, first-born son of his beloved wife Rachel who must be the standard-bearer of the Abrahamic Covenant as the family of Jacob enters history as the nation of Israel. Indeed, Jacob presents him with the "striped colored cloak" as a sign of his election!

As the story unfolds, however, there are apparent weaknesses within Joseph's personality which make him unsuitable for the prize, at least at this stage of his life. He reports their every peccadillo back home to their father; he treats them with supercilious disdain and brags to them about his dreams of mastery. He has the capacity to unify the brothers; however, the problem is that they are all united against him - even in their desire to kill him.

It is these dreams which appear to be Joseph's major flaw. The greatest legacy which Abraham received from God to bequeath to his descendants was the Promised Land of Israel, but Joseph hankers after the sheaves of grain produced by the more sophisticated Egypt, super-power of the Middle East, "gift of the Nile". And even more problematic, while God was at the center of Abraham's universe and of Jacob's dream of the ladder uniting heaven and earth, Joseph is at the center of his own dreams, with the eleven sheaves of grain bowing down to him. Yes, he understands the familial mission to the world, but while he dreams of the sun, moon and stars, he sees them, too, as bowing down to him! The God of Abraham is nowhere in his dreams.

The brothers, take a page out of Rebecca's textbook. They believe their father to be blinded by his love of Rachel, so for the good of the family and future nation, they plot to get rid of Joseph; and deceive their father into thinking that he has been torn apart by a wild beast.

It is at this juncture that the most likely candidate for heir-apparent comes to the fore, proving his selfless high morality in his attempt to save Joseph from his brothers. Reuben is, the first-born son of Jacob, albeit to the unappreciated wife Leah. Logic dictates that he would have had most cause to rejoice at Joseph's disappearance, making he, Reuben, Jacob's most logical next choice.

Nevertheless, just as the brothers grab the hapless Joseph and are about to kill him, Reuben hears (the cries of the crowd) and saves him from their hands;

(Reuben) says, "let us not murder a soul" (Gen 37:21). Strangely, the very next verse (37:22) begins, "And Reuben said to them, Do not shed blood; cast him into this pit..." But why does the Bible have Reuben "speak" twice without anyone else speaking in between?

The great Biblical teacher, Nechama Leibowitz, explains that in a Shakespearian play, there would appear a parenthesis between both of Reuben's speeches which would read, "Crowd murmurs in dissent." Reuben underestimated his brothers' hatred; he thought that with a few ethical directives, he could save Joseph. But apparently, he lacked the authority and the wisdom to deflect their murderous designs. They cast Joseph into the pit, which would certainly have become his grave had he remained there. By the time Reuben returns to save him, Joseph is gone.

Now a third unlikely candidate appears on the scene, Judah, the fourth son of Leah and Jacob. He is ethical as well as wise; he understands the importance of saving Joseph; he even refers to him as our "flesh and blood, our brother," but he understands that the only way to dissuade the brothers from murdering Joseph is by gaining profit for them. Why kill him and receive nothing in return? Why not sell him, which will bring profit as well as removing him from the picture? (Gen 37:26,27). The wise Judah wins the day!

Who eventually receives the birthright, and why? Do Joseph, Reuben and Judah change and develop as they grown older? Our story is only beginning... © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**L**ife generally and Jewish life particularly, is unpredictable, surprising, mysterious and enigmatic. Yaacov expects that after his encounter with Lavan and Eisav the worst is behind him. But the fun is just about to begin. Who could predict that after the sibling controversies between Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaacov and Eisav that the greatest sibling controversy in Jewish history would now begin?

All sorts of mysterious and inexplicable events conspire to bring this story along. Why does Yaacov give Yosef a special tunic and show such favoritism in front of his other children? Why does he send Yosef on such an apparently dangerous mission to find his brothers? Who is the mysterious man that leads into the lair of Shimon and Levi? And why is the final result of all of this the sale of Yosef as a slave destined for Egyptian bondage?

Later in the parsha, how does Yehuda commit such an apparently immoral act and why is he nevertheless rewarded as being the ancestor of Jewish royalty and messianic destiny? And why does Peretz push his way out of his mother's womb ahead of Zerach?

The Torah grants us no answers to any of these fantastic events. Midrash offers various comments and interpretations to help us somewhat understand this chain of events. But at the end of the story, it all remains one great enigma wrapped in heavenly mystery. I am very poor at solving mysteries or explaining very difficult, complex torah issues and biblical narrative. Therefore I content myself with observing in wonder the story that the Torah relates to us.

The prophet Yeshayahu taught us that God's ways are not our ways and that his guiding hand in all human affairs remains invisible, mysterious and most wondrous. This is the basic thrust of how Jewish tradition viewed not only Biblical narrative but all of Jewish and human history.

In our time the Holocaust was unforeseen unbelievable and even after its occurrence it is still subject to denial by millions of people. Who could have imagined a Jewish state emerging in the Land of Israel against internal and external odds, expectations and predictions? And how, after millennium of Torah tradition and ritual observance would that State bring forth as an apparent bastion of secularism and even atheism?

Yet all of this has happened, and the wonders of Jewish life continue to expand before our very eyes. Israel has become much more of a Jewish state than a socialist one. Anti-Semitism has never been stronger and yet the Jewish people have never felt as emboldened and strong as it is today.

The enormous rebirth of Torah scholarship and study within the Jewish people the world over and especially here in Israel is perhaps the greatest surprise of our time. All of this should make us wary of expert predictions, all-knowing politicians and other savants who claim to know our future and what is really in our best interests. Mysteries of the parsha are themselves the message of the parsha. © 2012 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"L

*Summarized by Shaul Barth; Translated by Kaeren Fish*

**O**ur parasha opens with the verse, "Yaakov dwelled in the land of his fathers' sojourning, in the land of Canaan" (Bereishit 36:1). The Midrash comments, "Yaakov wanted to dwell in tranquility- therefore the turmoil of Yosef came upon him" (Bereishit Rabba 84:3). At first this seems puzzling: what was so bad about Yaakov wanting to live in peace and quiet? After all the trials and tribulations that he had

endured, finally he had come back to his land and was looking forward to the possibility of living out his life in peace. Why was this problematic?

Throughout these parashot, we see how Yaakov's life was complicated by the fact that he stole Esav's blessing. Even at the very start of this chain of events- as he stands before his father, disguised as Esav- he thinks that he is acting as he does in order to receive "the blessing of Avraham," but instead he hears from his father, "You shall be a lord to your brothers." Yaakov did not want this blessing; why would he want to be a lord over Esav? Ultimately, he discovers that he would have received the blessing that he really wanted anyway, and all the deception that he employed was unnecessary. Thereafter Yaakov is accompanied by a constant sense of obligation to compensate Esav for the injustice that was caused to him.

During Yaakov's stay with Lavan, when he discovers that he has received Leah in marriage instead of Rachel, Lavan tells him: "It is not done in our place, to give the younger [in marriage] before the elder" (Bereishit 29:26). Yaakov understands the hint to the deception that he employed in taking the birthright from Esav, his elder brother, and stealing his blessing. Afterwards, too, when Lavan cheats him out of his rightful payment, Yaakov regards this as punishment for his deception.

When he eventually meets Esav face to face, Yaakov humbles himself before him and calls him "my master;" the commentators explain that through this act, he returns the stolen blessing to Esav and tries to compensate him for the injustice he has suffered. By humbling himself, Yaakov tries to say that he made a mistake in stealing the blessing, and that he has no need for the status of being a "lord" over Esav- in fact, quite the contrary. Yaakov views even Reuven's violation of his marital relationship as punishment for having stolen Esav's blessing. After all, Yaakov, too, tried to intervene "by force," as it were, in his father's actions, and compelled him to give the blessing to him instead of to Esav.

For this reason, after all of Yaakov's efforts to repay Esav, and all the punishments that he sees himself experiencing as a result of stealing the blessing in the first place, he finally returns to Eretz Yisrael and believes that he will now be able to live in peace; that his act has now been atoned for. But God shows him that his measure of punishment is not yet complete; he is subjected to the agony of losing Yosef. As the Midrash teaches, the years that Yaakov lives with the "loss" of Yosef equal the years during which Yitzhak did not see Yaakov after the latter was forced to flee following the theft of Esav's blessing. Yaakov understands all of this; he reads the events correctly, perceives all that happens to him as punishment, and accepts his punishment with love.

His sons, however, have an altogether different perception of events. All of Yaakov's children think they

know what is "supposed" to happen in the future; each performs God's calculations-and terrible things happen as a result of this. The brothers believe that the Divine will requires that Yosef be banished; therefore they carry out terrible deeds "for the sake of heaven"-in order to cause the "Divine plan" to be realized. Yosef acts with similar motivation: because he believes that God wants his dreams to be fulfilled, he fails to send Yaakov any message, throughout all the years of their separation, letting him know that he is alive and well in Egypt. He even has Binyamin brought down to Egypt-at the expense of the anguish that this causes to his father-in order that his dreams will be fulfilled. But neither Yosef nor his brothers understand the Divine plan correctly. God takes care of His own accounts and His own plans; no one should act with force for the sake of bringing about God's plans as he sees them.

"The actions of the forefathers are a sign for their descendants." We must act in light of the values that we learn from the Torah. The story of Yosef and his brothers teaches us that reading the Divine map should cause us to engage in teshuva-as did Yaakov, when he understood that all that was happening to him was a punishment. But we should not try to hasten the Divine plan, or presume that we have grasped the underlying nature of the processes that we see taking place in reality, to the point of intervention and an attempt to influence them. *[This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Vayeshev 5765 (2004).]*

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Chanukah, teaches us a hidden dimension of Hashem's compassionate ways. The prophet Zechariah opens by announcing prophecies of the arrival of Hashem's presence in the near future. He declares in Hashem's name, "Rejoice and be happy daughter of Zion for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," These words refer to the sudden erection of the second Temple after seventy dark years of exile. In truth, early construction began earlier but our Jewish brethren slandered to the Persian government and brought the development to an immediate halt. This led the Jewish people to total despair and to forfeit all hope of experiencing Hashem's return. Suddenly and totally unexpected, the prophet Zechariah announced Hashem's immediate plan to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah the prophet continues and reveals a private discussion between Hashem and the assigned prosecuting angel. The discussion centered around Yehoshua ben Yehozadak who was designated to serve in the new Temple. Hashem defended Yehoshua and said, "Is he not an ember spared from fire? The prophet Zechariah continues, "And Yehoshua was wearing soiled garments and standing before the angel. And the angel responded, 'Remove the soiled garments from

upon Yehoshua...and they placed the turban upon his head.'" (Zechariah 3:4-5) This dialogue reflects that the ordained high priest was seriously faulted for an offense to the priesthood. The Sages explain that Yehoshua was judged for failing to involve himself in his children's choice of marriage. Unfortunately, the Babylonian exile took its toll upon the Jewish nation and corrupted their moral fiber. Their constant exposure to the Babylonians broke down basic barriers and numerous intermarriages occurred. Yehoshua's offsprings were party to this mind set and married women forbidden to them according to priesthood standards. (Targum and Rashi ad loc)

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

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

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

This lesson repeated itself in Yehoshua's offsprings during the days of Chanukah. In the early years of the second Temple the Jewish people were

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

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

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

May Hashem accept our total commitment to His service and grant us the privilege of serving him in His holy abode in the nearest future. © 2012 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

**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 Kiddushim 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 God. 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 God'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 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, and it is Yaacov, and not 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 Yehudah 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 © 2004 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.

### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**T**he Gemara (Shabbat 23b) teaches: "Rav Huna said: 'If one is meticulously careful in lighting candles, he will merit to have sons who are Torah scholars.'" Rashi z"l explains: "This is based on the verse (Mishlei 6:23), 'For a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light'—through the mitzvot of Shabbat and Chanukah candles comes the light of Torah."

So many people light Shabbat and Chanukah candles, observed R' Kalman Winter z"l (long-time rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation-Knesset Yehoshua in Silver Spring, Maryland; passed away 8 Marcheshvan of this year), yet relatively few have children who are Torah scholars! Why? Because Rav Huna's promise is addressed only to those parents who want their children to be Torah scholars.

Not so long ago, R' Winter added, the concept of studying Torah "lishmah"/ as an end in itself was relatively unknown in America. If a young man announced that he wanted to remain in yeshiva and study Torah, his relatives would ask, "But what will you do with it? Do you plan to become a rabbi?" Rav Huna's teaching, which relates the mitzvah of Chanukah candles to the study of Torah, shows us that this attitude is wrong. Halachah states that one may derive no benefit from the Chanukah lights; one may look at the candles, but nothing more. Similarly, there is a concept of studying Torah lishmah, studying Torah without any material benefit in mind. This is the type of Torah study which creates real Torah scholars. (Heard from R' Winter, 23 Kislev 5762)

"And Reuven heard, and he saved him [Yosef] from their hand; he said, 'Let us not strike him mortally... Throw him into the pit in the wilderness...!' (37:21-22)

The Gemara (Shabbat 24a) states that this pit was home to snakes and scorpions. The halachah is that if a man falls into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, he is deemed dead and his widow may remarry. Yet, the Torah refers to Reuven's act as saving Yosef!

In contrast, Yehuda convinced his brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and to sell him into slavery. Yet, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 6a) says that whoever praises Yehuda for this angers Hashem. Why?

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) explains: Reuven caused Yosef to be lowered into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, but the pit was in Eretz Yisrael. Yehuda saved Yosef's physical life, but he caused Yosef to be taken out of Eretz Yisrael. It is far better, said R' Chaim, to remain in Eretz Yisrael surrounded by snakes and scorpions than to live outside of Eretz Yisrael. (Quoted in the journal Yeshurun Vol. VI, p. 200)

Why does our observance of Chanukah seem to commemorate the miracle of the oil burning for eight days more than the miracle of the few (the Chashmonaim) defeating the many (the Greeks)?

Rabbeinu Moshe ben Machir z"l (16th century) explains: "The primary miracle was the one involving the oil, for it revealed after the fact the great salvation which Hashem had brought about out of His good will and His tremendous love for the Jewish People. That is why the Sages established that on these eight days, beginning with the 25th day of Kislev, all of the Jewish People should kindle lights in addition to the lights that illuminate the home." (Seder Ha'yom)

R' Aharon David Goldberg shlita (rosh yeshiva, Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland, Ohio) elaborates based on the words of Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263) in Sha'arei Teshuvah (1:42). R' Yonah writes:

A ba'al teshuvah / person who has repented should pray to Hashem to erase his sin like an ephemeral cloud. He also should pray that Hashem want a relationship with him as much as if he had never sinned. This is necessary because it is possible that one's sin could be forgiven but Hashem still does not want any connection with the person. Such a situation would be contrary to a tzaddik's greatest aspiration—that Hashem be pleased with him and desire him.

In this vein, R' Goldberg explains, the fact that the Jewish People defeated the Greeks in battle could have meant that they had been forgiven for the sin that led to their subjugation in the first place, but it did not necessarily mean that Hashem desired them. The miracle of the oil, though, since it otherwise was completely unnecessary, demonstrated that Hashem had regained His former affection for the Jewish People. (Meshivat Nefesh Al Sha'arei Teshuvah p.99)

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