

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It was Joseph's first real attempt to take his fate into his own hands, and it failed. Or so it seemed.

Consider the story so far, as set out in last week's parsha. Almost everything that happens in Joseph's life falls into two categories. The first are the things done to him. His father loves him more than his other sons. He gives him a richly embroidered cloak.

His brothers are envious and hate him. His father sends him to see how the brothers are faring, attending the flocks far away. He fails to find them and has to rely on a stranger to point him in the right direction. The brothers plot to kill him, and sell him as a slave. He is brought to Egypt. He is acquired as a slave by Potiphar. Potiphar's wife finds him attractive, attempts to seduce him, and having failed, falsely accuses him of rape, as a result of which he is imprisoned.

This is extraordinary. Joseph is the centre of attention whenever, as it were, he is onstage, and yet he is, time and again, the done-to rather than the doer, an object of other people's actions rather than the subject of his own.

The second category is more remarkable still. Joseph does do things. He runs Potiphar's household. He organises a prison. He interprets the steward's and baker's dreams. But, in a unique sequence of descriptions, the Torah explicitly attributes his actions and their success to G-d.

Here is Joseph in Potiphar's house: "G-d was with Joseph, and He made him very successful. Soon he was working in his master's own house. His master realised that G-d was with [Joseph], and that G-d granted success to everything he did." (39:2-3).

"As soon as [his master] had placed him in charge of his household and possessions, G-d blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph. G-d's blessing was in all [the Egyptian] had, both in the house and the field." (39:5)

Here is Joseph in prison: "G-d was with

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Joseph, and He showed him kindness, making him find favour with the warden of the dungeon. Soon, the warden had placed all the prisoners in the dungeon under Joseph's charge. [Joseph] took care of everything that had to be done. The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care. G-d was with [Joseph], and G-d granted him success in everything he did." (39:21-23).

And here is Joseph interpreting dreams: "Interpretations are G-d's business," replied Joseph. "If you want to, tell me about [your dreams]." (40:8)

Of no other figure in Tanakh is this said so clearly, consistently and repeatedly. Joseph seems decisive, organised and successful and so he appeared to others. But, says the Torah, it was not him but G-d who was responsible both for what he did and for its success. Even when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife, he makes it explicit that it is G-d who makes what she wants morally impossible: "How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before G-d!" (39:9)

The only act clearly attributed to him occurs at the very start of the story, when he brings a "bad report" about his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaids. (39:2) This apart, every twist and turn of his constantly changing fate is the result of someone else's act, either that of another human or of G-d (as for Joseph's dreams -- were they a Divine intimation or a product of his own imagination? -- that is another story for another time).

That is why we sit up and take notice when, at the end of the previous parsha, Joseph takes destiny into his own hands. Having told the chief steward that in three days he would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position, and having no doubt at all that this would happen, he asks him to plead his cause with Pharaoh and secure his freedom: "When things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me a favour and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place." (40:14)



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What happens? "The chief steward did not remember Joseph. He forgot about him." (40:23) The doubling of the verb is powerful. He did not remember. He forgot. The one time Joseph tries to be the author of his own story, he fails. The failure is decisive.

Tradition added one final touch to the drama. It ended the parsha of Vayeshev with those words, leaving us at the point that his hopes are dashed. Will he rise to greatness? Will his dreams come true? The question "What happens next?" is intense, and we have to wait a week to know.

Time passes and with the utmost improbability (Pharaoh too has dreams, and none of his magicians or wise men can interpret them -- itself odd, since dream interpretation was a specialty of the ancient Egyptians), we learn the answer. "Two full years passed." Those, the words with which our parsha begins, are the key phrase. What Joseph sought to happen, happened. He did leave the prison. He was set free. But not until two full years had passed.

Between the attempt and the outcome, something intervened. That is the significance of the lapse of time. Joseph planned his release, and he was released, but not because he planned it. His own attempt ended in failure. The steward forgot all about him. But G-d did not forget about him. G-d, not Joseph, brought about the sequence of events -- specifically Pharaoh's dreams -- that led to his release.

What we want to happen, happens, but not always when we expect, or in the way we expect, or merely because we wanted it to happen. G-d is the co-author of the script of our life, and sometimes -- as here -- He reminds us of this by making us wait and taking us by surprise.

That is the paradox of the human condition as understood by Judaism. On the one hand we are free. No religion has so emphatically insisted on human freedom and responsibility. Adam and Eve were free not to sin. Cain was free not to kill Abel. We make excuses for our failures -- it wasn't me; it was someone else's fault; I couldn't help it. But these are just that: excuses. It isn't so. We are free and we do bear responsibility.

Yet, as Hamlet said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will." G-d is

intimately involved in our life. Looking back in middle -- or old age, we can often discern, dimly through the mist of the past, that a story was taking shape, a destiny slowly emerging, guided in part by events beyond our control. We could not have foreseen that this accident, that illness, this failure, that seemingly chance encounter, years ago, would have led us in this direction. Yet now in retrospect it can seem as if we were a chess piece moved by an invisible hand that knew exactly where it wanted us to be.

It was this view, according to Josephus, that distinguished the Pharisees (the architects of what we call rabbinic Judaism) from the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees denied fate. They said G-d does not intervene in our lives. The Essenes attributed all to fate. They believed that everything we do has been predestined by G-d. The Pharisees believed in both fate and free will. "It was G-d's good pleasure that there should be a fusion [of divine providence and human choice] and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate" (Antiquities, xviii, 1, 3).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life of Joseph as told in Bereishit, and nowhere more so than in the sequence of events told at the end of last week's parsha and the beginning of this. Without Joseph's acts -- his interpretation of the steward's dream and his plea for freedom -- he would not have left prison. But without divine intervention in the form of Pharaoh's dreams, it would also not have happened.

This is the paradoxical interplay of fate and freewill. As Rabbi Akiva said: "All is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:15). Isaac Bashevis Singer put it wittily: "We have to believe in free will: we have no choice." We and G-d are co-authors of the human story. Without our efforts we can achieve nothing. But without G-d's help we can achieve nothing either. Judaism found a simple way of resolving the paradox. For the bad we do, we take responsibility. For the good we achieve, we thank G-d. Joseph is our mentor. When he is forced to act harshly he weeps. But when he tells his brothers of his success he attributes it to G-d. That is how we too should live. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

As children, we learn that Hanukah is about the victory of the Judeans over the Greek-Syrians, Jews over Gentiles. We know from the Books of the Maccabees and the Second Commonwealth historian Josephus, however, that the struggle began as a civil war, a battle between brothers waged in order to determine the future direction of the Jewish people. Hellenistic Jews fought Torah-based Jews, assimilationist Jews fought traditionalist Jews would be Greeks fought old fashioned committed Jews.

But after the traditionalists won, they did not banish Greek culture never to allow it a foothold in the sacred portals of Judea. Not only have thousands of Greek words (and via those words, Greek concepts) entered the Talmud and Midrash, but Greek philosophy, science and aesthetics have found a place in the corpus of Jewish literature, especially through great commentators and codifiers such as Maimonides. A brief comment in the Midrash Shabar should mute the idea that Judea rejected Hellas:

The Midrash breaks the word "Zion" (Israel) into its two components. The first letter, the tzaddik represents the holy, righteous Jews while the last three letters yud, vav, nun spell out "Yavan", the Hebrew word for Greece. We're being told that at the very heart of everything revered in Judaism – Zion- there must be the beauty of Greece. The question is to what extent?

The Talmud cites the verse, "May G-d expand Japheth and may he (Japheth) dwell in the tents of Shem"(Genesis 9: 27) as proof that the Torah was not to be translated into any language except Greek (Babylonia Talmud Megillah 9b). The verse is Noah's blessing to Japheth and Shem for their modest behavior after he was shamed by their brother Ham. The Talmud's reading of the verse turns Japheth and Shem into symbols. Japheth is the forerunner of Greece and Shem; the progenitor of Israel. The expansion of Japheth is the beautiful Greek language "which shall dwell in the tents of Shem," when the Torah is translated into Greek. The Midrash adds: "Let the beauty of Japheth be incorporated into the tents of Shem" which has come to mean the ability to extract the positive aspects of Greek culture and synthesize them with our eternal Torah.

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

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

But even in the pastures, Joseph was dreaming of a new world. His dreams were focused on agriculture – the Egyptian occupation which came after shepherding. What upsets the brothers is not just an event in a dream (their sheaves bowing to his), but the very fact that sheaves feature at all. Sheaves represent not only agriculture, but also modernism a break with tradition.

Joseph's second dream is about the sun, moon and stars. Again, it isn't so much the events of the dream that disturbs, but its universalistic elements. The brothers could even have understood a dream of the cosmos with G-d at the center, like Jacob's early dream

of the ladder. But here, Joseph himself is at the center like the Greek message: "Man is the measure of all things", man and not G-d. Moreover, the Bible says Joseph gloried in his physical appearance, his being of beautiful form and fair visage – "yafeh" (beautiful) like "Japheth" Greece (Genesis 39: 6). And as Heinrich Heine said, "For the Greeks, beauty is truth, for the Hebrews, truth is beauty".

Everyone loves Joseph – handsome, clever, urbane, the perfect guest, dazzling you with his knowledge of languages, including the language of dreams. Joseph is the cosmopolitan Grand Vizier of Egypt, the universalist. Joseph is more Yavanlike than Shemlike, more similar to Greek-Hellenism than to Abrahamic-Hebraism.

Hence the tensions between Joseph and his brothers are not unlike the tensions between Hellenism and Hebraism. But Joseph matures and by the time he stands before Pharaoh, he does see G-d at the center, "Not I, but rather G-d will interpret the dreams to the satisfaction of Pharaoh". (Genesis 41: 15)

And Judah will remind Joseph of the centrality of his family and ancestral home, establishing the first house of study (yeshiva) in Goshen, Egypt (Genesis 49: 22 and Rashi ad loc). Judah symbolizing Torah and repentance will receive the spiritual birthright (Genesis 49: 10) and Joseph will receive the blessings of material prosperity (Genesis 49: 22) The two will join together for the glory of Zion and Israel. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

It is obvious from the biblical narrative of this week's Torah reading that the brothers of Yoseph were determined not to see his dreams of dominance and greatness fulfilled. Even when they stood before him and faced him directly, they did not recognize him. They were committed not to recognize him as the prince of Egypt.

It is extremely difficult to change the perspective and previous held opinions of people, no matter how great those people may be. Having committed themselves to destroying Yoseph's dreams, his brothers were blinded to the reality that it was their brother before whom they were bowing. So often in life our preconceived ideas and beliefs are challenged by the reality of what we see before our eyes.

It is very difficult to admit that one was wrong regarding important issues and ideas, be they of family or nation. Yet, the future of the Jewish people was entirely dependent on the brothers of Yoseph repenting of their previous attitude and actions and acknowledging that the dreams of Yoseph had validity and actually translated themselves into reality.

I think that as difficult as it is for us ordinary people to give up on ideas and beliefs that we

cherished in the past, it is even more difficult when superior people – such as the brothers of Yoseph - are called upon to do so. Much thought and soul-searching must have gone into their original decision to attempt to eliminate Yoseph, perceiving him as being an existential threat to their survival and mission in life. So, after such a momentous decision was made and acted upon, it became unlikely that they would recognize that they were standing before their condemned brother Yoseph.

One of the great problems that I feel is present in our society is the inability to review and rethink past positions in light of present reality and current situations, when these positions were once endorsed by great and holy scholars and leaders. Many opinions of the great people of the past two centuries in Jewish life are quoted in support of positions and attitudes which fly in the face of the reality of the Jewish world in which we currently live.

I know what the great men said regarding certain issues in the Jewish world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which they lived. But I am not quite certain as to what their opinions would be today in dealing with the realities of the Jewish world as they now exist. It is difficult to have to change one's mind regarding basic issues in Jewish society when it means reversing a certain traditional way of thinking about those issues.

Nevertheless, without such a rebooting, so to speak, of attitudes towards large sections of the Jewish people, the state of Israel as it now exists and towards the societal challenges that beset Jewish life from all sides, it will prove to be well nigh impossible to guarantee our future success and survival. We should all attempt to see that it is our brother Yoseph who stands before us. ©2016 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

It is well known that on the first day of Chanukah one candle is lit. On each successive night, one more is kindled. This in fact is the view of Beit Hillel as recorded in the Talmud. (Shabbat 21b)

Beit Shammai dissents. His position is that on the first night eight candles are lit. On each successive night, one less light is kindled.

The Talmud explains the reasoning behind each view. Beit Hillel bases his view on Ma'alin Bakodesh, holiness moves in ascending order. Since lighting the Chanukah candles is a holy act, each night requires an additional candle to be lit.

Beit Shammai sees it as corresponding to the

sacrifices offered on the Sukkot festival. As they were offered on successive days in descending order, so too, the Chanukah lights. For Beit Shammai the descending order also reflects the amount of oil remaining as the miracle unfolded. On the first night there was enough oil for eight days, on the second night there was left enough for seven days until the eighth night when only the amount for that night remained.

Yet there is another way to look at this disagreement. Chanukah is a two dimensional miracle. On the one hand, we were victorious over the Syrian Greeks who were prepared to annihilate our religion. This miracle is spelled out in the Al Hanisim prayer. In it we say that on Chanukah G-d "gave the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few."

There is also the miracle of the lights. There was enough oil for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight. This miracle is alluded to in the Haneirot Halalu which is recited after the candle lighting.

In one word the Al Hanisim celebrates the physical miracle of overcoming the Syrian Greeks. The Haneirot Halalu, the spiritual miracle of retaining our belief system even in the face of powerful assimilationist forces.

Could it be that Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree concerning which miracle is paramount. For Beit Shammai it was the physical military victory. Hence, the candles are lit in descending order. Such is the way of military victory. At first, it looms large, all eight candles are lit. But, while physical victory is important, if it does not lead to a meaningful message, it quickly fades and diminishes in power.

Beit Hillel is of the opposite opinion. For Beit Hillel, the miracle is spiritual. The way of spirituality is to begin modestly almost unnoticed. In time, the spiritual power expands and becomes larger and larger. Hence Beit Hillel insists the candles be lit in increasing numbers - each day the power of the spirit becomes stronger and stronger.

In Israel, soldiers display important physical power and do so with a sense of deep ethics. This is known in the Israeli Defense Forces as tihur haneshek, purity of arms. In this sense, our soldiers reflect the words of Zechariah read this week: "Not by might nor by power but by My spirit says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) This does not mean that might and power are not important. Indeed, some commentators understand this sentence to mean "Not only by might nor only by power, but also by my spirit says the Lord of hosts." Power and might are crucial when infused with a spirit of G-d.

And so it is with our holy soldiers. On this Chanukah may they all be blessed. ©2016 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah sets forth Pharaoh's prophetic dream: "And behold from the Nile rose up seven cows, which looked good and healthy of flesh and they grazed in the pasture" (Genesis 41:2).

What does it mean that the cows "looked good"?

Rashi comments that their looking good was a sign of the years of plenty, for then people look good to one another and are not envious of each other.

The idea that Rashi expresses is important for happiness in life. When you allow what someone else has to rob you of your own happiness, you will frequently suffer. However, if you learn to appreciate what you have to its fullest, you will be so filled with good feelings yourself that you will not be disturbed by what anyone else has. The more you focus on the good in your life, the less it will make a difference to you if anyone has more than you. When you master this attribute of feeling joy for what you have, your whole life is a life of plenty! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin*



Pharaoh dreamt two disturbing dreams and all his wise men failed to interpret them to his satisfaction. Pharaoh's chief butler had previously been in the same jail as Joseph, where Joseph successfully interpreted his dreams. The butler now suggests that Pharaoh seek the advice of Joseph. Note how the butler recommends Joseph's talents to Pharaoh:

"And there was with us there (in jail) a Hebrew lad (na'ar), a slave to the Captain of the Guard and we told him (our dreams), and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he interpreted" (Genesis 41:12).

What lesson for life can we learn from analyzing the butler's words?

Rashi comments on the butler's statement to Pharaoh: "Cursed be the wicked, for even their goodness is not complete. The butler praises Joseph's ability, but in contemptuous terms:

- a. na'ar (a lad): a fool, and not fit for greatness,
- b. Hebrew: he doesn't even know our language,
- c. a slave: and it is written in the statutes of Egypt that a slave cannot rule nor don royal garments.

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz comments that the butler actually meant to speak well of Joseph, for Joseph had been kind to him. Nevertheless, a completely favorable statement will never emerge from the lips of a wicked person. Even when praising someone, he will off-handedly add a derogatory

comment.

Every person should check his own behavior with regard to this pitfall. When you speak favorably of someone, do you habitually add something unfavorable? For example: "She is very charitable, and always makes sure that people know it" or "He's very kindhearted now, but you should have seen him five years ago." *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Chanukah

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Outside of Israel in the Diaspora we celebrate two days of Holiday ("Chag") during the three major festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. In ancient times the new month was proclaimed by the Beit Din in Jerusalem. Messages were then sent to all the surrounding communities and also the communities outside Israel. Because of the time factor in reaching these communities in time for the Chag, those living outside Israel celebrated two days of Chag. Though today we have a calendar, we still maintain this tradition in the Diaspora.

However with reference to the holiday of Chanukah we only have eight days and we don't add any additional days. Some believe that the reason for this is that we only add additional days on holidays that are dictated by the Torah ("Deorayta"), not those that are dictated by the Rabbis (as Chanukah).

Others state that the number eight has special significance, since one of the evil decrees against the Jews was to obliterate the Mitzva of Circumcision which is on the eighth day, and also the holiday of Succot is eight days as well.

A famous question is posed by the "Beit Yoseph": Why should Chanukah be celebrated for eight days since they found enough oil to last for one day? The first day therefore would not be a miracle and hence we should celebrate Chanukah for only seven days?

Perhaps we can answer this question by citing the controversy between the school of Shammai ("Beit Shammai") and the school of Hillel ("Beit Hillel") as to the exact way the Menorah should be lit on Chanukah. "Beit Shammai" state that on the first night we light eight candles and each succeeding night we decrease this number by one until the last day when we have only one candle lit. "Beit Hillel" on the other hand state that every day we add a candle until the eighth day when all candles are lit (this is the tradition that we follow).

It would therefore follow, that if we only celebrated seven days of Chanukah then on the fourth day there would be no discernable difference between

"Beit Hillel" and "Beit Shammai" (since both would light four candles) . The same would be true if we would add a day (as we do on regular holidays) and celebrate nine days, for then the fifth night there would be no difference. Hence we insist of having exactly eight days of Chanukah. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Miketz, we find Paroh having two dreams that none of his advisors can interpret satisfactorily. Yosef is then introduced, and he tells of the 7 years of plenty that will be followed with the 7 years of hunger. As part of the interpretation of the dreams, Yosef tells Paroh to appoint a man that is 'smart and wise' to overlook the storage of food for the hunger years. Paroh promptly appoints Yosef as that person, reasoning that Yosef has the 'spirit of G-d', and therefore is smart and wise. Paroh then gives Yosef more power than anyone in the entire country. Many of these actions need explanation.... Why would Paroh need a wise man to be in charge of storing food? Wouldn't it be enough to have an efficient person? And if it was important to have a 'smart and wise' person in charge, why did Paroh then choose Yosef because he had a 'spirit of G-d', when it wasn't even the requirement he was looking for? Furthermore, once he did appoint Yosef, why was he so eager to give him so much power?

To answer these questions, we first need to know Rav E. Lopian's insight into the 'smart and wise' requirement. He explains that although any bright person could have arranged for food to be stored, it takes a wise person to plan and implement for the future. It's that extra bit of foresight a wise person has that gives him the added push to do what he knows must be done, although the results are not immediate, or immediately apparent. With this we can now explain what Paroh saw in Yosef... Not only was Yosef wise, but he also had the 'spirit of G-d' -- meaning -- Not only was he wise enough to think of the future, but he had G-d's help in knowing how to do it, which is an even higher level. That's why Paroh was so eager to give him all that power. Paroh himself knew that he didn't have the potential Yosef had, and it was all because Yosef had G-d's guidance. When we follow the guidelines of the Torah, we too show that we're wise enough to not only think of what the Torah wants, but use those actions to save up for our future (in the next world), which takes the spirit of G-d, and even more of a commitment. It's ironic that Paroh is the one that reminds us of how lucky we are to even have the Torah as our guide. We should all be wise enough to 'store' all the Torah study and good deeds we can, and enjoy their reward when it counts -- in the future world. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

The great famine has already hit the Land of Canaan. Yaakov, tells his sons to go down to Egypt and procure food for the family. The Torah tells us, "So, Yosef's brothers -- ten of them -- went down to buy grain from Egypt." [Bereshis 42:3]. Rashi points out that until now, the Torah always referred to the brothers as "Yaakov's sons" (Bnei Yakov). Here, for the first time, the Torah calls them "Yosef's brothers". Rashi elaborates: This teaches us that they regretted his sale and set their heart to act towards him with brotherhood and to ransom him for any price his captors might set.

They had sold him as a slave and they assumed he was still working as a slave. They were prepared to ransom him from slavery, no matter what the cost. They were beginning the first steps of Teshuva.

I saw an interesting question in a sefer called Tiv HaTorah from Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch. We are at the threshold of the greatest calamity that befalls Yosef's brothers. From this point on, they have a horrible existence. We all know the story -- Yosef recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. He accuses them of being spies. He makes them jump through hoops. He makes them bring Binyamin down. The remainder of this parsha and the beginning of Parshas Vayigash narrate Yosef putting his brother through "the seven levels of Gehenom".

Is it not ironic, Rav Rabinovitch asks, that their troubles start after they are already doing Teshuva, deciding that they will redeem their brother regardless of what it costs, and regretting their earlier action? Is it not ironic that specifically now, Yosef is making them go through all the difficulties? If they were steadfast in their opinion that Yosef was a murderer and a pursuer -- then making them suffer might be poetic justice. However, given the fact that they are already on the road to repentance, why does Yosef put them through the torture?

To answer this question, Rav Rabinovitch cites a very interesting observation of the Sefas Emes. The Sefas Emes points out a similar type of phenomenon. In last week's parsha, Yosef faced a great temptation -- that of the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife. Here you have a young man, separated from his family, alone, and the wife of Potiphar is trying to seduce him. Yosef withstood the test. For this spiritual accomplishment, Yosef earned the title "Yosef HaTzadik" [the righteous Yosef]. Chazal make this point on the pasuk, "the sea saw and it fled" [Tehillim 114:3, by the splitting of the Red Sea] that the sea saw the coffin of Yosef and fled in awe, just as he fled from the

pursuit of his master's wife.

What happened to Yosef immediately after he withstood this test? They threw him into the dungeon. "This is Torah and this is its reward"? For this act of piety for which we are still the beneficiaries thereof, Yosef's immediate "reward" is to be thrown into a pit and kept there for years? Where is the justice here?

The Sefas Emes explains the matter: When a person does an act of Tzidkus [righteousness] and when a person initiates the process of repentance, then the Ribono shel Olam knows he is on the path to teshuva -- and helps him do a complete teshuva by punishing him for his past deeds. Yosef had to do penance because he did speak lashon harah [slander] to his father about his brothers. Up until this point, Yosef was not ready to endure the punishment that the Ribono shel Olam felt that he needed to endure. Once he achieved this great spiritual level of righteousness -- that he withstood this great temptation -- then the Almighty said "You have already started the process of Teshuva, now I am going to help you do Teshuva Gemura [complete repentance]. How am I going to do that? I am going to throw you into the dungeon as a kaparah [atonement] for your sin of lashon harah, so that when you come out of that dungeon, you will come out as pure as fresh snow.

That is why, specifically after the incident with Potiphar's wife, Yosef was thrown in the dungeon. Therefore, Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch says, the same logic and the same reasoning explain what happened with Yosef's brothers: Precisely because now they started the process of Teshuva, they are now fit to complete the process of Teshuva -- by enduring the terrible travails through Yosef. This completed their kaparah.

Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch adds the following interesting idea. (I personally know many cases where I have seen this and it has always been something that is inexplicable to me.) Sometimes a person decides to become a Baal Teshuva. Slowly but surely, he becomes more and more religious. The fellow has a fantastic business and a wonderful family and he decides to do teshuva. He closes his business on Shabbos through great self-sacrifice.

Then what happens? The sky falls in. The business goes down the drain. He has family problems. Half the family does not want to have anything to do with him. They think he is off his rocker. Here the fellow is a sincere Baal Teshuva; he was moser nefesh; he closed his business on Shabbos! What happened after all this? His life goes sour!

What is the theological meaning of this? I have seen this happen too many times for it to be considered a rare coincidence. We would think that since this fellow became a Baal Teshuva, the Almighty should shower him with all types of reward!

Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch says it is this same

phenomenon. Until now, he was not up to withstanding these tests. Now, he has begun the teshuva process. He has reached a different level. The Almighty wants him to complete the teshuva process. In order to complete that process, perhaps he must endure yisurim [difficulties] to give penance for his former life. Therefore, rather than immediately reaping the benefits of being a Baal Teshuva, he sometimes must endure hardships. Certainly, the eventual goal of all this is that he will in fact emerge from this ordeal as a much purer person. He is ready to endure it because he has already shown that he has the mettle that it requires to become a Baal Teshuva.



Make A Kiddush Hashem!

We all know the story. Pharaoh has dreams. He does not know what they mean. The seven fat cows, the seven thin cows; the seven fat stalks; the seven thin stalks. Yosef interprets the dreams. He tells them there are going to be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Yosef not only interprets the dreams but also gives Pharaoh advice: In the seven years of plenty, store the surplus grain so that food will be available during the seven lean years.

The pasuk states: "Pharaoh called Yosef's name Tzafnas-panayach and he gave him Asnas, daughter of Poti-fera, Chief of On, for a wife; Thus Yosef emerged over the land of Egypt." [Bereshis 41:45] True to form, there were seven plentiful years -- "The land produced by handfuls during the seven years of abundance. He gathered all food of the seven years that came to pass in the land of Egypt, and he placed food in the cities; the food of the field that was around each city he placed within it. Yosef amassed grain like the sand of the sea, very much, until he ceased counting, for there is no number." [Bereshis 41:47-49] Just as Yosef predicted and advised.

Then the seven years of famine began: "The seven years of abundance that came to pass in the land of Egypt ended. And the seven years of famine began approaching, just as Yosef said; and there was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread." [Bereshis 41:53-54]

Rav Yitzchak Yakov Reines asks why it is that when the seven years of plenty came, the pasuk does not say, "Just as Yosef said". It is only when the seven years of famine began that scripture writes, "Just as Yosef said". Why is that? Either say, "As he predicted" both by the good and by the bad years or omit it both by the good and by the bad years! Apparently, Yosef was "blamed" for the bad years that were attributed to his prediction, but he did not get credit for the good years, which he also predicted.

Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky cites an interesting anecdote involving Albert Einstein. When the great physicist developed the theory of relativity, he travelled

to the great institutions of higher learning in those days to discuss his discovery. He presented his theory of relativity at the Sorbonne in Paris. He is reported to have quipped that if the theory of relativity will bear out, then the French will say that I am a citizen of the world and the Germans will claim that I am a German. "However," he continued, "if the theory falls on its face, then the French will say that I am a German and the Germans will say that I am a Jew."

The point of this story is that success has many fathers but failure is an orphan. In a twist on that, success may have many fathers, but failures are attributed to the Jews. Only when there is something negative to report -- that is when we are told if it was a Jew.

Unfortunately, we typically cannot do anything about that. There is only one way to combat Chillul Hashem and that is with Kiddush Hashem. While most of us will not have the opportunity to make a public Kiddush Hashem, in our daily lives each of us has the opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem on a daily basis. I think this is something we all need to think about -- how we can create Kiddush Hashem?

We should never underestimate the ramifications of a small Kiddush Hashem. This week I had the opportunity to sit at the same table with Rav Abish Brodt. He reminded me of a very interesting story that I had actually heard previously. There was a certain reception in honor of Rabbi Berel Wein in Detroit. The person hosting the reception was a big wig in Detroit and he invited many business associates including the editor of the Detroit Free Press to this luncheon.

The editor of the Detroit Free Press asked if he could address the assemblage. This Detroit Free Press and this editor in particular had a history of being very pro-Israel and very pro-Jewish. The editor got up and said the following:

"I want to tell you why I have such warm feelings towards the Jewish people in general and towards Israel in particular. My mother came over from Ireland in the earlier part of the twentieth century. As was common with immigrants in those days, she was a housecleaner. She got a job as a maid in the house of an Orthodox Jew, a prominent member of the Jewish community, who happened to live next to a shul. The family, for whatever reason, went out of town for a couple of weeks during December and they were scheduled to come home on December 23."

"My mother thought to herself, 'This is terrible. They are out of town. When they come back, it will already be December 23rd at night. Where are they going to get a tree for the living room?' Therefore, she decided, 'They are such good people to me -- I am going to go out and buy a tree.' She bought a tree and put it in the front window of the living room, right next to the synagogue. She bought the tinsel and she put up

the red and the green lights."

When people came to shul for mincha-ma'ariv, they saw the house all decorated for the Christian holiday and they started wondering -- What happened with these people?

When the owner arrived home that night, he looked at his living room window and could not believe his eyes.

There are two ways he could have reacted to this. He could have told the maid to "PLEASE GET THIS THING OUT OF HERE IMMEDIATELY!!!" or he could have spoken to her gently, as he did. He called her into the kitchen and said "I want to tell you -- this is one of the nicest, most sensitive, most considerate things that ANYONE has ever done to me in my life. I am so appreciative that I am going to give you a bigger Christmas bonus than I intended." He handed her a \$50 bill (which in those days was a lot of money). "However", he continued, "We do not celebrate this holiday and we do not display trees in our houses. So in spite of the fact that it was such a beautiful sentiment on your part, we are going to need to get rid of the tree."

The editor of the Detroit Free Press told the reception of Jewish leaders that his mother used to tell him this story about the tree and the Jew. It created such warm feelings in him towards Jews, Judaism and Israel. Why? It is because one Jew made a Kiddush Hashem that had a wide-ranging impact. One Jew did not just react to the spectacle of a tree sitting in his living room, but rather he thought about what went into it, and what the maid must have been thinking, and how sensitive that was, and he reacted in a sensitive matter. That created a Kiddush Hashem that had ramifications for many years to come.

We cannot erase the effects of some Jews who may unfortunately embarrass themselves and us. However, we can always do our best to make a Kiddush Hashem. ©2016 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

