

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

We live life looking forward but we understand it only looking back. As we live from day to day, our life can seem like a meaningless sequence of random events, a series of accidents and happenstances that have no shape or inner logic. A traffic jam makes us late for an important meeting. A stray remark we make offends someone in a way we never intended. By a hair's-breadth we fail to get the job we so sought. Life as we experience it can sometimes feel like Joseph Heller's definition of history: "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open in a wind."

Yet looking back, it begins to make sense. The opportunity we missed here led to an even better one there. The shame we felt at our unintentionally offensive remark makes us more careful about what we say in the future. Our failures, seen in retrospect many years later, turn out to have been our deepest learning experiences. Our hindsight is always more perceptive than our foresight. We live life facing the future, but we understand life only when it has become our past.

Nowhere is this set out more clearly than in the story of Joseph in this week's parsha. It begins on a high note: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age, and he made a richly embroidered robe." But with dramatic speed, that love and that gift turn out to be Joseph's undoing. His brothers began hating him. When he told them his dream, they hated him even more. His second dream offended even his father. Later, when he went to see his brothers tending their flocks, they first plotted to kill him, and eventually sold him as a slave.

At first, in Potiphar's house, he seemed to be favoured by fortune. But then his master's wife tried to seduce him and when he refused her advances she accused him of attempted rape and he was sent to prison with no way of proving his innocence. He seemed to have reached his nadir. There was nowhere

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in loving memory
on the occasion of the Shloshim
of our beloved grandson
Uriel ben Chayim Yitzchok Kahn a"h
by Mr. and Mrs. Fernand Kahn

lower for him to fall.

Then came an unexpected ray of hope. Interpreting the dream of a fellow prisoner, who had once been Pharaoh's cup-bearer, he predicted his release and return to his former elevated role. And so it happened. Joseph asked only one thing in return: "Remember me when it goes well with you, and please show me kindness: mention me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this place. For I was forcibly taken from the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing to deserve being put in this pit."

The last line of the parsha is one of the cruelest blows of fate in the Torah: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." Seemingly his one chance of escape to freedom is now lost. Joseph, the beloved son in his magnificent robe has become Joseph, the prisoner bereft of hope. This is as near the Torah gets to Greek tragedy. It is a tale of Joseph's hubris leading, step after step, to his nemesis. Every good thing that happens to him turns out to be only the prelude to some new and unforeseen misfortune.

Yet a mere two years later, at the beginning of next week's parsha, we discover that all this has been leading to Joseph's supreme elevation. Pharaoh makes him Viceroy over Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world. He gives him his own signet ring, has him dressed in royal robes and a gold chain, and has him paraded in a chariot to the acclaim of the crowds. A mere thirty years old, he has become the second most powerful man in the world. From the lowest pit he has risen to dizzying heights. He has gone from zero to hero overnight.

What is stunning about the way this story is told in the Torah is that it is constructed to lead us, as readers, in precisely the wrong direction. Parshat Vayeshev has the form of a Greek tragedy. Mikketz then comes and shows us that the Torah embodies another worldview altogether. Judaism is not Athens. The Torah is not Sophocles. The human condition is not inherently tragic. Heroes are not fated to fall.

The reason is fundamental. Ancient Israel and the Greece of antiquity – the two great influences on Western civilisation – had profoundly different understandings of time and circumstance. The Greeks believed in moira or ananke, blind fate. They thought that the gods were hostile or at best indifferent to humankind, so there was no way of avoiding tragedy if that is what fate had decreed. Jews believed, and still

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

believe, that God is with us as we travel through time. Sometimes we feel as if we are lost, but then we discover, as Joseph did, that He has been guiding our steps all along.

Initially Joseph had flaws in his character. He was vain about his appearance;¹ he brought his father evil reports about his brothers;² his narcissism led directly to the advances of Potiphar's wife.³ But the story of which he was a part was not a Greek tragedy. By its end – the death of Joseph in the final chapter of Genesis – he had become a different human being entirely, one who forgave his brothers the crime they committed against him, the man who saved an entire region from famine and starvation, the one Jewish tradition calls “the tzaddik.”⁴

Don't think you understand the story of your life at half-time. That is the lesson of Joseph. At the age of twenty-nine he would have been justified in thinking his life an abject failure: hated by his brothers, criticised by his father, sold as a slave, imprisoned on a false charge and with his one chance of freedom gone.

The second half of the story shows us that Joseph's life was not like that at all. He became a tale of unprecedented success, not only politically and materially, but also morally and spiritually. He became the first person in recorded history to forgive. By saving the region from famine, he became the first in whom the promise made by God to Abraham came true: “Through you, all the families of the land will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). There was no way of predicting how the story would end on the basis of the events narrated in parshat Vayeshev. The turning-point in his life was a highly improbable event that could not have been predicted but which changed all else, not just for him but for large numbers of people and for the eventual course of Jewish history. God's hand was at work, even when Joseph felt abandoned by every human being he had encountered.

We live life forward but we see the role of Providence in our lives only looking back. That is the

¹ Bereishit Rabbah 84:7; see Rashi to Gen. 37:2.

² Gen. 37:2, and see Bereshit Rabbah 84:7.

³ Tanhuma, Vayeshev, 8.

⁴ Yoma 35b.

meaning of God's words to Moses: “You will see My back” (Ex. 33:23), meaning, “You will see Me only when you look back.”

Joseph's story is a precise reversal of the narrative structure of Sophocles' Oedipus. Everything Laius and his son Oedipus do to avert the tragic fate announced by the oracle in fact brings it closer to fulfilment, whereas in the story of Joseph, every episode that seems to be leading to tragedy turns out in retrospect to be a necessary step to saving lives and the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams.

Judaism is the opposite of tragedy. It tells us that every bad fate can be averted (hence our prayer on the High Holy Days that “penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil decree”) – while every positive promise made by God will never be undone.⁵

Hence the life-changing idea: Despair is never justified. Even if your life has been scarred by misfortune, lacerated by pain, and your chances of happiness seem gone forever, there is still hope. The next chapter of your life can be full of blessings. You can be, in Wordsworth's lovely phrase, “surprised by joy.”

Every bad thing that has happened to you thus far may be the necessary prelude to the good things that are about to happen because you have been strengthened by suffering and given courage by your ability to survive. That is what we learn from the heroes of endurance from Joseph to the Holocaust survivors of today, who kept going, had faith, refused to despair, and were privileged to write a new and different chapter in the book of their lives.

Seen through the eye of faith, today's curse may be the beginning of tomorrow's blessing. That is a thought that can change a life. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And Judah said to his brothers: ‘What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh.’” [Gen. 37:26-27].

Why are Jews (Yehudim) referred to as such? Historically speaking, the vast majority of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who remained committed to their traditions and faith after the first exile (586 B.C.E.) come from the tribe of Judah (Yehuda), since the ten tribes (not including Levi) were exiled by Sanherib. In addition to the factually-accurate nomenclature, however, I would like to offer a textually-

⁵ Shabbat 55a.

based explanation that provides a complementary but very different answer to our question.

The mere fact that a person can still call himself a Jew (Yehudi) 3,300 years after Sinai and despite nearly 2,000 years of national homelessness is truly a miracle. He is a most unlikely survivor; sustained, nurtured and kept alive by Divine providence in the face of exile, wars, pogroms, and assimilation. To understand what enables a Jew to survive despite all the forces against him, we must turn to his eponym, Judah.

What special traits did Judah possess that set him apart from his eleven brothers, and in particular from his eldest brother, Reuben? For example, when an angry and jealous mob of brothers have the chance to carry out their long-harbored wish to kill Joseph, two siblings— Reuben and Judah—each take a leadership role, and it seems that Reuben's words are the more courageous and moral!

First, Reuben, assuming his status as first-born, attempts to foil his brothers' evil design: "Let us not kill him...let us not shed blood...cast him into this pit...but lay no hand upon him..." [ibid., 37:22]. As the verse itself then explains, Reuben's plan to delay a drastic decision was driven by his goal that "he might deliver [Joseph] out of their hand, to restore him to his father". Although they do indeed place Joseph into the pit, Reuben never gets to fully implement the plan.

This is because Judah sights a caravan of Ishmaelite traders in the distance, and suggests to his brothers that there is no point in murdering Joseph when they could just as easily earn money from his sale to slavery. "What profit [mah betza] is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh..." [ibid., v. 26-27].

Reuben returns, finds an empty pit, and rends his garments. His despair is deep and painful: "The child is not here, and I, where shall I go?" [ibid., v. 29-30].

If we compare the responses of Reuben and Judah, the former seems to own the moral high ground, risking his brothers' wrath in preventing them from murdering Joseph on the spot.

Judah, on the other hand, appears crass, turning the crisis into a question of profit. Speaking like an opportunistic businessman, he sees a good deal and convinces the brothers to get rid of their nemesis and enjoy a material advantage at the same time.

In this light, his concluding words, "for [Joseph] is our brother and our flesh" sound grotesque. If Judah harbored fraternal feelings for Joseph, how could he subject his younger brother to abject slave conditions? This makes Jacob's subsequent decision to name Judah as the recipient of the birthright even more puzzling.

Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, I would

like to suggest that Judah's decision is actually what makes him the most fitting leader from among his brothers. The real test of leadership is not who provides the most absolute, morally upright solution, if that will not be accepted by the "crowd," but rather he or she who ultimately saves the life of the victim!

It is precisely because Judah is a realist who understands when and how to make the best deal possible under exceedingly difficult circumstances that he is deemed best suited for the yoke of leadership.

Faced with dreadful options, he pursues the least horrific one possible. Acceding to Reuben's proposal to leave Joseph inside the pit— which, according to our Sages, was filled with snakes and scorpions— was tantamount to leaving Joseph to die a cruel death (unless we relied on a last-minute miracle!). On the other hand, allowing his brothers to act on their zealous hatred of Joseph would have been unthinkable!

So when Judah sees the Ishmaelites in the distance, he seizes the opportunity to save Joseph from certain death, giving his brother a chance to perhaps survive. However, in order to be heard by his angry and jealous brothers, he understands that he must conceal his motivations under the guise of a profit-making venture for them!

Reuben may have had the best intentions for Joseph, but intentions alone are not enough. "Let us not kill him," Reuben declares, but his words fall on deaf ears. While Reuben nobly appeals to his brothers' "better angels", he fails the leadership test in not utilizing more pragmatic tactics in order to attain his goal of saving Joseph. In contrast, Judah wisely couches his plea in accordance with the politician's "art of the possible".

Thus it is Judah, in his first test of leadership, who becomes worthy of receiving the birthright from his father, Jacob, a man also intimately familiar with navigating in a treacherous world. In an imperfect world in which ideal situations rarely exist, it is Judah, eponymous ancestor of all "Jews," who demonstrates what it is that enables a Jew to survive and thrive: to take responsibility for the welfare and continued life of his brother, even if he must use guile in order to achieve that end-goal! ©2017 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Abraham had to deal mainly with his son Isaac in order to continue the tradition of monotheism and humanity that he had begun. His other children were sent away from his home so that in effect all of his efforts were concentrated on his son Isaac. Isaac himself had two sons, Jacob and Esau. He attempted to divide his attention and share his legacy with both of them.

The sons were of greatly different temperament

and potential and Jacob found it impossible to reconcile the two. Both would now be forced to go their separate ways in life and in history. It was recognized early on that the two personalities would never mesh and therefore only through Jacob would the legacy of Abraham and Isaac be fulfilled.

Now we see that Jacob had 12 sons. Every father and mother knows that every child is different and the wise parent recognizes the subtleties of those differences and incorporates them into the parenting process. Now just imagine having to deal with 12 different sons each one of whom had a different personality, different talents and different perspectives on life and the family.

Jacob himself in his final words to his sons at the end of this book describes each of them in a different way, emphasizing their characteristics, talents and abilities. So, it shall not be surprising that sibling frictions abounded in his family. What is surprising is that apparently all of those frictions were channeled into the contest between Joseph and his 10 brothers.

That Joseph was the lightning rod for all of the differences in the family is clear from the description of the Torah in this week's reading. The Torah tells us that they could not speak peacefully one with another. The commentators over the centuries have provided various reasons for the behavior of both Jacob and Joseph as to why this family discord occurred. However it is clear from the biblical narrative itself that Joseph was so special, both in his own mind and in the eyes of his father, and that the brothers felt threatened by the family situation that he created.

The task of reconciling 12 different personalities, all of them strong and powerful, would now occupy the rest of the narrative of the Torah. The ability to live in peace and harmony, given the fact that there are always varied personalities, ideas and viewpoints has remained the main challenge in Jewish life today. It would take a tortured and completely unpredictable path to reunite Joseph and his brothers and allow the people of Israel to be formed positively.

At the end of the story the brothers are reconciled with Joseph but their different personalities still do not meld. Reconciliation in human terms is always a process and there is no magic bullet or instant formula that can accomplish it. It takes time and patience and changing circumstances and eventually the intervention of Heaven itself to bring about true family and national reconciliation.

Hopefully we are in the midst of such a process, with all of its ups and downs, in our current struggles in the Jewish world. The story of Joseph and his brothers and their eventual reconciliation should provide us with hope and faith for our future as well. ©2017 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

After Joseph's two dreams his siblings are naturally upset—believing that Joseph had aspirations to control them. The rage turns into jealousy when his father Jacob seems to give credence to Joseph's dream. (Genesis 37:11)

In response, Joseph's brothers set out to Shechem. This is where, just a bit earlier, two of them killed all the male inhabitants for the rape of Dinah, their sister. (Genesis 34) According to the Midrash, the brothers again go to Shechem to decide how to take retribution, this time against Joseph. (Rashi, Genesis 37:12)

This is where Jacob sends Joseph to seek out to his brothers' welfare. (Genesis 37:13)

Soncino, the 15th century Italian commentary, explains that, although Jacob could have sent a servant to find out if his sons were well, he purposefully sent Joseph in the hope that he would be able to make peace with them.

This begs the question: With the brothers' enmity towards Joseph so great, wasn't Jacob placing Joseph in danger?

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

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

Once growing older, Jacob doesn't want to make the same mistake. And so, when Jacob's sons feud, he adopts a plan which is the direct opposite of what was suggested to him when he was younger. Rather than have Joseph separate from his brothers, he sends Joseph to his siblings in the hope that they will reconcile.

It is often the case that children vow not to make the mistakes of their parents. What is ironic is that even as we try a different path, nothing is a guarantee. Despite Joseph being sent to, rather than from, his brothers, he remains separated from his family for 22 years.

The message: While Jacob should be lauded for trying a new path, it is often the case that no matter what we do, "the song remains the same." (aval hamanginah tamid nisheret). ©2017 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

Rabbi Avraham Pam, of blessed memory asked "What was so special about the miracle of the oil burning for eight days? The Talmud tells us that there were ten miracles that regularly occurred in the Temple (Pirke Avos, Ethics of the Fathers 5:7). None of these are commemorated.

Rabbi Pam cites the halachah (Jewish law) that for communal rituals, the prohibition against tumah (ritual impurity) may be waived. Many commentaries, therefore, ask why was there a need for a miracle at all? It was permissible to light the menorah even with ritually impure oil.

The P'nei Yehoshua answers that precisely because it was permissible to use impure oil that the only purpose of the miracle was to show God's intense love for Israel -- especially towards those who had defected to Hellenism, but returned to Torah observance with the triumph of the Macabees.

This is the message of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph did not simply forgive his brothers and suppress his resentment for their abuse of him. Rather, he loved them and cared for them as if nothing had happened, telling them that he feels toward them as he does to Benjamin, who was not involved in his kidnapping (Rashi, Gen. 45:12).

The celebration of Hanukah is, therefore, more than the commemoration of a miracle. We are to emulate the Divine attributes (Talmud Bavli, Shabbos 133b). Just as when God forgives, His love for us is completely restored, so must we be able to restore the love for one another when we mend our differences.

As we watch the Hanukah candles, let us think about the light they represent: the bright light of a love that is completely restored. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD © 2017 Rabbi K. Packouz*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Embarrassing Someone

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Our sages derive from this week's portion that "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person". This we derive from the actions of Tamar, who refused to state that Judah made her pregnant for fear that he would be embarrassed.

It would seem therefore that this mitzvah is one that a person should give up his life, rather than transgress. Though we only list three sins that one

must forfeit one's life rather than transgress, (namely, morality, killing, and idol worship), this mitzvah to not humiliate someone, is included in the transgression of killing, for when one becomes embarrassed, one's face turns white, which indicates a loss of blood which is considered akin to killing.

Others believe that this Mitzva is only hinted in the Torah while the cardinal three prohibitions cited above are mentioned explicitly. Indeed the Meiri states that the expression "that it is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person" is only a "good idea" ("Heara"), that one should be aware of and sensitive to the feelings of others.

Is one permitted to embarrass oneself?

If we compare embarrassing another to killing, then just as it is forbidden for one to injure him/her self purposely so too it should be forbidden for one to embarrass oneself. As a result a person should not wear shredded clothing, even though his intent might be to show humility or even if it is done as a way to acquire money.

However the same Meiri cited above states that one is permitted to embarrass oneself and it is not considered immoral.

In order to avoid transgressing the prohibition "not to embarrass anyone", our sages implemented the law that when one brings his "First Fruit" ("Bikurim") to Jerusalem, he had to place his fruits in baskets of reeds rather than elaborate gold or silver so that the poor would not be humiliated. As well, in many congregations there is a designated reader from the Torah so that one, who is unable to read because of lack of knowledge or unpreparedness, would not be shamed. However there are also some congregations who are not concerned in this case with embarrassment and insist that the person who is given an Aliya to the Torah reads their section, as an incentive that one should be prepared properly. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Landmark Decision

The story of Yoseph's discord with his brothers' waxes as a factual, albeit eternal, analogy to feuding Jews. There are dreams and fantasies, jealousies and misconceptions. Unfortunately, the saga never seems to end, as even today it seems that there are those of our brethren who would sell out their kin - all for the sake of Heaven.

The Torah relates: Yoseph's brothers go to Shechem to tend the flock of their father, Yaakov. Yoseph is sent by Yaakov to find out what they are up to. As he approaches them they declare, "Behold, the dreamer approaches." At first they plot to kill him but Reuvain and Yehuda intervene, one suggesting he be cast into a pit, and the other convincing the brothers to sell him to passing merchants.

Were the plans to rid themselves of their younger sibling premeditated, or was the sale an impromptu action based on sighting Yosef as he approached them?

Let us analyze the story and the commentaries.

Yaakov asked his children to tend his sheep.

The verse tells us that, "Now, his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem." In the Hebrew language, a prefix "es" is often used in conjunction with a noun. Here it is used in conjunction with the word sheep. Es is a word usually placed to allude to something additional. (e.g. the famous command, "In the command, "Honor your father and your mother" the Torah adds an es before the words father and mother, "Honor es your father and es your mother." The extra word es is there to include elder siblings, stepparents and the like, all who must be afforded honor.) In this case the word es in conjunction with the sheep is not only extra, it also has dots above it. Those dots intone, says Rashi, in the name of the Midrash, that the brothers did not set out to tend only the sheep, thus solely for the purpose of honoring their father, rather they were intent on tending to themselves. They were interested in a self-serving outing, one that involved eating and drinking, without the service of their father in mind.

The question is simple. How does the Medrash know that from the extra word es and the dots above it? Maybe the extra word and the dots imply that they had an extra mission to fulfill? Maybe it implies sheep and other cattle, thus the extra es. Where does it imply that they were not fulfilling their fathers's will. rather they were fulfilling their own agenda? The Gemara (Bava Kama 50a) relates that once there lived a man known as Nechunia the Well Digger. Nechunia selflessly dug wells to provide water for the pilgrims, who traveled to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Sukkos and Shavuos.

It happened once that Nechunia's daughter fell into a deep well that he had dug. People ran to the great tzadik, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who was known for his miraculous ability to intercede on behalf of those in distress, and asked him to pray for the child.

It seemed that he was not the least bit concerned. During the first hour he said to them, "Don't worry, she will be all right." An hour later, when there was still no sign of the girl, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa still seemed unperturbed. "She still is fine," he said.

During the third hour, he told those who had come to him "do not worry, she has come out of the well already." When they asked the girl, "Who brought you up?" she replied, "A ram materialized, and an old man was leading it." After hearing this, the people asked Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa, "What made you so sure that she would be saved? Are you a prophet?" Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa replied, "I am not a prophet, nor am I the student of a prophet. But I said to myself, it

is impossible that a deep well, one that the tzadik Nechunia the Well Digger took so much pain to dig in order to quench the thirst of travelers, would be a pitfall for one of his children! I felt it would be impossible for his child to be harmed by his good deed. Therefore I knew she would be safe."

The Midrash used simple logic. If the brothers' intent was solely to honor and service their father by tending his sheep, then that mission could never have produced the consequences that brought Yaakov misery for 22 years. How is it possible that an exercise in parental honor would turn into an activity that would cause such parental grief and anguish? Therefore, those two dots that hover over the extra word contain a powerful message. Tainted acts cause tainted results. If the mission is pure, so are the results, and when we see sullied circumstances then we must assume tainted intent. However, when brothers act out of purity of purpose and with a non-tainted mission, then their intent will only bring honor to Heaven. © 2001 Project Genesis & Rabbi M. Kamenetzky

RAV AVIGDOR NEBENZAHL

Chanukah-Purity of Heart

by Nehemiah Klein, Netiv Aryeh

Yosef spent much time learning with his father. He was a fine talmid and one would have expected him to find favor in the eyes of his brothers. This, however, was not the case, for not only do they not love him but they harbored hatred towards him going so far as to plot to kill him. The brothers had much in common with Yosef, they all served the Creator, they were all Jewish, yet they were not especially charmed by Yosef.

On the other hand, part of the Torah's description of Yosef in the house of Potiphar was: 'His master perceived that Hashem was with him, and whatever he did Hashem made succeed in his hand. Yosef found favor in his eyes' (Bereishit 39:3-4). Potiphar was an idol worshipper yet Yosef found such favor in his eyes that Potiphar "appointed him over his household, and whatever he had he placed in his custody' (ibid.).

Following the incident involving Potiphar's wife, Yosef was imprisoned by non-Jews and yet we read: 'Hashem was with Yosef, and He endowed him with charisma and He put his favor in the eyes of the prison warden' (ibid. 21). Once again, his brothers whom all serve the Creator were not too impressed with Yosef while a few idol worshippers were.

We may learn from here that the idea of 'chein',



Take Control of
YOUR MONEY!
tinyurl.com/fitness5

...probably the best personal
finance training course I've seen! - CPA

finding favor in the eyes of others is not something we can explain through logic. This is a valuable lesson. Following the death of Yosef, the Jewish people tried to find favor with the Egyptians. One example was that they ceased performing the mitzvah of brit milah in order to resemble them. What was the end result? Not only did they not find favor in their eyes but quite the contrary, they were subjected to slavery and back-breaking labor. It was only after the Egyptians had suffered nine plagues trying to avoid a tenth that we read: "Hashem gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians" (Shemot 12:36). When the Jewish people attempt to assimilate among the other nations and find favor in their eyes, Hashem makes sure that the opposite happens. When Bnei Yisrael behave as they should, only then will there be chein in the eyes of the other nations.

Throughout our long exile whenever Jews attempted to integrate too much with the other nations they were not successful. A classic example of this is Nazi Germany. The German Jews of that time wished to be fine upstanding German citizens. Their behavior trying to emulate them resulted in fierce anti-Semitism until the Germans declared that every Jew must be killed. The chein in the eyes of the other nations can only come when we observe the Torah as we should.

When Noach sent out the dove, the Torah states: 'the dove could not find a resting place for the sole of its foot' (Bereishit 8:9). Chazal understand this to mean that had it found a resting place then it would not have returned to Noach. They compare this to the Jewish nation going into exile which is described as: "she dwelled among the nations, but found no rest" (Eicha 1:3). It is only upon returning to Eretz Yisrael and to Hashem that they will find rest. Thank G-d, Hashem put an end to Nazism, however even today Jews find no rest in the Diaspora, the other nations are causing them much trouble.

Hashem does not wish for the Jewish people to have a rest while in exile. During the period of the Greeks, there were many among Am Yisrael who desired to assimilate into Greek culture, they were known as mityavanim, or Hellenists in English. Hashem sent Matityahu and his sons to wage war and to insure that the people do not assimilate and continue keeping the Torah. Many died al Kiddush Hashem.

The war waged by Matityahu and his sons was purely to prevent us from adopting Greek culture, it was not a war of freedom, independence, or with any nationalistic motives. The war was for Torah, mitzvot, the beit hamikdash, brit milah, Shabbat and other mitzvot. The victory also granted them independence, as the Rambam states, the kingdom returned to the hands of the Jewish nation for another two hundred years. This was a side-benefit, it was not the cause for the Chashmonaim waging war. A subsequent war for independence during the days of Bar Kochva did not

meet with success. This war succeeded because it was for Torah and for purifying the Beit Hamikdash.

We kindle our Chanukah lights for a period of eight days because of the miracle in which a flask with sufficient oil for one day burned for eight days. This, however, is not the primary cause of our celebration. We celebrate our victory over the Greeks affording us the ability to keep Torah, Shabbat, brit milah, and other mitzvot. The miracle with the menorah was simply as sign from Hashem how we should celebrate this great victory. The miracle involving the flask of oil was only witnessed by a few kohanim, the miracle of the victory in battle and the subsequent return of Torah was witnessed by all.

There were two items lacking for proper fulfillment of the mitzvah of kindling the menorah. Firstly, there was no pure oil, and secondly there was no golden menorah. Regarding the oil, Hashem performed a miracle that they were able to find a small flask of oil which miraculously kindled for eight days. Regarding the golden menorah, Hashem did not perform a similar miracle. While gold is preferable, the mitzvah may be fulfilled from certain other materials. They made a menorah from iron and as their means grew they eventually constructed one from gold.

Why did Hashem perform a miracle regarding the oil and not the menorah? One possible understanding is that Hashem wished to show that the purity of the oil, the internal beauty, is preferred over the external beauty of the golden menorah. While there is a mitzvah to use gold, as we see that in later years the practice of lighting with a golden menorah returned, however, internal purity comes first.

We see that in some cases the idea of purity was over-emphasized. Chazal recite the story of a man who wished to violate one of the most severe sins and that was to have relations with a married woman. What prevented him from going through with his act? The woman pointed out that there was no mikvah in the vicinity where he would then be able to purify himself. Imagine, he was not terribly bothered by having relations with a married woman but was more concerned about finding a mikvah in which to immerse.

Similarly, Chazal relate the story of two kohanim in the mikdash arguing over who would carry out a particular service. The argument became so heated until one took out a knife and stabbed the other in the heart -- imagine, trying to murder a fellow kohen while serving in the Beit Hamikdash. The father of the stricken young man came in and told everyone not to worry, he is still alive and the knife is therefore not tamei. Imagine, a man tries to kill his son and all he cares about is whether or not the knife was tamei.

Another such example -- there is a halacha regarding offerings known as piggul. Piggul involves a Kohen performing a service having in mind to perform another service or even eating the sacrificial parts,

outside of the permitted time. The offering becomes piggul and one who eats it is liable with the penalty of kareit. To prevent a Kohen from making an offering piggul, Chazal instituted that anyone who comes in contact with piggul becomes tamei. Here as well, the potential penalty of kareit did not move them as much as the threat of their becoming tamei.

One final example -- Chazal added stringencies regarding human skin. To fabric it into something to sleep on is a Torah prohibition, Chazal added that it also renders a person tamei. Why did Chazal feel the need to do so? The reason given is to prevent a person from using the skin of his parents. Imagine here as well, the respect for his parents does not interest him as much as avoiding tumah.

I believe the miracle of the Chanukah oil greatly enhanced the idea of remaining in a pure state, perhaps too much so. Hashem wishes for the purity to be from the heart, not something external. This was partially achieved during Chanukah. The war against the mityavnim was not a total victory, later came the tzdukkim and many others of a similar nature who battled against the Torah. Nevertheless, our celebration of the miracle of Chanukah is that the Beit Hamikdash was returned to its pure state and the kingdom was restored for another two hundred years. We were then able to learn Torah and observe mitzvot. However, the war against those who fight Torah will continue for many generations until the arrival of Moshiach, speedily in our day. Amen. ©2014 N. Klein and Netiv Aryeh

RAB SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais HaMussar

Yosef, a young lad of seventeen, was sold into slavery in Egypt, the most depraved society of the time, and shortly after his arrival he was tested. His master's wife was bent on seducing him to sin with her, and she even began torturing him to this end. Despite her attempts day in and day out, week after week and month after month, Yosef emerged from the lion's den as righteous as he entered. The Torah relates how Yosef was then thrown into a dungeon and ultimately ended up as the viceroy to the king and the second most powerful person in the world.

Chazal tell us (Bereishis Rabba 90:3) that all the greatness that Yosef attained, really originated from Yosef himself. In other words, his behavior generated a parallel reward. Yosef ensured that his mouth would not kiss in sin, and in turn Pharaoh declared "By the word of your mouth shall all my people be sustained." His body which did not sin was eventually garbed in royal clothes. His neck which did not bend to commit a sin was adorned with a golden necklace and his hand which did not transgress was bejeweled with Pharaoh's ring.

Rav Wolbe comments (Shiurei Chumash) that it is amazing to see how Hashgacha Pratis responds and

relates precisely to each and every detail. This idea also apparent earlier in the parsha when Yosef was sold by his brothers to a group of Arab wayfarers.

The Torah makes a point of mentioning the merchandise carried by the camels in the Arab caravan: "Their camels, bearing spices, balsam and lotus, were on their way to bring them down to Egypt." Rashi explains that although Arabs generally carry foul smelling cargo, Hashem orchestrated that the caravan which carried Yosef would have good smelling spices so that he not suffer from a foul odor on his way down to Mitzrayim. Even the smells we smell are all ordained by Heaven!

The above Chazal gives us much food for thought and things to work on. Firstly, it is clear that every action and nuance has the ability to generate great results.

This knowledge brings with it not only great responsibility but also tremendous opportunity. We should never belittle even the smallest positive deeds because they have the ability to bring much blessing in their wake.

The story is told about the wife of the Vilna Gaon who made a pact with a friend that whoever passes away first will come to the other one in a dream and inform them about what awaits her in the World to Come. The friend passed away first and after a few days she appeared to Vilna Gaon's wife in a dream. "I cannot reveal to you what awaits you" she said, "but I can tell you that for even the smallest mitzvah there is great reward. Do you remember how we collected money for tzedakah and you pointed to a woman for whom we were looking? Well, in Heaven you were given much greater reward for the mitzvah than I was, because of the added effort involved in picking up your hand to point for the sake of tzedakah!"

Additionally, Chazal are conveying to us that all that occurs to a person really originates from the person himself. No matter what happens to a person, the first place for him to turn is inward to discover why he was deserving of that which occurred.

Every piece of jewelry worn by Yosef can be traced back to his behavior in his master's house. Indeed, the search for the treasure chest of answers should begin in one's own backyard! ©2015 Rav S. Wolbe, zt"l and AishDas Society

