

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he story of Joseph and his brothers, spread over four parshiyot, is the longest and most tightly-scripted of all the narratives in the Torah. Nothing is there by accident; every detail counts. One moment, however, seems gloriously irrelevant -- and it is this that contains one of the most beautiful of the Torah's ideas.

With great speed, we are introduced to the broad lines of the story. Joseph is envied and hated by his brothers. So deep has the animosity gone that they cannot talk peaceably with one another. Now the brothers have left home to tend their sheep, and Jacob tells Joseph to go and see how they are doing. This encounter will set in motion the central drama from which all else will follow: the moment when the brothers sell Joseph into Egypt as a slave.

But it nearly didn't happen. Joseph arrived at Shechem where he expected his brothers to be, but they were not there. He might well have wandered around for a while and then, failing to find them, gone home. None of the events that take up the rest of the Torah would have happened: no Joseph the slave, no Joseph the viceroy, no storage of food during the years of plenty, no descent of Joseph's family to Egypt, no exile, no slavery, no exodus. The entire story -- already revealed in broad outlines to Abraham in a night vision -- seemed about to be derailed. Then we read the following: "A man found [Joseph] wandering around in the fields and asked him, 'What are you looking for?' He replied, 'I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?' 'They have moved on from here,' the man answered. 'I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan." (Gen. 37:15-17)

I know of no comparable passage in the Torah: three verses dedicated to an apparently trivial, eminently forgettable detail of someone having to ask directions from a stranger. Who was this unnamed man? And what conceivable message does the episode hold for future generations, for us? Rashi says he was the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra says he was a passer-by. Ramban however says that "the Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a guide without his knowledge."

I am not sure whether Ramban meant without Joseph's knowledge or without the guide's knowledge. I

prefer to think both. The anonymous man -- so the Torah is intimating -- represented an intrusion of providence to make sure that Joseph went to where he was supposed to be, so that the rest of the drama could unfold. He may not have known he had such a role. Joseph surely did not know. To put it as simply as I can: he was an angel who didn't know he was an angel. He had a vital role in the story. Without him, it would not have happened. But he had no way of knowing, at the time, the significance of his intervention.

The message could not be more significant. When heaven intends something to happen, and it seems to be impossible, sometimes it sends an angel down to earth -- an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel -- to move the story from here to there. Let me tell the story of two such angels, without whom there might not be a State of Israel today.

One was a remarkable young woman from a Sephardi family who, at the age of seventeen, married into the most famous Ashkenazi family in the world. Her name was Dorothy Pinto; her husband was James de Rothschild, son of the great Baron Edmond de Rothschild who did so much to support the settlement of the land in the days before the proclamation of the State.

A critical juncture occurred during the First World War that would eventually lead to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the placing of Palestine under a British mandate. Suddenly, Britain became absolutely central to the Zionist dream. A key figure in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, was in Britain, experimenting and lecturing in chemistry at Manchester University. But Weizmann was a Russian immigrant, not a prominent member of British society. Manchester was not London. Chemistry was not politics. The most influential and well-connected Jewish family was the Rothschilds. But Edmond was in France. James was a soldier on the battlefield. And not every member of the British Rothschilds was a Zionist.

At that moment, Dorothy suddenly assumed a leading role. She was only nineteen when she first met Weizmann in December 1914, and understood very little of the political complexities involved in realising the Zionist dream. But she learned quickly. She was perceptive, resourceful, energetic, delightful and determined. She connected Weizmann with everyone he needed to know and persuade. Simon Schama, in his definitive account of Two Rothschilds and the Land

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of Israel, says that "young as she was... she combined charm, intelligence and more than a hint of steely resolution in just the right mixture to coax commitment from the equivocal, enthusiasm from the lukewarm and sympathy from the indifferent."

His judgement on the effect of her interventions is that "through tireless but prudent social diplomacy she had managed to open avenues of influence and persuasion at a time when they were badly needed." (Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel, Collins, 1978, 196-98) The result, in 1917, was the Balfour Declaration, a milestone in the history of Zionism -- and we should not forget that the Declaration itself took the form of a letter to Lord (Walter) Rothschild.

Dorothy's husband James, in his will, left the money to build the Knesset, Israel's parliament building. In her own will, Dorothy left the money to build a new Supreme Court Building, a project undertaken by her nephew Jacob, the current Lord Rothschild. But of all the things she did, it was those connections she made for Chaim Weizmann in the years 1914 to 1917 that were surely the most important. Without them, there might have been no Balfour Declaration and no State of Israel.

The other figure, who could not have been less like Dorothy de Rothschild, was Eddie Jacobson. The son of poor Jewish immigrants, born in New York's Lower East Side, he moved with his family to Kansas City where he met a young man called Harry Truman. They knew one another in their youth, and became close in 1917 when they underwent military training together. After the end of World War I, they opened a haberdashery business together. It failed in 1922 because of the recession.

From then on, they went their separate ways, Jacobson as a travelling salesman, and Truman successively a county administrator, Senator, Vice-President, and then when F.D. Roosevelt died in office in 1945, President of the United States. Despite their very different life-trajectories, the two stayed friends, and Jacobson would often visit Truman, talking to him about, among other things, about the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

After the war, the position of America vis--vis the State of Israel was deeply ambivalent. The State Department was opposed. Truman himself refused to

meet Chaim Weizmann. On 13 March 1948, Jacobson went to the White House and persuaded Truman to change his mind and meet Weizmann. Largely as a result of this, the United States became the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel on 14 May 1948.

Many years later, Truman wrote: "One of the proudest moments of my life occurred at 6:12 p.m. on Friday, May 14, 1948, when I was able to announce recognition of the new State of Israel by the government of the United States. I remain particularly gratified by the role I was fortunate to play in the birth of Israel as, in the immortal words of the Balfour Declaration, 'a national home for the Jewish people.'"

Two people, Dorothy de Rothschild and Eddie Jacobson, appeared on the scene of history and connected Chaim Weizmann with individuals he might otherwise not have met, among them Arthur Balfour and Harry Truman. (Weizmann had met Arthur Balfour already, but without Dorothy he would not have had the influence that he eventually came to have over a whole circle of leading politicians.) They were like the stranger who connected Joseph and his brothers, but with infinitely more positive consequences. I think of them both as angels who did not know they were angels.

Perhaps this is true not only about the destiny of nations but also about each of us at critical junctures in our lives. I believe that there are times when we feel lost, and then someone says or does something that lifts us or points the way to a new direction and destination. Years later, looking back, we see how important that intervention was, even though it seemed slight at the time. That is when we know that we too encountered an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel. That is what the story of Joseph's stranger is about. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"**A**nd Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and I placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." (Gen. 40:11) The Bible believes in the significance of dreams; so did the Sages of the Talmud (B.T. Berakhot, chapter 9), so did William Shakespeare and so did Sigmund Freud. Shakespeare declared that "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" (The Tempest 4:1) – that the thoughts and emotions of the human being provide the raw material for the dreams he experiences in his sleep at night. Conversely, Freud taught that the best code to unlocking the mystery of an individual's personality is by studying the symbolism of his dreams.

Hence when Joseph heard that the imprisoned

cup-bearer is dreaming of serving wine to Pharaoh once again, he understood that this man did not have a guilty conscience and in all likelihood, Pharaoh's investigation would find him innocent; the cup-bearer would be freed and re-instated. The baker, on the other hand, dreamt that birds were eating Pharaoh's baked goods from a basket he was carrying on his head. One who paranoically believes that others are robbing him of the food he has prepared for Pharaoh obviously feels that he was derelict in his duties and worthy of being punished. Joseph knew that the baker would be found guilty...

Interestingly, the Sages of the Talmud utilize this dream of the cup-bearer as the source for one of the primary activities of our Passover Seder, and, in so doing, reveal a great truth about the personality of Joseph as well as about the political significance of our exodus from Egypt. In chapter ten of tractate Pesachim in the Jerusalem Talmud, Rabbi Yohanan suggests that the four cups of wine which punctuate the Seder and enhance our Festival of Freedom hark back to the four references to "cups" of wine in the cup-bearer's dream – rather than to the four expressions of redemption in Exodus (6:6-8) as brought down in the version of that same tractate in the Babylonian Talmud . (Those who are familiar with my Commentary on the Haggadah will note that there is a fifth time when "cup" is mentioned in Genesis paralleling the fifth expression of redemption in Exodus.).

What would cause the Jerusalem Talmud to prefer a source from the period of Joseph over a seminal Divine prophecy which foretold the exodus?!

Firstly, the cup-bearer's dream relates specifically to goblets of wine, the precise objects with which we are dealing in the Seder. Halakhically speaking, Rav Haim Brisker maintains that the cup, or goblet, is very significant; one must not only drink the majority of a *revi'it* of wine (3.3.ozs) with each blessing over the wine, but one must drink a majority of the cup from which one is drinking, no matter how large it is. Remember that wine not only helps one feel joyous, but it also makes one feel free.

Moreover, the cup-bearer had been wrongfully imprisoned (enslaved) by Pharaoh, and was then exonerated and freed, perfectly paralleling the situation of the Hebrews at the time of the exodus. Herein lies a great lesson, which might have been overlooked had we only had the source from Exodus.

The four expressions of redemption apply specifically to the Israelites – which might have led us to believe that the significance of the exodus related only to God's special love for Israel. Linking the four cups of freedom to the Egyptian cup-bearer reminds us that God wants every human being to be free – because every human being is created in the image of the Divine, is equal to every other human being, and no human dare enslave his brother. Joseph is the true

universalist among the tribes. He initially dreams of sheaves of grain, Egyptian agriculture, and he wishes to influence the entire cosmos, the sun, the moon and the stars.

This fundamental principle of a free humanity is a meta-halakhah which must govern human affairs. At the Song of the Reed Sea, all the nations – Edom, Moab, Canaan – are pictured as submitting to the power of the one God of the Universe, who alone must rule the world (Ex. 15:14-18). The American Revolutionaries got it right: "Rebellion against tyranny is obedience to God." Would that the President of the United States today would lead the United Nations in that direction vis a vis Syria and Iran!

For Maimonides, this principle must be the basis of our Oral Law as we interpret the Torah for each generation. Yes, says the Ramban, the law in the past did allow us to treat the Gentile slave with "rigor," but this must not be the attitude of any Jew now. He cites the Book of Job, wherein God says to the Master who is inconsiderate to his slave, "was it not the one God who formed both Master and Slave in His womb?" (31:13-15). Maimonides in effect abolishes slavery (see the last law in his Laws of Slaves).

And this fundamental human right to be free causes Maimonides to re-interpret the simple meaning of the Bible to enable the woman imprisoned in an insufferable marriage to be freed. "Our wives are not to be treated as captives under the control of their husbands," he declares! (Laws of Matrimony 14:8). If only today's legal decisors would take Maimonides' words to heart and mind. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

In this great emotional drama that will consume the balance of the sections of this book of the Torah, we are witness to a very difficult family situation and the dynamic consequences that it creates. The Torah itself testifies to the love and favoritism that Jacob shows towards his son Joseph. We can well understand this relationship of Jacob to Joseph, since Joseph strongly resembled his father physically, was extremely talented and precocious, and was the son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel. However Jewish tradition raised objections to the overt favoritism shown to Joseph by Jacob when he bestowed upon him the special garment that signified their bond and love for one another.

We can also understand why Joseph himself felt so special, and justified in lording it over his brothers, by telling them of his dreams and ambitions. Again, the traditional commentaries to the Torah found fault in Joseph's youthful arrogance and lack of judgment. And, finally, we can also appreciate how hurt the brothers were by the actions of their father and brother.

They were so hurt that they felt that Joseph was an existential threat to their very survival as a family and future nation. So, we are faced with a situation where all the leading people involved in the story are both right and wrong at the very same time. We can appreciate the feelings of each of the parties to the story, and, yet we are aware of the disaster and trauma that could result.

There is an over-arching drama that is being enacted here in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Jewish tradition teaches us that we are all somehow mere actors in the great drama of human civilization, presented on the stage of Jewish history. Even though each of the individuals involved in the narrative presented in this week's Torah reading apparently acts on his own volition, the sum total of their actions will result in the descent of the Jewish people into Egyptian slavery and the eventual redemption and acceptance of the Torah at Sinai.

We recite in our daily prayers that there are many thoughts and intentions in the hearts of human beings, but that eventually it is the guidance of Heaven that will prevail. Nowhere is this basic understanding of the pattern of Jewish history more evident than it is in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Everyone involved seemingly follows their own individual course of action, but the result is a historic change in the dynamics of the family and the trajectory of Jewish history. Only if we step back and view the entire chain of events in its totality can we begin to see this emerging pattern as the will of Heaven guiding the family of Jacob and the Jewish people. ©2019 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)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

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

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

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

connect to 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 (Judah) leads the brothers in removing this threat by selling Yosef. In this sense, each seek to become the sole heir of Yaacov (Jacob). (See Sforno, Genesis 37:18)

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

The Joseph story breaks this pattern in that, in the end, all of Yaacov's children were included. No wonder, Yosef and Yehuda and for that matter, all of the brothers are blessed by Yaacov. Indeed, their descendants 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. ©2019 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

**"A**nd Yaakov settled in the land of his father's dwelling, in the Land of Canaan." (Beraishis 37:1) Immediately following this verse, the Torah tells us about Yosef, Yaakov's son who would be sold into slavery then rise to become the viceroy of Egypt, arguably the most-powerful man on the planet, albeit after numerous travails. What is the connection of these two verses? Perhaps to answer this question, Rashi offers a famous commentary.

"Yaakov wished to settle in tranquility, so the situation of Yosef jumped upon him." He quotes the Midrash (Beraishis Rabba 84:3) which says, "Is it not enough for the righteous that the next world is prepared for them? Do they wish to also sit in tranquility in this world?" If one thinks about it, this seems out of character for Hashem to say. He is not usually conveyed as being vindictive.

In fact, if one looks at the Midrash, he will find that this was NOT Hashem speaking. "Says R' Acha: at the time when tzaddikim are sitting peacefully and wish to dwell peacefully in this world, the Satan comes and instigates. "Is it not enough for the righteous that the next world is prepared for them? Do they wish to also sit in tranquility in this world?" As proof of this, when Yaakov Avinu wished to dwell in peace, the situation with Yosef arose."

It seems harsh that righteous people are given a raw deal and can't have any peace. Why must there always be something wrong and why is the Satan given the ear of Hashem to cause them trouble? The answer is eye-opening and gives us a new perspective on life's difficulties.

What is the Satan's job? He is merely an angel of G-d sent to perform a mission. His task is to challenge us at each step of our lives and dare us to defy him. He is intent on trying to get us to sin not because he wants us to sin, but because he wants us to stand up to him!

Much as a coach or physical trainer pushes us to our limits and beyond, the Satan pushes us in the direction of sin so we will push back and build spiritual strength. The coach wants us to get stronger and so does this angel. Therefore, he shakes his head in wonder at the "folly" of the righteous. "Their lives of goodness are establishing for them the World to Come. Do they really want to sit back and do nothing?"

The Satan's point is that the entire purpose of this world is to continue working, striving, and building up the tzaddik's place in the next world. To sit in peace deprives him of that opportunity and undermines this purpose. While it may be fine if Hashem chooses the righteous person to dwell tranquilly, this should NOT be the tzaddik's first choice. Therefore, he brought Yaakov the challenge of Yosef which would test his mettle for decades, and build an even more elaborate and lush place for him in Olam Haba.

*A woman sat near her mother's bedside watching her debilitating disease drag on. She wondered to herself why her mother was suffering so. With these thoughts on her mind, she went about her preparations for Shabbos and stopped at a takeout store. She made some comment to the storekeeper who told her the following frightening story:*

*A fellow was in the hospital in a vegetative state. His son had been visiting him and decided his father was living in hell, with no hope of quality of life or*

*dignity in sight. He decided it was time to end it and he directed the doctors to "pull the plug."*

*Shortly after the funeral, his father came to him in a dream. "Every minute of that suffering was purifying me. JUST FIVE MINUTES MORE and my soul would have reached its perfection! Now I have to start again and begin a new life to try to get those moments of rectification back."*

*The woman was comforted as she now understood there was a purpose to the pain. ©2019 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

# Embarrassing Someone

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit*

*by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**ur 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 DAVID LEVIN**

## The Brothers' Misinterpretation

**"Y**osef and his brothers" is one of the most difficult passages in the Torah. It can be read on many different levels, but the bottom line of each level is a difficult family situation which increases in its intensity. Some of the hatred and jealousy from the brothers to Yosef can be attributed to Yosef's missteps, but other discord came as the result of outside forces. Yosef accused the brothers of different transgressions of the Torah, but the brothers were following a different interpretation of the law, which was their right. This brought about the first level of hatred towards him. Ya'akov loved Yosef more than his other sons, and they reacted to his gift of the multi-colored coat and the time that he devoted to Yosef and his learning. Still the ultimate outside force that separated the brothers were the two dreams that Yosef had.

After the gift of the multi-colored coat, the Torah tells us, "His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers, so they hated him, and they were not able to speak with him peaceably. Yosef dreamt a dream and he told it to his brothers and they increased even more to hate him. And he said to them, 'Hear, if you please, this dream which I dreamt. Behold, we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when behold, my sheaf arose and also stood; then behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.' His brothers said to him, 'Would you then reign over us? Would you then dominate us?' And they increased even more to hate him because of his dreams and because of his words. He dreamt again another dream and related it to his brothers; and he said, 'Look, I dreamt another dream: behold, the sun, moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' And he related it to his father and his brothers, and his father scolded him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you dreamt? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, to bow down to you to the ground?' So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father observed the matter."

Professor Nechama Leibovits explained that there is a difference of opinion as to whether there were two dreams or three. It appears that Yosef first tells his brothers that he had a dream, and they "increased even more to hate him." Some of the meforshim wish to say that this sentence was the first dream and is separate

from the telling now of the second dream about the sheaves. Other meforshim (HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, Kli Yakar, Or HaChaim) wish to say that the two sentences are really combined. Assuming that the second interpretation is better since it is more accepted, one must wonder why the brothers were upset even before hearing the dream. One explanation given is that they hated him because Yosef already knew that they could not speak peaceably with him, yet he begged them to listen to his dream.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that there are different kinds of dreams: one which comes from Hashem and one which comes from other sources. He asks how we can tell the difference between the two. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that a dream from Hashem will be more forceful and will have a greater emotional effect on the dreamer. The Or HaChaim explains that a dream from Hashem will be more compelling and the dreamer will tell everyone because he seeks an interpretation which is dreamed subliminally with the dream but is forgotten upon waking. This explains the compulsion of the wine steward and the baker to find an explanation. It also explains the emotional stress of Par'oh to find someone who could interpret his two dreams. The Or HaChaim also says that the first day after having such a dream is the most conducive to finding the proper interpretation. Yosef understood this and was compelled to seek an interpretation from his brothers even if this might increase their hostility towards him.

Another area of difficulty in understanding this passage is the sentence immediately following the brothers' interpretation of Yosef's first dream: "And they increased even more to hate him because of his dreams and because of his words." The Torah is very clear that there were dreams, more than just one. This is fine for those who say there were three dreams and this is the second dream. The Or HaChaim, who says that there were only two dreams, explains that Yosef's first dream had several parts: (1) my sheaf arose, (2) and stood up, (3) your sheaves gathered around and bowed down. Since the one dream contained both a message to Yosef and a message to the brothers, we can count it as more than one dream. There is still the problem of the two reasons given for their hatred, namely the dreams and the words. HaRav Sorotzkin assigns the "words" to the original problem of Yosef's accusations against his brothers.

A further question arises concerning the scene within the dream. The brothers were primarily shepherds, not farmers, yet the dream focused on gathering crops. The brothers could have focused on this aspect of the dream and come to the correct interpretation that Yosef would have food for them when their crops were bowed and unable to stand erect. Instead they focused on what appeared to be a question of rulership, which infuriated them because

they knew that Yosef's tribe would not be the tribe which would lead the people. They believed he was attempting to challenge Hashem's plan for the nation.

I would humbly offer another possible explanation which might answer each of these problems. It is clear from a number of different sources (Or HaChaim, Sorotzkin, Kli Yakar, Nechama Leibovits, and others) that Yosef and his brothers and father all understood that this dream was a nevuah, a prophecy. Whether one says that there were three dreams or just two, it is clear that the brothers became angrier with Yosef even before hearing the words of the dreams. It was simply the fact that Yosef had a dream that was from Hashem which engendered this additional hatred. Their father, Ya'akov, already showed that he treated Yosef specially. He studied with him daily and dressed him in a coat which indicated leadership. Now, when Yosef had a compelling dream from Hashem, a prophecy, he became the first of the brothers to record such closeness to Hashem. This increased the jealousy which the brothers experienced. When they then heard the words of the dream, they were already suspicious of its meaning and therefore interpreted the dream incorrectly. Their jealousy made them blind to any other possible explanation which the unusual facts of the dream (farming instead of shepherding) might contain. This misinterpretation caused even greater hatred and jealousy.

We are often confronted with situations in which we attribute motivations for another's actions. We fail to grasp the importance of opening our minds to the mindset of the person and focus instead on how those actions affect us. In doing so, we project our own interpretation instead of the proper one. This creates anger and separation. May we learn to be *dan l'chaf zchut*, judge each one's actions positively, and view all others with understanding. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levin

#### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

### Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah sensitizes us to the severity of injustice. The prophet Amos begins by informing us of the limits of Hashem's tolerance. Hashem says, "I can be patient over the three offenses of the Jewish people, but the fourth is inexcusable. Namely, the sale of the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. They anticipate the dirt placed on the head of the impoverished." (2:6, 7) Amos admonishes the Jewish people here for their insensitivity towards injustice. He complains about the judges who would bend the law for nominal sums and exchange justice for an inexpensive pair of shoes. They would discriminate against the poor and even drag the impoverished through the dirt when they refused to comply with their unjustified sentence. Over these Hashem expresses serious disturbance and declares them unforgivable.

The Radak, in explanation of the above passages, magnifies this disturbance and interprets the three offenses mentioned here to be the three cardinal sins -- idolatry, incest and murder. Hashem explains that the most cardinal sins do not receive an immediate response from Above. For these Hashem is somewhat patient and allows the offender the opportunity to repent and correct his outrageous behavior. But the injustice shown to the poor evokes Hashem's immediate response. Rabbeinu Bachya (see introduction to our Parsha) explains the basis for this and reminds us that the poor place their total trust in Hashem. Their financial resources do not command any respect or assistance from others which forces them to place their total trust in Hashem. Therefore, Hashem pledges to come immediately to their defense and responds harshly to any injustice done to them.

The Pirkei D'Reb Eliezer (Chapter 38) sees in the above passages a reference to the infamous sale of Yoseif Hatzaddik by his brothers, the tribes of Israel. Chazal explain that the brothers sold Yoseif for the equivalent of twenty silver dollars and that each brother purchased a pair of shoes with his portion of the money, two silver dollars. According to R' Eliezer, this is the incident Amos refers to when reprimanding the Jewish people for selling the righteous for silver and the pauper for shoes. The prophet tells us that this sin was unforgivable and was viewed with greater severity than every cardinal offense. With this statement the prophet alludes to the fact that the greatest scholars of Israel, the ten holy martyrs would be brutally murdered in atonement for this sin. Hashem said that the sale of Yoseif, unlike all other sins, could never be overlooked and that one day the greatest Tannaim (Mishnaic authors) would suffer inhuman torture and be taken from us in atonement for this sin. No offense of the Jewish people ever evoked a response so harsh as this one and the torturous death of the ten martyrs remains the most tragic personal event in all of Jewish history.

This week's haftorah shares with us an important perspective regarding the offense of Yoseif's sale by focusing on a particular aspect of the offense. As we glean from the prophet's words it was not the actual sale that aroused Hashem's wrath, rather the condition of the sale. Amos refers to the indignity shown to Yoseif and the insensitivity towards his feelings, being sold for an inexpensive pair of shoes. When lamenting the ten martyrs during the liturgy in the Yom Kippur service we accent this dimension and recount that the wicked Roman ruler filled the entire courtroom with shoes. This was his fiendish way of reminding the martyrs about their indignant behavior and insensitivity towards their brother.

The upshot of this is that there was some room to justify the actual sale of Yoseif. The Sforno (37:18) explains that the brothers truly perceived that their life was in serious danger as long as Yoseif remained in

their surroundings. After closely following his actions and anticipating the outcome of his inexcusable attitude and behavior the brothers found it necessary to protect themselves from his inevitable attack of them. Although they totally misread the entire situation from the start it can be argued that their precautionary measures were somewhat justified and permissible. However, Sforno draws our attention to their insensitivity during these trying moments. The brothers are quoted to have reflected on their decision and said, "But we are guilty for observing his pain when he pleaded with us and we turned a deaf ear to it." (Breishis 42:21) Even they faulted themselves for their insensitivity towards their brother. When he pleaded for his life they should have reconsidered and adjusted their harsh decision. It is this insensitivity that the prophet refers to when focusing upon the sale for shoes. Apparently, they purchased these shoes in exchange for Yoseif to indicate that he deserved to be reduced to dirt. Their statement reflected that whoever challenged their authority deserved to be leveled and reduced to nothing. (see RadaI to Pirkei D'R'Eliezer)

This expression of indignation was inexcusable and required the most severe of responses. Hashem chose the illustrious era of the Tannaim to respond to this offense. During those times a quorum of prominent scholars presided over Israel which personified the lessons of brotherhood and sensitivity. An elite group was chosen for the task, including: the Prince of Israel, the High Priest and Rabbi Akiva who authored the statement, "Love your friend as yourself" is the fundamental principle of the Torah." In atonement for the inexcusable sale Hashem decreed upon these martyrs the most insensitive torturous death ever to be experienced. The Tzor Hamor (see Seder Hadoros year 3880) explains that the lesson this taught the Jewish people was eternal. After this horrifying experience the Jewish people were finally cleansed from all effects of the infamous offense done to Yoseif. From hereafter they could be authentically identified as a caring and sensitive people. From this we learn how sensitive we must be and even when our harsh actions are justified we must exercise them with proper sensitivities. As difficult as the balance may be we must always feel for our Jewish brethren and show them the proper dignity and compassion they truly deserve. ©2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

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## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Vayeshev relates a seemingly disturbing series of events. After telling us that Yosef snatched on his brothers, it says that Yaakov loved Yosef more than all the other brothers and that's why he made him a striped shirt. Then it says of the brothers could no longer tolerate Yosef, and didn't believe his dreams of them bowing to him. First, why

did Yaakov love one son more than the others? Second, why couldn't the brothers tolerate Yosef only after his father made him the striped shirt? Lastly, why did Yosef insist on telling his brothers his dreams, when he must have sensed that they didn't want to hear them? Rav Kaminetsky explains that Yaakov had taught Yosef all that he'd learned in the Yeshiva (school) of Shem and Eiver where he studied, and where Yitzchok and Avraham studied as well. The main strength of that school was that they taught Torah that could survive in negative environments. Avraham used it to deal with the rest of the world, Yitzchok used it to deal with Yishmael, and Yaakov used it to deal with Lavan and Esav. Now Yaakov was teaching it to Yosef, and the brothers were worried. Were they as bad as Esav or Lavan? Why would Yaakov have to teach Yosef that Torah? Little did they know that Yosef would need it to deal with Egypt, and all the trials he would face there.

Yaakov loved Yosef more because he learned more, and wanted the other brothers to be jealous (that's why he made him the shirt), so that they'd want to learn it too. But instead they became jealous for the wrong reasons. It was then that Yosef tried to tell them that they shouldn't be jealous, because he had to learn for his own sake, because he'd have to be a leader in a foreign land (as the dreams with stalks suggested, since there were no stalks where they lived). But the brothers had let themselves be blinded by hate, and couldn't see the truth, as obvious as it may have been.

There's an important lesson in all of this: jealousy can be used in a good way, as Yaakov tried to do. However, if we're not careful, we could miss the whole point, and end up doing things we shouldn't. The first test is to ask ourselves if we want something because we need it, or simply because someone else has it. We should be jealous of things we can learn and grow from, like Torah knowledge, good character traits, and even courage and persistence. Everyone has qualities we can and should be jealous of, as long as we use it not to prove ourselves, but to improve ourselves. © 2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

