

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

This is a true story that took place in the 1970s. Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch, then Principal of Jews' College, the rabbinic training seminary in London where I was a student and teacher, was approached by an organisation that had been given an unusual opportunity to engage in interfaith dialogue. A group of African Bishops wanted to understand more about Judaism. Would the Principal be willing to send his senior students to engage in such a dialogue, in a chateau in Switzerland?

To my surprise, he agreed. He told me that he was sceptical about Jewish-Christian dialogue in general because he believed that over the centuries the Church had been infected by an antisemitism that was very difficult to overcome. At that time, though, he felt that African Christians were different. They loved Tanach and its stories. They were, at least in principle, open to understanding Judaism on its own terms. He did not add – though I knew it was in his mind since he was one of the world's greatest experts on Maimonides – that the great twelfth-century Sage held an unusual attitude to dialogue. Maimonides believed that Islam was a genuinely monotheistic faith while Christianity – in those days – was not. Nonetheless, he held it was permitted to study Tanach with Christians but not Muslims, since Christians believed that Tanach (what they called the Old Testament), was the word of God whereas Muslims believed that Jews had falsified the text.¹



So we went to Switzerland. It was an unusual group: the semichah class of Jews' College, together with the top class of the yeshiva in Montreux where the late Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg,

author of Seridei Esh and one of the world's foremost halachists, had taught. For three days the Jewish group davened and bentsched with special intensity. We learned Talmud each day. For the rest of the time we had an unusual, even transformative, encounter with the African Bishops, ending with a chassidic-style tisch during which we shared with the Bishops our songs and stories and they taught us theirs. At three in the morning we finished by dancing together. We knew we were different, we knew that there were deep divides between our respective faiths, but we had become friends. Perhaps that is all we should seek. Friends don't have to agree in order to stay friends. And friendships can sometimes help heal the world.

On the morning after our arrival, an event had occurred that left a deep impression on me. The sponsoring body was a global, secular Jewish organisation, and to keep within their frame of reference the group had to include at least one non-orthodox Jew, a woman studying for the rabbinate. We, the semichah and yeshiva students, were davening the Shacharit service in one of the lounges in the chateau when the Reform woman entered, wearing tallit and tefillin, and sat herself down in the middle of the group.

This is something the students had not encountered before. What were they to do? There was no mechitzah. There was no way of separating themselves. How should they react to a woman wearing tallit and tefillin and praying in the midst of a group of davening men? They ran up to the Rav in a state of great agitation and asked what they should do. Without a moment's hesitation he quoted to them the saying of the Sages: A person should be willing to jump into a furnace of fire rather than shame another person in public. (See Brachot 43b, Ketubot 67b) With that he ordered them back to their seats, and the prayers continued.

The moral of that moment never left me. The Rav, for the past 32 years head of the yeshiva in Maaleh Adumim, was and is one of the great halachists of our time.² He knew immediately how serious were

¹ Maimonides, Teshuvot HaRambam, Blau Edition (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1960), no. 149.

² This essay was originally written by Rabbi Sacks in 2015. Rabbi Dr. Nachum Rabinovitch was Rabbi Sacks' Rav, his Rabbi, teacher, and mentor. He sadly passed away in 2020, a few months before Rabbi Sacks. To read more from Rabbi Sacks about Rabbi Rabinovitch, please see the Covenant & Conversation essay entitled "My Teacher: In Memoriam", written for Matot-Masei.

the issues at stake: men and women praying together without a barrier between them, and the complex question about whether women may or may not wear a tallit and tefillin. The issue was anything but simple. But he knew also that halachah is a systematic way of turning the great ethical and spiritual truths into a tapestry of deeds, and that one must never lose the larger vision in an exclusive focus on the details. Had the students insisted that the woman pray elsewhere they would have caused her great embarrassment. Never, ever shame someone in public. That was the transcending imperative of the hour. That is the mark of a great-souled man. One of the great privileges of my life was to have been his student for over a decade.

The reason I tell this story here is that it is one of the powerful and unexpected lessons of our parsha. Judah, the brother who proposed selling Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:26), had “gone down” to Canaan where he married a local Canaanite woman. (Gen. 38:1) The phrase “gone down” was rightly taken by the Sages as full of meaning.³ Just as Joseph had been brought down to Egypt (Gen. 39:1) so Judah had been morally and spiritually brought down. Here was one of Jacob’s sons doing what the patriarchs insisted on not doing: marrying into the local population. It is a tale of sad decline.

He marries his firstborn son, Er, to a local woman, Tamar.⁴ An obscure verse tells us that he sinned, and died. Judah then married his second son, Onan, to her, under a pre-Mosaic form of levirate marriage whereby a brother is bound to marry his sister-in-law if she has been widowed without children. Onan, reluctant to father a child that would be regarded as not his but his deceased brother’s, practised a form of coitus interruptus that to this day carries his name. For this, he too died. Having lost two of his sons, Judah was unwilling to give his third son, Shelah, to Tamar in marriage. The result was that she was left as a “living widow,” bound to marry her brother-in-law whom Judah was withholding, but unable to marry anyone else.

After many years, seeing that her father-in-law (by this time a widower himself) was reluctant to marry her to Shelah, she decided on an audacious course of action. She removed her widow’s clothes, covered herself with a veil, and positioned herself at a point where Judah was likely to see her on his way to the

sheep-shearing. Judah saw her, took her to be a prostitute, and engaged her services. As surety for the payment he had promised her, she insisted that he leave her his seal, cord and staff. Judah duly returned the next day with the payment, but the woman was nowhere to be seen. He asked the locals the whereabouts of the temple prostitute (the text at this point uses the word kedeshah, “cult prostitute,” rather than zonah, thus deepening Judah’s offence), but no one had seen such a person in the locality. Puzzled, Judah returned home.

Three months later he heard that Tamar was pregnant. He leapt to the only conclusion he could draw, namely that she had had a physical relationship with another man while bound in law to his son Shelah. She had committed adultery, for which the punishment was death. Tamar was brought out to face her sentence, and Judah instantly noticed that she was holding his staff and seal. She said, “I am pregnant by the person to whom these objects belong.” Judah realised what had happened and proclaimed, “She is more righteous than I” (Gen. 38:26).

This moment is a turning-point in history. Judah is the first person in the Torah explicitly to admit he was wrong.⁵ We do not realise it yet, but this seems to be the moment at which he acquired the depth of character necessary for him to become the first real baal teshuvah. We see this years later, when he – the brother who proposed selling Joseph as a slave – becomes the man willing to spend the rest of his life in slavery so that his brother Benjamin can go free. (Gen. 44:33)

I have argued elsewhere that it is from here that we learn the principle that a penitent stands higher than even a perfectly righteous individual. (Brachot 34b)⁶ Judah the penitent becomes the ancestor of Israel’s Kings while Joseph the Righteous is only a viceroy, mishneh le-melech, second to the Pharaoh.

Thus far Judah. But the real hero of the story was Tamar. She had taken an immense risk by becoming pregnant. Indeed she was almost killed for it. She had done so for a noble reason: to ensure that the name of her late husband was perpetuated. But she took no less care to avoid Judah being put to shame. Only he and she knew what had happened. Judah could acknowledge his error without loss of face. It was

³ According to midrashic tradition (Midrash Aggadah, Pesikta Zutreta, Sechel Tov et al.), Judah was “sent down” or excommunicated by his brothers for convincing them to sell Joseph, after the grief they saw their father suffer. See also Rashi ad loc.

⁴ Targum Yonatan identifies her as the daughter of Noah’s son Shem. Others identify her as a daughter of Abraham’s contemporary Malkizedek. The truth is, though, that she appears in the narrative without lineage, a device often used by the Torah to emphasise that moral greatness can often be found among ordinary people. It has nothing to do with ancestry. See Alshich ad loc.

⁵ The text here is full of verbal allusions. As we noted, Judah has “gone down” just as Joseph has been “brought down.” Joseph is about to rise to political greatness. Judah will eventually rise to moral greatness. Tamar’s deception of Judah is similar to Judah’s deception of Jacob – both involve clothes: Joseph’s blood-stained coat, Tamar’s veil. Both reach their climax with the words haker na, “Please examine.” Judah forces Jacob to believe a lie. Tamar forces Judah to recognise the truth.

⁶ Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings*, pp. 303-314.

from this episode that the Sages derived the rule articulated by Rabbi Rabinovitch that morning in Switzerland: it is better to risk being thrown into a fiery furnace than to shame someone else in public.

It is thus no coincidence that Tamar, a heroic non-Jewish woman, became the ancestor of David, Israel's greatest King. There are striking similarities between Tamar and the other heroic woman in David's ancestry, the Moabite woman we know as Ruth.

There is an ancient Jewish custom on Shabbat and festivals to cover the challot or matzah reciting Kiddush. The reason is so as not to put the bread to shame while it is being, as it were, passed over in favour of the wine. There are some very religious Jews who, unfortunately, will go to great lengths to avoid shaming an inanimate loaf of bread but have no compunction in putting their fellow Jews to shame if they regard them as less religious than they are. That is what happens when we remember the halachah but forget the underlying moral principle behind it.

Never put anyone to shame. That is what Tamar taught Judah and what a great Rabbi of our time taught those who were privileged to be his students. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©5775 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd 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.'" (Genesis 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-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! ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The story of Joseph and his brothers reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of mortal beings and a family structure. Parents, in a perfect world, do not have favorite children. All their children are their favorites, in their minds and hearts. However, in the imperfect world that we live in, favoritism within a family is a norm and not an exception. For whatever reason – and it is usually an emotional and even irrational one – favoritism within a family is a fact of life and common in the human experience.

The issue is not the favoritism itself, but, rather, how the parents and the other members of the family deal with this situation. A great deal depends upon the attitude of the child that is being favored.

In this week's Torah reading, Joseph flaunts his status as being the favored child of Jacob. It is not so much that the brothers resent the specialness displayed by Jacob as he relates to Joseph, for they realize that Joseph is a person of physical strength and attraction, filled with great spiritual and creative values. They even do not begrudge him his status as being the favorite of their father. What they do object to, and most vehemently react to, is the way Joseph chooses to

publicly display his favored status in their faces and to their detriment.

One need not demean others to establish one's own greatness and talents. Every person is entitled to great dreams but may not to use them publicly as a weapon against others. And it is this vicious pattern of behavior exhibited by Joseph that the brothers object to, and eventually feel mortally threatened by.

At the end of this wondrous story related to us in the Torah, the brothers and Joseph will come to terms with his uniqueness and favorite position in the family. Joseph will wisely refrain from relating to them his dreams of success, nor attribute his position of power over them to that of entitlement, but rather, as being God's servant in bringing about salvation for all concerned. The brothers, for their part, will realize that their actions were unjustified and extreme regarding their treatment of their brother.

All parties concerned will be forced to take a step back and readjust their thinking as to their reaction regarding the favored status of Joseph. It will take decades and a great deal of pain and suffering on the part of all of Jacob's sons to face up to the reality of their past behavior towards one another. But the greatness of our forefathers, who created the tribes of Israel and the Jewish nation, lies in their honest assessment of their past behavior, and their attempt to begin again with a new and different attitude towards each other.

There will be lingering doubts and fears, of course, for the past never disappears, but in the Torah readings during this coming month, the crucial moral lesson about being honest regarding our past, and being better people regarding our future, will be driven home to us. ©2021 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Embarrassing Someone

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Our Sages derive from Parshat Vayeshev the principle of "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person in public." For we see that Tamar refused to announce that Yehudah was the one who got her pregnant, for fear of embarrassing him, even though as a result of her silence she was taking the risk of being put to death.

It would seem that this is an example of a case in which a person should give up his life rather than transgress. True, we normally assume that there are only three sins in this category: sexual immorality, murder, and idol worship. However, it is possible that the prohibition of humiliating someone is a subset of the

prohibition of murder. This is because when a person is mortified, his face turns white when the blood drains from it, just as in death.

Others disagree, explaining that the three cardinal sins are limited to those mentioned explicitly in the Torah. The prohibition to embarrass someone is not explicit. Furthermore, the Meiri explains that the principle of "It is better for someone to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person in public" is not meant to be taken literally. It is stated dramatically to ensure that people will take it seriously, making efforts to be sensitive to the feelings of others.

May people embarrass themselves? If we take literally the comparison between embarrassing and murdering, then just as people may not harm themselves intentionally, so too they should be forbidden to embarrass themselves intentionally. This would mean that a person would not be allowed to wear torn clothes that expose a deformed part of his body, even if he is doing so in order to make money. However, the Meiri allows a person to embarrass himself, consistent with his understanding the comparison as ethical and not literal.

In order to avoid embarrassing people, our Sages ordained that all first fruits (*bikurim*) that are brought to Jerusalem should be in baskets of reeds. This was to prevent the rich from using gold and silver baskets, which would make the poor feel embarrassed of their more humble baskets. There is also a custom in many congregations that a designated Torah reader (*ba'al korei*) does all the reading from the Torah. This ensures that someone who is unable to read from the Torah will not be embarrassed by being expected to do so. However, there are other congregations that do not share this concern. On the contrary, they believe that the fear of embarrassment will motivate all the men in the congregation to learn to read the Torah for themselves. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After Joseph's two dreams, his siblings are naturally upset, believing that Joseph has aspirations to control them. That rage becomes jealousy when their father Jacob seems to give credence to Joseph's dream (Genesis 37:11).

In response, Joseph's brothers set out to Shechem where, just a bit earlier, two of them killed all the male inhabitants in retaliation for the rape of Dinah, their sister (Genesis 34). According to the Midrash, the brothers again visit Shechem to decide how to take retribution, this time against Joseph (Rashi, Genesis 37:17).

Shechem is also where Jacob sends Joseph to seek out to his brothers' welfare (Genesis 37:13). Sforno explains that although Jacob could have sent an

emissary to learn if his sons were well, he purposefully sends Joseph in the hope that he will be able to amend whatever problems he might find. Might this include making peace with his brothers?

The possibility of a hoped-for reconciliation begs the question: With the brothers' enmity toward Joseph so great, wasn't Jacob placing Joseph in danger?

It can even 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 Esau and Ishmael, who were cast aside by their parents.

Yet Joseph could have misread his father. Jacob may have sent Joseph to his brothers because of what happened to Jacob himself in his younger years. After Jacob took the blessings from his brother Esau, he was advised by his mother to flee to avoid Esau's wrath (27:43-46). In the end, the advice led to Jacob being painfully separated from his family for twenty-two years.

Growing older, Jacob doesn't want to make the same mistake. And so, when his sons feud, he adopts a plan that is the antithesis 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.

Children frequently 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 twenty-two years.

While Jacob should be lauded for trying a new path, it is often the case that no matter what we do things remain the same, as familial patterns are very strong. Still, Jacob shows us that we should not give up, and the attempt at change is worthy - perhaps it will bear fruit. ©2021 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 AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Counting the Little Things

We are taught that Yaakov's concern about "little vessels" brought about the miracle of Chanuka. In Parshat Vayishlach, prior to meeting Eisav, Yaakov Avinu retraces his steps in order to retrieve "pachim ketanim" (little vessels) that he inadvertently left behind. It was at this point that he encountered the guardian angel of Eisav.

How does Yaakov's frugality connect to the historical and national impact of the 8 days of oil?

The Gemara tells us (חולין גא) that righteous people value everything that HaShem gives them and are therefore careful with their possessions.

It was Yaakov's efforts to retrieve the "pachim ketanim" that enabled his descendants to merit the miracle of the "pach shemen" (vessel of oil), the basis of Chanuka.

Other than the word "pach", what is the connection between appreciating everything that HaShem does/gives and the celebration of Chanuka.

The Shulchan Aruch states (תרט"ב) that there is no obligation to make a festive meal on Chanuka. Unlike Purim, in which we have "feasting and joy", the purpose of Chanuka is to Thank and Praise (להודות וולהלל). Therefore, a physical manifestation is not required. On Purim our physical existence was threatened. Chanuka challenged our spiritual lives. Thus the focus of the celebrating is the expression of gratitude for being able to survive as Jews.

Gratitude is the hallmark of the Jewish people. We are called Jews specifically because Leah named her son Yehuda as an acknowledgement of HaShem's gifts through the birth of a fourth son (הפעם אודה את ה').

When the "big" things happen (a birth, a financial windfall, the Orioles winning), it is easy for one to express appreciation and offer praise for their good fortune.

As Jews, however, we must acknowledge every gift and kindness from Above, no matter how minute it may seem. We are equally charged to express our thanks to others who bestow good on us. הכרת הטוב (showing appreciation) is central to our interpersonal relationships.

Our day begins with our uttering the words אני מודה, "I thank/acknowledge" You for giving me another day of life.

One of the longest blessings of the Shmoneh Esrai is the brocha of "Hodaah", giving thanks. Within that blessing is the paragraph of מודים in which we mention both נפלאות and נסים. These terms convey our acknowledgement of both the "big" and "little" things in our lives that we might take for granted.

Imagine if that each time that we recite מודים we would think about at least one little chesed ("wink") from HaShem that we are grateful for. That parking spot that we found with ease, a short line at the Post Office or the beautiful weather on that day. Our simple acknowledgement of courtesy or simple kindness from others can make this world an even better place.

Our ancestor Leah imbued deep within us the character to thank and acknowledge all that is good in our lives. When we show appreciation to HaShem for the "little things" there is Divine inspiration for even more benevolence.

Perhaps that is the connection between the "small vessels" of Yaakov Avinu and the "big" miracle of the oil lasting for an additional 7 days.

Yaakov Avinu realized that one must not only appreciate the major kindnesses in life. It's the little things that count as well. His devotion and appreciation

for everything that HaShem bestowed on him paved the way for the seemingly bigger miracles that can and will come.

May our gratitude for all of the "little vessels" in our life open the way for even greater things, on a personal, national and global level.

Shabbat Shalom and Chanuka Sameach!
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RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Eir, Onan and Yosef

Parashat Vayeishev contains the sin of Yosef's kidnapping and sale into Egypt. This single act is one for which the Jewish people have continually been punished throughout the ages. Sometimes a single action can have a lasting effect on our lives that cannot be totally reversed even with a teshuvah gemurah, a complete atonement. The horrible account of the deaths of the ten great Rabbis who were tortured and murdered by the hand of the Roman Emperor, is recited each Yom Kippur, and is clearly a punishment for the sale of Yosef.

One of the immediate effects of that sin is found directly at the end of the sale and the false report presented to Ya'akov. The Torah brings us the sad story of Yehudah and his sons. "And it came to pass at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers and turned away until he came to an Adulamite man whose name was Chira. And Yehudah saw there the daughter of a Canaanite man whose name was Shu'a, and he married her, and he went into her. And she became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son, and he called his name Eir. And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son, and she called his name Onan. And she gave birth yet again to a son and she called his name Sheilah, and he was at K'ziv when she gave birth to him. And Yehudah took a wife for Eir his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. And it was that Eir the firstborn of Yehudah was evil in the eyes of Hashem, and Hashem killed him. And Yehudah said to Onan, go in unto the wife of your brother and perform a levirate marriage with her and establish a child for your brother. And Onan knew that the child would not be his, and it was that whenever he had relations with his brother's wife that he spilled the seed into the ground in order that he not give a child to his brother's wife. And that which he did was evil in the eyes of Hashem, and he was killed also."

Our narrative begins with the phrase, "And it came to pass at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers." There are several questions which arise from these words. "At that time", namely, when the brothers had reached a low in the selling of Yosef, Yehudah reached an even lower level as their leader. The Rabbis argue over the significance of the word "vayeired, he went down". Some say that this is

pointing out direction. The land of Israel is considered to be higher, both geographically and spiritually than the lands which surround it. We can also understand the word both directionally and emotionally. Rashi implies that the word is a description of leadership. Yehudah was the leader of the brothers, as the leadership of the people would arise from Yehudah. The brothers, however, said, "You said to sell him, had you said to return him we would have listened to you." His leadership was diminished.

Now that he was no longer their leader, Yehudah separated himself from them. Rashi emphasized the ostracizing of Yehudah in terms of business. The brothers no longer wished to tend their flocks with him, since he gave them the idea for the sale. HaRav Sorotzkin attributes this to their guilt when they saw how much their father now suffered. Yehudah was forced to find another business partner and traveled to Chira, the Adulami.

Yehudah's first son, his b'chor, was named Eir, which the Rabbis tell us was the reverse of the letters, ayin and resh, which spell out ra or evil. We see this in the pasuk, "And Eir did evil in the eyes of Hashem, and Hashem killed him." The sin of Eir was the same as that of his brother Onan, but for a different reason. Eir did not want Tamar to become pregnant because he believed it would damage her beauty. Onan did not want to impregnate Tamar because the child would not be considered his. Yet this was his father's command: "...go in unto the wife of your brother and perform a levirate marriage with her and establish a child for your brother."

What was the sin of Eir and Onan and its connection to the sale of Yosef? The first mitzvah given to Adam was "be fruitful and multiply". HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch discusses the moral character of a marriage as the striving to produce a family. Eir wished to postpone or eliminate that aspect of his marriage, which deprived that marriage of its moral foundation. "Through the death of the husband, a marriage has been left without establishing this final purpose of continuing the human race in the particular tendencies of that particular family. This loss is to be made good by the marriage of the childless widow to one of the nearest members of that family." Onan was that "nearest family member." This is the essential act of yibum, the marriage of a childless widow to continue the name of the childless husband.

This was comparably the sin of the brothers in their sale of Yosef. The sons of Leah already disliked Yosef because of Ya'akov's special treatment of him. When they heard Yosef describe the dreams, they saw these dreams as prophecy. They believed these dreams foretold that Yosef was to rule over them. Had the brothers discarded the dreams as total nonsense or the silly thoughts of a foolish, young boy, they would not have been so angry and upset. Yet if they did

believe that these dreams were really prophecy, then the brothers disrespected the "plan" of Hashem. Their problem was that they did believe the dreams, but this was not the future that they wanted. By throwing Yosef into the pit and selling him into Egypt at the suggestion of Yehudah, the brothers were placing their own agenda ahead of the "plan" of Hashem.

We see from this section of the Torah that one can derive a mitzvah even in the midst of a tragedy. Hashem's Torah speaks to our everyday life. Eir and Onan were a response to the evil sale of Yosef, yet they were not killed for that sin but for a sin of their own. Through this horrible tragedy we learn a comforting law concerning the death of a husband who is childless and see Hashem's plan for the perpetuation of his family. In many ways the Jewish people are like Eir and Onan. We have too often chosen to place our own personal agendas before Hashem's agenda. We have for too long been childless without a Beit Hamikdash. The Temple Mount is our widow, who must not be left childless. May we soon be worthy to marry her and produce the Third Beit Hamikdash bim'heira v'yameinu. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd it was, after these things, the King's wine steward, and the baker, sinned to their master, to the King of Egypt." (Beraishis 40:1)

The Midrash connects this story to Yosef in two ways. First of all, since Yosef had been thrown into jail, Potiphar's wife ensured that it was the hottest topic of gossip in Egypt. Now, with the fall from grace of these two high-ranking officials, people no longer spoke about Yosef, but spoke about the wine steward and baker instead.

Second of all, through these two individuals Yosef would gain not only his freedom, but rise to tremendous power and honor. Had one person sinned, it might have made the news and become the topic of conversation, but only because Yosef gave the baker a negative interpretation, while he gave the butler a positive one, was it clear that he had the ability to correctly interpret dreams.

If we look at this carefully, and understand that nothing in this world happens by chance, we can gain insight into why this was the way Hashem chose to make people stop talking about Yosef and bring about his ascent to greatness.

The Bartenura asks, "Why does it need to say they sinned, "to their master"?" He explains that since the fly in the cup or the stone in the bread were not intentional, but mistakes, their actual sin lay in not being careful enough in the service of their master. Even according to those who say it was not the actual Head Baker or Wine Steward who made the error, but those in their employ, the responsibility for attending to

their master's needs lay on their shoulders, and for this they were held accountable.

Let us juxtapose that against what Yosef told Potiphar's wife when she propositioned him. Yosef said that there was no one more trusted or honored in the household than he, and he could not sin against his master this way. Doing so would even be a sin against G-d, for He seeks out trustworthy people on Earth.

Hashem chose to bring about Yosef's redemption through two people who were cavalier about serving their master, to highlight Yosef's loyalty and fidelity. Acting *mida k'neged mida*, measure for measure, Hashem wanted to show the difference between those who are guided by their dedication to Him, and those guided by their own desires. When people spoke about the butler and baker, and how they had failed to diligently respect and protect their master the king, Potiphar's wife had to recognize just how special Yosef was.

One other note is that it calls one, "the wine steward of the King of Egypt," and the other merely, "the baker." The requirement to serve our Master, Hashem, doesn't depend on our stature in life. Whether we are highly-regarded *tzaddikim*, or average run-of-the-mill folk, we are enjoined to serve our Master with every ounce of our ability. As the Gemara says (Yoma 35b): "Yosef mechayev es hareshaim, Yosef obligated [even] the wicked," and surely, the rest of us must be no less diligent.

Irving Bunim was known for his Hatzala work during World War II, his philanthropy, Torah knowledge, and activism. He was also a successful businessman known for his integrity. On one occasion, he bought a significant amount of fabric from a company owned by a man named Burnet Valentine. When Bunim received the bill, he realized the billing clerk had dropped the first digit of each cloth's length, leading to an undercharge of \$40,000, a huge sum in the 1950's.

Bunim called Valentine, and said, "Today is a Jewish holiday. Today is the day that a Jewish businessman shows you what our Torah's ethics and morality demand of us." He then explained the error and gave Burnet a check for \$40,000. Valentine was shocked, but grateful, saying he would never have discovered the error. He added, "I don't know anyone else in the business world who would have returned this money."

Bunim related the story to his family and said, "That moment when Mr. Valentine realized what Hashem's holy Torah means to us was the greatest Kiddush Hashem a man could ask for." (Source: A Fire in His Soul) © 2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat 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 stocks 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. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

