

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI MICHA BERGER**

### Aspaqlaria

**W**ho was the True Hero of Chanukah? I would suggest it was not Matisyahu, nor Yehudah haMacabee and his brothers.

Look closely at the words of the gemara describing the miracle of oil. " בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד " they searched and only found a single jar of oil, that rested with the seal of the Kohein Gadol."

It took a search. (בדיקת חמץ.)

Don't picture a single jar of oil found amidst the rubble. The Beis haMiqdash wasn't trashed, it was perverted into a Temple of Zeus. The other jars weren't shattered, they were defiled. The whole point of the Hellenists was to keep the Temple running, but in service of some god who was supposed to be both Zeus and the actual Creator.

That single jar oil needed to be searched for because it had been hidden.

Who hid it? I would presume some kohein who had the bitachon, trust in Hashem, to be certain that someday the Beis haMiqdash would be restored. That even though things looked bleak, better times would certainly come.

A man with the mesiras nefesh to risk everything by defying the Hellenists for the sake of that vision, and yet with the anavah to do so despite knowing the act couldn't get him recorded for posterity.

This anonymous kohein, he is the hero, the role model, Chanukah should be teaching us to emulate.

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**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

**S**omething extraordinary happens between last week's parsha and this week's. It is almost as if the pause of a week between them were itself part of the story.



Recall last week's parsha about the childhood of Joseph, focusing not on what happened but on who made it happen.

Throughout the entire roller-coaster ride of Joseph's early life he is described as passive,

not active; the done-to, not the doer; the object, not the subject, of verbs.

It was his father who loved him and gave him the richly embroidered cloak. It was his brothers who envied and hated him. He had dreams, but we do not dream because we want to but because, in some mysterious way still not yet fully understood, they come unbidden into our sleeping mind.

His brothers, tending their flocks far from home, plotted to kill him. They threw him into a pit. He was sold as a slave. In Potiphar's house he rose to a position of seniority, but the text goes out of its way to say that this was not because of Joseph himself, but because of God: "God was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that God was with him, and that God caused all that he did to prosper in his hands."

Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, and failed, but here too, Joseph was passive, not active. He did not seek her, she sought him. Eventually, "She caught hold of his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside." Using the garment as evidence, she had him imprisoned on a totally false charge. There was nothing Joseph could do to establish his innocence.

In prison, again he became a leader, a manager, but again the Torah goes out of its way to attribute this not to Joseph but to Divine intervention: "God was with Joseph and showed him kindness. He gave him favour in the sight of the chief jailer ... Whatever was done there, He was the one who did it. The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because God was with him; and whatever he did, God made it prosper."

There he met Pharaoh's chief butler and baker. They had dreams, and Joseph interpreted them, but insisted that it is not he but God who was doing so: "Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.'"

There is nothing like this anywhere else in Tanakh. Whatever happened to Joseph was the result of someone else's deed: those of his father, his brothers, his master's wife, the chief jailer, or God Himself. Joseph was the ball thrown by hands other than his own.

Then, for essentially the first time in the whole story, Joseph decided to take fate into his own hands.

Knowing that the chief butler was about to be restored to his position, he asked him to bring his case to the attention of Pharaoh: "Remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For indeed I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into prison."

A double injustice had been done, and Joseph saw this as his one chance of regaining his freedom. But the end of the parsha delivers a devastating blow: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, and forgot him." The anticlimax is intense, emphasized by the double verb, "did not remember" and "forgot." We sense Joseph waiting day after day for news. None comes. His last, best hope has gone. He will never go free. Or so it seems.

To understand the power of this anticlimax, we must remember that only since the invention of printing and the availability of books have we been able to tell what happens next merely by turning a page. For many centuries, there were no printed books. People knew the biblical story primarily by listening to it week by week. Those who were hearing the story for the first time had to wait a week to discover what Joseph's fate would be.

The parsha break is thus a kind of real-life equivalent to the delay Joseph experienced in jail, which, as this week's parsha begins by telling us, took "Two whole years". It was then that Pharaoh had two dreams that no one in the court could interpret, prompting the chief butler to remember the man he had met in prison. Joseph was brought to Pharaoh, and within hours was transformed from zero to hero: from prisoner-without-hope to Viceroy of the greatest empire of the ancient world.

Why this extraordinary chain of events? It is telling us something important, but what? Surely this: God answers our prayers, but often not when we thought or how we thought. Joseph sought to get out of prison, and he did get out of prison. But not immediately, and not because the butler kept his promise.

The story is telling us something fundamental about the relationship between our dreams and our achievements. Joseph was the great dreamer of the Torah, and his dreams for the most part came true. But not in a way he or anyone else could have anticipated. At the end of last week's parsha – with Joseph still in prison – it seemed as if those dreams had ended in ignominious failure. We had to wait for a week, as he had to wait for two years, before discovering that it was not so.

There is no achievement without effort. That is the first principle. God saved Noah from the flood, but first Noah had to build the ark. God promised Abraham the land, but first he had to buy the cave of Machpelah

in which to bury Sarah. God promised the Israelites the land, but they had to fight the battles. Joseph became a leader, as he dreamed he would. But first he had to hone his practical and administrative skills, first in Potiphar's house, then in prison. Even when God assures us that something will happen, it will not happen without our effort. A Divine promise is not a substitute for human responsibility. To the contrary, it is a call to responsibility.

But effort alone is not enough. We need *seyata di-Shemaya*, "the help of Heaven". We need the humility to acknowledge that we are dependent on forces not under our control. No one in Genesis invoked God more often than Joseph. As Rashi (to Gen. 39:3) says, "God's name was constantly in his mouth". He credited God for each of his successes. He recognised that without God he could not have done what he did. Out of that humility came patience.

Those who have achieved great things have often had this unusual combination of characteristics. On the one hand they work hard. They labour, they practice, they strive. On the other, they know that it will not be their hand alone that writes the script. It is not our efforts alone that decide the outcome. So we pray, and God answers our prayers – but not always when or how we expected. (And of course, sometimes the answer is No).

The Talmud (Niddah 70b) says it simply. It asks, What should you do to become rich? It answers: work hard and behave honestly. But, says the Talmud, many have tried this and did not become rich. Back comes the answer: You must pray to God from whom all wealth comes. In which case, asks the Talmud, why work hard? Because, answers the Talmud: The one without the other is insufficient. We need both: human effort and Divine favour. We have to be, in a certain sense, patient and impatient: impatient with ourselves but patient in waiting for God to bless our endeavours.

The week-long delay between Joseph's failed attempt to get out of jail and his eventual success is there to teach us this delicate balance. If we work hard enough, God grants us success – but not when we want but, rather, when the time is right. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"The Lord shall broaden and beautify Yefet, and he (or perhaps "He") shall dwell in the Tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:27). The Chanukah struggle was between two powerful ideologies, Judaism vs. Hellenism, Jerusalem vs. Athens, a band of Maccabee traditionalist rebels who waged war (at first a Civil War against the leadership-establishment High Priest

Menelaus and then against a broader contingent which included Greek-Syria) to prevent the Holy City Jerusalem from becoming a Greek city-state (polis), hosting idolatrous Olympic games as well as Dionysian, orgiastic celebrations.

But the roots and results of Hellenism were much more profound than their mythological idols and hedonistic orgies. Yavan, (Ion, Greece), son of Yefet and grandson of Noah, bequeathed to world history the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the dramatic literature of Sophocles and Euripides, the mathematics of Euclid and Pythagoras, the sculpture of Praxiteles, the epic poetry of Homer. If indeed Western Civilization is the result of the two great cultures of Greco-Rome and Judeo-Christianity, and if our Bible is the fount of ethical wisdom and humane morality, then it was Greece who pioneered structured philosophic discourse, mathematics as the language of science, and the esthetics of art, music and drama, which are all so significant in the modern world.

To be sure, there is a fundamental tension between the two world-views of Judaism and Hellenism. Whereas for us the God of love, compassion and truth stands at the center of the Universe; the human being created in the Divine image, must strive for morality and sanctity, for Athens the human being, embodiment of perfection, is “the measure of all things.” The gods are created in his image, and he must strive to be brave, courageous and contemplative.

On Chanukah, the two ideologies clashed and we emerged triumphant; but is there room for a synthesis, even dialectic, between the two? Can the soul of Jerusalem be garbed in the cloak of Athens much like Mother Rebecca linked the voice of Jacob to the external trappings of Esau?

Our question depends on how we read the verse cited in the introduction to this article. One approach is, “The Lord shall broaden and beautify Yefet, and he (Yefet, the glories of Greek culture) shall dwell in the tents of Shem,” in sacred synthesis or dialectic.

Another approach dictates that we must guard against the anthropocentric and hedonistic Yefet who will try to shatter and overwhelm the fundamentally frail boundaries and ramparts of Shem – “The Lord shall broaden and beautify Yefet, but He, God, can only dwell in the tents of Shem” (Rashi, ad loc Gen. 9:27)!?

I believe the answer to our query is to be found in a fascinating incident recorded in the Talmud (B.T. Bava Kamma 82b). Two brothers; descendants of the Hasmonean dynasty were fighting one another in a civil war, not long after the victory of the Maccabees. One brother and his troops were positioned within the Holy City of Jerusalem, and the other with the help of Roman legions were camped outside the city walls. Despite their conflict, they continued to cooperate on one project. Every day, coins were sent over the wall in a

basket by one brother and animals were purchased and hoisted over the wall by the other, so that the daily sacrificial offerings of the Temple would not be interrupted.

Using what the Talmud calls the language of “Greek wisdom”, an elderly man from inside the city suggested to the enemy on the outside that as long as the sacrificial rite continued unabated, the brother on the outside would never conquer Jerusalem. The next day, when the coins for the purchase of sacrifices arrived, instead of sending bullocks for the sacrifices, they hoisted a pig, and when the pig’s hoofs touched the ramparts of Jerusalem, the Holy City was convulsed with an earthquake. The story concludes, “The Sages then decreed, “Cursed be the individual who raises pigs, and cursed be the father who teaches his son Greek wisdom.”

After the Chanukah experience and its aftershocks, one would have thought that Greek wisdom – Greek philosophy, Greek literature and Greek art, if not Greek science and Greek mathematics – would have been banned as a result of this Talmudic decree. But this was not the case. The Talmud goes on (B.T. Bava Kamma 83a) to praise the Greek language and interprets “Greek wisdom” as a skill necessary for international political discourse.

In fact, a parallel account at the end of Babylonian Tractate Sotah defines “Greek wisdom” as a special language of nuance and riddle used by politicians especially for the purpose of espionage, which is how Maimonides understands the Talmudic decree. He adds that there is no contemporary application to the ban, since that particular language has completely disappeared from usage.

Even later responsa (see for example Rivash, Rav Yitzhak bar Sheshet, Responsum 45) agrees with Maimonides’ interpretation of “Greek wisdom” in the context of the ban. To be sure, he argues that philosophical tracts committed to the extirpation of Jewish theological principles are to be avoided, and even suggests that Maimonides and Gersonides may have been led astray by Greek philosophy; nevertheless, normative Judaism never codified a prohibition of studying Greek wisdom.

Apparently despite the danger, the Jewish ideal remains incorporating the “beauty of Yefet within the tents of Shem.” ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

The entire narrative of the story of Joseph and his brothers, as he sent off the Jewish people to Egyptian society, slavery and ultimate redemption, is meant to illustrate to us the



guiding hand of Providence in human affairs.

There is no question that all of the participants in this dramatic narrative acted according to their own wishes and wisdom. Yet the confluence of all of these conflicting personalities and ambitions leads to the desired end of the fulfillment of the prophecy and promise of God to Abraham about the future fate of the Jewish people.

This principle, that man proposes but God disposes is one of the basic beliefs of Judaism and is vindicated, for good or for better, throughout the history of the Jewish people and humankind generally. All of the twists and turns of daily and national life, the seemingly random and inexplicable events that assault us on a regular basis, somehow have a purpose and a goal. They help us arrive at the situation and circumstance that God's destiny has provided for us.

The difficulty in all of this is that very rarely is this pattern revealed or are we aware of it. The Lord told Moses that 'you will see my back, not my face.' We see things much more clearly in retrospect than in the ability to judge present events and somehow predict the future.

All of the dreams of Joseph will be fulfilled but no one could have imagined at the onset of the story how they could have been fulfilled and under what circumstances, of both tragedy and triumph, they would come to be the reality of the narrative of the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Of all of the brothers, Joseph seems to be the one that is most aware that he and they are merely instruments in God's plan. The rabbis teach us that Joseph was distinguished by the fact that the name of God never left his lips and that he always attributed events to divine providence and God's will.

That is why Joseph is seen as the main antagonist to Eisav, for Eisav always attributed events to random chance and to human action and power. We will see later that this was also the main contest between Pharaoh and Moshe. Pharaoh continually maintained that the troubles of the Egyptians were coincidence and that all of the blows that he sustained were due to circumstance and nature. Even when his wise men stated that the finger of God was pointing at him, he refused to admit that it was the divine presence that was driving Egypt to destruction.

We also live in a world where many see the events that surround us as being mere happenstance, random events engendered by human beings. However, Judaism knows better and teaches better and we are therefore confident that all of the processes ordained for us millennia ago will yet be completely fulfilled. There is a divine hand that guides the affairs of mankind. ©2022 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

It is commonly known that the reason that we call ourselves Yehudim (Jews) is because most of us come literally from the Kingdom of Yehudah (Judah), or more specifically the tribe of Judah. Yet there is a deeper reason that we have continued to use this term.

Soon after Joseph provides food for his brothers, he takes Simon hostage and demands that the brothers bring Benjamin to Egypt as a precondition for both Simon's release and for providing more food for Jacob's family (Genesis 42:24).

Jacob is understandably hesitant. Having already lost Joseph, his favorite, he fears losing Benjamin, his only remaining son from his beloved wife Rachel. It is here that Judah bravely rises to declare that he will act as an orev (guarantor), a surety for Benjamin. "If I don't return him," he says to his father Jacob, "I will bear the sin forever" (43:9).

Judah's pledge is unusual. Normally when a debtor guarantees collateral, it comes from a party other than the debtor. Here, Judah takes his obligation to a higher level. Judah himself is both the one who makes the commitment and also the guarantor. This indicates how seriously Judah takes this commitment.

It is for this reason that we are called Yehudim, after Yehudah (Judah). As Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik writes, "Why are the Reuveini, the Shimoni and Israelites of all tribes, called 'Yehudi'? And the answer is given: Because he, Yehudah, said: 'For your servant is a surety for the boy' [Genesis 44:32]. It is the principle of surety that constitutes the distinguishing feature of the Jew" ("Jew and Jew, Jew and Non-Jew").

So powerful is Rav Ahron's thought that a further exploration of the term orev is in order. Orev is a composite of eir (literally, stir, or awake, or, more broadly, alert) and rav (literally, great). It thus refers to someone who is stirred by others. Homiletically, orev speaks to a heightened sensitivity to the needs of others.

This etymology relates to the rabbis' teaching that Am Yisrael can be compared in certain ways to a human body – when one part – such as the tooth or toe – hurts, the whole body hurts (Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, 19:6).

In a word, areivut points to a relationship of empathy. There is a difference between sympathy and empathy. In sympathy, I feel for you, but you remain you, and I remain myself. In empathy, I become you. Your pain is my pain; your suffering is my suffering; your joy, your dance, your song, are my joy, my dance, my song.

The story of a two-headed man elucidates this point. Upon the death of his father, the man became embroiled in a bitter dispute with his brothers and sisters over the inheritance. "Since I have two heads,"

he claimed, "I deserve twice as much of the money as the rest of you." "Perhaps you have two heads," his siblings responded, "but you have just one body. Therefore, you deserve only one share." The case was brought before King Solomon, the wisest of the wise. His response was characteristically enlightening. "Pour boiling water over one of the man's two heads," said King Solomon. "If the second head screams in pain, then we will know he is one person. If not, then we have determined that the two-headed person is in fact two separate, independent individuals" (Otzar Hamidrashim, Midrashim al Shlomo Hamelech; Tosafot, Menachot 37a).

So, too, with the Jewish People, with all of humankind. If boiling water is poured over another head, we must cry out and empathize. Feeling the pain of another as if it's our own inspires decisive action. Such was the empathy and action of Judah, who declares his preparedness to be the orev for Benjamin, setting the tone for all his descendants, all Yehudim, to emulate. ©2022 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



#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Chanukah

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

Outside of Israel, Shavuot is a two-day *Yom Tov*, and both Pesach and Sukkot begin and end with two days of *Yom Tov* as well. In ancient times, the new month was proclaimed by the *Beit Din* in Jerusalem. Messages were then sent to the surrounding and outlying communities, telling them when the new month began. Because the more distant communities did not receive the message before the start of the holidays, those living outside Israel observed two days of *Yom Tov* due to the uncertainty of the correct date. Although today there is a set calendar, we still maintain this tradition of observing two days in the Diaspora.

Nevertheless, when it comes to Chanukah, everybody celebrates it for eight days, including those in the Diaspora. Some explain that we only add a day to biblical holidays but not to rabbinic ones (such as Chanukah). Others feel that the number eight has special significance vis-a-vis Chanukah. This is either because one of the evil decrees of the Greeks against the Jews banned circumcision, which takes place on the eighth day, or because Chanukah was designed to parallel Sukkot (which at the time of Chanukah's origin was eight days long even in the Diaspora).

We would like to suggest an additional approach. The *Beit Yosef* poses a famous question: Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? Since

the Jews found enough oil to last for one day, the miracle lasted for only seven days. One of the answers proposed is that had they celebrated seven days, then on the fourth day it would have been impossible to tell who was following Beit Hillel and who was following Beit Shammai. Beit Shammai says that on the first night we light eight candles, and on each succeeding night we decrease the number by one. On the final day of the holiday, only one candle is lit. In contrast, Beit Hillel maintains that on the first night we light one candle, and on each succeeding night we increase the number by one. Thus on the eighth day, eight candles are lit. (This is the current custom.) It follows, then, that if we celebrated only seven days of Chanukah, on the fourth day there would be no discernible difference between those following Beit Hillel and those following Beit Shammai (as both would light four candles). To avoid this problem, Chanukah is eight days and not seven. Similarly, if we were to add a day (as we do on other holidays) and celebrate nine days of Chanukah in the Diaspora, this problem would arise on the fifth night. For this reason we do not add a day in the Diaspora, but rather celebrate Chanukah for eight days everywhere. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

"And behold, seven other cows came up after them, ugly and gaunt, and they stood near the cows on the bank of the river." (Beraishis 41:3) Pharaoh's dreams were very specific, intended to convey a message, as Yosef explained. Being that this was so, each detail in them is important. In this case, the Torah tells us the seven thin cows that came from the Nile stood next to the seven fat cows.

The commentaries discuss this and offer numerous approaches, some even contradictory. The fact that they were standing together indicates that there would not be a break between the years of plenty and those of famine. Rather, it would be an overnight change, not a gradual one. This is indicated by them standing on the shore together.

Others say this is an indication that the years of plenty and famine would co-exist, as we find that there was a famine in all the lands but in Egypt there was food, while others say the famine was only in Egypt, but other lands further away did not suffer from a famine.

It is also possible to explain that the years of famine would not immediately consume all the remnants of the years of plenty, as indeed, we find that the grain Yosef prepared enabled them to survive for some time before the famine truly took hold.

From all these different explanations, it is possible to learn another fantastic lesson, that of relative truth and comparison. When the thin cows and fat cows stood together, the signs of both famine and

feast existed at the same time, and this allowed for so many differing viewpoints. Some had a negative connotation, and some a positive one.

Perhaps a key lesson for us is that when we see a situation, we must take into account other factors before rendering a judgment on whether it is good or bad. When we feel we are lacking something, we ought to look around and see what others have or don't have. That will help us to frame our determination – but it must be done properly.

The happy man of faith understands that whatever Hashem does is for the best, and IS the best. The recognition of this can be made easier by using comparisons, as the posuk teaches us that the two groups of cows stood together. So how do we compare? That depends what we're looking for.

If we're trying to judge our financial state, or the things we're lacking, that's when we look to the thin cows standing alongside the healthy, fat ones. We should focus on the people who have less than we do, and recognize our good fortune. Though there is a famine in other lands, in our own homes, we have more.

On the other hand, if we're looking at our spiritual state, we should look around and see those who are fuller than we with Torah and mitzvos. We should imagine them as strong and healthy and ourselves as weak and in need of fattening up. Then we will work towards that goal, and become stronger and healthier, harbingers of Hashem's bountiful blessings.

*R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky zt"l once visited Cracow. His suit had torn on the way and he sought out a tailor to fix it. He eventually found one, but the tailor said, "Forgive me, Kavod HaRav, but I have not yet lit the Chanukah candles. If you wish, you can wait until light, and after a half an hour, I'll sew your suit."*

*While R' Chaim Ozer waited, he noticed how this simple tailor prepared himself for the mitzvah. He removed his weekday clothing, and donned Shabbos clothing. He washed his hands and joyously prepared to light the candles. R' Chaim Ozer was astounded by the temimus of this man and said to himself, "Now I understand how the city Cracow produces such Gedolai Torah and giants of spirit - if this is what even the simple tailors are like!" ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

**RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

## Cross-Currents

**Y**osef, as an Egyptian viceroy, is so emotionally conflicted as he maltreats his brothers, who don't recognize him, he has to leave the room to cry (Beraishis, 42:24).

Why he felt he had to persist in his protracted ruse to get his brothers to bring him the youngest of them, Binyamin, his only full brother, why he needed to

threaten to imprison his young sibling, is fairly obvious.

To reach the goal of a true reconciliation with the brothers who plotted against, and then sold, him years earlier, Yosef had to ascertain if his brothers had truly repented of their past treatment of him. That would be evident if they now were prepared to protect a younger half-brother -- one from the same mother, Rachel, who bore him -- at whatever cost.

They passed the test, standing up to the viceroy and showing their readiness to do whatever might be necessary to return Binyamin to his father Yaakov.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah, 2:1) famously writes: "What is considered complete repentance? When a person confronts the same situation in which he sinned and has the potential to commit [the sin again] but nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it... not because of fear or a lack of strength."

In that halacha, the Rambam is codifying what Rav Yehudah says in Yoma, 86b. But neither the Gemara there nor the Rambam indicates the ultimate source in the Torah of that idea.

I suspect it is the account of Yosef and his repentant brothers. ©2022 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

**RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG**

## TorahWeb

**Y**osef called his second son Efrayim, "for Hashem has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering" (Bereishis 41:52). According to the simple understanding of the passuk, the root of the name Efrayim -- אפרים is פרי -- פרי, fruit. The Da'as Z'keinim gives a radically different explanation of the name, and says that Efrayim is named after his ancestors Avraham and Yitzchak who are referred to as, "ash -- אפר". Avraham said, "I am but dust and ash" (Bereishis 18:27), and Hashem sees Yitzchak before Him as if his ashes are on the altar (Rashi Vayikra 26:42), and Efrayim is the plural of eifer, meaning two sets of ashes. Therefore, all of Yisroel, all of whom are descended from Avraham and Yitzchak, are called Efrayim as it is said, "Efrayim, my favorite son" (Yirmiyahu 31:19).

How can this understanding of Efrayim as a plural form of eifer -- ashes, be reconciled with the Torah's explicit explanation of Efrayim's name as indicating that Yosef was fruitful, having been blessed with children, as in the mitzvah of "pru u'rvu -- be fruitful and multiply" (1:28)?

Perhaps the answer lies in how the mitzvah of pru u'rvu was redefined for Am Yisroel, beginning with Avraham Avinu. Hashem loved Avraham because he commands his children to keep the way of Hashem (18:19). This includes the paternal obligations of mila, pidyon haben, teaching the child Torah and a trade, and marrying him off so that the generations continue in

the way of Hashem (Kiddushin 29a). Furthermore, if his children are not observant, he may not have fulfilled *pru u'rvu* (Mishna Berura 574:12).

We can now reconcile the seemingly unrelated translations of Efrayim. The literal understanding, recorded in the Torah, is "Hashem has made me fruitful". However, in order to properly fulfill the mandate of being fruitful, *pru u'rvu*, the children must follow in the way of their ancestors. Therefore, the Da'as Z'keinim links Efrayim to *eifer* -- ashes, a reference to Abraham and Yitzchak. Only by Yosef's sons following in their ways, a particularly difficult challenge in the isolation of the land of his suffering, would his being fruitful constitute a blessing. Thus, the name Efrayim representing the successful transmission of a Torah life to future generations, is an appropriate appellation for all of Am Yisroel.

Yosef called his firstborn Menashe, "for Hashem has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house" (41:51). The K'sav V'hakabala asks: how could Yosef Hatzadik have forgotten his father's house? Wasn't the image of his father (Rashi 39:11) still uppermost in his mind? Why did Yosef not tell his beloved father that he was alive and well, appointed over all the land of Egypt (41:43)?

The answer is that Yosef did not forget his father for even one moment. Moreover, he bemoaned his father's pain over their separation much more than his own. However, his great righteousness prevented him from honoring his father. Hashem decreed in his prophetic dream that his father and brothers would bow down to him (Bereshis 37:7-10, see Rashi). Heavenly decree prevented him from informing his father. He had to overcome his great desire to gladden his father's broken heart, so that the Divine will be fulfilled in its time.

To do Hashem's bidding, he had to distance the thought of honoring his father from his mind. He therefore called his son Menashe, i.e. Hashem enabled me to not think every moment about my father. He was able to put it out of his mind, the equivalent of forgetting. He thanked Hashem, by calling his son Menashe, for this ability. Thus, the name implies great honor toward his father, not the reverse, because only by Hashem's intervention was he able to contain his great love and respect for his father in order to carry out Hashem's plan.

Yaakov blessed his grandsons Efrayim and Menashe, and added, "May my name be declared upon them and the names of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak" (48:16). The Seforno explains that Yaakov prayed that they be *tzaddikim* worthy of being called proper descendants of their illustrious ancestors. A more literal interpretation is based on the aforementioned comments of the Da'as Z'keinim and the K'sav V'hakabala. The names of Avraham and Yitzchak are called upon Efrayim which refers to their

ashes. And the name of Yaakov himself is alluded to in the name Menashe, which recalls the great love and respect that Yosef had for Yaakov.

The text of Yaakov's beracha is used by fathers to bless their children and grandchildren to this very day. We pray that they keep the way of Hashem and be worthy descendants of our forefathers. We often give them the actual names of our forefathers or names which refer to previous generations, as Yosef did.

We utilize the beracha given to Efrayim and Menashe in particular. Just as they were not influenced negatively by their surroundings in Egypt, we bless our progeny that they, too, will not be led astray by the prevailing culture of their time and place.

On Chanukah we celebrate our ability to resist the Hellenization which swept the world and, sadly, corrupted large segments of the Jewish nation; only the fierce dedication of the Chashmonaim saved them from acculturation and assimilation. Only by replicating the countercultural exclamation of "Mi lashem elai" can we overcome the powerful pull of the host culture which is in precipitous decline. May we, like Yosef, Efrayim, and Menashe, withstand the onslaught of the contemporary Greek-like immorality which surrounds us by clinging to the pure Torah values and precepts represented by the Chanukah menorah. ©2022 Rabbi M. Willig and TorahWeb.org



**RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## Re'uvein & Yehudah

**W**hen the brothers came to Egypt to purchase food during the first year of famine, Yosef recognized his brothers even though they did not recognize him. He devised a plan to cause them to bring Binyamin back with them when their food would run out in the second year of the famine. He took Shimon as a hostage and told the brothers that they could not return to Egypt unless they brought their brother, Binyamin, with them to prove that they were not spies. When the brothers reported this information to Ya'akov, they created a serious problem for Ya'akov. He would have to choose between protecting Binyamin and feeding his family.

"Their father, Ya'akov, said to them, 'I am the one who you bereaved! Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin? Upon me has it all fallen!' Then Re'uvein told his father, saying, 'You may slay my two sons if I fail to bring him back to you. Put him in my care and I will return him to you.' But he said, 'My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. Should disaster befall him on the journey which you shall take, then you will have brought down my hoariness in sorrow to the grave.'"

Later when the famine became too great and

all the food was depleted, Ya'akov told them to return to Egypt to purchase more food. "But Yehudah told him, saying, 'The man (Yosef) sternly warned us saying, "Do not see my face unless your brother is with you." Ya'akov was upset with the brothers for telling the man that they had a brother. "Then Yehudah said to Yisrael, his father, 'Send the lad with me, and let us arise and go, so we will live and not die, we as well as you as well as our children. I will personally guarantee him, of my own hand you can demand him. If I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned to you for all time.' And Yisrael, their father, said to them, 'If it must be so, do this.'" Ya'akov (Yisrael) then told the brothers what gifts they should take to this man.

Our Rabbis discuss the difference between Ya'akov's reaction to Re'uvein as compared to his reaction to Yehudah. Re'uvein's statement to his father seems rather strange, yet the Ramban views his offer differently. According to the Ramban, one should view Re'uvein's offer as one similar to Yehudah's, namely, that he would protect Binyamin with his life, just as he would protect his own sons. Re'uvein was willing to be punished if Binyamin was harmed, but did not really mean that he would kill his own sons. The Or HaChaim explains that Re'uvein's words were not uttered as a k'lalat chacham, the curse of a sage, for we learn in Gemara Makot (11a) "The curse of a sage, even if uttered conditionally, is fulfilled." The Bal HaTurim implies that one must be careful with his statements, as this was a k'lalat chacham, and Re'uvein would lose two of his "sons" (descendants), Dan and Aviram. The Or HaChaim also comments that Re'uvein had four sons but only offered two of his sons. Though this was not the same sacrifice that his father would have had to make should anything happen to Binyamin, Re'uvein was concerned with fulfilling the mitzvah of "be fruitful and multiply." Ya'akov had other sons, albeit not from his favorite wife, Rachel, but Re'uvein would have lost all his sons should he have offered all four. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that two of Re'uvein's sons were still too young to be held accountable for their own sins. Re'uvein offered these two sons to be killed by Hashem at His judgment, but not to be brought to Ya'akov for punishment. Ya'akov dismissed Re'uvein's offer, both because his offer was made before the families had completed the food that had been brought by the brothers upon their return to their families, and his offer was bizarre. Ya'akov would lose not only sons but grandsons; Re'uvein's offer would only increase Ya'akov's pain.

To understand Yehudah's promise, we must first understand the change which takes place in Ya'akov's name within our text. Ya'akov is known by two different names in the Torah: Ya'akov and Yisrael. We saw that when Ya'akov returned to his brother, Eisav, he fought with Eisav's angel who renamed him

Yisrael, "No longer will it be said that your name is Ya'akov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with man, and have overcome." Yet it is clear from our passage that Ya'akov is still called Ya'akov. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains, "Until then, since the loss of Yosef, he is always referred to as Ya'akov. For Ya'akov designates the depressed state of mind in which one feels oneself dependent, sinking, and 'limping behind' circumstances, unable to be master of them, and having to submit to being dragged along by them." Hirsch explains that this clouded Ya'akov's reactions to all that was happening to him and his family. He was reluctant to allow Binyamin to leave, for he feared that Hashem would not protect him. Ya'akov believed that something he had done had caused Hashem to abandon His protection. Once he realized that Binyamin would suffer just as much from a lack of food as he would from this perilous journey, his Faith in Hashem's protection was restored and he was referred to as Yisrael.

Yehudah's promise contained a double statement, "Send the lad with me, and let us arise and go, so we will live and not die." The Torah is very concise and could have been perfectly clear with either "we will live" or "we will not die." The Kli Yakar explains that whenever a double statement of this sort is found in the Torah, it indicates in this world and in the next world (after death). Yehudah ended by saying that if he did not return Binyamin, "then I will have sinned to you for all time." Yehudah meant that he would have sinned to his father in this life and he would die with that sin still attached to his sole in the next life.

This offer was precisely in line with the name Yisrael as opposed to the name Ya'akov. HaRav Hirsch explains that, "Only two things depress the righteous Jew, (a) guilt, having done wrong, and (b) being in doubt as to what to do, but not about what could happen." Once Ya'akov understood that there was no more that he could do to protect Binyamin, he returned to being Yisrael. "As soon as a Jew knows it is beyond his human powers to help himself further, he is told, 'what is difficult for you, 'roll over' to Hashem. Just what is most difficult but must be done, does he do with fresh, raised courage, for just there where it is beyond man's power to direct matters, 'Hashem's Direction' begins for him.

We understand our need to exert our efforts (hishtadlut) to solve all our problems and provide a livelihood for our families. But there is a limit to what we can personally accomplish. When we place our Faith in Hashem, we know that He will direct our actions to accomplish our goals. It is that comfort which our Faith provides. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

