

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he Torah is a deep book. We make a great mistake if we think it can be understood on one superficial level.

On the surface, the story is simple. Envious of him, Joseph's brothers initially planned to kill him. Eventually they sell into slavery. He is taken to Egypt. There, through a series of vicissitudes, he rises to become Prime Minister, second only, in rank and power, to Pharaoh.

It is now many years later. His brothers have come to Egypt to buy food. They come before Joseph, but he no longer looks like the man they knew many years before. Then, he was a seventeen year old called Joseph. Now he is thirty-nine, an Egyptian ruler called Tzofenat Paneach, dressed in official robes with a gold chain around his neck, who speaks Egyptian and uses an interpreter to communicate with these visitors from the land of Canaan. No wonder they did not recognise him, though he recognised them.

But that is only the surface meaning. Deep down the book of Bereishit is exploring the most profound source of conflict in history. Freud thought the great symbol of conflict was Laius and Oedipus, the tension between fathers and sons. Bereishit thinks otherwise. The root of human conflict is sibling rivalry: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and now Joseph and his brothers.

Joseph has the misfortune of being the youngest. He symbolises the Jewish condition. His brothers are older and stronger than he is. They resent his presence. They see him as a trouble maker. The fact that their father loves him only makes them angrier and more resentful. They want to kill him. In the end they get rid of him in a way that allows them to feel a little less guilty. They concoct a story that they tell their father, and they settle down to life again. They can relax. There is no Joseph to disturb their peace any more.

And now they are facing a stranger in a strange land and it simply does not occur to them that this man may be Joseph. As far as they are concerned, there is no Joseph. They don't recognise him now. They never did. They never recognised him as one of them, as their father's child, as their brother with an identity of his own and a right to be himself.

Joseph is the Jewish people throughout history.

"Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him."

Judaism was the world's first monotheism but not the last. Two others emerged claiming descent, literal or metaphorical, from Abraham, Christianity and Islam. It would be fair to call the relationship between the three Abrahamic monotheisms, one of sibling rivalry. Far from being of mere antiquarian interest, the theme of Bereishit has been the leitmotiv of the better part of the last two thousand years, with the Jewish people cast in the role of Joseph.

There were times-early medieval Spain was one-when Joseph and his brothers lived together in relative harmony, convivencia as they called it. But there were also times-the blood libels, the accusations of poisoning wells or spreading the plague-when they sought to kill him. And others- the expulsions that took place throughout Europe between the English in 1290 and the Spanish in 1492 -- when they simply wanted to get rid of him. Let him go and be a slave somewhere else, far from here.

Then came the Holocaust. Then came the State of Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey since the days of Abraham, the homeland of the Jewish people since the days of Joshua. No nation on earth, with the possible exception of the Chinese, has had such a long association with a land.

The day the State was born, 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion, its prime minister, sought peace with its neighbours, and Israel has not ceased seeking peace from then until now. But this is no ordinary conflict. Israel's opponents-Hamas in Gaza, Hizbollah in Lebanon, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, are not engaged in a border dispute, these boundaries or those. They deny, as a matter of non negotiable religious-not just political-principle, Israel's right to exist within any boundaries whatsoever. There are today 56 Islamic states. But for Israel's neighbours a single Jewish state the size of Wales, is one too many.

Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.

There is no State among the 192 member nations of the United Nations whose very existence is called into question this way. And while



we as Jews argue among ourselves as to this policy or that, as if this were remotely relevant to the issue of peace, we fail to focus on the real issue, which is, so long as Joseph's brothers do not recognise his right to be, there can be no peace, merely a series of staging posts on the way to a war that will not end until there is no Jewish state at all.

Until the sibling rivalry is over, until the Jewish people wins the right to be, until people-including we ourselves-realise that the threat Israel faces is ultimate and total, until Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah agree that Jews have a right to their land within any boundaries whatsoever, all other debate is mere distraction. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust [rabbisacks.org](http://rabbisacks.org)

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Torah Lights

“**A**nd Pharaoh said to Joseph, I had a dream last night, and no one is able to interpret it...” [Genesis 41:15] There is an unusual symmetry in the portion of Miketz as well as in Vayeshev, both of which deal almost exclusively with the rise and fall – Vayeshev – and fall and rise – Miketz – of Joseph.

Vayeshev begins with an introduction to Joseph. Not only is he talented, brilliant and handsome, but he is the beloved son of the beloved wife, Rachel. As the apple of his father's eye, physically as well as spiritually, he can do no wrong. Little wonder that his father adores him and adorns him with the much-prized cloak of many colors.

Yet, by the end of the portion, Joseph is in prison. It is the final degradation in a series of degradations that began shortly after earning the hatred of his brothers for his loose tongue and provocative dreams as a result of which he was cast into a pit and sold into slavery in Egypt.

Miketz finds Joseph still in prison, but almost immediately we witness his miraculous rise and emergence as a world leader. The former seventeen-year-old dreamer becomes Grand Vizier (second only to the Pharaoh) and Secretary of Treasury, Labor and Agriculture all rolled into one. Pharaoh may be the symbolic head of Egypt, the god of the Egyptian 'pantheon', but because of his total trust in Joseph, the son of Jacob now effectively rules the land, a prime minister without the possibility of anyone casting a no-confidence vote against him.

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein ingeniously suggests the method behind the symmetry. The favored and beloved Joseph is doomed to begin his downward descent because, although he dreams grand dreams, he is totally self-absorbed; his sole interest lies in communicating his dreams of self-aggrandizement to others. By the beginning of Miketz, Joseph is listening to the dreams of

others and using them to help the others. Once one begins listening to other people's dreams one is ready to ascend upwards and achieve true leadership.

I would develop this idea further by suggesting that the real key to Joseph's interpretation lies in his newfound ability to carefully listen. Remember that the prophet Elijah receives a vision from the Almighty at the end of his life teaching him that the Divine Presence is to be found in a small silent voice, Kol demama daka. How can a voice be silent? The adviser's voice must be silent in order to listen very carefully to the words of the supplicant. Proper advice which has God's own stamp of approval can only emerge from careful listening to and empathizing with the individual who speaks out of desperation and travail. Only when one understands what the questioner really wants, can one offer him/her proper advice. Prophecy is based in no small measure upon one's ability to listen.

When the wine steward revealed his dream – and dreams are always a key to the hidden and often subconscious thoughts and aspirations of the dreamer – of 'squeezing grapes into Pharaoh's cup, and then placing the cup in Pharaoh's hand' [Gen. 40:11], it became clear to Joseph that the wine steward only wanted to continue to serve his master, that he had no trace of a guilty conscience, and so he would be found innocent and returned to service.

The chief baker's dream, on the other hand, is very different. He dreams of birds snatching the loaves of bread from the basket on his head. The birds, or nature, are 'out to get him' – and usually people who suffer from paranoia have reason to feel guilty. Joseph listened well and surmised that the chief baker was indeed guilty and so would be hanged within three days.

Similar was the case of Pharaoh's dream. Joseph understood that Pharaoh's chief concern was the economic well-being of Egypt, and this subject had to be the point of a dream which repeated itself so often to the man most responsible for Egypt's well being. And if Pharaoh was frightened of economic disaster – by the way, a cyclical occurrence in Egypt which Joseph was certainly aware of – the best way for Joseph to overcome that concern was to present a plan of prevention:

'Now therefore let Pharaoh seek out a man understanding and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. And let them store up all the food of those good years that come, and pile up corn under the hand of Pharaoh...that the land shall not be cut off through the famine.' And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh....' [Gen. 41:33–37]

The Joseph of Miketz did not shout his dreams to others whom he saw as his servants; he rather listened carefully to the dreams of others, and was ready to be of service to them wherever possible. Only this changed Joseph could be expected to rise and remain on top.

The content of Joseph's earlier dreams is also

an important piece in understanding his downward turn. Joseph's dream is predicated to a certain degree upon his father Jacob's dream, the dream of '...a ladder standing on the ground, its top reached up toward heaven...God's angels were going up and down on it...'. Joseph, too, dreams of the two elements in his father's dream, the earth and the heavens. His first dream is of the earth – stalks of wheat – and his second dream is of the heavens – sun, moon and stars.

But there are two major differences between the dreams of father and son. Jacob's dream is one: he yearns to connect heaven and earth. Joseph has two separate dreams. In Jacob's dreams, God and the angels are at its center; in Joseph's dream he himself is at the center, with the eleven stalks of wheat and eleven stars, sun and moon bowing down to him. God is absent from Joseph's subconscious; he, Joseph, wishes dominion on earth and even in the heavenly cosmos.

But as the Joseph stories develop, a much chastened Joseph, as well as his repentant brothers, learn invaluable lessons. The brothers learn that they should have tried to teach – not tear away – their errant and supercilious brother. Joseph learns that his abilities of economic and administrative leadership must serve the higher power of God and Torah. Joseph's dreams are realized in Egypt – when his family must bow to him as Grand Vizier of Egypt.

But in the greater dream of Israel, the vision of the Covenant between the Pieces and the ultimate goal of world peace and redemption, Joseph will serve Judah, the guardian of tradition and Torah. Jacob only gives Joseph the 'blessing' of a double portion; the 'birthright' of spiritual leadership and direction is granted to Judah [Gen. 49:8–10]. When Joseph truly understands his proper position, he is able to rise above his fall into the pit and take his place as the heir to the blessing. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he dreamer is about to be saved by dreams, albeit not the ones that he dreamt but rather those dreamt by an unlikely stranger – the Pharaoh of Egypt himself. But dreams are dreams and often times they do not coincide with human reality. What makes Yosef so extraordinary in the eyes of Pharaoh was his ability to, so to speak, dream along with Pharaoh, interpret his dreams and translate them into practical life-saving action.

The Torah here teaches us an important lesson about life and events. Everyone has dreams and again, so to speak, they are relatively easy to come by. Nevertheless, it is what follows the dream that counts

most. The rabbis and the Talmud taught us that all dreams are judged and realized according to their interpretation. By this statement, they meant to teach us that what is actually done or accomplished with the dream becomes the lasting value of the dream itself. There are many dreams that remain just that – dreams, unfulfilled reveries, good ideas and rosy predictions that somehow never come to action or fruition.

Yosef worked his entire life to make his dreams become real and true. He spared no effort to force his brothers to recognize him as their leader and to validate the dreams that he reported to them in his youth. And it was his administrative skill and foresight that made his interpretation of the dreams of the Pharaoh accurate, meaningful and providential. It is only the behavior and actions of humans after the dream that give the dream a challenging and meaningful purpose.

The Jewish people have long dreamt and prayed for their return to the Land of Israel and for the ingathering of the exiles to their homeland. Over the past century, in unlikely fits and starts, this dream has taken on reality and substance. And, it did so, certainly, with the help and guidance of Heaven but just as importantly with the actions, achievements and sacrifices of real people and the Jewish world everywhere. This great dream lay dormant for many centuries because no one acted upon it ...more of a fantasy than a possible reality. But somehow the Jewish people awoke from the slumber of the exile and over the past century has succeeded in bringing this dream to physical reality. It is difficult to assess why it was only in the recent past, historically speaking, that the practicality of the dream began to be emphasized and exploited.

There were many great people and great Jewish communities that existed before our time who perhaps would have been deemed more worthy to give flesh and bones to the great dream of Israel. Why did they not do so and why did Jews over the last century and a half devote themselves to the realization of this dream? That will remain one of the many mysteries of God that surround us on a regular basis. But one thing is clear, that the fate of dreams, national and personal, depends upon our practical, human interpretation and implementation of those dreams. © 2023 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**

**J**acob hesitates to allow Benjamin, his youngest child, to return with his brothers to Egypt. Reuben, the eldest of the brothers, guarantees he'll bring Benjamin home,



proclaiming, "Let two of my sons be killed if I fail to bring him back to you" (Genesis 42:37). Jacob rejects Reuben's offer.

In the end, Judah steps forward and declares, "If I do not bring [Benjamin] back to you... I will have sinned to you forever" (43:9). These words are accepted by Jacob. But one wonders why Jacob embraces the argument of Judah and not that of Reuben.

Nachmanides notes that Reuben impetuously makes his comment while there is still food left from their trip to Egypt. Judah waits until all the food is gone to make his plea. Nachmanides concludes that only after the food was gone would Jacob be ready (Nachmanides, Genesis 42:37). This teaches the importance of timing. What we say and what we do may be rejected at one moment but embraced at the next.

Another possibility is that the greatest consequence of doing wrong is to be constantly wracked by the sin itself. Jacob rejects Reuben's argument because Reuben offers a discrete punishment should he fail. Judah, on the other hand, expresses that his punishment will be ever-present guilt in having sinned. In the words of Benamozegh, quoted by Nehama Leibowitz, "Sin itself is its own punishment."

A final thought comes to mind. Reuben's answer displays the assurance of one absolutely certain of success – so certain he offers the precious lives of two of his sons for punishment. Judah, on the other hand, recognizes the precariousness of the mission. He understands that he may not succeed. Hence, he argues, "If I fail, I will forever have sinned to you." Jacob accepts Judah's argument and not Reuben's, for, often, the greatest success goes to one who understands the danger of the situation and realizes the very real possibility of not succeeding.

Notwithstanding his uncertainty, Judah has the courage to act. The real test of commitment is becoming involved even when the outcome is unknown. This impresses Jacob.

May we all be so courageous to act, even when we are uncertain of the result. And like Jacob, may we trust – with the help of God – that all will work out. ©2023 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 behold, seven ears, thin and wind-blasted, sprouted after them." (Beraishis 41:6) Pharaoh's dreams, which are the focal point of the beginning of the parsha, were quite full of imagery. His impressions were just as much a part of the dreams as the details themselves. Here we find that after the seven good ears of corn grew on a single stalk, indicating years of peace and prosperity, with goodwill amongst

people, seven withered ears of corn sprouted, though not on a single stalk.

The description of the ears as being blasted by the East wind seems odd, for the posuk tells us they grew this way. There was no wind to speak of, nor did any time elapse for the wind to harm otherwise good corn. Instead, it was as if it instantly sprouted this way, having already suffered the harm.

The Ramban and Tur address this and says that Pharaoh did not actually see the ears growing. Rather, they suddenly appeared, as if they sprouted from nowhere, indicating the speed with which the dreams would come to fruition. Therefore, though we do not hear of any wind or disease affecting ears that grew normally, we can understand that his impression of them were as though they had been through that.

With this description of Pharaoh's impression, we can learn something about our perceptions. Sometimes we can see a situation as it is and imagine that it is completely new. We don't consider that perhaps it was something that started some time in the past, and has proceeded through various stages to get to where it is now. Instead, we are completely surprised and caught off guard.

However, it wasn't true that this sprung up suddenly. Rather, we were not aware of it before, or else we did not take notice of it. The warning signs or the damage could have been there the whole time but because it didn't enter our field of vision, we are stymied by how it happened so quickly.

A lesson, perhaps, is that we ought to take time to look around and notice things. Maybe we have to work on noticing people, events, nuances, and almost imperceptible changes in the world around us that will one day have large consequences. Looking back at the results, we can see the damage that had been ongoing, but then it may be too late to do anything about it.

Yes, Pharaoh was self-centered and focused on the world in terms of how it affected him or served his needs. We ought to learn from his mistakes and think of the world in terms of how we affect it and serve the needs of others. In this way, we can be fruitful and good, promoting peace and prosperity on earth and beyond.

*A man called R' Avigdor Miller z"l in a desperate situation. His daughter had left Judaism and become a Moonie. She was coming in for a short visit and he wanted to save her so she wouldn't go back. He insisted that R' Miller talk to her.*

*Said R' Miller, "I was willing, but he spoke to me in such a disrespectful tone. He called me up with such a curt voice and was insistent I should speak to her. He wanted me to drop everything to do him a favor and speak to his daughter. And he was disrespectful!"*

*I didn't say it, but I wanted to tell him: 'Mister, you know, it's your fault! If that's your attitude towards rabbis, is it any wonder that your children run away from your faith -- or your lack of faith?' There are plenty of people*

to knock in this world; the evolutionists, the immoral people breaking down all the traditions of society in America, but don't knock the good ones, and above all, don't knock Hashem." © 2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr



## 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 DAVID LEVIN

# The Brothers & Ya'akov

At the beginning of this week's parasha, Yosef was taken from prison and brought before Par'oh to interpret Par'oh's dreams. Because of his ability to interpret the dreams as well as his skill at finding a solution to the upcoming famine, Yosef was placed as second-in-command in Egypt. This set the stage for both his acquiring power and being in position for his brothers when they would come to Egypt for food during the famine. When the famine began in earnest, ten of his brothers came to Egypt where Yosef recognized them, though they did not recognize him. Yosef questioned them as a stranger, ordered them to return with Binyamin to prove they were not spies, and secretly placed their money back onto their camels. All these actions were to frighten the brothers and place them in a confused mindset as to how to explain these events to their father.

The Torah states, "They (the brothers) came to Jacob, their father, to the land of Canaan, and they told him of all that had happened to them, saying, 'The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly with us and considered us as if we were spying out the land. But we said to him, "We are truthful men! We have never been spies! We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is gone and the youngest is with our father today in the land of Canaan.'" Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, "By this I will know whether you are truthful people: One of your brothers, leave with me; and what is needed for the hunger of your households, take and go. And bring your youngest brother to me so that I will know that you are not spies, that you are truthful, I will give your brother to you and you will be free to circulate about the land.' So, it happened: They were emptying their sacks and behold! – every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and they saw their bundles of money, they and their father were terrified. Their father, Ya'akov, said to them, 'You have bereaved me! Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin? Upon me has it all fallen!'"

Several commentators remark about the changes in the conversation with Yosef and what the brothers experienced that the brothers presented to their father. Some of the changes are subtle, some are by omission, and some are more obvious. One such subtle change occurred in the repetition of the first answer that the brothers gave to Yosef when he accused them of being spies. Their actual statement was, "we are all the sons of one man." The *Kli Yakar* explains that the brothers were saying that they were all fearful of the evil eye, namely, they were concerned with appearances



and that their actions would cause them harm. When they answered that the youngest brother remained at home with his father, and another brother was not among them, they understood that their actions appeared to resemble that of spies, but they entered the city through ten different gates to search for that brother, not to spy out the land. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the brothers told Yosef that they were from the same father so that he would understand that they were not sent by a king but by their own father, and they offered no threat as one family would not try to attack an entire land. In retelling the conversation to Ya'akov, the brothers changed the "one man" to "our father," a subtle mark of respect which they had not said directly to Yosef for fear that he would insist that they bring their father to him.

The brothers also changed the words of Yosef, namely, "you will be free to circulate the land," which occurs nowhere in Yosef's statements to them. His words instead were, "And bring your younger brother to me so your words will be verified and you will not die." The Ramban explains that the brothers were reluctant to tell Ya'akov the real words that were uttered because they wished to return promptly with Binyamin. The word in the sentence, "tischaru," which is translated as "circulate about" can also mean "do business, trade." The brothers changed the wording to appear peaceful. "Similarly, for the sake of peace, they told him Yosef's words, 'Leave one of your brothers with me (Shimon),' and they did not tell their father of their imprisonment or of Shimon's imprisonment." Had they mentioned either of these events, their father might have mounted an attack on Egypt or he might have tried to bribe the leader of Egypt to free Shimon. But at the least, he would never have allowed them to bring Binyamin with them.

More seriously, the brothers did not mention at all that they had been thrown in prison for three days when Yosef decreed that only one brother would return to Ya'akov while the others remained in prison. They did, however, need to tell their father that Shimon remained in captivity until they would return with Binyamin. They understood that they would need to convince Ya'akov that Binyamin would be safe, for they fully expected their father's reluctance to part with Binyamin. As Yehudah says in next week's parasha, "his soul is so bound up with his soul." The brothers were afraid that even if Binyamin were totally safe, the separation of the two might cause irreparable damage to both.

Ya'akov did not like the idea that the brothers insisted that they would have to bring Binyamin back with them. "Their father, Ya'akov, said to them, 'You have bereaved me! Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin? Upon me has it all fallen!'" HaEmek Davar tells us that the word "aleihem, to them" is missing the letter yud. He learns from this missing letter that Ya'akov could not talk directly to them because he now suspected them of killing Yosef and Shimon. Thus, his words, "you have bereaved me,"

indicates that Ya'akov believed that they had harmed Yosef and Shimon. From this we are to understand that Ya'akov still did not know what actually happened to Yosef. What is not clear is why he suspected the brothers now of harming Shimon other than the fact that Shimon was not with them. This, however, added to his reluctance to send Binyamin with them.

The entire section in the Torah from the beginning of Parashat Vayeishev through next week's Parashat Vayigash, is an extremely difficult time for the Jewish People. The twelve tribes went through what appears to have been a time of jealousy, dysfunction, and deception. The repercussions of the sale of Yosef are enormous; the sin has been part of the numerous punishments that Jews have suffered around the world. The reconciliation of the brothers was not complete until the time of Har Sinai, several generations later. Our personal relations can also suffer long-term problems. We must learn to communicate, not just with our voices but with our ears. All of us have concerns, doubts, and fears, but we must also have love, trust, and hope to survive and conquer those fears. When we place our faith and trust in Hashem, it is easier to place our faith and trust in our relationships. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Jewish Geography

Yosef recognized his brothers, but his brothers didn't recognize him (Bereishis 42:8). Why they didn't recognize him is discussed (see Rashi), but what about the Egyptians? If we follow the storyline, it would seem that the Egyptians should have realized that the brothers were relatives of their Viceroy. After all, it was known that Yosef was an עברי – as evidenced by Pharaoh's officer identifying him as such (41:12) – and the Egyptians didn't eat with the brothers (43:32) because they were עברים. Yet, the Egyptians seem surprised to learn that these עברים were Yosef's brothers (45:16). Why didn't they realize that the עברים Yosef was paying special attention to were his relatives?

[Yosef was described as "נער עברי, עבד לשר" – the servant of the שר – meaning that Yosef himself was an עברי, not that he was the servant of an עברי who became the servant of the שר. Potifar's wife referred to him (39:14) as an "איש עברי" – which may be why Chazal understood the butler calling him a "נער עברי" to be an attempt to minimize Yosef's stature (see Rashi on 41:12). The bottom line is that it was known that Yosef was an עברי.]

Radak says Pharaoh and his servants were pleased to find out who Yosef's brothers were (45:16) "because they saw that [Yosef] came from a well-respected family, as Avraham's family was well known." Similarly, when Yosef told his prison-mates (40:15) that he was kidnapped from "the land of the עברים," Radak explains that "the family of the עברים, i.e. the Patriarchs,

who lived in the land of Canaan, was well known, so the land was ascribed to them." Even though Yosef could have been saying he was kidnapped from that land even if he wasn't part of the family, since he was identified as an עברי by Potifar's wife (39:14/17) and by Pharaoh's bartender (41:12), they had to have known that he was part of this well-known family. Why didn't the Egyptians put two and two together?

Several reasons are given to explain why the Egyptians would not eat with עברים. Unkeles says it was because עברים ate the animals that the Egyptians worshipped. Ibn Ezra (46:34) says the Egyptians didn't eat meat (or drink milk); since עברים ate meat (see 43:16), they were despised. Rashbam and Chizkuni say the Egyptians were haughty, and looked down upon all foreigners. Some modern scholars attribute it to Egyptian hygiene; the Egyptians wore linen clothing, which could be kept clean, while עברים wore wool and leather, which had an odor. [This would explain why Yosef gave his brothers a change of clothing (45:22), as well as why shepherds were despised by Egyptians (46:34), as dealing with animals includes being able to tolerate their odors.] Without getting into the pros and cons of each of these approaches, one common denominator is that the Egyptian distaste wouldn't be limited to just עברים; it would apply to anyone who shared these characteristics. It is therefore possible that the Egyptians didn't know that the brothers were עברים, only that they did things that were abhorrent to them. Nevertheless, the Torah implies that it was because they were עברים, not because they did things that were distasteful to Egyptians – things that others also did.

Yosef said (40:15) he was kidnapped from "ארץ העברים," the only time in Tanach this term is used. We can understand why Yosef didn't refer to it as the Land of Canaan – he was telling his prison-mates that he wasn't really a slave; since the descendants of Canaan were designated as slaves by Noach (9:25-27, see Radak on 10:19), saying he was from Canaan could undermine the point he was trying to make. But he still needed to use terminology that they would understand. Even though his father, grandfather and great-grandfather were well known (and had amassed a great amount of wealth – see 13:2, 26:14 and 30:43 – which included having a large staff), referring to it as "their" land is a bit awkward, since they were just one family. But was it really just one family?

Bereishis Rabba (42:8) quotes three opinions as to why Avraham was called an "עברי." Rabbi Yehuda says it was because the whole world was on one side ("עבר") and he was on the other side (referring to his being monotheistic and confronting those who weren't); Rabbi Nechemya says it was because he was a descendant of עבר (who was monotheistic); and the Rabbanan say it was because he came from the other side ("עבר") of the river (the Euphrates) and spoke לשון עברי. Hak'sav V'hakabala (Bereishis 14:13) says all three

agree that the main reason he was called an עברי was because of his monotheism, not because of his family or place of origin. After all, Eiver did have other descendants (and Avraham was more well-known than Eiver), and many others lived east of the Euphrates. The other "opinions" are only adding that the term "עברי" applies for other reasons too.

When Avraham and Sarah moved from Charan to Canaan, they brought "the souls they had made in Charan," i.e. those they had converted to monotheism (see Rashi on 12:5) with them. Shem and Eiver (who were also monotheists, but did not confront those who weren't) had academies (and judicial courts) in Canaan, as I discussed a couple of weeks ago (<https://dmkjewishgeography.wordpress.com/2023/11/19/vayaytzay-5784/>). Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov had their own Yeshivos there as well (Yoma 28b). There was clearly a decent-sized monotheistic movement underway in Canaan, with Avraham being the founder of this movement. And since he was called an "עברי" because of his monotheism, those who followed his lead were referred to as "עברים." Having a well-known community of עברים in Canaan made it possible for Yosef to refer to his home, from where he was kidnapped, as "ארץ העברים."

We don't know what happened to this monotheistic community after Yaakov and his sons moved to Egypt. It may have fallen apart, or it may have remained intact enough to become integrated into כלל ישראל forty years after the Exodus. It is clear that the term "עברי" would eventually refer only to those who were part of כלל ישראל (see Ibn Ezra on Shemos 21:2). But it seems likely enough that, when the brothers went down to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, there was a large enough community of "עברים" in Canaan that the 11 עברים who had to eat separately from the Egyptians were not assumed to be related to the עברי who was the Viceroy of Egypt. ©2023 Rabbi D. Kramer



**RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

## Cross-Currents

**M**any years ago, a wise rebbe of mine, addressing instances of financial finagling by some members of the tribe, explained that the forefathers of us Jews whom we revere are Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and we are to strive to emulate their rectitude and integrity. But, he continued, our bloodline also includes the cheater Lavan. And sometimes, regrettably, his genes, so to speak, can express themselves in some Jews' inclinations, and even behavior.

At the end of the parsha, Yosef, still "undercover" as the Egyptian viceroy, plants a royal goblet in Binyamin's knapsack. When the chalice, which Yosef indicates was used for telling the future, is "found"

there, he says to his brothers, "Don't you know that a person like me practices divination?"

Divination, or kishuf, is forbidden by the Torah. Yosef received his ability to interpret dreams directly from Heaven, not through any magical means. And that is clearly why he avoids lying outright, not claiming that he himself uses the goblet for divination purposes but, rather, that it is so used by "a person like me" -- referring to Par'oh, not himself.

The halachos of what constitutes kishuf are complex. There are occasions when an omen may be taken seriously but, generally speaking, acting on the "revelation" of an omen, or relying on seemingly magical means to make one's plans, constitutes a forbidden act.

There are, unfortunately, practices that have found footholds in some otherwise observant Jewish circles that seem clearly to be straddling, if not crossing, the line between legitimate "omen recognizing" and outright, forbidden occultism. I won't venture into citing particular practices. As the same wise rebbe quoted above would say about controversial things, "Go ask your local Orthodox rabbi." But when faced with the option of utilizing a seemingly questionable segulah, one needs to weigh the possibility that doing so may be an *issur d'Oraysa*, a Torah prohibition.

Back in parshas Vayeitzei, we find Lavan telling Yaakov, that "I have learned by divination that Hashem has blessed me on your account" (Beraishis 30:27).

Once again, Lavan is in our ancestry. But we have free will, and are charged to do our best to squelch whatever inclinations we may have that are born of that ancestor's influence. © 2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

### **RABBI YAACOV HABER**

## **Light in the Dark**

I was thinking recently about Chanuka, and a new idea occurred to me. Chanuka, the Festival of Lights, occurs at the darkest time of the year -- the time when you would least expect it. And this is an important characteristic of Judaism: that light, and holiness, occur where one would least expect them.

Remember the origin of Chanuka: the Greeks were conquering the world, with their ideas as well as their armies, and were bringing a modern, practical, "enlightened" philosophy to the world; and resistance to this came where one would have least expected it: a small group of people, without military power, without weapons, went into the streets against the Greek rule, and were victorious!

I am reminded of a story of a man I had the honor of meeting in Jerusalem, Reb Yehuda Holtzman. He was not a Rabbi, not a Dayan, just a humble Jew in Mea Shearim, known as "Yehuda the Blecher", since he made blechs (Shabbos plates). I was friendly with an American who was in the habit of spending Shabbos with him. How he met him, or got into this habit, I never found out. He told

me that Reb Yehuda had the custom of making Kiddush on challa every Friday evening. (Making Kiddush on challa is permitted if you have no wine, but it is unusual.) At first he thought that Reb Yehuda might be allergic to wine, but no, on Saturday morning Reb Yehuda would drink wine at Kiddush. He did not ask him about this, until one Friday evening, after some years of this, he saw Reb Yehuda's wife bringing him a bottle of wine, which he then used for Kiddush.

My friend could not contain his curiosity any longer, and asked him the reason for this. He answered: "I'll tell you. There's no deep cabalistic reason. It's very simple." And he told him the following story.

Twenty-five years earlier, during the British Mandate, a friend of Reb Yehuda had a serious illness, for which the only known cure would cost five thousand pounds sterling, a fortune in those days. He had absolutely no idea how he would raise the money, and came to Reb Yehuda for advice. Reb Yehuda said to him: "Go ahead and borrow the money, and I'll repay it for you." For he had calculated that if he did without wine at Kiddush on Friday evening for twenty-five years, he would be able, with the money saved, to repay the whole debt. And that is what happened. And on that very Shabbos, the twenty-five years were up, and he could go back to having wine for Kiddush.

Holiness, as I said, is found in the most unexpected places. I am involved in fund-raising myself, and I know that the real money comes, not from the big names you find in Fortune magazine, but from quiet, humble people, who have an abiding sense of commitment.

There is a custom, among some people, of turning off the lights when they light the menorah at Chanuka. This emphasizes the idea of light coming forth from darkness, and holiness appearing where it is least expected.

I wish you all a lot of joy this Chanuka. © 1986 Rabbi Y. Haber



... "Anybody got a match?"

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