

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd it was after two years” (Beraishis 41:1). After two years of what? Yosef was in prison for 12 years (he was 17 when he was sold, worked for Potifar for one year before being imprisoned, and was 30 when he was called to Paro). So it can't mean after two years in prison. The context of the verses tell us that it was two years since he had asked Paro's butler to mention his plight directly to the king so that he could regain his freedom. This is confirmed by numerous midrashim, which add that these two additional years in prison were Yosef's punishment for relying on the butler to help him get out, rather than relying on G-d (see Rashi on 40:23). Originally, Yosef was supposed to be there for 10 years, one year for each brother he spoke poorly about to their father (see Shemos Rabbah 7:1), but because of this misdirection of trust, his sentence was lengthened to 12 years.

As Yosef surely trusted and relied on G-d, his error is usually explained as being a shortfall of what is expected of one as righteous as he was; he should have trusted G-d completely, and not have relied on the butler's help at all (see Rabbeinu Bachya on 40:14). Because I can't begin to comprehend the level Yosef was on, it is difficult to even attempt to comprehend what the shortfall was exactly. Nevertheless, if we are not supposed to rely on miracles, it is certainly understandable why Yosef would try to utilize the opportunity presented by the chief butler's soon-to-be-reinstated access to Paro. What should Yosef have thought? “Most people should make the “hishtadlus” (effort) to get out, even though it is all ultimately in G-d's hands. I, however, am not just anybody. I am Yosef Hatzadik! I am too great to resort to anything but G-d himself doing it all for me!” Can we imagine Yosef thinking that way? How could he *not* have taken advantage of the opportunity G-d surely provided him?

The difficulty becomes greater when we consider the wording of some of the midrashim. As the Be'er Basadeh (40:23) points out, the Tanchuma (Vayaishev 9) says that two years were added because Yosef “tossed away his trust in G-d and trusted in the chief butler.” This seems to imply more than just putting in the effort rather than sitting back and letting G-d do it all.

The Midrash Hagadol (41:1) quotes Rav Yanai as saying, “since he interpreted the dreams of the chief butler and chief baker and asked the chief butler to remember him, two years were added.” If the problem lay only in asking the chief butler to remember him, why mention interpreting the dreams, as if part of his mistake was doing so? Should Yosef not even have offered to interpret their dreams, but let them remain depressed?

When Yosef was asked to interpret Paro's dreams, he didn't stop at the interpretation alone. He continued by giving Paro advice as to how he should deal with the events the dreams foretold. There is much discussion about how Yosef had the audacity to go beyond what the king asked of him. Here he is, an imprisoned slave, telling the king of Egypt how to run his country! And although it might seem more obvious knowing the story, it doesn't seem to be groundbreaking advice either. There will be too much food for 7 years, and not enough food for 7 years, so save some of the food from the years when there is extra for the years when there will be a shortage. And for giving this “brilliant” advice, Yosef is made Viceroy! He should have been punished for speaking of things he wasn't asked to address, and for presuming that Paro wouldn't have otherwise figured out what to do.

However, Yosef never said he could interpret dreams. He didn't even say that G-d could and he would tell Paro what G-d's interpretation was. Rather, all Yosef said was “G-d will answer regarding Paro's well-being” (41:16). If a king has a dream that means more than just the mind playing out his thoughts and desires, it must be a heavenly message. Yosef offered to share what this heavenly message was. G-d was telling him what was about to happen in Egypt so that he could prepare for it. Yosef wasn't giving advice as to how to proceed, but telling him the purpose of the dream. Yosef was completing his stated objective of giving over the complete message. You are the king, and G-d is telling you what is going to happen because you will now be able to prepare for it. The “advice” may have been obvious, but it wasn't really advice at all, it was part of the message.

Paro realized this, and more. If G-d just wanted him to get this message, He could have made the dream easier to interpret. By choosing Yosef as the vehicle for its interpretation, He was telling Paro that this is the person who should oversee the grain

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distribution. "And Paro said to Yosef, "being that G-d has informed you of all of this, there is no one as smart and wise as you" (41:39). It wasn't the quality of the "advice" that convinced Paro and his servants that Yosef was the man for the job, but that G-d had chosen *him* to deliver the message.

This is all well and good as far as Paro's dreams. He was the king, and warning him about what was about to happen affected the whole country. But what about his officers? Why would G-d inform them of their fate? Did the baker need 3 days to prepare to meet his Maker? Was Yosef even able to convince him to convert to monotheism so that it would make a difference? Why did the butler need to know that he was being restored? And, more to the point, why were these "messages" sent through Yosef? Couldn't the message have been made easier to understand, or have someone else explain it? As Yosef told them, "G-d has His interpreters" (40:8, see Radak). If G-d is trying to tell you something, He must have enabled someone to give over the message. If the message can't be understood or delivered, why bother sending it in the first place?

Yosef should have (and might have) realized that G-d made him the messenger for a reason. But he was the messenger for both officers, not just the butler. Yet, as soon as he realized that the butler was getting out, he asked to be mentioned to Paro. If G-d just wanted to create a means for someone to ask Paro to get him out, there was no reason to have him interpret dreams. And certainly not the dreams of both officers. All that would have been needed was for Yosef to know who was being released and ask him for the favor. His years of total dedication to the needs of the prisoners should have been enough to get them to do this. If G-d made Yosef the premiere dream-interpreter, there must be a different plan. But instead of letting G-d's plan take root, he asked the butler to get him out.

It's possible that Yosef would not have been taken to task (or as much to task) for asking the same thing of the butler had the dreams not occurred. If a prisoner was being released and would have access to Paro, perhaps he should ask for help getting out. However, as Rav Yanai said, after seeing that G-d made him the one to interpret the officers' dreams, it was inappropriate to then ask the butler to try getting

him out. For if G-d is already working on your release, why push it in a different direction? © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah's use of the word miketz at the conclusion - instead of the word acharei after or later is the cause for much comment amongst our sages. The rabbis seem to indicate that the word miketz or ketz signifies not only a chronological change in time frame but rather a complete change from the past situation to a completely different situation and even another era. Pharaoh's dreams signify not only that two years have passed since Yosef was imprisoned but rather that a completely new situation is now about to be constructed that will naturally impinge on the lives of Pharaoh and Yosef. One of the great characteristics of Yosef's personality, as we view it through the lens of the Torah narrative, is his adaptability to change circumstances while retaining his inner self-confidence and rock-hard faith. Even when he is in the pit with snakes and scorpions surrounding him, pleading for his life from his own brothers, he is still Yosef, the confident and optimistic dreamer. Sold into Egyptian slavery, his talents and drive bring him to a position of importance in the house of Potiphar. At no time does he relinquish his belief in himself and in the realization of his dreams. It is the dream of his father and brothers eventually recognizing his greatness and holiness that allows him to avoid the pitfall of Potiphar's wife. And even in prison he is the expert on dreams, not only his dreams but those of others as well. His adaptability to fortune, both good and bad, and his ability to remain Yosef the righteous one throughout his life is what sets him apart in the story of the Jews and earns him eternal approbation and approval.

In Yosef we see the story of the Jewish people generally. In a world of billions of people of other faiths, of oppressors and murderers, of hardship and never-ending challenge and changing circumstance, of the rise and fall of empires and superpowers, the Jewish people have remained constant in their self-confidence and the eventual fulfillment of their dreams. The outside world often mistook this Jewish strength of adaptability and holy stubbornness for arrogance (Remember DeGaulle's statements about Israel and the Jews after the Six-Day War?) It is often disturbing that the only interpreters of dreams for a world that finds itself imprisoned by terror, materialism and emptiness of meaning are the Jews and the Jewish values that have created other faiths and propelled human civilization forward. The State of Israel and the resurgence of Torah within a significant section of the Jewish world in the face of overwhelming hatred, discrimination and assimilation, emulates this ability of Yosef to remain Yosef no matter what changes occur in one's life and

society. Our generation also came into being at a time of miketz the ending of an era and the beginning of a completely new world of politics, technology and mass media. The old world of nostalgia is gone, never to return. How we will adapt to the new realities of our existence and yet remain faithful to our heritage and to the realization of our ancient dreams is the supreme challenge of our time. All of Jewish history teaches us that, all statistics and pessimistic experts notwithstanding, we will also be able to be equal to the challenge of Jewish survival and growth and the actualization of the Jewish dream here in Israel and throughout human society. ©2005 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/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood.... (66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying

commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones."(57: 15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are nospecific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it

will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

When Yosef (Joseph) is appointed second to the king by Pharaoh he is given an Egyptian name. In the words of the Torah; "and Pharaoh called Yosef - Tzafnat Paneach." (Genesis 41: 45) The Torah then tags on an additional statement: "and Yosef went out over the land of Egypt." If Yosef was given a new name why does the Torah not use that name when describing his going out to rule Egypt?

Perhaps the answer lies in evaluating Maimonides' position that the person who sanctified G-d's name most in the world (Kiddush Hashem) was Yosef. (Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah 5:10) This is strange, because after all, sanctifying G-d is commonly associated with dying for G-d. Why did Maimonides not pick any of the myriad of Jews who gave their lives for the Almighty to embody this most important principle? Why pick Yosef who did not die for G-d?

Rav Ahron Soloveitchik offers an interesting insight. He argues that for Maimonides the greatest sanctification of G-d is not dying for Him but living for G-d.

In many ways dying for a cause is easier than living for one. Dying takes a moment and is often associated with great honor. Living for G-d requires an every day and every moment commitment. Doing the small things that often go unnoticed is the true test of Kiddush Hashem.

Note Maimonides formulation of the laws of Kiddush Hashem. What is Kiddush Hashem, he asks? Rather than list the times that one should die for G-d, Maimonides first lists those times when one should transgress the law rather than die. Only after explaining when life overrides the law, does Maimonides mention the few times when dying for G-d is mandated. (Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah 5:1,2) Rav Ahron concludes that living for G-d is mentioned first, as it is paramount.

No wonder Yosef is the model of Kiddush Hashem. True, he did not die for G-d. Still, although the only Jew living in Egypt he lived every moment for G-d-never forsaking his Jewish identity. In the most difficult of times he did not assimilate, he did not forget who he was. This is Kiddush Hashem par excellence.

Our original question is now answered: Pharaoh's intent in giving Yosef an Egyptian name may have been to encourage him to lose his identity. The Torah, however, is quick to point out that Yosef went out over the land of Egypt to underscore that Yosef remained Yosef. He was not swept away by Pharaoh's thinking; he remained true to his Jewish identity.

An important message for Jews living in the modern world. When engaging modernity and gleaning from worldly wisdom and becoming involved in tikkun olam we dare not forget our roots, our names, our responsibility to see the world from the prism of Torah. A good starting point in keeping our roots is to retain our Hebrew names. Names reveal a great deal about character, about who we are. Like Yosef who despite Pharaoh's efforts to rename him, to redirect him, remained the same Yosef. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes took on the responsibility of becoming the Gerer Rebbe in 5631 (1871). In that year, Shabbos Parshas Mikeitz coincided with Rosh Chodesh Teiveis. Accordingly, on that Shabbos, the Sfas Emes presented thoughts on both topics: Parshas Mikeitz and Rosh Chodesh.

The Sfas Emes begins with a comment on one of Par'oh's dreams, specifically on the dream in which Par'oh sees lean, mangy cows-symbolizing the power of Evil-devour pleasantly plump, healthy-looking cows. The Sfas Emes comments that the dream gives the impression that Evil dominates the world. The Sfas Emes insists that notwithstanding appearances, the apparent autonomy and the power of Evil derive from HaShem.

The Sfas Emes continues with the discussion of this basic fact of life- the difficulty of perceiving HaShem's Presence in the world as we usually see it. Hester-HaShem's "hiding" from us-is so pervasive, the Sfas Emes tells us, that even when we are granted a glimpse of HaShem's Presence, the purpose of that glimpse is to enable us to get through the bad times that (the Sfas Emes takes for granted) will follow. Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that when HaShem does permit us to see through the hester, the reason for that illumination is to sustain us in the times when kedusha is hidden.

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another theme. He quotes a pasuk in Yechezkel (46: 1) This pasuk was apparently very important for the Sfas Emes. So important that he quotes it often. So important that I urge you to look the pasuk up, to see it in its full majesty.) The pasuk describes a feature of the future Beis Hamikdash, and says: "... Sha'ar he'chatzeir ha'penimis, ha'poneh kadim yihey sagur sheishes yemei hama'aseh; u'beyom HaShabbos yipase'ach; u'beyom HaChodesh yipasei'ach.' (ArtScroll: "...The gate of the inner courtyard that faces eastward shall be closed during the six days of labor; but on the Sabbath day... and on the day of the New Moon, it shall be opened.")

The Sfas Emes reads this pasuk as telling us that on Shabbos and on Rosh Chodesh, a special channel is opened to give us easier access to the world's penimiyus. A question comes immediately to mind. How does the Sfas Emes get from this pasuk's simple pshat to this wildly distant non- pshat? After I thought about it for a long time, the answer came back: simple. The pasuk's words 'ha'penimis' and 'ha'poneh' evoke the sound- alike of "penimiyus".

Another question. what does the Sfas Emes have in mind when he refers to 'penimiyus'? When the Sfas Emes speaks of penimiyus, he is referring to the real "real world"; i.e., to the world in which HaShem's Presence is evident. I say the real "real world" in contradistinction to the apparent "real world," in which hester hides HaShem's Presence. The pasuk is telling us that Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh can give us access to the world as it truly is; i.e., before it gets hidden by Teva (nature) and/or by Hergeil (routine; habit).

Proceeding further in his interpretation of the pasuk from Yechezkel, the Sfas Emes reads the "be" in the pasuk's words "ube'yom hashabbos " and "ube'yom hachodesh" not as conventionally understood-as a time word- that would give us: 'On Shabbos or on Rosh Chodesh...' Instead, the Sfas Emes reads the pasuk's 'be' as meaning: 'by means of'. Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that we can use Shabbos or Rosh Chodesh as keys to open the gate that blocks our access to the penimiyus-to HaShem's Omnipresence- even during the week, on yemei hama'aseh.

(Note the strength of the Sfas Emes's ko'ach hachidush [innovative power]. The posuk in Yechezkel tells us unambiguously that the gate should remain closed on weekdays. The Sfas Emes just opened it.)

The Sfas Emes moves on now to include discussion of topics from Parshas Mikeitz.

The Sfas Emes spoke earlier about the possibility of a major spiritual breakthrough: to have access to the 'inner court' not only on Shabbos, but on weekdays as well. He adds that to achieve that breakthrough, we must adhere to the bris (the covenant). What is this bris to which the Sfas Emes refers? Bris milah, which many authorities view as a means of diminishing sexuality. More generally, the Sfas Emes tells us, to live our lives in a manner consistent with the covenant, we would be well advised to follow the model that Yosef exemplified-the model for which he is often called "Yosef HaTzadik". The Sfas Emes explains that Yosef kept the bris under very difficult conditions. The Sfas Emes is referring here to Yosef's handling of sexuality, most notably with the wife of Potifar.

The Sfas Emes has just told us that bris milah is a key feature of our relationship with HaShem. Why so? Because unbridled sexuality is the most powerful competitor to our living our lives in constant awareness of HaShem's Presence. Why is it so important that we live our lives fully aware of HaShem's Presence? Because by so doing, a person can achieve "hisbatlus"-subordinating his/her will to the will of HaShem, and his/her agenda to the agenda of HaShem. Such hisbatlus-even in a small measure-can enable a person to reach a state of Ahavas HaShem-love of HaShem. For the Seforim define love as a state in which one gives priority to the will of the beloved over one's own will.

The Sfas Emes goes on to point out that Rosh Chodesh, too, can be an opportunity for access to the penimiyus. Because the new moon is a phenomenon of nature, we can use Rosh Chodesh as a trampoline to perceive HaShem behind nature. Thus, instead of seeing teva as fixed and unchanging, we can see HaShem constantly giving it existence. You may ask: what is so bad about not seeing HaShem behind teva? The answer is straightforward. A failure to be aware of HaShem behind nature may be part of a general lack of awareness about what is going on, metaphysically, in our lives. And a life lived in unawareness- in a rut of habit-is the very opposite of the sense of hischadshus-the constant freshness with which we are enjoined to live our lives.

The Sfas Emes takes us back briefly to the mangy cows of par'oh's dream. He comments that golus resembles those miserable-looking cows. All we see is a bunch of unappealing animals; but we should be aware that inside those cows there is also penimiyus.

A further point concerning control of sexuality. The Sfas Emes tells us that if we keep the bris, we can perceive HaShem even in golus. And the Sfas Emes notes that the golus began only when Bnai Yisroel stopped keeping the bris in the way Yosef had.

The Sfas Emes has focused on lost control of sexuality as a key feature of our golus in Egypt. This may be a part of the story that you were not told when you were a child. It is important to be aware that we have this feature from Chazal; the Sfas Emes did not invent it. In this context, the Sfas Emes cites a Medrash Rabba on Parshas Shemos. The posuk on which the Medrash comments is (Shemos, 1:8): 'Vayokom melech chadash' (ArtScroll: 'A new king arose in Egypt...'). Note: the Sfas Emes is working here with the allusion of chadash to chodesh.

After he refers to the text in Medrash Rabba, the Sfas Emes says: 'Ayein Shom' ('Look it up!'). Knowing the importance of heeding the words of a tzadik, we do look it up. And we find the Medrash (on the posuk: 'Vayokom melech chadash') quoting Hoshe'ah (5:7): "Be'HaShem bagadu ki banim zarim yaladu; ata yochaleim chodesh'. (That is: "They have betrayed HaShem, for they have begotten alien children. Now a month will devour them.") By directing us to the Medrash in Shemos, the Sfas Emes is telling us that the golus in Egypt came in the following sequence. Bnei Yisroel gave up Bris Milah, thereby losing control of their sexuality. Thus, they failed to follow the model that Yosef Hatzadik had provided for survival in Egypt. As a result, they lost awareness of the world's constant hischadshus, and thus, of HaShem's Omnipresence. At that point, with Bnei Yisroel locked into teva and hergeil, "Vayokom melech chadash..." © 2005 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, celebrates not only the victory of the Judeans over the Greek-Syrians, but even more fundamentally, the victory of Judaism over Hellenism. But what is there about Hellenistic Greek culture which caused Judaism to fight against it with such Strength? After all, the Greek Civilization gave us the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, the mathematics of Pythagoras, the theater of Sophocles and Aeschylus and the epic poetry of Homer, and the sculpture of Praxitales. Our great sage Maimonides sights Aristotle with great respect, and his work Shmoneh Perakim (an introduction to Mishna Avot) is almost a precise translation of Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics. So what is there about Greek culture which was so antithetical to Torah thought?

Even those who are not necessarily conversant with the Oedipus Trilogy of Sophocles, know the great riddle of the Sphinx: who walks on all four in the morning, on two in the afternoon and on three in the

evening? The answer is: Man, who crawls on all four as a child, who walks upright as an adult and who requires the addition of a cane in old age. As C.M. Bowra in his classical work *The Greek Mind* notes, for the Greeks, man was not only the answer for the riddle of the Sphinx; man is the answer to every human question.

The Greeks believed that man was the center of the Universe, that man represented perfection. The human form displayed the loftiest expression of art, and human attributes such as power, speed and beauty were idealized in the G-ds of Mount Olympus. The chorus of the Antigone sings out again and again, "Many are the awesome and the awful creations of the universe, but there is nothing as awesome and awful as man". Indeed, the sum total of Greek philosophy cried out, "Man is the measure of all things".

Judaism has a very different notion to bequeath to the world. G-d and not man-is the measure of all things, this center of the universe. Yes, the human being may be but "A little lower than G-d, adorned with glory and majesty" as the psalmist declares. But that little bit of difference between G-d and man makes all the difference in the world. If the Greeks created G-ds in man's image, Judaism holds out to man the possibility of greatness since he-the human being-is created in G-d's image! And since G-d is spirit and not physical matter, the Jewish ideals towards which we must strive are spiritual characteristics of compassion, freely given love, patience, loving kindness and truth. These are the attributes of G-d revealed to Moses (exodus 34:6-7) which human beings must strive to emulate.

On the basis of this understanding, it becomes clear why Hellenism considered circumcision an abomination and forbade the Judeans from circumcising their children: if the human form represents perfection, then tampering with an organ of the human body is nothing less than sacrilegious. But since for the Torah we must sanctify and perfect our imperfect, incomplete beings through the Divine commandments, circumcision expresses the very essence of our philosophy. Furthermore, the Greeks saw the different and varied human shapes and species, and therefore in their pantheon created in man's image, they posit different and varied ideals, values, and morals. In effect, the Greek mind pre-dated our present day post-modernism, in which everything is relative since there are no absolute values, and everyone is right according to his/her point of view. In such a world, a suicide bomber who targets innocent children can be justified as a freedom fighter. It is only a Judaism of one G-d which can possibly insist on an absolute moral structure which is based upon "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage", and "Thou shalt not murder". It is the very relativistic ethical outlook fostered by Polytheism which makes idolatry such an anathema to Judaism.

From this perspective, we can well understand the first transgression of the Bible having been Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent (Gen. 3) declares at the moment they eat of the fruit, "you shall be like G-d". What's wrong with being like G-d? What could possibly be wrong with eating a fruit which gives knowledge? And Eve herself describes the fruit as being "Good for food (which I take to mean without calories or cholesterol), lustful for the eyes (which I take to mean that it had a good presentation and an attractive packaging) and pleasing for the mind (which I take to mean, beneficial for the synopsis of the brain)". So why not eat it?

The struggle within Adam and Eve is the very struggle between Judaism and Hellenism. Who is to decide what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong? In eating the fruit Adam and Eve said they want to decide, because after all it is their lives. G-d however says (as Sigmund Freud taught many generations later) that every individual is a genius when it comes to justifying what he/she wants to do. The Bible is therefore teaching that there must be an external ethical and moral guide-beyond the individual himself- to declare what is right and what is wrong. G-d is the center of the universe.

From all that we have said, it becomes clear why the stories of Joseph are read during the period of Chanukah. Joseph was hated by his brothers because of his dreams-and the source of the hatred was far deeper than jealousy alone. Joseph dreamt two dreams, the first of Sheaves of grain and the second of the orbs of the heavens; father Jacob also dreamt of a ladder rooted in the earth and extended to the heavens. But despite the similarity of the elements of difference: In Jacobs dream, G-d stood over and above the ladder, at the very center; in Joseph's dreams, Joseph himself was at the center. Jacobs dream was a Jewish dream whereas Joseph's dream was a Greek dream. It is only many years later, after Joseph is forced to wander to Egypt and to suffer many setbacks, that he realizes that G-d is truly at the center of the world. Hence in this weeks Torah reading, as Joseph stands before Pharaoh to interpret the dreams of the most powerful individual in Egypt, the much wiser hero of our stories declares as the introduction to his interpretations: "That is beyond me; it is G-d who will respond in accordance with pharaoh's welfare" (Gen 41:16). © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The stories of Yosef and his brothers have many examples of double descriptions, and it is important to understand these events. One of the most startling of these repetitions is with respect to the

way the brothers find the money that is returned to them according to Yosef's instructions. First, we are told that the brothers discovered the money at the inn, on their way home, and that this caused them to be afraid. "And one of them opened his sack, in order to give his donkey food at the inn, and he saw that his money was at the top of his sack. So he said to his brothers, my money has been returned, here it is in my sack. And they were frightened, and each one turned trembling to his brother, saying, what has G-d done to us?" [Bereishit 42:27-28]. However, from the continuation of the story it seems that the money was discovered only after they arrived home and told Yaacov about their adventures. "And, while they were emptying their sacks, every man found his bundle of money in his sack. And they and their father saw the bundles of money, and they were afraid." [42:35]. How can we understand this apparent contradiction? The Ramban explains, "One of the brothers opened his sack at the inn in order to give his donkey to eat, but the others did not open their sacks until they reached their father." But this still leaves us with a question: Why did the Torah use such ambiguous language, implying that all the brothers opened their sacks and found the money twice? What is the point of this duplicate description of the events?

To explain what happened, it is first necessary to understand why Yosef decided to return the money to the brothers. Evidently he wanted to strengthen the feeling of the brothers that they were paying the price of their sin of selling him, a feeling which had begun with the imprisonment of Shimon. Yosef, who was convinced that his brothers had sold him (see 45:4, and our discussion last week), wanted to remind them of the previous time that they had come home with one brother missing, carrying with them money from an unexpected source. This explains why the brothers react on a spiritual level, "What has G-d done to us?" They realized that the two events were related.

The second description of finding the money is especially significant. According to this, the brothers only found the money in the presence of their father, Yaacov. He was very surprised to see his sons, with one missing but with extra money, and this strengthened his suspicion, wondering if his sons had told him the complete truth about the affair of Yosef or not. This explains Yaacov's immediate reaction. "And Yaacov their father said to them: You have caused me to be bereaved. Yosef is gone and Shimon is gone, and now you want to take Binyamin. Everything has happened to me!" [42:36]. His reaction clearly shows that he had doubts about the stories that his sons told him.

In summary, the two different descriptions emphasize the two different aspects of the return of the money to the brothers. The fact that they found the money by themselves helped them to understand their

own sin, and when they found the money in their father's presence they were in a way punished by being "caught in the act," accused by their father without being able to hide the facts. In this way, the move by Yosef was another important step in his plan to cause his brothers to acknowledge their sin and to repent.

"And He Shaved"-Out of Respect for Royalty

by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

According to the Talmud, Yosef was released from prison on Rosh Hashanah (see Rosh Hashanah 10b). But if so, he shaved and cut his hair on a holiday. Is this possible? Have we not been taught that the forefathers observed all the mitzvot?

We are required to show respect for kings. This is derived from the verse, "Place a king over you" [Devarim 17:15], which implies that we should fear a king. Even though this verse refers to a Jewish king, it was also required of Yosef, since Moshe and Aharon were also commanded with respect to Pharaoh: "And he commanded them to go to Bnei Yisrael and to Pharaoh, the King of Egypt" [Shemot 6:13], implying that they should show respect for royalty.

Showing respect means that a person must maintain a good appearance, as Yosef did, and this requirement takes precedence over some prohibitions. For example, the members of the household of Rabbi Yehuda, the Nassi, would look in a mirror, in spite of the prohibition to wear women's clothing and to act like a woman, so that they would appear in a respectful way before the Roman authorities. It is necessary to stand up to show respect for a king, and under certain conditions it is necessary to bow down. It is also necessary to bless a king when he enters or leaves, just as Yaacov blessed Pharaoh. There were places where Jews took Torah scrolls with them to greet a king.

It may be that for this reason Yosef allowed himself to be shaved on Rosh Hashanah, having a Gentile to do the actual shaving. This is similar to taking a Torah scroll along to welcome a king, which sometimes took place on Shabbat. How could the Jews carry a Torah scroll into the public area? The answer is that they gave it to a Gentile to carry. This also corresponds to the wording of the verse, "And Pharaoh sent for him and called Yosef, and they rushed him from the pit, and he shaved him and changed his clothing" [Bereishit 41:14]. If Yosef shaved himself, the verse is written very awkwardly, with the subject changing from somebody else to Yosef in the middle. It is much more reasonable to assume that the shaving was done by Pharaoh's servants.

The reason to show respect for Gentile kings would seem to be a matter of good customs. It may also be that this helps us practice the way to show respect for kings, even while we are in exile, so that we will know how to show proper respect for our own kings

when the day comes. We will know how to differentiate between a Gentile king and one of our own when the time comes. We have even been given permission to ignore caskets of dead people under certain circumstances, in order to teach us that respect for a king takes precedence over respect for the dead. *Reference: Talmudic Encyclopedia, volume 26, "Royal Respect"*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Miketz tells of the sons of Yaakov traveling to Egypt to buy food and bring it back to their father. Yosef tries to foil their plans by accusing his brothers of being spies because their father wouldn't have to send all 10 sons to get food, and the brothers respond that "we are all sons of one man" (42:11). How does that explain why they were all sent? The suspicion Yosef raises still exists?

In Majesty of Man, Rabbi Leibowitz explains that when Hillel and Rabbi Akiva emphasized loving our fellow man as ourselves, they were describing fundamental principles of the Torah. As the Ramban explains, although the trip to Egypt was long and dangerous, Yaakov felt that developing the brothers' feeling of unity and brotherhood was worth the risk. This Ahavat Yisrael (love for a fellow Jew) is so critically important that Hillel and Rabbi Akiva stressed it, and Yaakov risked his own sons' safety for it. If we neglect each other's needs in the outside world, in the workplace and at home, we're placing ourselves in danger of losing the comm"unity" we strive to be a part of! © 2005 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

חג שמח! Happy Chanukah!



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