Miketz 5772 Volume XIX Number 13

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI ARI WEISS

Except for Chanukah

Throughout the many generations, the Jewish people have had sages of the highest caliber who dedicated their genius to the Torah and its interpretation, and were subsequently made immortal by their rulings and decisions which last until today. While everyone admits to the brilliance and erudition of all of our great scholars, when it comes to the question of which to follow, especially when there is a conflict of opinions, specific communities of Jews will often follow the rulings of their sage, while others will follow the leader of their respective community.

One common example is that of Maimonides (Rambam). Maimonides wrote a commentary which he claimed would put an end for the need of any future commentary, entitled the Mishne Torah, which is a complete book of Jewish life and law. Any person with a question regarding an aspect of religious practice need only open the correct volume of Mishne Torah and there he or she will find the guidance being sought. However, an astute Jew of Eastern-European descent may quickly realize that Maimonides cites and rules almost entirely according to Sefardic practice, rarely taking into account Ashkenazic custom and tradition. One will find, therefore, that although Jews of Eastern-European descent respect and admire Maimonides, they usually will follow the rulings of Ashkenazic sages as, for example, the commentary of Tosafot, which contains rulings of generations of Ashenazic scholars beginning with the grandsons of Rashi in the twelfth century. Sometimes Ashkenazim and Sefardim will follow Maimonides, perhaps both may follow Tosafot, but whenever in disagreement, Ashknazim always side with Tosafot (or perhaps a different Ashkenazic sage), and Sefardim with Maimonides.

Except for Chanukah.

For some reason, when it comes to the holiday of Chanukah, something goes awry. When one opens up the Talmud one sees many hot topics of debate regarding observance of Chanukah (this was long before the well-known debate which came about with the advent of the English language, namely, how to spell Chanukah). One such debate involves how many Chanukiot (Menorahs) one must light in the home. The debate is taken up by the commentators, and Maimonides maintains that every member of the household should have his or her own candelabra, a custom which should be familiar to most Ashkenazic families. Tosafot, on the other hand, maintain that too many flames in the window detracts from the mitzvah and therefore, instead, one person only should light one Menorah on behalf of the entire household, a custom recognized and practiced by Sefardim throughout the world. So, there you have it: On Chanukah Sfardim follow Tosafot instead of Maimonides, and Ashkenazim do the opposite, choosing Maimonides over their own Tosafot. Why should there be such an anomaly in Jewish law, and how might its occurrence be associated with Chanukah?

Perhaps an answer can be gleaned from how the Torah describes the lighting of the first Menorah, the one in the Tabernacle. There, after G-d commands Moses to instruct Aaron the High Priest to kindle the lights of the Great Menorah, and Aaron dutifully follows the instructions exactly, the Torah continues with an out-of-place description of the Menorah: "V'zeh maaseh Hamenorah, Mikshah Zahav. Ad yereich, Ad pircha, mikshah he" "This is the way the Menorah was made: from one piece of gold. From its center branch (thick section) to its flowers (delicate, thin sections), it was one piece of gold."

Now, we already know what the Menorah looks like from an earlier account. What, then, is the significance of this superfluous description when all we're really interested in hearing about is the lighting of the Menorah?

The answer, I believe, is that the lighting of the Menorah is a symbol of the unity of the Jewish people. Just as the Menorah is fashioned from one solid piece of gold, so too are all Jews intimately connected at our source. Some Jews might be like the thin, delicate flower ornaments of the Menorah, representing a weak or relatively small connection to Jewish heritage, while others are like the thick, sturdy center column of the Menorah, representing a strong sense of Jewish identity, upon which others may rely for strength. Either way, we are all hewn from the same piece of gold. The act of lighting the Menorah, which brings together all the branches into one Mitzvah, therefore symbolizes the powerful and holy unity of the Jewish people.

How better to express this feeling of unity than for Ashkenazim and Sefardim to follow the rulings of each others' Halachic leader. We don't have to agree in order to be unified, but we must never lose sight of our connection one to another, and that which binds us

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together as Jews: the Torah and our adherence to its precepts. After all, that's what the Maccabees were fighting for, and it is truly the message of the holiday of Chanukah. *© 2011 Rabbi A. Weiss. Rabbi Ari Weiss is the rav of Agudas Achim Synagogue in West Hartford, CT*

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It was Joseph's first real attempt to take his fate into his own hands, and it failed. Or so it seemed. Consider the story so far, as set out in last week's parsha. Almost everything that happens in Joseph's life falls into two categories. The first are the things done to him. His father loves him more than his other sons. He gives him a richly embroidered cloak.

His brothers are envious and hate him. His father sends him to see how the brothers are faring, attending the flocks far away. He fails to find them and has to rely on a stranger to point him in the right direction. The brothers plot to kill him, and sell him as a slave. He is brought to Egypt. He has acquired as a slave by Potiphar. Potiphar's wife finds him attractive, attempts to seduce him, and having failed, falsely accuses him of rape, as a result of which he is imprisoned.

This is extraordinary. Joseph is the centre of attention whenever, as it were, he is onstage, and yet he is, time and again, the done-to rather than the doer, an object of other people's actions rather than the subject of his own.

The second category is more remarkable still. Joseph does do things. He runs Potiphar's household. He organises a prison. He interprets the steward's and baker's dreams. But, in a unique sequence of descriptions, the Torah explicitly attributes his actions and their success to G-d.

Here is Joseph in Potiphar's house: "G-d was with Joseph, and He made him very successful. Soon he was working in his master's own house. His master realized that G-d was with [Joseph], and that G-d granted success to everything he did." (39:2-3)

"As soon as [his master] had placed him in charge of his household and possessions, G-d blessed the Egyptian because of Joseph. G-d's blessing was in all [the Egyptian] had, both in the house and the field." (39:5)

Here is Joseph in prison: "G-d was with Joseph, and He showed him kindness, making him find favor with the warden of the dungeon. Soon, the warden had placed all the prisoners in the dungeon under Joseph's charge. [Joseph] took care of everything that had to be done. The warden did not have to look after anything that was under [Joseph's] care. G-d was with [Joseph], and G-d granted him success in everything he did." (39:21-23)

And here is Joseph interpreting dreams: "'Interpretations are G-d's business,' replied Joseph. 'If you want to, tell me about [your dreams].'" (40:8)

Of no other figure in Tenakh is this said so clearly, consistently and repeatedly. Joseph seems decisive, organised and successful and so he appeared to others. But, says the Torah, it was not him but G-d who was responsible both for what he did and for its success. Even when he resists the advances of Potiphar's wife, he makes it explicit that it is G-d who makes what she wants morally impossible: "How could I do such a great wrong? It would be a sin before G-d!" (39:9)

The only act clearly attributed to him occurs at the very start of the story, when he brings a "bad report" about his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaids (39:2). This apart, every twist and turn of his constantly changing fate is the result of someone else's act, either that of another human or of G-d (as for Joseph's dreams-were they a Divine intimation or a product of his own imagination? -- that is another story for another time).

That is why we sit up and take notice when, at the end of the previous parsha, Joseph takes destiny into his own hands. Having told the chief steward that in three days he would be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his former position, and having no doubt at all that this would happen, he asks him to plead his cause with Pharaoh and secure his freedom: "When things go well for you, just remember that I was with you. Do me a favor and say something about me to Pharaoh. Perhaps you will be able to get me out of this place" (40:14).

What happens? "The chief steward did not remember Joseph. He forgot about him" (40:23). The doubling of the verb is powerful. He did not remember. He forgot. The one time Joseph tries to be the author of his own story, he fails. The failure is decisive.

Tradition added one final touch to the drama. It ended the parsha of Vayeshev with those words, leaving us at the point that his hopes are dashed. Will he rise to greatness? Will his dreams come true? The question "What happens next?" is intense, and we have to wait a week to know.

Time passes and with the utmost improbability (Pharaoh too has dreams, and none of his magicians or wise men can interpret them-itself odd, since dream interpretation was a specialty of the ancient Egyptians), we learn the answer. "Two full years passed." Those,

the words with which our parsha begins, are the key phrase. What Joseph sought to happen, happened. He did leave the prison. He was set free. But not until two full years had passed.

Between the attempt and the outcome, something intervened. That is the significance of the lapse of time. Joseph planned his release, and he was released, but not because he planned it. His own attempt ended in failure. The steward forgot all about him. But G-d did not forget about him. G-d, not Joseph, brought about the sequence of events-specifically Pharaoh's dreams-that led to his release.

What we want to happen, happens, but not always when we expect, or in the way we expect, or merely because we wanted it to happen. G-d is the co-author of the script of our life, and sometimes-as here-He reminds us of this by making us wait and taking us by surprise.

That is the paradox of the human condition as understood by Judaism. On the one hand we are free. No religion has so emphatically insisted on human freedom and responsibility. Adam and Eve were free not to sin. Cain was free not to kill Abel. We make excuses for our failures-it wasn't me; it was someone else's fault; I couldn't help it. But these are just that: excuses. It isn't so.

We are free and we do bear responsibility.

Yet, as Hamlet said: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will." G-d is intimately involved in our life. Looking back in middle- or old age, we can often discern, dimly through the mist of the past, that a story was taking shape, a destiny slowly emerging, guided in part by events beyond our control. We could not have foreseen that this accident, that illness, this failure, that seemingly chance encounter, years ago, would have led us in this direction. Yet now in retrospect it can seem as if we were a chess piece moved by an invisible hand that knew exactly where it wanted us to be.

It was this view, according to Josephus, that distinguished the Pharisees (the architects of what we call rabbinic Judaism) from the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees denied fate. They said G-d does not intervene in our lives. The Essenes attributed all to fate. They believed that everything we do has been predestined by G-d. The Pharisees believed in both fate and free will. "It was G-d's good pleasure that there should be a fusion [of divine providence and human choice] and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate" (Antiquities, xviii, 1, 3).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life of Joseph as told in Bereishit, and nowhere more so than in the sequence of events told at the end of last week's parsha and the beginning of this. Without Joseph's acts-his interpretation of the steward's dream and his plea for freedom-he would not have left prison. But without divine intervention in the form of Pharaoh's dreams, it would also not have happened.

This is the paradoxical interplay of fate and freewill. As Rabbi Akiva said: "All is foreseen yet freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:15). Isaac Bashevis Singer put it wittily: "We have to believe in free will: we have no choice." We and G-d are co-authors of the human story. Without our efforts we can achieve nothing. But without G-d's help we can achieve nothing either. Judaism found a simple way of resolving the paradox. For the bad we do, we take responsibility. For the good we achieve, we thank G-d. Joseph is our mentor. When he is forced to act harshly he weeps. But when he tells his brothers of his success he attributes it to G-d. That is how we too should live.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

As children, we learn that Hanukah is about the victory of the Judeans over the Greek-Syrians, Jews over Gentiles. We know from the Books of the Maccabees and the Second Commonwealth historian Josephus, however, that the struggle began as a civil war, a battle between brothers waged in order to determine the future direction of the Jewish people. Hellenistic Jews fought Torah-based Jews, assimilationist Jews fought traditionalist Jews would be Greeks fought old fashioned committed Jews.

But after the traditionalists won, they did not banish Greek culture never to allow it a foothold in the sacred portals of Judea. Not only have thousands of Greek words (and via those words, Greek concepts) entered the Talmud and Midrash, but Greek philosophy, science and aesthetics have found a place in the corpus of Jewish literature, especially through great commentators and codifiers such as Maimonides. A brief comment in the Midrash Shahar should mute the idea that Judea rejected Hellas: The Midrash breaks the word "Zion" (Israel) into its two components. The first letter, the tzaddik represents the holy, righteous Jews while the last three letters yud, vav, nun spell out "Yavan", the Hebrew word for Greece. We're being told that at the very heart of everything revered in Judaism - Zion- there must be the beauty of Greece. The question is to what extent?

The Talmud cites the verse, "May G-d expand Japheth and may he (Japheth) dwell in the tents of Shem"(Genesis 9: 27) as proof that the Torah was not to be translated into any language except Greek (Babylonia Talmud Megillah 9b). The verse is Noah's blessing to Japheth and Shem for their modest behavior after he was shamed by their brother Ham. The Talmud's reading of the verse turns Japheth and Shem into symbols. Japheth is the forerunner of Greece and Shem; the progenitor of Israel. The expansion of Japheth is the beautiful Greek language "which shall

dwell in the tents of Shem," when the Torah is translated into Greek. The Midrash adds: "Let the beauty of Japheth be incorporated into the tents of Shem" which has come to mean the ability to extract the positive aspects of Greek culture and synthesize them with our eternal Torah.

Fascinatingly, the Festival of Hanukah always coincides with Torah portions recording the struggle between Joseph and his brothers. A parallel can be drawn between Joseph's struggle and traditional Judea's struggle with Hellenism.

Joseph's roots were nomadic, his ancestors were shepherds. Pastoral life, as we know, allows the soul to soar; a shepherd has the leisure to compose music and poetry, as well as to meditate on the Torah and communicate with the Divine.

But even in the pastures, Joseph was dreaming of a new world. His dreams were focused on agriculture - the Egyptian occupation which came after shepherding. What upsets the brothers is not just an event in a dream (their sheaves bowing to his), but the very fact that sheaves feature at all. Sheaves represent not only agriculture, but also modernism a break with tradition.

Joseph's second dream is about the sun, moon and stars. Again, it isn't so much the events of the dream that disturbs, but its universalistic elements. The brothers could even have understood a dream of the cosmos with G-d at the center, like Jacob's early dream of the ladder. But here, Joseph himself is at the center like the Greek message: "Man is the measure of all things", man and not G-d. Moreover, the Bible says Joseph gloried in his physical appearance, his being of beautiful form and fair visage - "yafeh" (beautiful) like "Japheth" Greece (Genesis 39: 6). And as Heinrich Heine said, "For the Greeks, beauty is truth, for the Hebrews, truth is beauty".

Everyone loves Joseph - handsome, clever, urbane, the perfect guest, dazzling you with his knowledge of languages, including the language of dreams. Joseph is the cosmopolitan Grand Vizier of Egypt, the universalist. Joseph is more Yavanlike than Shemlike, more similar to Greek-Hellenism than to Abrahamic-Hebraism.

Hence the tensions between Joseph and his brothers are not unlike the tensions between Hellenism and Hebraism. But Joseph matures and by the time he stands before Pharaoh, he does see G-d at the center, "Not I, but rather G-d will interpret the dreams to the satisfaction of Pharaoh". (Genesis 41: 15).

And Judah will remind Joseph of the centrality of his family and ancestral home, establishing the first house of study (yeshiva) in Goshen, Egypt (Genesis 49: 22 and Rashi ad loc). Judah symbolizing Torah and repentance will receive the spiritual birthright (Genesis 49: 10) and Joseph will receive the blessings of material prosperity (Genesis 49: 22) The two will join together for the glory of Zion and Israel.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The word miketz or keitz signifies "end" or "conclusion." It is usually used to denote the end of an era, the defining moment of the passage of time. It also denotes that a great change of circumstances is about to occur. What was before will be no longer. The end of the past will give way to a new reality. In this week's parsha the word introduces us to the radical change in the circumstances of Yosef - from dungeon inmate to viceroy of Egypt.

In Jewish tradition, the word is employed to describe the end of the period of exile and trials of Israel and the beginning of the longed for redemption and messianic era. Implicit in our understanding of the word as it appears in the Torah and Jewish tradition is the understanding that nothing is certain and what may appear to be long lasting and immovable is always only temporary and given to change.

Only uncertainty is certain in our lives and in all human affairs. There is always an end to the present and a new future, for good or for better, always is present just over the horizon of time. This short Hebrew word mocks all of the predictions of experts in any field of endeavor. All such statements are based upon the known past and present but these come to an eventual end and the future remains as inscrutable as ever. We are experts in hindsight. We rarely achieve meaningful foresight in any field of human endeavor, and in national and personal living.

All of this is true regarding humankind generally. It is doubly true regarding the future of the Jewish people and Israel. Only the diehards stubbornly insist that somehow the path of the Oslo Agreements has not yet come to an end. Only the hardened and Jewishly Torah ignorant secularist believe that somehow theirs is the solution to the "Jewish problem," both internally and externally.

In our generation, the end has come to many ideas, ideologies and circumstances that were supposed to carry on for future centuries. The whole world's economic structure is now threatened by the unthinkable, something that economic experts told us could never happen and that there never would be an end to consumer and debt driven prosperity.

Hitler's Reich was to have lasted one thousand years and Marx's economic theories were to have produced eternal peace, fairness and a certain and easily predictable future. The world operates as though the word miketz is not present in the human lexicon. That is the main tragic error in human society for it allows for faulty planning, a sense of overconfidence, and a pompous certainty of rectitude that is based on

the false assumption that circumstances and eras do not change or end.

This week's parsha reiterates this true fact of our existence, uncomfortable as that may be to our psyche. The Midrash introduces its commentary to our parsha with the verse "keitz - an end has the Lord brought to our darkness." May that be the keitz to our era as well. *© 2011 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*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Although the holiday of Chanukah is Rabbinic in origin (the events it commemorates occurred during the Second Temple, well after Tanach was canonized, and certainly well after Moshe died), there are several hints to it in the Torah. I can vividly recall my father, sh'lita, excitedly sharing with me his discovery that the 25th (the numerical value of "kuh") encampment ("chanu," they camped) of the Children of Israel in the desert was at "Chashmonah" (Bamidbar 33:29), the same name ("Chashmona'im") used to describe the heroes of the Chanukah story. Similarly (although not as blatant), the 25th word in the Torah is "Or," light (B'raishis 1:3; see Midrash Y'lamdeinu, quoted by Yalkut Shimoni 47, which calls this a "chanukah," a dedication).

The Menorah, the seven-branched candelabrum at the center of the Chanukah miracle, when its lights burned for eight days despite having only enough oil for one day, is discussed in the Torah five times; three if you exclude the commandment to make it and the narrative when it was made. The first time (Sh'mos 27:20-21), it isn't mentioned by name, even though its oil is discussed, as are some of the details of lighting it. These verses are mirrored, almost word for word, in Vayikra (24:2-3), followed by a third verse (24:4) mentioning that this lighting is done atop the Menorah. This paragraph is taught immediately after a description of the Biblical holidays (23:1-43), hinting to us about another holiday, one where the Menorah is front and center.

The third time the Menorah is discussed (Bamidbar 8:1-4), there also seems to be no connection to the subject matter either right before or right after it, and what was taught could have been incorporated into the other mentions. The Ramban (8:2), quoting and explaining Midrashic sources, explains why Aharon lighting the Menorah follows the gifts brought by the Nesi'im (Heads of Tribe) at the dedication of the Mishkan: "For when Aharon saw the dedication ("chanukah") of the Nesi'im, he was disappointed that neither he nor his Tribe were included in the dedication ("chanukah"). [This part is a quote of the edition of Rashi that Ramban had; the next part is Ramban quoting Rabbeinu Nissim, who quoted a Midrash.] G-d said to Moshe, 'speak to Aharon and tell him that there will be another dedication ("chanukah"), one that has a lighting of the flames (the Menorah); I (G-d) will do for Israel, through your sons, miracles and a salvation and a dedication ("chanukah") that will be associated with them-the dedication of the Chashmona'im (who were Kohanim, descendents of Aharon). And therefore this paragraph (about Aharon lighting the Menorah) is next to the dedication of the [Mishkan]." In other words, the commandments relating to Aharon lighting the Menorah were taught immediately after the Nesi'im brought their dedication offerings because of the role Aharon's descendants would have in the miracle of Chanukah.

Another hint to Chanukah appears in this week's Parasha, read on Shabbos Chanukah. After Binyamin joins his brothers to return to Egypt to buy food, they are invited to a royal feast at Yosef's house (B'raishis 43:16). The instructions Yosef gives the executive in charge of his house are to "slaughter that which is slaughtered and prepare it." The last word of that expression ("v'hachain"), along with the last letter of the word immediately preceding it ("tevach") are the same letters as the word "Chanukah." Elya Rabbah 670:10 says that the word "chanukah" is embedded in Yosef's instructions to prepare a feast to promote having a festive meal on Chanukah, even though it is not officially part of the celebration (as opposed to Purim, the other Rabbinical holiday, where a festive meal is). The connection of the other hints to Chanukah is rather obvious; "chanu chaf hay," i.e. their 25th encampment being in Chashmonah, "light" being the 25th word in the Torah for the "Festival of Lights," the Menorah being taught right after teaching us about the holidays and the dedication facilitated by Aharon's descendents being used as a consolation for his not participating in the Mishkan's dedication all fit the context of what the Torah is teaching. However, what connection is there between Yosef's instructions regarding the meal for his brothers and the message of Chanukah? Is the "hint within a hint" to have a festive meal even though it's not required, and giving us this hint on Shabbos Chanukah, the connection between the two, or is there more to it?

The Talmud (Chulin 91a) tells us that Yosef's instructions had a specific intent. "Slaughter that which is slaughtered" meant not just to slaughter the animal properly, but to "reveal the area where it was slaughtered," so that his brothers could verify that they could eat it. "Preparing it" meant to remove the "gid ha'nasheh," the sciatic nerve, which is off-limits to the Children of Israel (see B'raishis 32:33). The instructions were also meant to convey other aspects of the meal's preparation (see Midrash Aggadah, which explains how each letter of "v'hachein" represents laws of preparing meat properly); B'raishis Rabbah (92:4) is among the Midrashim which say that this meal was eaten on the Sabbath, with Yosef giving instructions to make sure the

meal was prepared before Shabbos started so that no prohibitions would be violated. The bottom line is that embedded in Yosef's instructions to "slaughter" the animals and "prepare" them properly was the message that despite all those years in Egypt, including being part of Egyptian royalty, he hadn't abandoned his religion and didn't become assimilated into Egyptian culture; he still kept kosher, the Sabbath and the other laws that were unique to his family. Is there a more appropriate place to embed a hint to Chanukah, when we resisted becoming Hellenized, than in the words indicating that Yosef remained true to his heritage? Our refusal to be assimilated into Greek culture or to abandon our laws, customs and traditions very much mirrors Yosef retaining his religious identity despite his years, and involvement, in Egypt, setting the tone that gave us the strength to resist Hellenization. A hint to this parallel is therefore contained in the Torah reading of Shabbos Chanukah. *© 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion, Yaakov (Jacob) hesitates to allow Binyamin (Benjamin) his youngest child, to return with his brothers to Egypt. Reuven, the eldest of the brothers, guarantees he'd bring Binyamin back home-proclaiming, "Let two of my sons be killed if I fail to bring him back to you." (Genesis 42:37) Yaakov rejects Reuven's offer. In the end, Yehuda (Judah) steps forward and declares, "If I do not bring him (Binyamin) back to you...I will have sinned to you forever." (Genesis 43:9) These words are accepted by Yaakov.

One wonders, why? Why does Yaakov embrace Yehuda's argument and not Reuven's?

Ramban notes that Reuven impetuously makes his comment while there is still food left from their trip to Egypt. Yehuda leaves Yaakov alone waiting until all the food is gone to make his plea. Ramban concludes that only after the food was gone would Yaakov be ready. 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 suggestion is in order: It can be posited that the greatest consequence of doing wrong is to be constantly wracked by the sin itself. And so, Yaakov rejects Reuven's argument as he offered a punishment if he fails. Yehuda on the other hand, is saying that his punishment will be his ever-present guilt in having sinned to Yaakov. In the words of Benamozegh (19th century, Italy) "sin itself is its own punishment."

A final thought comes to mind. Reuven'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. Yehuda, 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." Yaakov accepts Yehuda's argument and not Reuven's, for, often, greatest success goes to one who understands the danger of the situation and realizes the very real possibility of not succeeding.

Additionally, Yaakov assents to Yehuda precisely because he (Yehuda) was prepared to act even when unsure of success. The real test of commitment is to become involved even when the outcome is unknown. This impresses Yaakov. This idea relates to the Chanukah holiday. Unlike in the Bible, where G-d assures Moshe (Moses) of success in Egypt, the Hasmoneans received no such assurance. Still, against great odds, uncertain of victory, they fought and prevailed. Maybe that is why we use the dreidel on Chanukah. The dreidel spins without knowing where it will land.

The Biblical Yehuda and Yehuda HaMaccabee of the Chanukah story interface. Both were aware of the uncertainties of their mission. Notwithstanding, they went forward.

May we all be so courageous, to do, even when unclear about the outcome. And like Yaakov, may we trust-with the help of G-d-that all will work out. *© 2011 Hebrrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Chanukah, teaches us a hidden dimension of Hashem's compassionate ways. The prophet Zechariah opens by announcing prophecies of the arrival of Hashem's presence in the near future. He declares in Hashem's name, "Rejoice and be happy daughter of Zion for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," These words refer to the sudden erection of the second Temple after seventy dark years of exile. In truth, early construction began earlier but our Jewish brethren slandered to the Persian government and brought the development to an immediate halt. This led the Jewish people to total despair and to forfeit all hope of experiencing Hashem's return. Suddenly and totally unexpected, the prophet Zechariah announced Hashem's immediate plan to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah the prophet continues and reveals a private discussion between Hashem and the assigned prosecuting angel. The discussion centered around Yehoshua ben Yehozadak who was designated to serve in the new Temple. Hashem defended Yehoshua and said, "Is he not an ember spared from fire? The prophet Zechariah continues, "And Yehoshua was wearing soiled garments and standing before the angel. And the

angel responded, 'Remove the soiled garments from upon Yehoshua...and they placed the turban upon his head.'" (Zechariah 3:4-5)

This dialogue reflects that the ordained high priest was seriously faulted for an offense to the priesthood. The Sages explain that Yehoshua was judged for failing to involve himself in his children's choice of marriage. Unfortunately, the Babylonian exile took its toll upon the Jewish nation and corrupted their moral fiber. Their constant exposure to the Babylonians broke down basic barriers and numerous intermarriages occurred. Yehoshua's offsprings were party to this mind set and married women forbidden to them according to priesthood standards. (Targum and Rashi ad loc)

Their esteemed father, Yehoshua was unsuccessful in influencing them to choose appropriate wives and was now seriously faulted for this. The prosecuting angel protested Yehoshua's priestly status because of his inability to properly preserve it. Hashem defended Yehoshua and argued that he deserved special consideration because he was an ember spared from the fire. Yehoshua received a second chance and immediately resolved to rectify his fault and terminate these inappropriate relationships. Hashem responded to this sincere commitment and restored Yehoshua to his prestigious position.

This incident reveals a unique dimension of Hashem's judgement and compassion. In truth, Yehoshua was at fault for his children's behavior and conceivably should have forfeited his esteemed position. However, Hashem focused on Yehoshua's outstanding merit as an ember spared from the fire. The Sages (Sanhedrin 93a) explain that the wicked Nebuchadnezar tested Yehoshua's faith and merit and casted him into a fiery furnace. Yehoshua was miraculously spared thereby displaying his supreme level of devotion to Hashem. Hashem argued that every fiber of Yehoshua's being was devoted to Hashem and deserved careful consideration. Although Yehoshua was faulted for his children's behavior he received a second chance and regained his status of the High Priest.

We learn from this Hashem's appreciation and response to devotion. Yehoshua totally dedicated himself to Hashem's service and thereby earned his privileged status. Yehoshua's devotion brought him into Hashem's inner circle and earned him special appreciation. Hashem views His close ones through the perspective of devotion and affords them special privileges. After proving their total loyalty to Hashem their subsequent service becomes invaluable. Such pious people bring credit to Hashem by their mere existence and will undoubtedly increase this credit a thousand-fold through their continuous service to Hashem. Although they may be imperfect their quality of devotion surpasses all and renders them the most worthy candidates for his service.

This lesson repeated itself in Yehohua's offsprings during the days of Chanukah. In the early years of the second Temple the Jewish people were represented by illustrious high priests such as Ezra Hasofer and Shimon Hatzadik. During that period the Menorah's western lamp burned throughout the day. This constant miracle showed the entire world Hashem's constant presence amongst His people. However, after Shimon's passing this coveted priestly position was periodically neglected. It assumed political status and was obtained, at times, through handsome sums of money. Numerous unworthy individuals served as high priests for brief periods of time. Every year Hashem would display their unworthiness and punish them for entering the Holy of Holies without proper preparation. (Mesichta Yoma 9a) After years of mistreating their Temple privileges Hashem responded to this disgrace and permitted the Greek's to control the Bais Hamikdash. This new development exiled the Jews in their very own land and restricting them for sacrificial service. The Chashmonaim, high priests by rite, took charge of the situation and sacrificed their lives to restore this service. They displayed unprecedented levels of devotion and Hashem responded and returned the Temple to them.

The Chashmonaim overstepped their bounds and declared themselves rulers over the entire Jewish nation a position belonging exclusively to the household of Dovid Hamelech. Although this was a serious fault Hashem focused on their display of devotion and granted them the privilege of the priesthood. (Ramban Breishis 49:10) According to some opinions Yanai (Yochanan) Hamelech served as the high priest for eighty years. (Mesichta Brachos 29a) The Chashmonaim family proved their devotion and deserved to remain in Hashem's inner circle. Their total dedication to Hashem created a relationship of fondness and endearment and establish them the most qualified candidates for his service. (see Malbim, Zechariah 3:7)

The Bach sees this dimension of service as the heart of the Chanuka experience. He explains that the Jewish people became lax in their service in the Temple Bais Hamikdash. This sacred and precious opportunity became a matter of routine and was performed without inner feeling and devotion. Hashem responded and removed their privileges to awaken them to their shortcomings. The Chashmonaim, descendants of Yehoshua and Shimon Hatzadik understood the message and resolved to restore Hashem's glory to His nation. Following the footsteps of their predecessors they totally dedicated themselves to this service and sacrificed their lives on its behalf. Hashem responded to their devotion and led them to a miraculous victory. We kindle our menora as an expression of our devotion to Hashem's service and resolve to internalize Chanuka's lesson. After sincerely examining our level of service we dedicate heart, mind and soul to Him and apply our

Chanuka experience to our service throughout the year. (comment of Bach O.H. 670)

May Hashem accept our total commitment to His service and grant us the privilege of serving him in His holy abode in the nearest future. *© 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The first words of this week's Torah portion are "And it happened, at the end..." [Bereishit 41:1]. The Zohar begins its commentary as follows: "Rabbi Chiya opened by saying, 'He put an end to darkness' [Iyov 28:3]. He put an end to the left-hand side." That is, the word "keitz" - end - is a hint of the left or second the word - "yamin" - in the phrase used by Daniel for the end of days, "keitz hayamin."

The events that happened to the forefathers are a sign for the offspring, and we can learn from the exile in Egypt about the other exiles. Yaacov was told, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt... I will descend with you, and I will also surely raise you up." [Bereishit 46:3-4]. Rabban Shimon Ben Yochai said: "Just look how fond the Holy One, Blessed be He, is of Yisrael. Wherever the people went the Shechina - the Divine presence - went with them." [Megilla 29a]. This is the source of the phrase, "The Shechina is in exile." The very fact that the other nations ask "where is your G-d?" is a desecration of the holy name, as if G-d Himself is in exile together with us. Similarly, Rabbi Akiva said, "'Because of Your nation which You redeemed from Egypt, the nation and their G-d' [Shmuel II 7:23]. If this had not been written in this way, it would not be possible to say it: It is as if Yisrael said to the Holy One, Blessed be He, You have redeemed Yourself ." [Shemot Rabba 15].

The same is true in the future. "When they will be redeemed in the future, the Shechina will be together with them, as is written, 'Your G-d will bring your captives back' [Devarim 30:3] - not that He will send them but that He will return. This teaches us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, returns with them from the exiles." [Megilla, ibid].

Thus, we can see a new meaning to such verses as "I will be happy with your salvation" [Tehillim 9:15] and "I will show Him my salvation" [91:16]. They imply not only that the Holy One, Blessed be He, helps Yisrael but rather that He is also saved, and that we rejoice in His redemption too.

"Even as I walk in the Valley of Death I will not be afraid, for You are with me" [Tehillim 23:4]. That is, in the straightforward reading of this verse - even when I am in trouble I will have no fear because I am confident that You will save me. But a Chassidic app roach reads the verse differently: "Even when I walk in the Valley of Death where there is no fear - it is bad, because You are with me." We are not worried about ourselves but rather about the fact that we have dragged the Holy One, Blessed be He, into exile together with us.

And that is why we say, "Help Your right hand and respond to me" [Tehillim 60:7]. "The Almighty said, I have set a limit for my right hand. As long as the people are enslaved, My right hand will be enslaved. When I redeem my sons, I will redeem My right hand too." [Yalkut Shimoni]. The right hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, symbolizes the power and the strength to redeem Yisrael, but this right hand is enslaved and cannot operate properly as long as Yisrael remains in exile. We therefore ask G-d to put an end to the exile of His own right hand.

Thus, the phrase in the Book of Daniel, "You will rise up to your fate in the end of days" [12:13], refers not o nly to the future but also, as is noted by Rabeinu Saadia Gaon, "to the end when I will rescue My right hand, which was turned towards My back because of the enemy. Then I will rescue Jerusalem, as is written, 'If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget too" [Tehillim 137:5]."

And that explains the quote from the Zohar at the beginning of this article. "'He put an end to darkness' [Iyov 28:3]. He put an end to the left-hand side." The end of the left is the beginning of the right - salvation will grow up out of the darkness so that the trait of the right side will be revealed, and then the Holy One, Blessed be He, will come out of exile.

"And You made a great name for Yourself in the world - for us to give thanks and sing the praises of Your great name" ["Al Hanissim," Chanukah prayer]. *© 2011 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet*