

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 Ashkenazic 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, Ashkenazim 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 Sefardim 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

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connection one to another, and that which binds us 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. © 2012 Rabbi A. Weiss

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Finally after twenty-two years and many twists and turns, Joseph and his brothers meet. We sense the drama of the moment. The last time they had been together, the brothers planned to kill Joseph and eventually sold him as a slave. One of the reasons they did so is that they were angry at his reports about his dreams. He twice dreamed that his brothers would bow down to him. To them that sounded like hubris, excessive confidence and conceit.

Hubris is usually punished by nemesis and so it was in Joseph's case. Far from being a ruler, his brothers turned him into a slave. That, however, turned out not to be the end of the story but only the beginning. Unexpectedly, now in this week's parsha, the dream has just come true. The brothers do bow down to him, "their faces to the ground" (Gen. 42: 6). Now, we feel, the story has reached its end. Instead it turns out only to be the beginning of another story altogether, about sin, repentance and forgiveness. Biblical stories tend to defy narrative conventions.

The reason, though, that the story does not end with the brothers' meeting is that only one person present at the scene, Joseph himself, knows that it is a meeting. "As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognised them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them ... Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him."

There were many reasons they did not recognise him. They did not know he was in Egypt. They believed he was still a slave while the man before whom they bowed was a viceroy. Besides which, he looked like an Egyptian, spoke Egyptian and had an Egyptian name, Tsofenat Paneakh. Most importantly, though, he was wearing the uniform of an Egyptian of high rank. That had been the sign of Joseph's elevation at the hand of Pharaoh when he interpreted his

dreams: So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain round his neck. He made him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, 'Make way.' Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt. (Gen. 41: 41-43)

We know from Egyptian wall paintings and from archeological discoveries like Tutankhamen's tomb, how stylised and elaborate were Egyptian robes of office. Different ranks wore different clothes. Early pharaohs had two headdresses, a white one to mark the fact that they were kings of upper Egypt, and a red one to signal that they were kings of lower Egypt. Like all uniforms, clothes told a story, or as we say nowadays, "made a statement." They proclaimed a person's status. Someone dressed like the Egyptian before whom the brothers had just bowed could not possibly be their long lost brother Joseph. Except that it was.

This seems like a minor matter. I want in this essay to argue the opposite. It turns out to be a very major matter indeed. The first thing we need to note is that the Torah as a whole, and Genesis in particular, has a way of focusing our attention on a major theme. It presents as with recurring episodes. Robert Alter calls them "type scenes." There is, for example, the theme of sibling rivalry that appears four times in Genesis: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau and Joseph and his brothers. There is the theme that occurs three times of the patriarch forced to leave home because of famine, and then realising that he will have to ask his wife to pretend she is his sister for fear that he will be murdered so that she can be taken into the royal harem. And there is the theme of finding-future-wife-at-well, which also occurs three times: Rebecca, Rachel and Jethro's daughter Zipporah.

The encounter between Joseph and his brothers is the fifth in a series of stories in which clothes play a key role. The first is Jacob who dresses in Esau's clothes while bringing his father a meal so that he can take his brother's blessing. Second is Joseph's finely embroidered robe or "coat of many colours," which the brothers bring back to their father stained in blood, saying that a wild animal must have seized him.

Third is the story of Tamar taking off her widow's dress, covering herself with a veil, and making herself look as if she were a prostitute. Fourth is the robe Joseph leaves in the hands of Potiphar's wife while escaping her attempt to seduce him. The fifth is the one in today's parsha in which Pharaoh dresses Joseph as a high-ranking Egyptian, with clothes of linen, a gold chain and the royal signet ring.

What all five cases have in common is that they

facilitate deception. In each case, they bring about a situation in which things are not as they seem. Jacob wears Esau's clothes because he is worried that his blind father will feel him and realise that the smooth skin does not belong to Esau but to his younger brother. In the end it is not only the texture but also the smell of the clothes that deceives Isaac: "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field the Lord has blessed" (Gen. 27: 27).

Joseph's stained robe was produced by the brothers to disguise the fact that they were responsible for Joseph's disappearance. Jacob "recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! A wild animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." (Gen. 37: 33).

Tamar's appearance dressed as a veiled prostitute was intended to deceive Judah into sleeping with her since she wanted to have a child to "raise up the name" of her dead husband Er. It seems that in the pre-mosaic law of levirate marriage, other close relatives like a father-in-law, not just a brother-in-law, could fulfil the duty. Judah was duly deceived, and only realised what had happened when, three months later, Tamar produced the cord and staff she had taken from him as a pledge.

Potiphar's wife used the evidence of Joseph's robe to substantiate her claim that he had tried to rape her, a crime of which he was wholly innocent.

Lastly, Joseph used the fact that his brothers did not recognise him to set in motion a series of staged events to test whether they were still capable of selling a brother as a slave or whether they had changed.

So the five stories about garments tell a single story: things are not necessarily as they seem. Appearances deceive. It is therefore with a frisson of discovery that we realise that the Hebrew word for garment, b-g-d, is also the Hebrew word for "betrayal," as in the confession formula, Ashamnu, bagadnu, "We have been guilty, we have betrayed."

Is this a mere literary conceit, a way of linking a series of otherwise unconnected stories? Or is there something more fundamental at stake?

It was the nineteenth century Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz who pointed out a fundamental difference between other ancient cultures and Judaism: "The pagan perceives the Divine in nature through the medium of the eye, and he becomes conscious of it as something to be looked at. On the other hand, to the Jew who conceives G-d as being outside of nature and prior to it, the Divine manifests itself through the will and through the medium of the ear . . . The pagan beholds his god, the Jew hears Him; that is, apprehends His will."¹

In the twentieth century, literary theorist Erich

Auerbach contrasted the literary style of Homer with that of the Hebrew Bible.² In Homer's prose we see the play of light on surfaces. The *Odyssey* and *Iliad* are full of visual descriptions. By contrast, biblical narrative has very few such descriptions. We do not know how tall Abraham was, the colour of Isaac's hair, or what Moses looked like. Visual details are minimal, and are present only when necessary to understand what follows. We are told for example that Joseph was good-looking (Gen. 39: 6) only to explain why Potiphar's wife conceived a desire for him.

The key to the five stories occurs later on in Tanakh, in the biblical account of Israel's first two kings. Saul looked like royalty. He was "head and shoulders above" everyone else (1 Sam. 9: 2). He was tall. He had presence. He had the bearing of a king. But he lacked self confidence. He followed the people rather than leading them. Samuel had to rebuke him with the words, "You may be small in your own eyes but you are head of the tribes of Israel." Appearance and reality were opposites. Saul had physical but not moral stature.

The contrast with David was total. When G-d told Samuel to go to the family of Yishai to find Israel's next king, no one even thought of David, the youngest of the family. Samuel's first instinct was to choose Eliav who, like Saul, looked the part. But G-d told him, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16: 7).

Only when we have read all these stories are we able to return to the first story of all in which clothes play a part: the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit, after eating which they see they are naked. They are ashamed and they make clothes for themselves. That is a story for another occasion but its theme should now be clear. It is about eyes and ears, seeing and listening. Adam and Eve's sin had little to do with fruit, or sex, and everything to do with the fact that they let what they saw override what they had heard.

"Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him." The reason they did not recognise him is that, from the start, they allowed their feelings to be guided by what they saw, the "coat of many colours" that inflamed their envy of their younger brother. Judge by appearances and you will miss the deeper truth about situations and people. You will even miss G-d Himself, for G-d cannot be seen, only heard. That is why the primary imperative in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, "Listen, O Israel," and why, when we say the first line of the Shema, we place our hand over our eyes so that we cannot see.

Appearances deceive. Clothes betray. Deep

¹ Heinrich Graetz, *The structure of Jewish history, and other essays*, New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1975, 68.

² Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957, 3-23.

understanding, whether of G-d or of human beings, needs the ability to listen. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Yosef was served by himself and the brothers by themselves... the brothers were seated before Joseph (with Yehuda at head of table)... they drank with him and became intoxicated," (Genesis 43:32).

"And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him, with their faces to the ground... And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamt about them and he said to them, 'you are spies'" (Genesis 42:6, 9) One of the most fascinating aspects of the portions we are reading is the extent to which our towering personalities are driven, even obsessed by their dreams. To what extent is it the dream, and not the individual's merits and actions, which determines the recipient of the familial leadership legacy? We shall investigate these issues, but first let me explore the dreams of Joseph, the most prolific biblical dreamer.

Joseph's dreams invited envy - and even hatred unto death - in the hearts of his brothers. Why? Certainly sibling rivalry is a most observable phenomenon, but, it is difficult to understand the intense venom felt amongst the great grandchildren of Abraham, the future Twelve Tribes of Israel, towards this most beloved son of their father.

When we remember that our dreams reveal our innermost and often subconscious thoughts, fears and ambitions, then we can unravel the code. The classical Jewish dream was that of Joseph's father, Jacob, a ladder connecting Heaven and Earth, ascending and descending angels between the earthly and heavenly domains, with G-d at the top of the ladder promising Jacob Divine protection. Israel is a land on Earth which merits G-d's care from the beginning of year until year end, and the Holy Temple is slated to become the earthly abode for the Divine Presence. The Holy Land and the Holy Temple express Jacob's dream of uniting Heaven and Earth.

Joseph too dreamed of those same elements, the below and the above, sheaves of wheat and heavenly bodies. But in Joseph's dreams, they are not connected.

Each has its separate dream. Moreover, Jacob dreams of Divine assurances that he will return safely to Israel, whereas Joseph dreams of agricultural produce, a form of productivity, indeed, a profession invented in Egypt, the unwholesome and powerful "gift of the Nile."

Worst of all, while at the center of Jacob's dream stands G-d, Joseph himself is the center of his own dreams, as he wields mastery over the earthly as well as the spiritual, with both Earth and Heaven

bowing down to him! If the striped, colored cloak expressed the bestowal of the familial leadership upon Joseph, then the brothers were convinced that their father Jacob had made a tragically wrong choice. Joseph was a "megalomaniac" who hankered after Egypt instead of Israel; narcissistically worshiping himself instead of G-d. They hated with the righteous hatred of children who see their ancestral religion of compassionate righteousness and moral justice being hijacked in favor of Egyptian wheat.

Just as Esau had been ejected from the family, so too must Joseph be ejected, if the vision of Abraham is to endure and eventually prevail in subsequent generations.

Joseph is blithely unaware of the complex interpretation his brothers give his dreams; he merely sees himself as achieving economic, earthly mastery as well as spiritual, heavenly domination over his siblings, the two areas of control which Jacob had wrested from Isaac: the physical blessings and the spiritual "firstbornship."

It was this faith in the ultimate realization of his two dreams which fortified him to overcome all of the setbacks he suffered after he was sold into Egypt.

Now to return to our portion, When Joseph saw his brothers bowing before him in order to purchase grain (Genesis 42:6), he believed that his first dream of economic and political power had been realized. But what he really desired was the spiritual leadership, the essence of the "firstbornship," the universal assemblage of all the nations under the sovereignty of G-d, with him - Joseph - being the earthly king of Israel.

Hence, when "Joseph remembered his dreams" and prepared for their realization, he said to his brothers "you are spies" and insisted that they return with his beloved full brother, Benjamin. He wrongly calculated that the old father would not send Benjamin alone, but would opt to accompany him. Then Jacob, too, would bow down to the "Grand Vizier" and the second dream too would be realized.

Alas, Jacob does not go down to Egypt at this point, and Joseph never achieves spiritual mastery over Israel.

Perhaps it is because Jacob does not bow before him and so his second dream is never fulfilled; perhaps because Jacob decides to separate the material blessing from the spiritual birthright because he still feels guilty about the deception Rebekah convinced him to enact; perhaps because despite the fact that he repents, he wasn't worthy.

You will remember that when Joseph stands before Pharaoh to interpret his dream, he insists that it is not his wisdom, but G-d who will interpret the dreams for the well-being of Pharaoh. He likewise recognizes the importance of the Land of Israel when, with his very last breath, he asks to be buried there. Nevertheless, Joseph invested most of his most productive years on

behalf of Egypt and the Egyptians rather than on behalf of Israel and the Israelites. He also enslaved the Egyptians to Pharaoh for economic reasons, which was hardly the legacy of Abraham's "compassionate righteousness."

Ultimately, it seems that worthiness and not "dreaminess" is the deciding factor for the future Jewish leadership. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The astounding and amazing story of Yosef continues in this week's parsha. Through a series of inexplicable events, Yosef finds himself raised from being a kidnapped victim and slave who was thrust into prison and doomed to oblivion, to becoming the chief minister of the Pharaoh and the Egyptian Empire. Yosef takes all of this in stride and certainly sees it as being part of a series of events that had to happen since they were divinely ordained and predicted to him in his youthful dreams.

One who expects miracles to happen apparently is not overly impressed when they actually do occur. Yosef's inner voice had long ago told him that he was destined for power and greatness and so the unusual events that befell him are unable to destabilize him. He somehow knows that he will be a ruler of men and the leader of his brothers.

There are many instances in human and Jewish history where people, early on in their lives, realize they were born to greatness and enormous potential achievement. The prophet Yirmiyahu is told in his initial vision of prophecy that he was already ordained, in his mother's womb, to become the prophet of Israel. All men may be created equal but we are well aware that not everyone comes into this world with equal talents and opportunities.

Achieving greatness is not preordained, though the circumstances that may allow one to rise to greatness apparently are. The dreams that guided Yosef in his youth and that brought him to initial travail and later to unbelievable triumph told him of opportunity but provided no guarantee of fulfillment. Only Yosef himself, through his own actions and ingenuity, could bring the promise of those dreams to fruition.

So, too, is it with all of us. One of the central issues and questions of life deals with the fulfillment of one's potential and the positive exploitation of the circumstances of life that are dealt to us. Yosef's words to the butler/officer of Pharaoh while in prison -- "I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews and I have done nothing wrong here and now I find myself imprisoned" -- is not to be read as being solely a lament over the circumstances of life that have overtaken him. Rather, it was a statement of fact upon which Yosef built his hopes for the future. He implored the butler/officer of Pharaoh to remember him to the king and set him free.

Yosef sees in this seemingly chance encounter in prison with the butler/officer, the opportunity to pursue his goal and rise to greatness. Yosef will not squander that opportunity nor will he wallow in despair or rail against the fate that has treated him so cruelly. He will not allow events and circumstances to deter him from the realization and actualization of his dreams and visions.

Rather, he will attempt to use and exploit all of those circumstances to make his dreams reality and to achieve the greatness that he believes he is entitled to and has been promised to him. This lesson of human fortitude has guided the Jewish people throughout the long night of our exile and dispersion. We are currently faced with difficult circumstances and troublesome events. We should, somehow, attempt to turn them to our advantage and realize our age-old dream of Zion and Jerusalem. ©2014 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

It is commonly known that the reason that we call ourselves by the name Yehudim (Jews) is because most of us come literally from the Kingdom of Judah, or more specifically the tribe of Judah. Yet, there is a deeper reason why we have continued to use this term specifically when there are countless other names that our people and religion could go by.

This week's Torah portion points to this reason. In the narrative, Yosef (Joseph) takes Shimon (Simon) hostage and demands that the brothers bring Binyamin (Benjamin) to Egypt, as a precondition for both Shimon's release and his (Yosef's) providing of more food for Yaakov's (Jacob's) family.

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

Yehudah's pledge is unusual. Normally when a debtor guarantees collateral, the collateral comes from a party other than the debtor. Here, Yehudah takes his obligation to a higher level. Yehudah himself is both the one who makes the commitment as well as the guarantor. This indicates how seriously Yehudah takes the pledge or the "arevut" he is offering.

"Arevut," writes Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, "means more than just another concern for one's fellow Jew. It means that I am a surety-each and every Jew is a surety for every other Jew. Just as a surety in money

is held responsible as if he had been the debtor, so, also, every Jew is a surety for all the spiritual obligations of every other Jew."

Of course this does not mean that Jews are not concerned for all of humankind. We are. Every human being is created in the image of G-d. In the words of our Rabbis, *chaviv adam shenivrah be-tzelem Elokim*. As such, we have very deep obligations to all people. But our obligation to our fellow Jew is unique. As we are more connected to our inner family with whom we share a common tradition, history and destiny, so too concerning our larger family - the people of Israel.

Hence, we are called Yehudim, as we are named after the person who so intensely exemplified *ahavat Yisrael* - Yehudah. We must realize the centrality of the principle of Jewish unity. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, the medieval poet and philosopher notes that all of Israel can be compared to a human body. When one limb hurts, the entire being is affected. So it is with Am Yisrael. All Jews are one body. He taught that when one Jew is in pain, Jews everywhere feel that pain.

Yet, he also taught us that when a Jew dances and experiences joy, we all dance and feel the joy. Let us hope that we can experience the unity of joy, an important element in our obligations as Yehudim, more and more in the days, months and years to come.
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RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And they said one man to his brother (Joseph's brothers), we are guilty about our brother. We saw the suffering of his soul when he pleaded to us and we did not listen to him. Therefore, this misfortune has befallen us" (Genesis 42:21). What lesson for our lives can we learn from their statement?

Rabbi Dovid of Zeviltov comments in the commentary *Otzer Chaim*: If a person did something wrong and recognizes that he has done wrong, he will be forgiven. However, if a person does something wrong and denies it, there is no atonement for him. When Joseph's brothers previously said that they were innocent, Joseph responded by calling them spies. When they said that they were guilty, Joseph was full of compassion for them and cried.

Many people deny their faults and the things that they have done wrong because they mistakenly think that others will respect them more. In reality people admire someone with the honesty and courage to admit his mistakes. It takes a brave person to say, "Yes, I was wrong." This kind of integrity will not only build up your positive attribute of honesty, but will also

gain you the respect of others. When you apologize to someone for wronging him, he will feel more positive towards you than if you denied that you did anything wrong. This awareness will make it much easier for you to ask forgiveness from others. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

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. © 2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The Rambam (*Hilchos M'gila v'Chanukah 3:1*) summarizes the history of Chanukah: "During the Second Temple, when the Greeks ruled, they made decrees against Israel (the nation) to undermine their religion, and didn't allow them to be involved with Torah or Mitzvos and took control of their money and their daughters, and entered the Temple and breached it and defiled that which was pure and made it very difficult for Israel, oppressing them greatly, until the G-d of our ancestors had mercy on them and rescued them from their hands and saved them." The Rambam then explains how G-d did this: "The sons of the Chashmona'im, the High Priests, overpowered [the Greeks] and killed them and rescued [Israel] from their hands and appointed one of the priests as king, and sovereignty was returned to Israel for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Temple." He then continues (3:2-3) by recounting the miracle of the oil and how, based on this, the sages instituted the holiday of Chanukah. As I have previously discussed (see <http://tinyurl.com/mnu5vmy>), the essence of the holiday is our once again becoming a sovereign nation,

with the miracle of the oil providing the divine stamp of approval for making it a yearly celebration.

Being a sovereign nation has many advantages, but, as the State of Israel has found out the hard way, some serious disadvantages as well. Usually, the biggest issues are internal ones, as garnering the needed consensus to move forward on anything can be quite difficult. In Israel's case, however, they also have to deal with being surrounded by hostile enemies, a sizeable internal population that identifies with these enemies more than with the country they live in, and an incredible amount of hostility across the globe. Although I usually try to avoid discussing political issues, I share the anguish of my Jewish brethren regarding Israel's predicament, and with Jewish sovereignty being a major theme of the Chanukah story, have decided to share some thoughts that I have withheld until now.

Unfortunately (and this is a word that can unfortunately be used many, many times when it comes to the Middle East), before discussing any of the issues, certain "ground rules" must be set, as the danger of being misunderstood is great. As it is, the visceral reactions to the issue at large, as well as to the underlying issues, make it very difficult to have a rational discussion.

First of all, I don't believe there will ever be a resolution without divine intervention of biblical proportions. Nevertheless, as with everything in life (which is ultimately in G-d's hands) we must try to do whatever we can. Secondly, compromise, from all parties, will be necessary. When I say all parties I also mean those who are trying to help mediate a long-term sustainable resolution. Granted, until now it seems that only one side has made any real compromises, and my pessimism regarding there ever being a resolution is based primarily on my pessimism about one side ever really compromising, but all sides must be prepared to make significant, even painful, compromises. To paraphrase Shimon Peres (in his interview several years ago with the New York Times Magazine), neither love nor peace is possible without closing your eyes and ignoring several aspects of your partner. Included in these compromises is the need to (sometimes) ignore the truth and focus on practical steps that can be taken at this point in time, even if where we are at this point is built on lies, embellishments, violence and pain.

So far I have avoided using any term for one side of the conflict, because the term most widely used, Palestinians, is a misnomer. When the country was called "Palestine" (before the State of Israel was founded), there were both Jewish and Arab residents, making the more appropriate term for the Arabs whose families lived in Palestine "Palestinian Arabs." A similar term, "Palestinian Jews," referring to Jews whose families lived in Palestine before 1948, is just as appropriate, making the term "Palestinians" one that

can refer equally to both Arabs and Jews. A strong argument could be made that before 1948 there was no Palestinian nationality, but it would be difficult to deny that one has since evolved, even if their "nationhood" is based on their negative reaction to the founding of the State of Israel. [From a sociological perspective, it's not that different from our becoming a nation in the "crucible" of Egypt based on our experiences there.] Since based on their shared experiences they are now a nation (even if those experiences were artificially manufactured), how and when they became a nation is irrelevant to reaching a long term sustainable resolution, as is how they are referred to. If there will ever be a two state solution, one of them will be called "Palestine," so refusing to refer to its future residents as "Palestinians" because they shouldn't have been referred to that way originally is counterproductive (in the context of a two-state solution). Therefore, I will refer to them as "Palestinians," even though I am mindful of the baggage that comes with the term.

Because of my pessimism regarding the ability of the Palestinians to accept anything less than the elimination of the State of Israel (as well as ever allowing Jewish residents to live in any part of the Holy Land) -- which makes any real compromise by Israel essentially worthless -- the only real possibility of anything happening must come from outside the two involved parties. Unfortunately, the world, specifically the West (the United States and the European Union) has not held the Palestinians accountable for their actions, nor for their refusal to make any meaningful compromises. Instead, they have given them political cover and support, as well as serious financial aid. Until the West makes real demands of the Palestinians, things will only get worse. Although the recent support in Europe for a Palestinian state and the attempt by the Palestinians to pass a U.N. resolution insisting that Israel withdraw by a certain date from any land conquered in 1967 are detrimental to reaching a solution negotiated by the two parties, it does create a window for the world to start placing some meaningful demands on the Palestinians.

An obvious prerequisite (and I do mean prerequisite, as opposed to in conjunction with any withdrawal) is an end to any reference or implication of the elimination of the State of Israel in any and all official Palestinian literature. Maps of "Palestine," including the map of "Palestine" that is part of their logo, cannot include any land that will be part of the State of Israel after a withdrawal. How can "Palestine" be part of a two-state solution if it only acknowledges one of the two states, claiming the land of both? By allowing official Palestinian literature to contain any indication of having aspirations for land that will be part of Israel, the West has emboldened the Palestinians, allowing them to think they can have it all without being held accountable. There must also be an insistence

that the Palestinian leadership renounces all terrorism (in all languages, to all audiences), including incitement, with a mechanism in place that includes meaningful consequences if the Palestinians do not live up to this requirement.

Another issue that must be addressed is land swaps. No one expects any two-state solution to work without land swaps, but if there is no provision for it before any withdrawal must take effect, there is no incentive for the Palestinians to agree to one before the deadline for Israel to withdraw. If, however, the required withdrawal includes a prior agreement regarding which lands will be swapped, there is no less pressure on the Palestinians to agree to a land swap than there is on Israel. (The current resolution mentions land swaps, but only in the window of negotiations; I am referring to it being a required agreement before the mandated withdrawal.)

A compromise resolution that passed in the European Parliament this week supporting "in principle the recognition of Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution," which "should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks" also included "strong support" for a "secure State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the right of self-determination and full respect of international law." Sounds unrealistic (similar wording is in the resolution draft), but why has there been no protest against repeated Palestinian insistence that no Jew will be allowed to live in Palestine? How can they support a Palestinian State that insists that no Jew can live within its borders? [We'll put aside how different the dynamic of the "settlement blocs" would be if withdrawing from the post-1967 orders did not automatically mean that these blocs could not become part of "Palestine."] It must be made abundantly clear than a Palestinian State that is "Judenrein" will not be allowed.

Which brings us to what I think is the key issue for any resolution: Palestinian acknowledgment of the historical ties between the Land of Israel (including the Temple Mount) and the Jewish people. This aspect is completely separate from Israel being a "Jewish State" (an issue beyond the scope of this piece), as it also applies to land that would become part of a Palestinian State. The biggest failure of the West in this elongated "peace process" has been its failure to insist that the Arab world acknowledge our historical connection to the land. [In a negotiated agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the wording can be watered down to acknowledging the Jewish perspective that we have an historical connection to the land. Although this connection is undeniable, for political purposes it can be compared to our acknowledging that Muslims have a religious connection to the Temple Mount without believing that what they believe

happened there. But this is only appropriate in a negotiated settlement; when it comes to a resolution demanding that Israel withdraw to its pre-1967 orders, a demand for acknowledgment by the Palestinians of our historical connection to the land cannot be a negotiating tactic.] The Palestinians seem motivated to deny our connection to the land because they think (agree?) that having such a connection gives us the right to live on it (similar to their Holocaust denial being based on the thinking that it is what gives the State of Israel the right to exist); if we were there first, their moving in after we were forced off wouldn't give them the right to keep it. [This line of thinking has much validity.] However, since no one else denies our connection to the land, yet still think land conquered in 1967 belongs to the Palestinians since they lived there prior to 1967 (based on an arbitrary date of when history is "reset" and whomever lived somewhere at the "reset" is deemed the rightful owner), there is no need for them to continue to insist that there is no historical connection between the land and the Jewish people just to be able to establish their own state on the same land. There has to be a strong movement from there being "dueling narratives" to acknowledging a "dual narrative."

By not insisting that the Palestinians acknowledge our historical connection to the land, the West has not only undermined the peace process, but it has given the Palestinians a license to mistreat our holy places, invent grievances and incite extremists. The West can right this wrong (to some extent) by starting to insist that any Israeli withdrawal is contingent upon the Arab world (once again, since they did at one time) acknowledging our historical connection to the land.

When it comes to the continuing suffering of the Palestinians, there is much blame to go around. The primary blame should be directed at the failed Palestinian leadership for selfishly prolonging the conflict in order to maintain their leadership positions and for putting their desire to annihilate Israel ahead of any desire to ease the suffering of the people they lead. The leadership of the rest of the Arab world is a close second, as for many years they sacrificed the well-being of the Palestinian people in order to scapegoat the Israelis and distract their own people from their problems. (This has started to change a bit recently.) A not-so-distant third is the West, who have enabled the Palestinians to get away with too much for too long, providing them with little or no reason to compromise. And the best place to start to reverse this is by insisting that any peace partner must acknowledge the historical connection the other has to the land.

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