

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

Recall last week's parsha about the childhood of Joseph, focusing not on what happened but on who made it happen. Throughout the entire roller-coaster ride of Joseph's early life he is described as passive, not active; the done-to, not the doer; the object, not the subject, of verbs.

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

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

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

In prison, again he became a leader, a manager, but again the Torah goes out of its way to attribute this not to Joseph but to Divine intervention: "G-d was with Joseph and showed him kindness. He

gave him favour in the sight of the chief jailer ... Whatever was done there, He was the one who did it. The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because G-d was with him; and whatever he did, G-d made it prosper."

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

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

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

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

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

The parsha break is thus a kind of real-life equivalent to the delay Joseph experienced in jail, which, as this week's parsha begins by telling us, took "Two whole years". It was then that Pharaoh had two



Take Control of
YOUR MONEY!
tinyurl.com/fitness5

...probably the best personal
finance training course I've seen! - CPA

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

dreams that no one in the court could interpret, prompting the chief butler to remember the man he had met in prison. Joseph was brought to Pharaoh, and within hours was transformed from zero to hero: from prisoner-without-hope to Viceroy of the greatest empire of the ancient world.

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

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

There is no achievement without effort. That is the first principle. G-d saved Noah from the flood, but first Noah had to build the ark. G-d promised Abraham the land, but first he had to buy the cave of Machpelah in which to bury Sarah. G-d promised the Israelites the land, but they had to fight the battles. Joseph became a leader, as he dreamed he would. But first he had to hone his practical and administrative skills, first in Potiphar's house, then in prison. Even when G-d assures us that something will happen, it will not happen without our effort. A Divine promise is not a substitute for human responsibility. To the contrary, it is a call to responsibility.

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

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

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

The week-long delay between Joseph's failed attempt to get out of jail and his eventual success is there to teach us this delicate balance. If we work hard enough, G-d grants us success – but not when we want but, rather, when the time is right. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The festival of Hanukkah celebrates the military victory of the Judeans over the Hellenist Syrians in the second century BCE, as recorded in the Al Hanissim thanksgiving prayer added to our Amida prayers and Grace after Meals for the eight days of the holiday; the festival also celebrates the ideological victory of Judaism over Greek Hellenism, as symbolized in the kindling of the Menorah, the Holy Temple candelabrum signifying "the illumination which is Torah." Hence we were engaged in a two-pronged struggle; a national war of independence against the heirs of the military conqueror Alexander the Great, and a spiritual *Kulturkampf* against the wisdom of ancient Greece, with which that same Alexander wished to dominate the entire civilized world at that time.

Moreover, as is clear from the historical writings of Josephus Flavius and the Apocryphal Books of the Maccabees, the enemies who were vanquished were not only the gentile Syrians but also the Jewish secular assimilationists, especially the ruling priestly aristocracy who had become bitten by the "bug" of Hellenistic culture and who wished to transform Judea into a Greek city-state (See Victor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*).

But why the objection to Greek culture? The Dialogues of Plato deal with the most fundamental ethical and moral issues affecting human conduct.

Maimonides himself was a great devotee of

Aristotle; the theater of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus influenced literature and psychology to this very day (Shakespeare and Freud); the mathematics of Pythagoras and Euclid opened the doors to modern physics; and the sculptor Praxiteles served as an inspiration for Michelangelo. Do not many of the rabbis of the Midrash praise the vision of "the aesthetic beauty of Greek culture dwelling within the G-dly tents of Shem" (Yalkut Shimoni, Noah 61)? So whence the great ideological clash between Judaism and Hellenism? I believe that while it is possible to glean great wisdom and true enlightenment from serious study of Greek culture, the major principle at the core of Hellenism, which is directly antithetical to Judaism, must be recognized and fought against. You will remember the riddle of the Sphinx, the conundrum that only Oedipus could answer and thereby gain the keys to the kingdom of Thebes: Who walks on "four" in the morning, on "two" in the afternoon and on "three" at night? The answer is of course the human being, who crawls in the morning of his life, walks upright in the afternoon of his life, and walks only with the aid of a cane in the evening of his life. The renowned classicist C.M. Bowra points out that the human being is not only the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx; the human being is the answer to every question asked by the Greek mind. The human form is perfect, and "human beings are the measure of all things" (Protagoras).

Judaism, on the other hand, while recognizing the unique qualitative supremacy of the human being over all other creatures, nevertheless insists that "the human being is but a little lower than G-d, and is crowned with honor and glory" (Psalms 8:5) That "little lower" is of critical significance; indeed, it is the distance between Heaven and Earth. For Judaism, therefore, it is not man who is the measure of all things but is rather G-d who is the measure, and ultimate guide, for all human endeavors and for the human personality.

Hence the eighth commandment of the Bible, as categorized by Maimonides in his Book of Commandments, is that we emulate G-d's personality traits (as it were) as best as we can in accordance with the verse "you shall walk in His ways" (Deut. 28:9), and just as G-d is described as compassionate so must you be compassionate, just as G-d is described as giving love without cause, so must you give love without cause... just as G-d does acts of loving-kindness, so must you (Ex. 34:6-7).

On the basis of this distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism, it is no wonder that the pantheon of gods on Mount Olympus, according to Greek mythology, were all "people writ large"; each of whom was emphasized and expressed in larger than human terms.

Zeus the god of power, Hermes the god of speed, Aphrodite the goddess of beauty, etc; the gods

of Greece were created in the image of humans. And so there was also Dionysus, the god of debauchery and licentiousness; and so there is no absolute morality, no single group of moral principles which must be observed by all. Thus for Jews, idealizing physical animalistic traits-like power, speed and beauty-is idolatry.

From this perspective, we will be able to better understand the very first commandment G-d gave to Adam and Eve, the introductory preface to the entire Bible, the commandment not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. The human being is given free choice in every realm of life, but G-d demands that the human subject himself to G-d's definition of good-the seven universal laws of morality-and reject that which G-d considers evil - to deny these seven universal laws. When it comes to morality, the Single and Absolute G-d of love and peace insists upon His absolute morality.

And returning to Hanukkah, if the human form is absolute perfection, then circumcision becomes a desecration of the perfect and the beautiful; hence, for the Hellenists, circumcision was a capital crime. Jews, however, believe that the human body and the human personality must be refined and sanctified by the higher spiritual norms mandated by our G-d of love and peace.

© 2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

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

The Torah here teaches us an important lesson about life and events. Everyone has dreams and again, so to speak, they are relatively easy to come by. Nevertheless, it is what follows the dream that counts most. The rabbis and the Talmud taught us that all dreams are judged and realized according to their interpretation.

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

Yosef worked his entire life to make his dreams become real and true. He spared no effort to force his brothers to recognize him as their leader and to validate the dreams that he reported to them in his youth. And it was his administrative skill and foresight that made his

interpretation of the dreams of the Pharaoh accurate, meaningful and providential. It is only the behavior and actions of humans after the dream that give the dream a challenging and meaningful purpose.

The Jewish people have long dreamt and prayed for their return to the Land of Israel and for the ingathering of the exiles to their homeland. Over the past century, in unlikely fits and starts, this dream has taken on reality and substance. And, it did so, certainly, with the help and guidance of Heaven but just as importantly with the actions, achievements and sacrifices of real people and the Jewish world everywhere.

This great dream lay dormant for many centuries because no one acted upon it ...more of a fantasy than a possible reality. But somehow the Jewish people awoke from the slumber of the exile and over the past century has succeeded in bringing this dream to physical reality. It is difficult to assess why it was only in the recent past, historically speaking, that the practicality of the dream began to be emphasized and exploited.

There were many great people and great Jewish communities that existed before our time who perhaps would have been deemed more worthy to give flesh and bones to the great dream of Israel. Why did they not do so and why did Jews over the last century and a half devote themselves to the realization of this dream?

That will remain one of the many mysteries of G-d that surround us on a regular basis. But one thing is clear, that the fate of dreams, national and personal, depends upon our practical, human interpretation and implementation of those dreams. ©2015 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

"**A**nd Yosef commanded that the monies of each [brother] should be returned to his sack" (B'reishis 42:25). There has been much discussion as far as why Yosef treated his brothers so harshly (see Ramban on 42:9 and Kli Yakar on 42:7, see also pg. 2 of <http://tinyurl.com/lr7teku>), but returning the money they had brought to buy food with doesn't seem to fit this pattern. I would therefore like to discuss several approaches as to why Yosef instructed his staff to put their money back into their bags without telling them.

The Brisker Rav is quoted as having said that Yosef did this to make sure that his brothers would return to Egypt. He had made it a very unpleasant experience for them, and was afraid they would make

do with whatever they had (see 43:11, that some food was available in Canaan, even if grain wasn't) to avoid having to deal with that ogre of a ruler in Egypt. Knowing they would never keep money that didn't belong to them and would therefore have to come back to Egypt to return it, he put the money back into their bags.

Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita (Rinas Yitzchok I) asks three questions on this approach, leaving them all unanswered. First he asks how Yosef could be so sure that they would come back to return the money if they weren't obligated to do so (see Rambam's Hilchos G'zaila va'Aveida 11:3). However, since they knew there was a distinct possibility that the money was purposely put there to make them look bad (see Rashi on 42:28 and Radak on 42:35), they would have been required to return it (as Rambam himself says there). Secondly, he asks why, if they had to return the money, didn't they do so right away when Levi found his when they lodged (see Rashi on 42:27). However, since they had to bring food back to their families, returning the money to Egypt right away was not more important than feeding the hungry ones back home first and then returning the money later. The fact that when they returned they said all of them had found their money in their sacks when they lodged (43:21) shows that delaying returning the money to be able to feed their families as soon as possible was acceptable. Otherwise why would they make themselves look worse by admitting that they weren't that far from Egypt when they first realized that their monies were in their bags? Obviously, the need to return the money is not contradicted by not bringing it back immediately after it was discovered. His third question is rather straightforward; when they returned, it wasn't to return the money, but because they needed more food (43:2). Bringing the money back was just an afterthought (see 43:12), not the main reason they went. However, these were Yaakov's words, not his sons' words. They couldn't go back to Egypt without Binyamin (see 42:20 and 43:3-5), and until Yaakov allowed them to bring Binyamin, they couldn't go just to return the money. And Yaakov, who didn't trust them with Binyamin (nor did he trust that the money wasn't really stolen from the Egyptians, see B'reishis Rabbah 91:9, so he couldn't trust them to return it), only let him go with them because otherwise they would all starve (see 43:8). Therefore, the impetus for Yaakov allowing them to bring Binyamin, which was a prerequisite for returning, does not negate the possibility that Yosef wanted to give them an added incentive to return in case they could survive without buying more food. He couldn't know that Yaakov would only allow Binyamin to go if they would starve to death if he didn't (or that Yaakov was even still alive, or if the brothers would value Yaakov's wishes regarding Binyamin after having ignored their father's wishes when they sold him to

Egypt). All he knew (based on knowing how careful his family was with other people's money) is that even if the shortage of food wasn't enough to force them to return, all things being equal, having to return money that didn't belong to them would make them want to return.

In a similar vein, Abarbanel suggests that Yosef wanted to make sure that the family would have enough money to come back to buy more food, so put theirs back in their bags. Although this has nothing to do with the importance of treating other people's money with reverence, it does speak to Yosef's concern that they return. And with food being so scarce, it would not be far-fetched to have been concerned that even a family as wealthy as his might have had to use all of their resources to purchase food, and may not have enough to buy more. Nor was it unreasonable to be concerned that others had pillaged their things because of the shortage. Therefore, Yosef gave them their money back in case they needed it to buy more after the food they were bringing back was consumed.

When Shimon was taken from them and put in prison, the brothers acknowledged their guilt when they had ignored Yosef's pleas for mercy (42:21). Rashbam is among the commentators who point out that the brothers recognized that they were being punished "measure for measure," something that was likely Yosef's plan to help them understand what they had done wrong (see Abarbanel and Kli Yakar). When it came to finding the money in their sacks, though, they wondered how this was also "measure for measure" (see Rashbam and Chizkuni on 42:28). S'fornu (ibid) says they thought the money was purposely put there to frame them as thieves in order to make them slaves, which they recognized as being "measure for measure" for having sold Yosef into slavery, but they were puzzled because they thought selling Yosef into slavery was an act of mercy, since he really deserved to be executed for trying to have them excluded from G-d's "treasured nation" (see <http://tinyurl.com/zpyp95z>). They therefore wondered how this qualified as "measure for measure" if the intent of the Viceroy was malicious (enslaving them when they did nothing wrong) while theirs was an act of generosity. It is therefore possible that Yosef purposely did something (i.e. putting their money back in their bags) that would force them to try to figure out how it qualified as "measure for measure," which would get them to reexamine every detail of what they had done to him, in the hope that by doing they would finally realize what they had done wrong.

Radak (44:1, see also 42:27) understands Yosef's intentions throughout to be to cause them stress without doing any real damage. Abarbanel has a similar approach, adding that just as what the brothers did to him caused him stress (being sold as a slave and going to prison) but ended up being a good thing (he

became a ruler in Egypt and was able to support everyone, including his family, during a severe famine), Yosef tried to get them to understand what they had done wrong by causing them "measure for measure" stress without doing any real harm. Had they figured out he was Yosef before everything played itself out (including before he forced them to bring Binyamin to Egypt so he could verify that they would fight for Rachel's younger son even though they had treated her older son so poorly), the plan would have been foiled, the brothers would likely not have repented, and the chasm between Yosef and his brothers would have grown even wider. It is therefore possible that Yosef put the money back into his brothers' sacks not only to get them to try to figure out what they had done wrong to deserve this, but to further increase their stress level so they would be too distracted to figure out he was Yosef. Even when "the man who oversaw Yosef's house" told them that the money in their sacks was not considered stolen (43:23), Yosef had their donkeys confiscated (43:18) in order to make them think that they were going to be kept as slaves (see R' Chaim Paltiel and Chizkuni), making sure that their stress levels were still high. By preventing them from having any peace of mind, the brothers were unable to put all the pieces together, allowing Yosef's plan to run its course. ©2015 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. ©2015 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Mitzet 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. ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Aspaqlaria

The third stanza of the piyut "Maoz Tsur" describes the Hellene attack on the Beis Hamikdash with the words "ufartzu chomos migdalai—and they tore open the walls of my citadel."

Powerful words. Tore Open the Walls of my Citadel. Conjures up pictures of an army storming the mighty walls of a fortress to get at the oil and defile it.

The picture we get from the mishna is very different than this. "Within this [the wall around the Temple Mount] was the soleg, which was 10 tephachim high. Thirteen openings were in it, that the Hellenist Kings opened up. They restored them and closed them up, but legislated opposite them 13 bowings." (Midos 2:3)

The Bartenura explains that it was called a soleg, an open weave, because it was made of widely spaced wooden slats. It was 10 tephachim, 31 inches high or so. This is the "walls of my citadel"?! A waist-high open-woven fence? And why, when they converted the Beis Hamikdash into a temple for their pantheon was the soleg the one thing they destroyed?

The Tosfos Yom Tov explains that the soleg served to demarcate the cheil, the inner part of the Temple Mount, that was open only to Jews. (See the Rosh for an alternative explanation.) The soleg was 10 tephachim high because that is the minimum height for a mechitzah.

Tearing down the soleg was very much symbolic of the troubles we faced. The whole effort was to force Jews to assimilate, to blur the line between Jew and non-Jew—the very separation indicated by the soleg!

This is not to imply that there should be no interaction between Jew and non-Jew. We are supposed to be a "Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation". As individuals, we are to be kohanim, serving the religious needs of the world at large. But as a unified nation we are to be holy implying separate. How then can we be priests, serving the world's religious needs?

I'm reminded of a subtle change that came over American political rhetoric about a decade ago. Whereas the country used to call itself "The Great Melting Pot", it suddenly became "The Glorious Mosaic". A melting pot connotes the loss of individual ethnicity. The new model is one of many subcultures, each working together for the good of the larger picture.

I believe this is what Noach had in mind when he blessed his older two sons, "G-d gave beauty to

Yefes, but lives in the tents of Sheim" (Bereishis 9:27). Yefes, whose philosophy was epitomized by his grandson Yavan, the father of the Greeks, was blessed with beauty, with aesthetics, the development of the mind, of Greek philosophy. Sheim, the first Semite, was also the grandfather of a founder of a nation—Eiver, the first Hebrew. In Noach's picture of the world, each would contribute to the betterment of man. Yefes would provide the intellectual foundations, and the Jewish people would be the source of spirituality, growth and purpose.

Perhaps this is the reason behind the choice for the opening verses of the haphtorah for Chanukah, to remind us of the balance, the sh'vil hazahav, the golden mean between assimilation and isolation.

"Be joyous and happy, Daughter of Zion; because here, I am coming and I will dwell among you, by the trust of G-d. And many peoples will gather to Hashem on that day, and they will be for Me a nation; and I will dwell among you, and you will know that Hashem-of-Hosts sent me to you." (Zecharia 2:14,15)

The Radak explains that this is a prophecy about the Third Temple era. The purpose of this separateness is so that "from Zion shall come forth the Torah", so that we can radiate the truths, as a "Light for the Nations", to a world unified under the flag of the G-d of Israel.

The Ibn Ezra comments that this promise to dwell amongst us is conditional. We must first gather ourselves from among the nations, which has not yet happened. First we must build up the chomos migdalai, return to the land of Israel and the Torah of Israel. © 1996 Rabbi M. Berger & The AishDas Society.

RAB SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais HaMussar

One of the miracles that we commemorate on Chanuka is the incredible victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greek army. It is mindboggling how literally a handful of Jews vanquished a mighty army that numbered in the hundreds of thousands! How did they accomplish such a feat? More correctly, what did they do to merit such an overt miracle?

Rav Wolbe (Daas Shlomo) cites two statements made by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai which shed light on this question. Just prior to his passing, his disciples came to visit him and they asked him for a bracha. He replied, "May you fear Heaven to the extent that you fear another human being." "Is that all that is expected of us?" they inquired. He responded, "If only [people would fear Hashem to that extent] -- for we know that when a person sins he says, 'I hope nobody sees me'" (Brachos 28b).

In a similar vein, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai explained why the Torah requires a ganev (a thief who steals when no one is looking) to pay double the

principle while a gazlan (one who steals in broad daylight) only pays what he stole. "The gazlan equated the honor of the Master (Hashem) with the honor of the servant (human beings), while the ganev gave more honor to the servant than the Master. He made it appear as if Hashem does not see or hear what transpires on earth" (Bava Kama 79b).

With both of these statements, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai sought to impress upon his disciples one of the most fundamental ideas of our emunah -- that ruchniyus (spirituality) is a reality! Many people find that they have trouble praying properly.

This difficulty is caused by the fact that we cannot see or feel Hashem and only the tangible is a reality for us. Our avodah is to appreciate that ruchniyus is no less a reality than the chair on which one sits.

This idea became apparent at the time of krias Yam Suf (the splitting of the sea).

The Torah tells us that with the "breath" of Hashem, the water both formed into walls for Bnei Yisrael and also drowned the Egyptians. Additionally, when Bnei Yisrael stood by Har Sinai, Hashem "tore upon all the Heavens" and His reality became palpably clear as they "saw" and heard Him speaking to them via prophecy.

When the Chashmonaim risked their lives to fight a war for the sake of Hashem, they were in effect endeavoring to "make His Name great and holy in the world" (Al Hanissim).

Hashem's "Name" denotes the revelation of Hashem as a genuine reality. When spirituality is revealed in its truest sense, it is more of a reality i.e. a mightier force than any physical power. When empowered by ruchniyus, even a handful of untrained Jewish fighters can defeat a mighty army.

Yet, the Chashmonaim had to first prove themselves worthy of meriting such complete spiritual assistance. Every miracle necessitates that there be a person who generates the miracle. This is accomplished when a person overcomes his natural tendencies for the sake of Hashem. Once he has proven that he is "above nature" Hashem reciprocates with a supernatural occurrence. Chazal tell us that the sea split when it saw the coffin of Yosef. In the merit of Yosef overcoming the natural (and tremendous) inclination to sin with his master's wife, Hashem caused the sea to split and disregard its natural tendency to flow evenly. Likewise, when the Chashmonaim put their lives on the line for Hashem, Hashem reciprocated with a miraculous revelation of spirituality which was more powerful than the mighty and well-equipped Greek army against whom they were fighting.

This idea gives us a greater appreciation for one who keeps his mouth shut in the midst of an argument or despite a temptation to speak lashon hara. Such a person has in effect propelled himself out of his

natural state and into the realm of the supernatural. The result of such an occurrence is truly miraculous, for spirituality has no limitations. If we can ingrain in ourselves the knowledge that spirituality is the truest reality, then we will have learned the lesson of Chanuka, integrated it into our lives and succeeded in acquiring the most vital asset that a Jew can seek!
© 2015 Rav S. Wolbe, zt"l and AishDas Society

RABBI YAACOV HABER

Light in the Dark

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

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

I am reminded of a story of a man I had the honor of meeting in Jerusalem, Reb Yehuda Holtzman. He was not a Rabbi, not a Dayan, just a humble Jew in Mea Shearim, known as "Yehuda the Blecher", since he made blechs (Shabbos plates). I was friendly with an American who was in the habit of spending Shabbos with him. How he met him, or got into this habit, I never found out. He told me that Reb Yehuda had the custom of making Kiddush on challa every Friday evening. (Making Kiddush on challa is permitted if you have no wine, but it is unusual.) At first he thought that Reb Yehuda might be allergic to wine, but no, on Saturday morning Reb Yehuda would drink wine at Kiddush. He did not ask him about this, until one Friday evening, after some years of this, he saw Reb Yehuda's wife bringing him a bottle of wine, which he then used for Kiddush.

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

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

debt. And that is what happened. And on that very Shabbos, the twenty-five years were up, and he could go back to having wine for Kiddush.

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

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

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

ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ

Light in the Dark

"[Joseph] left [his brothers] and wept. He returned to them and spoke to them. He took Simeon from them, and bound him before their eyes." (Genesis 42:24)

What did Joseph have in mind by taking a hostage? Taking one of them hostage would insure a speedy return of his brothers (Bechor Shor). In addition, Joseph was giving his brothers a chance to atone for their sin against him. They had all stood by, and watched him imprisoned and sold. Now, they would be forced to watch one of their own being incarcerated (HaKesav VeHaKabbalah).

Why did Joseph prefer to take Simeon prisoner rather than another brother? Actually, Joseph had initially thought to take Reuben as his hostage, for Reuben was the eldest and the leader of his brothers at the time of Joseph's enslavement. It was Reuben, however, who had tried to save him, so in acknowledgement, Joseph detained the next oldest brother, Simeon (Ibn Ezra, Tur). Moreover, Simeon was the ideal brother to set as the example. When Joseph had approached them, Simeon had suggested that they kill Joseph and dip his cloak into blood. In fact, when that suggestion was rejected and it was decided to throw Joseph into a pit for holding, it was Simeon who confined Joseph (Rashi). Furthermore, it was the cooperation of Simeon and Levi that led to the killing of all the males of the city of Shechem. By separating Simeon from Levi, Joseph was preventing another potential murderous collaboration (Rashbam). © 1995
Z.S. Itzkowitz



... "Anybody got a match?"