

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### The Angel who did not know he was an Angel

The story of Joseph and his brothers, spread over four parshiyot, is the longest and most tightly-scripted of all the narratives in the Torah. Nothing is there by accident; every detail counts. One moment, however, seems gloriously irrelevant – and it is this that contains one of the most beautiful of the Torah's ideas.

With great speed, we are introduced to the broad lines of the story. Joseph is envied and hated by his brothers. So deep has the animosity gone that they cannot talk peaceably with one another. Now the brothers have left home to tend their sheep, and Jacob tells Joseph to go and see how they are doing. This encounter will set in motion the central drama from which all else will follow: the moment when the brothers sell Joseph into Egypt as a slave.

But it nearly didn't happen. Joseph arrived at Shechem where he expected his brothers to be, but they were not there. He might well have wandered around for a while and then,

failing to find them, gone home. None of the events that take up the rest of the Torah would have happened: no Joseph the slave, no Joseph the viceroy, no storage of food during the years of plenty, no descent of Joseph's family to Egypt, no exile, no slavery, no exodus. The entire story – already revealed in broad outlines to Abraham in a night vision – seemed about to be derailed. Then we read the following:

A man found [Joseph] wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. (Gen. 37:15-17)

I know of no comparable passage in the Torah: three verses dedicated to an apparently trivial, eminently forgettable detail of someone having to ask directions from a stranger. Who was this unnamed man? And what conceivable message does the episode hold

for future generations, for us? Rashi says he was the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra says he was a passer-by. Ramban however says that "the Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a guide without his knowledge."

I am not sure whether Ramban meant without Joseph's knowledge or without the guide's knowledge. I prefer to think both. The anonymous man – so the Torah is intimating – represented an intrusion of providence to make sure that Joseph went to where he was supposed to be, so that the rest of the drama could unfold. He may not have known he had such a role. Joseph surely did not know. To put it as simply as I can: he was an angel who didn't know he was an angel. He had a vital role in the story. Without him, it would not have happened. But he had no way of knowing, at the time, the significance of his intervention.

The message could not be more significant. When heaven intends something to happen, and it seems to be impossible, sometimes it sends an angel

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down to earth – an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel – to move the story from here to there. Let me tell the story of two such angels, without whom there might not be a State of Israel today.

One was a remarkable young woman from a Sephardi family who, at the age of seventeen, married into the most famous Ashkenazi family in the world. Her name was Dorothy Pinto; her husband was James de Rothschild, son of the great Baron Edmond de Rothschild who did so much to support the settlement of the land in the days before the proclamation of the State.

A critical juncture occurred during the First World War that would eventually lead to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the placing of Palestine under a British mandate. Suddenly, Britain became absolutely central to the Zionist dream. A key figure in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, was in Britain, experimenting and lecturing in chemistry at Manchester University. But Weizmann was a Russian immigrant, not a prominent member of British society. Manchester was not London. Chemistry was not politics. The most influential and well-connected Jewish family was the Rothschilds. But

Edmond was in France. James was a soldier on the battlefield. And not every member of the British Rothschilds was a Zionist.

At that moment, Dorothy suddenly assumed a leading role. She was only nineteen when she first met Weizmann in December 1914, and understood very little of the political complexities involved in realising the Zionist dream. But she learned quickly. She was perceptive, resourceful, energetic, delightful and determined. She connected Weizmann with everyone he needed to know and persuade. Simon Schama, in his definitive account of Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel, says that “young as she was... she combined charm, intelligence and more than a hint of steely resolution in just the right mixture to coax commitment from the equivocal, enthusiasm from the lukewarm and sympathy from the indifferent.”

His judgement on the effect of her interventions is that “through tireless but prudent social diplomacy she had managed to open avenues of influence and persuasion at a time when they were badly needed.”[1] The result, in 1917, was the Balfour Declaration, a milestone in the history of Zionism – and we should not

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forget that the Declaration itself took the form of a letter to Lord (Walter) Rothschild.

Dorothy's husband James, in his will, left the money to build the Knesset, Israel's parliament building. In her own will, Dorothy left the money to build a new Supreme Court Building, a project undertaken by her nephew Jacob, the current Lord Rothschild. But of all the things she did, it was those connections she made for Chaim Weizmann in the years 1914 to 1917 that were surely the most important. Without them, there might have been no Balfour Declaration and no State of Israel.

The other figure, who could not have been less like Dorothy de Rothschild, was Eddie Jacobson. The son of poor Jewish immigrants, born in New York's Lower East Side, he moved with his family to Kansas City where he met a young man called Harry Truman. They knew one another in their youth, and became close in 1917 when they underwent military training together. After the end of World War I, they opened a haberdashery business together. It failed in 1922 because of the recession.

From then on, they went their separate ways, Jacobson as a travelling salesman, and Truman successively a county

administrator, Senator, Vice-President, and then when F.D. Roosevelt died in office in 1945, President of the United States. Despite their very different life-trajectories, the two stayed friends, and Jacobson would often visit Truman, talking to him about, among other things, about the fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

After the war, the position of America vis-à-vis the State of Israel was deeply ambivalent. The State Department was opposed. Truman himself refused to meet Chaim Weizmann. On 13 March 1948, Jacobson went to the White House and persuaded Truman to change his mind and meet Weizmann. Largely as a result of this, the United States became the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel on 14 May 1948.

Many years later, Truman wrote: One of the proudest moments of my life occurred at 6:12 p.m. on Friday, May 14, 1948, when I was able to announce recognition of the new State of Israel by the government of the United States. I remain particularly gratified by the role I was fortunate to play in the birth of Israel as, in the immortal words of the Balfour Declaration, “a national home for the Jewish people.”

Two people, Dorothy de Rothschild and Eddie Jacobson, appeared on the scene of history and connected Chaim Weizmann with individuals he might otherwise not have met, among them Arthur Balfour<sup>[2]</sup> and Harry Truman. They were like the stranger who connected Joseph and his brothers, but with infinitely more positive consequences. I think of them both as angels who did not know they were angels.

Perhaps this is true not only about the destiny of nations but also about each of us at critical junctures in our lives. I believe that there are times when we feel lost, and then someone says or does something that lifts us or points the way to a new direction and destination. Years later, looking back, we see how important that intervention was, even though it seemed slight at the time. That is when we know that we too encountered an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel. That is what the story of Joseph's stranger is about.

[1] Simon Schama, *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel*, Collins, 1978, 196-98.  
[2] Weizmann had met Arthur Balfour already, but without Dorothy he would not have had the influence that he eventually came to have over a whole circle of leading politicians.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

“And there passed by Midianite merchants, and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver, and they brought Joseph down to Egypt” (Genesis 37:28).

Who bears the ultimate responsibility for a criminal act? Is it the person who plans the crime, or the one who pulls the trigger or stabs with the knife? Is it the agency that sets up the act, the terrorist inciters, the mercenary for hire, or even the disinterested parents or apathetic society that nurtured the evil intent leading to the villainous deed?

An ambiguous verse in Vayeshev dealing with the sale of Joseph initiates a difference of opinion amongst biblical commentators that have relevance to this important question.

Let's consider this scene of *déjà vu*. We know that Isaac was actually blind when he planned to give the blessings to his favored son, Esau, who turned out to be Jacob because of Rebecca's planned deception. Now, we find Jacob is equally blind in his relationships with his own sons, for “Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his

children, because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colors' [Gen. 37:3]. This infuriated his brothers. 'And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him' [Gen37:4]. The Talmud declares:

"A parent must never favor one child among the others; because of a piece of material worth two selahs [the coat of many colors] that Jacob gave to Joseph more than his other children, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter degenerated until our forefathers were forced to descend to Egypt." (B.T. Shabbat 10b)

Apparently, our Sages felt that Jacob bore 'ministerial responsibility' for the tragedy of the brothers, although his sin was certainly inadvertent. Jacob suffers grievously for his mistake in family management, believing for twenty-two years that his beloved son is dead. But nevertheless, he certainly is not the main culprit.

Joseph doesn't do anything to assuage his brothers' feelings: he recounts his dreams that flaunt his superiority and eventual domination over the other family members (Genesis 37:5–11). Then, in a fateful

move, the still unaware (blind) Jacob sends Joseph to Shekhem to see "whether all is well with his brothers, and well with the flock" (Genesis 37:14). Sighting Joseph from a distance and clearly aggrieved by their father's favoritism, Joseph's brothers conspire in their hearts to kill him. They tear off his coat of many colors and cast him into a pit.

Shortly afterwards, the brothers spy an approaching caravan, prompting Judah to suggest that since killing isn't profitable, they should rather sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite caravan and tell their father he was devoured by a wild beast.

Undoubtedly, the moment Joseph is sold into slavery is one of the turning points in the Torah. It is considered the most heinous crime of the biblical period – the sin of sibling hatred foreshadowing the Jewish divisiveness that led to the destruction of the Second Holy Temple and its aftermath of tragic exile and persecution.

However, when we examine the verse recording the sale of Joseph, it's hard to figure out who it was that actually sold the hapless brother, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites or the brothers who initiated the plan (Genesis 37:27,28).

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Joseph himself initially considers the brothers responsible, as he said when he first reveals his true self to them, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold to Egypt." (Genesis 45:4)

However, the Rashbam maintains that since the brothers were not the ones who actually pulled Joseph out of the pit to sell him, they could not be considered as the only guilty party; but they must still share responsibility for the events that unfolded as a result of the sale. Their initial act of casting their brother into the pit was done with murder in their hearts. Rashbam casts guilt upon everyone who shares in unleashing the forces of evil, even those whose hands remain clean – while others do the actual dirty work.

I share the view of Rashbam. One must do something – not merely think something – in order to be responsible, but the one who sets the ultimate crime in motion by his action, even though he might not have perpetrated the act of the sale itself, must nevertheless certainly take responsibility. Hateful intentions alone cannot create culpability, but placing an individual in a vulnerable position – like casting him into the pit – inciting others to participate in that hatred as well

as actively aiding and abetting the perpetrators of the crime, certainly makes one a partner in crime who must assume a share of the guilt.

But there is a twist in this portion, and Joseph engages in a little historical revisionism. A much wiser and more mature Joseph was Grand Vizier of Egypt twenty-two years later; he looks upon this incident from the perspective of Jewish history, *sub specie aeternitatis*, under an Eternal gaze. From his vantage point, when he stands as Master rather than hapless victims, he continues, “But now do not be sad, and let there not be reproach in your eyes because you sold me here; it was in order that you [all] might live that God sent me [to Egypt] before you...to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you [for a momentous deliverance]. And now, it was not you who sent me here but God...” (Genesis 45:5–8).

Hence Joseph may very well be holding the brothers responsible for the sale even though it may have been the Midianites who actually committed the transaction – not only because it was the brothers who began the process which led to the sale, but mostly because he wishes to involve them in redemption. For Joseph, the act that began as a crime concluded – owing to

divine guidance and Joseph’s own quick-wittedness – as the salvation of the family of Israel. Joseph is anxious to restore family unity – and thus to look upon the sale from a divine perspective, which turned a tragic family transgression into a truly mighty salvation!

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**The Person in the Parsha**  
**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**  
**"The 'Wisdom' of the East"**

There are jokes which are very funny on the surface, but which, upon reflection, can be quite painful and disturbing.

One of them, which was told frequently twenty years ago or more, concerns a matronly woman from the Bronx who seeks to visit a famous guru somewhere in the Far East, perhaps in the mountains of northern India or Tibet.

She boards a plane at John F. Kennedy airport and begins the long and arduous flight, which necessitates several stopovers and the changing of planes. She lands at the closest airport to the remote ashram, or temple, where the guru has his mountain retreat. She finds a bus that takes her part of the way to the ashram and, although she's never even seen a donkey before, summons a donkey cart to continue her trek to her encounter with the guru.

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Totally exhausted, she finally arrives at the guru's quarters. To her great disappointment, she learns that the guru has just begun a three-day period of fasting and meditation and cannot possibly be interrupted. Anything but total solitude is forbidden.

She pleads and begs and finally resorts to one of the strategies of persuasion that she learned back in the Bronx. She tells the guru's guards that she only wants to say three words to him.

On the condition that she limits her message to just three words, they allow her access into the guru's inner chamber. There she finds him sitting in the lotus yoga position, totally entranced in his meditation.

She approaches him, but he remains unaware of her presence. Finally, she bends over him and whispers in his ear: "Melvin? Come home!"

I used to tell his story many times, not so long ago, when so many young Jewish men and women, from the Bronx and from elsewhere, left to the Far East in their quest for spiritual truth and a meaningful path in life.

The story always drew laughs from the crowd, but the laughs were inevitably followed by a

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contemplative silence as the audience began to reflect upon the point of the story. Young Jews by the thousands had become alienated not only from their Jewish roots, but from Western civilization in general.

Although this phenomenon is no longer as prevalent as it once was, Eastern religions remain attractive to many, and not just to young Jews but to a wide variety of individuals in search of a "New Age" alternative to Western culture.

The reasons why so many are dissatisfied with the Western way of life center around the relentless pressures and frantic pace which that way of life entails. Eastern religions offer an alternative which promises serenity, tranquility, and inner peace.

This leads us to a question that surprisingly connects to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayeshev (Genesis 37:1-40:23).

The question is: "Is there anything wrong with seeking tranquility and inner peace? Are they not highly desirable components of a healthy and meaningful lifestyle?"

An answer can be found in the words of the Midrash Rabbah that appear in most contemporary editions of

Rashi's commentary, although they are absent from earlier manuscript editions.

The first words in this week's Torah portion read: "Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned..." The Bible then narrates the story of Jacob's son Joseph and how he is sold into slavery by his brothers.

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, comments: "Jacob wished to dwell in peace and tranquility but immediately was beset by Joseph's troubles and tribulations."

These words imply that it was somehow improper for Jacob to desire a calm and serene existence. The comment even suggests that Jacob was punished for his wish by suffering the disappearance, and supposed death, of his favored son.

Why? What possible sin would Jacob have committed by hoping for tranquility? Had he not suffered enough during his years of exile? Were the family crises described in detail in last week's parsha not sufficient torture?

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter (the second Rebbe of Gur), the author of the Sfat Emet ("Lips of Truth"), a profoundly

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insightful Chassidic work, suggests that the calm and peaceful life is not necessarily the religiously desirable. Such a life is conducive to complacency.

"What God wants from the Jew," he writes, "is for him to have a life of constant toil in the service of His Blessed Name, because there is no limit to striving for perfection."

The Torah's ideal is a life of action and involvement in worldly affairs. The Torah rejects the attitude of detachment and passivity which is implicit in the teachings of Eastern religions.

The Torah cannot envision the good life if that life is without challenge. Achievement of inner peace is not the ultimate value, especially not if it results in withdrawal from responsible action within society.

The author of the Sfat Emet led his flock and wrote his works in the latter half of the 19th century. But the important lesson he taught was expressed about a century before, in the words of Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzato, the 18th-century Italian mystic, whose work Mesilat Yesharim ("The Path of the Just") contains the following demanding passage:

A man must know that he was not created to enjoy rest in this world, but to toil and labor. He should, therefore, act as though he were a laborer working for hire. We are only day laborers. Think of the soldier at the battlefield who eats in haste, whose sleep is interrupted, and who is always prepared for an attack. "Man is born to toil" (Job 5:7).

The teaching of both of these authors was anticipated by this passage in the Talmud (Berakhot 64a), as translated and elucidated in the Koren Talmud Bavli:

Torah scholars have rest neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come, as in both worlds they are constantly progressing, as it is stated: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion."

The differences between the ideologies of Judaism and other religions are sometimes subtle and hard to define. But in contrasting Judaism with the religions of the Far East, the differences are quite clear. The latter promise inner peace and serenity and advocate detachment. Judaism makes no such promises. It tells us that life is all about struggle and challenge, and it demands that

we be actively involved in improving the world.

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**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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**The Father Who Weeps Unceasingly for His Lost Son**

The brothers threw Yosef into a pit on Reuvain's advice (rather than kill him outright). Reuvain intended to come back to the pit and rescue Yosef. However, in Reuvain's absence, the brothers decided to sell Yosef to traveling merchants. They first stripped him of the special robe his father had made for him and dipped it into the blood of a goat they slaughtered to make it look like Yosef was killed by a wild animal.

They sent the bloodied garment to their father and asked him to identify it. He recognized the garment and, as the brothers anticipated, concluded that his beloved son was torn up by a wild animal. The pasuk states that Yaakov ripped his garments, put on sackcloth, and went into an extended period of inconsolable mourning for Yosef.

The pasuk further relates: "All of his sons and daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be consoled. He said, 'I will descend to the grave mourning my son'. And his father mourned for him." [Bereshis 37:35]

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At a recent Agudah Convention, Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum from Queens told a story about a Rav from Eretz Yisrael. The story is related to this pasuk, and the commentary of the Ohr HaChaim haKadosh thereon.

The Ohr HaChaim haKadosh asks a question: When Yaakov's children saw that Yaakov refused to stop mourning for Yosef, they were perplexed. They commented to themselves: Such behavior may be appropriate for a person who has just one son and that son dies, or perhaps even someone who just has a few children – then perhaps a father might go into a deep and inconsolable mourning after witnessing the (almost) total devastation of his family.

The Ohr HaChaim wonders what it was that Yaakov's children said to him to try to comfort him and concludes that they did not say anything. Rather, they did something which they thought should provide a source of comfort to Yaakov by itself: "All of his sons and daughters arose to comfort him..." They assumed that the very gathering together of the large family including the many surviving children and grandchildren who were still part of Yaakov's legacy would itself bring their father a source

of consolation and comfort. They came as eleven remaining sons, and an equal number of daughters (for with each Tribe, according to the Medrash, a twin daughter was born). Imagine the scene. Yaakov is there, inconsolable. He can't find nechama. The family suggest to one another: Do you know what we will do? We will gather everyone together. All the sons, all the daughters, all the grandchildren. Yaakov will look up at this throng of people, and that will be his nechama. A person with such a large family should not be so distressed over the disappearance of just one of his sons.

The plan did not work. Yaakov refused to be comforted even by this scene. Yosef was clearly Yaakov's favorite son. Yaakov saw in him something that he did not see in any of the other children, and even the large remaining family could not compensate for the loss of the irreplaceable eldest son of his beloved wife Rochel.

This was part of a story told by Rabbi Oelbaum at an Agudah Convention: There was a Rav in Eretz Yisrael who spoke between Mincha and Ma'ariv during the week of Parshas VaYeshev. The Rav repeated this interpretation of the Ohr HaChaim haKadosh, and then he concluded: "And this is the

way the Ribono shel Olam feels. There are thousands and thousands of people who are religiously observant Jews, and who are learning Torah. Especially in Eretz Yisrael, there are large and growing communities full of Shomrei Torah and Lomdei Torah – tens of thousands of people! But the Ribono shel Olam looks and sees how many sons are lost and how many daughters are lost. Therefore, the fact that there are tens of thousands of people learning and being Shomrei Torah u'Mitzvos does not console Him. The Ribono shel Olam weeps for every Jew that is not Shomer Torah u'Mitzvos.

That was the Rav's drasha in Eretz Yisrael for Parshas VaYeshev. Just like Yaakov wept and kept on weeping for his son Yosef because he was lost, so too the Almighty weeps for every Jew who is lost.

There was a Jew in shul that evening, apparently a neighbor of the Rav, who was not a Shomer Mitzvos. Despite the Rav's many attempts to be mekarev this person and to have influence on him, nothing helped. That night, this Jew came to shul because he had Yahrzeit, and he heard the Rav's drasha that the Ribono shel Olam weeps over every Jew that is "lost" like Yaakov wept over Yosef. He came over

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to the Rav after Ma'ariv and asked "Do you mean that the Ribono shel Olam cries for me, that he weeps over me because I am not a Shomer Mitzvah?"

The Rav said, "Yes, precisely. The Ribono shel Olam cries profusely over every lost Jew, and you are such a lost Jew. Hashem considers every Jew to be one of his children,, and just like Yaakov would not be consoled over one of his children who was lost, that is the way it is with Hashem's mourning over his lost children. He keeps on weeping."

That apparently touched this Yahrzeit observer in the right place, and he became a Chozer B'Teshuva. Little by little, he found the way back home. He started becoming a Shomer Shabbos, and today he is already a full Shomer Torah U'Mitzvos.

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### Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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Sometimes, our greatest inspiration comes from within ourselves. In Parshat Vayeishev, the Torah describes how Yaakov favoured his son Yosef and a reason is given for this in Bereishit 37:3: "...ki ben zekunim hu lo," – "... because he was a child of his old age."

Mishnah - The Ba'al HaTurim, who is a master of Hebrew

words and letters, says that we can learn from here that Yaakov taught Yosef all the lessons of the Mishnah.

What an extraordinary teaching! Where does the Ba'al HaTurim get this from? The Ba'al HaTurim explains that it comes from the words 'ben zekunim.' Zekunim has five letters. The zayin stands for Zeraim, which is the first of the orders of the Mishnah, teaching us the laws of agriculture. The kuf stands for Kodshim, the sacrificial rites, the nun for Nashim teaching us all the laws relating to women and marriage, and so on. The yud stands for the word Yeshua, saving, relating to the way in which we need to save ourselves from the threat of being damaged as is described in Seder Nezikin, and then finally the mem stands for Moed which deals with all our festivals.

Now there's a huge question we have to ask on this Ba'al HaTurim. Even a little child, from the seder experience, knows about 'Shisha Sidrei Mishnah' – there are SIX orders of the Mishnah! The Ba'al HaTurim only refers to five of them here!

The Admor, Rev Itsche Meir of Gur, explains beautifully. He says that only five of the orders are mentioned because they

relate to the passing down of information, to instruction. When a parent instructs a child about something, it's a cerebral activity, which is how Yosef was able to learn from Yaakov about agricultural law, about the festivals, and so on.

Purity - When, however, it comes to the sixth Order of the Mishnah which is called Taharat, how to live a life of purity, no person can receive that automatically from previous generations. We need to look into ourselves to derive inspiration from ourselves to lead a pure life. That's something that Yaakov could not give to Yosef, and that's why that seder is missing.

Over many years I have come across many people who've been from the finest, most outstanding homes and yet that is not reflected in their way of life, and on the other hand I've seen so many extraordinary people who come from backgrounds which they would probably wish to forget about and yet from within themselves they have reached exceptional levels of human conduct and are an extraordinary inspiration for many others.

So when looking for guidance and inspiration in life, often we should just start from within ourselves.

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### Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\*

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#### Friendship in Judaism

If you were to ask anyone under forty how many friends he or she has, the changes are that the response would be "hundreds" or "thousands". But most of these "friends" from Facebook are people who they have not even met in person or had a serious conversation with in the last few months. Most people that we call "friends" are, at best, only acquaintances, not true friends. How does one discern who is a true friend and who is a mere acquaintance?

In this week's Torah Portion of Vayeshev, someone is called a friend for the first time in the Torah, in a relationship that is mostly overlooked or not even discussed in the commentaries. Judah secretly has a sexual encounter with Tamar, who he believes is a prostitute. Without payment, Judah gives Tamar a "deposit". The next day he wishes to pay and retrieve his deposit. But rather than go himself, Judah sends his friend "The Adulami" to pay for the encounter and retrieve the deposit (**Genesis 38:20**). The Adulami cannot find this woman and returns to Judah without the "deposit". We know almost nothing about this person, but what a friend he must have been.

Judah confided in him about this sin he committed and, too embarrassed, asked his friend to pay her. If this is true friendship in the Jewish sense, what type of relationship should it look like? Does the Jewish standard of friendship coincide or differ with the norms of western society?

In Judaism, friendship seems to signify much more than companionship. A friend is more than just a buddy one hangs out with. Pure friendship is defined in the Mishna (**Avot 5:16**), which says that if a friendship is based on any one thing (or even two or more specific things), then the friendship will certainly dissolve as soon as its basis disappears. On the other hand, friendship that is not based on any specific thing will survive forever. Thus, friendship based on living in the same neighborhood, a mutual interest or even a mutual activity, is not true friendship. Once one person moves away or loses interest in the activity that has kept the friendship together, the "friendship" will disintegrate. Mutual interest may begin a relationship, but the relationship may grow to the point that the specific activities that began the relationship are no longer important, and the friendship will endure. Jewish friendship, therefore, transcends individual interests.

The Mishna continues and describes the ultimate example of true friends, David, and Jonathan. These individuals had every reason and tendency to hate each other, based on events in their lives. It was David who replaced Jonathan's father as the king of the Jewish people. Jonathan, who might have naturally sought the crown as it was customary at that time (as it is today) for royalty to be passed down within the family, should have hated David for becoming king. Nevertheless, despite all these factors, the friendship of David and Jonathan endured and became even stronger. This is true friendship indeed.

Another Mishna in the same chapter of Ethics of the Fathers uses a strange verb in referring to becoming friends (**Avot 1:6**). In quoting the statement of Yehoshua Ben Prachya about how to properly behave in life, the Mishna says, "acquire for yourself a friend." But the literal translation is "Buy yourself a friend." How does one buy a friend? Is friendship, then, a function of wealth? It is clear that the means of buying referred to in the Mishna is not money. Rather, just as in any money transaction is, in reality, an exchange of money for a good or service, so, too, a friendship is an exchange. The material used for exchange in a friendship is mutual experience and giving to the other person. Thus, a

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friendship is "bought" through an exchange of give and take, a giving of oneself and receiving from the other person. The word for friend, *Chaver* comes from the Hebrew verb *Lechaber*, to unite to blend together. Thus, two friends unite into one by each giving of himself or herself to acquire that friendship. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (**Hirsch commentary to Genesis 22:2**) claims that the meaning of the word for love or friendship, *Ahav*, is derived from two Aramaic words meaning "I give." Thus, friendship implies giving more than taking.

But friendship in Judaism implies even more than mutual experiences or even giving to the other person. The Mishna (**Avot 4:12**) speaks about the importance of respect between friends. The honor and respect one should give a friend must be equal to the honor and respect one gives a teacher. It also says (**Avot 4:12**) that to acquire a friend, one must eat with him or her, drink, sleep, learn and even reveal one's secrets to him or her. This implies that a true Jewish friendship can exist only on the most intimate level. Nothing less fulfills the true meaning of the word "friend" in the Jewish sense.

**Do Friends Always Have to Agree?**

Do true friends necessarily have similar interests, similar opinions on issues and never disagree? If this were true, what a boring and shallow friendship this would be. Like a good marriage, part of friendship is disagreeing in a respectful manner and coming to some sort of accommodation that both partners can live with.

Friends, like spouses, must not be afraid to point out deficiencies (in a dignified discussion) and areas of disagreement. In fact, the Midrash (**Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 54:3**) points out that any friendship without reproving and without differences is not a true friendship. Issues must be dealt with in order for both partners to grow.

It is said that the opposite of love is not hate -- it is indifference. Just as the marriage is often a love-hate relationship, so it is with friendship, according to the Talmud (**Pesachim 113b**), which says that every friendship involves an element of hate. The Talmud (**Yevamot 14b**) describes the classic relationship of two famous schools in the Mishnaic period, Beit Shamai (The House of Shamai) and Beit Hillel (The House of Hillel). Although they argued with each other vociferously on many pages of the Talmud, they did not hesitate to intermarry, i.e., daughters and sons of Beit Shamai married those of Beit Hillel and vice versa. The

passage says that this demonstrates the great friendship between the people of the two schools and quotes a verse from Zechariah (**Zechariah 8:16**) that points out the importance of friendship and peace despite argument. From all these sources, it can be seen that Judaism views real friendship as a very intense relationship in which both parties are intimately involved with the lives of each other, but where there is disagreement which leads to personal growth by each person.

### **Friendship Implies Learning and Growing**

The modern use for the word *Chaver* means a friend. The same seems to be true of its use in the Mishna. However, in the period of the Talmud, this word signified a learned man. We can now see a relationship between friendship and learning. A good friend is one from whom a person can learn. Even today, the common term used in a Yeshiva to describe a learning partner is *Chavruta*, which also means a friend in Aramaic. Therefore, a friend is also a learning partner, both in the formal and informal sense. The Talmud (**Makkot 10a**), in fact, states that Rabbina remarked that he learned more from his friends than he did from his teachers who had taught him a lot of Torah. Thus, the growth of a friendship is intimately tied to a growth in learning.

### **Friendship in Judaism Shows Real Caring, Empathy and Kinship**

Based on the Mishna learned above, using the key verb “buying” in order to attain a friend and friendship (**Mishna, Avot 1:6**), Maimonides explains that a true friend is someone who is involved in every aspect of that friend’s life, similar to the person who cares for a very expensive item that was purchased. Friends should help one another in every aspect of each other’s lives. And if a person does not yet have such a relationship with an individual, continues Maimonides, a human being should continue to seek out associations with other people until he or she has found that one individual worth having this very special relationship called friend (**Maimonides, Commentary to the Mishna, Avot 1:6**).

When Proverbs says that the worry of a person weighs an individual down (**Proverbs 12:25**), Rabbi Assi in the Talmud (**Yoma 75a**), in a play on words, explains that this verse signifies that a person should unload his or her problems and worries on others, a friend, implying that this will make the person feel better. On this Talmudic passage, Rashi explains that a good friend might give advice to that worried and burdened individual, and maybe make him or her feel better (**Rashi commentary on**

**Yoma 75a**). Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in giving a eulogy for a friend who passed away, analyzed three aspects of Jewish friendship (**Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Shana Bishana, 1982, page 411**). The first is a friend of help -- assisting the friend that needs any help, in any form, when in any difficulty. The second aspect is a friend of "worry" -- being there as a friend to speak out any concern a person may have, enter into a dialogue about any topic, in order to ease an individual's burden and worry. The third aspect is a friend of wisdom -- to help a friend actualize a vision, attain any goal, or accomplish a mission, where both friends are united in purpose and deem the mission important.

### **Importance of Friendship in Judaism**

Judaism seems to attach special importance to the friendship relationship than other life relationships. Rabbi Eliezer stated that the most important thing in life to "cleave to" is friendship (**Avot 2:9**). When Choni fell asleep for seventy years and awoke to find out that all his friends had died, he searched and searched to find a friend, but was unsuccessful at finding anyone who recognized him or knew him (since all from his generation had died). Finally, he cried out, "either friendship or death," whereupon God took his

soul (**Taanit 23a**). Apparently, Choni felt that if he could not have a friendship, it was not worth living. Even in Jewish law, friendship is treasured. When a person does not see a good friend for a period of longer than thirty days, upon seeing that friend, he should recite the Shehechyanu blessing. If it is longer than twelve months, the blessing for the revival for the dead is recited. The Shulchan Aruch adds that this applies only for a true friend who is a favorite, a person he is indeed happy to see (**Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 225:1**). Friendship is such important part of life that a blessing should be made when it returns after an absence.

It is unnatural for a person to live without true friends or without seeking true friendships. The person who truly does not want to have friends and does not seek friends does not live a normal existence. Next to family, it is the most important human relationship a person can have. When God told man, that it is not good that he remains alone (**Genesis 2:18**), God meant that man needs a lifelong friend. Hopefully, a spouse fulfills that role. Sometimes, though, a friend can also act as a helpmate.

Ecclesiastes (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**) describes a friendship when he says that "two are better than one." This signifies that

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man's natural existence is in two's, in friendships, and not ones, alone. A friend adds meaning to the life of a person. The verses continue to say that if one falls, the other is there to pick him or her up. And if one is attacked, the other will come to the rescue. This refers not only to a physical fall or physical attack. A true friend is there for support of any type. Friends help each other and support each other through difficulties. Judaism considers a true friend much more than a mere acquaintance, but, rather, a person who will always be there for the other, to help the friend in difficult times, to celebrate in good times and to help the person grow through learning and through guidance. Finally, a good friend cares more about giving to a friend than receiving from a friend.

**\* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at [nachum@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)**

**Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah****‘And the pit was empty, having no water in it:’ The Deeper Message Behind the Hasmonean Revolt****Rabbi Dr. Ari Silberman**

Ask a Brazilian whether you can be neutral about any part of the World Cup. For a football-crazy country, even a game without Brazil playing impacts the Brazilian chances and cannot be overlooked. Every kick and pass brings with it massive consequences. While I don't quite understand that level of dedication, this idea can be particularly useful for understanding Channuka. What do I mean?

In the Talmudic discussion recounting the halachot of Channuka, we find an unconnected midrash. Rav Kahana recites a tradition in the name of Rav Natan Bar Manyumi, who tells in the name of Rav Tanhum that when Yosef was cast into the pit, the verse states that the pit was empty and then adds a seemingly superfluous, ‘and there was no water in it.’ The midrash, with its profound sensitivity to the nuances of the text, asks, ‘By inference from that which is stated: And the pit was empty, don't I know that there was no water in it? Rather, why does the verse say: There was no water in it?’ The answer is that ‘there was no water in it, but

there were snakes and scorpions in it.’

On a superficial reading, this midrash aggada is recited here because the preceding halachic discussion also had a teaching in the name of Rav Kahana, who repeated a tradition in the name of Rav Natan Bar Manyumi, who recounted it in the name of Rav Tanhum. The method of the Gemara – in a world before footnotes – is to include statements in this way, even if they are unrelated. Superficially, also, this Torah portion, tied to the story of Joseph, is usually read around the time of Channuka.

However, after a closer look, there is more to it. This midrash teaches a lesson inherent to the message of Channuka.

The cultural war between the Hellenists and the Jews was a deep ideological and theological divide. And yet the nature of Hellenism meant that for many Jews, a kind of syncretism was possible, allowing one to combine both cultures relatively easily. Especially in obvious secular contexts, one could claim that there was no need to stake a side. However, the Maccabees said no! In a cultural war, and indeed as a matter of Jewish belief, there is never a truly neutral space. Hashem and his Torah inhibit every realm.

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Either you are on the side of Hashem or not.

This is also the message of the midrash, and why it is found amongst the laws of Channuka. There is no such thing as an empty pit – if there is a space devoid of the light of Torah, it is necessarily filled with snakes and scorpions. The figure of Yosef himself embodies this more than anyone else. Exiled to the Egyptian court, tested with many ethical trials, he remained tied to his home and maintained the image of his father in the front of his mind at all times – and successfully maintained his identity. Like Yosef, we shouldn't exclude ourselves from society but must ensure that every element of the world around us is filled with Jewish tradition and Torah.

Just as the chanukiah is lit towards the street at the entrance to the home, our role as shlichim is to ensure that the lives of our communities in the shul, in the home, and on the street are infused with a purified, profound, and enlightening Torah.

**Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org****Rabbi Michael Rosensweig  
The Bayit-Centric Celebration  
of Chanukah**

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) asserts that "ner Chanukah mitzvah le-hanichah al petach

beito mi-bachutz - Chanukah candles should be placed outside the door of one's home". Tosafot (s.v. mitzvah), however, qualify this conclusion by adding that if there is a courtyard that intervenes between one's home and the public thoroughfare, the menorah should be situated at the opening to the courtyard. The Shulchan Aruch (571:5) rules in accordance with the Tosafist view. Certainly, the consideration of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle), a prime factor in this mitzvah (Shabbat 23b, 24a, Rosh Hashana 18b; see, also Shabbat 23a - *af hein hayu beito ha-ness* and numerous other manifestations of this dominant theme in *Hilchot Chanukah*), dictates this conclusion (along with other evidence- see Gera 571:10). Yet, Rambam (*Hilchot Chanukah* 4:6) leaves the Gemara's ruling unqualified, implying that under all circumstances a close proximity to the home is mandated, evidently even to the detriment of publicizing the *neis*! [Rashi's view on this matter is intriguing. See 21b s.v. *mi-bachutz*, 22b s.v. *mitzvah*] Moreover, Rambam integrates the statement of Rabah (Shabbat 22b) demanding that the menorah be situated within a *tefach* and on the left side of the door post across from the *mezuzah* in that very same *halachah* (while Shulchan Aruch codifies these

laws discretely in 571:5,7, as they are formulated distinctly in the Gemara), reinforcing the perspective that the home is central to this mitzvah. When the Rambam (*Hilchot Chanukah* 4:8) relates the Talmudic ruling (Shabbat 221b) that in times of danger one may light indoors, he downplays the scope of the change (especially compared with Shulchan Aruch [571:5] and others), subtly emphasizing that the consistent *bayit*-centric orientation of the mitzvah merely changes from outside to inside (4:7 - "*petah beito mi-bahutz...*", 4:8 - "*betoch beito mi-bifnim*").

Rambam's accentuated emphasis of the *bayit* in the mitzvah of Chanukah is further confirmed by his subtle reformulation of the core mitzvah. While the Gemara (Shabbat 21b) famously depicts the basic requirement as "*ner ish u-beito*", a candle per household (which may be perceived as a kind of agency), Rambam (*Hilchot Chanukah* 4:1) significantly expands the *bayit* factor by depicting it as a collective home obligation- "*mitzvatah she-yihyeh kol bayit u-bayit madlik ner echad bein she-hayu anshei ha-bayit merubin bein she-lo hayah bo ela adam echad*". [See, also, *Iggerot ha-Grid*, *Hilchot Chanukah* 4:1] It is particularly noteworthy that his view of even *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*

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maintains the focus on the collective obligation of the home as reflected by the pivotal role of the *baal ha-bayit*, who alone lights for the entire *bayit*! When the Rambam(4:2-3) explicates the different configurations of this mitzvah, he repeatedly (seemingly) gratuitously refers to the "*anshei beito*". The effect is to consistently underscore that this mitzvah, in all of its permutations, revolves around the institution of "*bayit*", man's inner sanctum!

The home-*bayit* in Jewish thinking represents the appropriate integration of physicality and spirituality; it embodies consistency, security, sanctity, and dignity. It is a venue-institution that is conducive to cultivating the values that foster spiritual growth in a physical environment. It is surely no coincidence that the *berachah* that we offer to a young couple is that they build a "*bayit neeman be-Yisrael*". The spiritual institutions that guide our religious life are also *battim* - *beit ha-mikdash*, *beit ha-kneset*, *beit ha-midrash* etc. When Hashem recognized the remarkable qualities of the "*meyaldot ha-ivriyot*", He responded: "*va-yaas lahem batim*". The *kohen gadol*, who enters *lifnai ve-lifnim* on *Yom Kippur*, must be married, as he

must be anchored in the bayit motif based on the expression "vekiper baado u-bead beito", as "beito zu ishto" (the word bayit is synonymous with married life).

While the term bayit appears in the early sections of Bereshit sporadically inter alia as a de facto reality ("lech lecha....mi-beit avicha", "zekan beito" etc.), the first recorded "binyan bayit" is ascribed to Yaakov-Yisrael, the bechir ha-avot who bears the moniker of the entire nation, who magnificently integrated (as reflected by his midah, tiferet) the best qualities of his diverse father and grandfather. Immediately upon neutralizing and dispatching Esav (Bereshit 33:16- "vayashav bayom hahu Esav le-darko seirah"), both the individual and the culture he embodied, signifying a pinnacle achievement that cemented his stature befitting one who Hashem depicted as "ki sarita im ha-Elokim ve-im ha-anashim va-tuchal", we are told "ve-Yaakov nasa sukota, va-yiven lo bayit"! The very next pasuk relates that "va-yavo Yaakov shalem ir shechem..." Rashi, citing the midrash explains that Yaakov had attained sheleimut-harmonious perfection in different realms that do not typically integrate- "shaleim be-gufo... shaleim bemamono...shaleim be-torato..." Rav Hirsch adds that

being shaleim connotes a perfect harmony that radiates from within, that reflects essential truths.

The cultural struggle of Chanukah revolves around many of these core issues. The Greek-Syrian focus on physical form and external esthetics, the emphasis on discrete powers and forces fostering a compartmentalized and fragmented approach to reality completely antithetical to the principle of an integrated, omnipotent Divine Being, and the disregard for religious self-expression and personal dignity, were manifest in attacks on targeted halachot (rosh chodesh, Shabbat, milah etc.), but also constituted a broad attack on Yahadut (Rambam 3:1-"bitlu datam velo hinichu otam laasok be-Torah u-mitzvot"), and on the very concept of "bayit". The breaching of the walls of the "bayit" ("ve-nichnasu le-heichal u-partzu bo peratzot") and the penetration of private and sanctified Temple venues is cited by the Rambam (Chanukah 3:1) as a substantive threat to spiritual survival. [One girsa (see Yalkut Shinuyei Nuschaot in the Frankel edition of Rambam, also strongly endorsed by Maaseh Rokeach 4:1) also records "u-pashtu yadam be-mamonam u-bebateihem (instead of "u-bebenoteihem" in the standard

girsaot, probably based upon Megilat Taanit chapter 6), directly linking the embattled "bayit" to the spiritual erosion of Jewish life!]

The miracle of Chanukah celebrates Divine providence manifest by the miracle of the pach ha-shemen. By anchoring this mitzvah in the bayit, the halachah also underscores the stakes and significance of both the military victory and the remarkable resurgence of the Beit Hamikdash and its norms. It promotes an acute *pirsumei nisa* but in conjunction with a resounding affirmation of the centrality of the "bayit" and all it represents. [We can suggest that even Tosafot and the Shulchan Aruch who disagree with the Rambam regarding placement of the menorah in proximity of the home when there is an intervening courtyard agree with the core principle we have developed. They perhaps perceive the courtyard as an extension of the "bayit", as it is in some other halachic contexts, with the added benefit of a more robust *pirsumei nisa*.]

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**Torah.Org Dvar Torah  
by Rabbi Label Lam**

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### **A Good Interpretation**

And Yaakov dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Yaakov: when Yosef was seventeen years old,

being a shepherd, he was with his brothers with the flocks, and he was a lad, with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Yosef brought evil tales about them to their father. And Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age; and he made him a fine woolen coat—And Yosef dreamed a dream and told his brothers, and they continued to hate him. And he said to them, "Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the midst of the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright, and behold, your sheaves encircled [it] and prostrated themselves to my sheaf." (Breishis 37:1-7)

and he was a lad: He behaved childishly, fixing his hair and touching up his eyes so that he would appear handsome. —a son of his old age: Onkelos renders: he was a wise son to him. Whatever he had learned from Shem and Eber he gave over to him—Rashi

Yosef shared this dream and another one too in which he was positioned at the epicenter of their lives. It turned out that these dreams were proven to be 100% prophecy but his brothers had reason to assume otherwise, and according to the Malbim they later judged him to be a

false prophet, either delusional or power hungry or both.

Why would they have come to that conclusion? A dream, the Talmud tells us, 1/60 prophecy. What is the significance of that ratio? If an ounce of milk falls accidentally into 60 ounces of meat-soup then it is considered butt'l -negligible because the flavor of the milk is lost in the meat. The proportion of 1/60 is 1 part to 59. The taste can be detected ever so slightly.

So too a regular dream is presumed to have a drop of prophecy but it is lost in an admixture, a salad of psychological phenomenon. What one thinks about in the day becomes the stuff of dreams at night and that includes all the worries, fantasies, conversations, confrontations, exposures, and experiences we had in the course of the day. Good luck sorting out the prophecy from folly.

Rashi explains that he behaved as a NAAR – a lad, and that he was fixing up his hair and making himself more attractive. That self-absorbed appearance was only confirmed by his dreams that placed him in the adoring middle of the family. Little did they know his father gave him a special coat as a special honor for his scholarship as one puts a handsome cover

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on a Sefer Torah. He was really absorbed with truth all day and that would account for his prophetic visions at night—making his dreams 100% TRUE!

I was a Yeshiva Bochur and I had a vivid dream one morning that a Sefer Torah, held up in front of me, was falling forward and I sat up in horror only to realize that I was late for Davening. So, I ran to the Beis Medrash to join the morning Minyan in progress. It was a Monday morning and so they took out the Sefer Torah to read. After calling up Cohen, Levi, and Yisrael, the Gabbai came over and tapped on my shoulder inviting me to do Hagbah.

As I approached the Bima the Gabai cautioned me, "Careful this is a heavy Sefer Torah!" It was a temporary replacement for the one that was found Possul, invalid on Shabbos. Then the Gabbai Sheni chimed in, "The handle is loose!" My frightful dream woke up that moment and I decided to call an emergency time out. I walked over to the Rosh HaYeshiva and told him that I am not picking up this Sefer Torah. He asked why. I told him, "I had a dream this morning that a Sefer Torah was falling!" He told me confidently, "That's a good dream!" I picked up the Torah without an issue.

Later I asked him how seeing a Sefer Torah falling is a good dream?! He said, "I have to do carpool after Davening. Come with me." It was pouring rain. As the kids came into the van and then as they exited to school he exclaimed, "Rain is good! Rain is good!" When we got back to Yeshiva he told me that the Talmud says about dreams, "Everything goes after the interpretation!" Saying it's good makes it good!

King David tells us when HASHEM will return us from our captivity in exile "we will have been like dreamers." Our current perception of reality is like that of a dreamer and so our dreams are begging for a good interpretation!

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### **Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash**

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#### **To Whom Was the Birthright Given?**

##### **Rav Meir Shpiegelman**

And the sons of Reuven, the firstborn of Israel – for he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Yosef the son of Israel, yet not so that he was to be reckoned in the genealogy as firstborn. For Yehuda prevailed

above his brothers, and he that is the prince came from him; but the birthright was Yosef's – the sons of Reuven, the firstborn of Israel: Chanokh and Palu, Hetzron and Karmi. (*Divrei ha-Yamim I 5:1-3*)

As these verses indicate, Yaakov divided the birthright between three of his sons: Reuven remained the eldest of the brothers ("Reuven, the firstborn of Israel"), Yosef received the actual birthright ("but the birthright was Yosef's"), and Yehuda received the leadership ("for Yehuda prevailed above his brothers, and he that is the prince came from him"). As we shall see below, it is not by chance that the birthright was divided specifically between these three brothers. The three of them, as we shall see, represent three different types of leadership: Reuven, as the oldest brother, assumes responsibility for various situations and tries to deal with them; Yehuda is the leader; and Yosef, as is clear from our *parasha*, is the visionary.

**Yosef the Dreamer** – Our first encounter with Yosef's vision is when he has his own dreams. Later, we find Yosef interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh and his servants, and he even manages – as a result of his wise

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interpretation – to successfully prepare for the years of famine. As history has often shown, the ability to predict the future causes problems in the present. A man who sees into the future and awaits an ideal era finds it difficult to live in the present and to experience the hardships of his time. It is perhaps for this reason that Yosef is insensitive to the distress around him. While still a teenager, he brings an evil report of his brothers to their father. Afterwards, he tells them his dreams, though he could have foreseen the negative impact this would have on them.<sup>1</sup> When Yaakov sends him to check on his brothers' welfare, Yosef goes to them without any means of protection, even though he knows they hate him. We also see that Yosef does not know how to solicit help from others. When Yaakov arrives in Charan, he goes to the well and asks the people if they know Lavan's family. Yosef, in contrast, loses his way in the field but does not approach other people to ask where he might find his brothers. Only when another person approaches and asks him what he is looking for, does Yosef seek assistance and ask him whether he has seen his brothers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yosef should certainly not have told his brothers about the second dream, after seeing their reaction to his first dream.

<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted that Yosef does not speak clearly to the man. He does not say that he is looking for the sons of Yaakov, but for his brothers, as if the man was supposed to know who Yosef was and who his brothers were. Whether Yosef spoke to the man in a clearer manner, or whether he did not, the Torah chooses to present Yosef's appeal to the man in an unclear manner, as if to allude to Yosef's difficulty with accepting the help of another person.

Yosef's difficulty with interpersonal relations is also evident from his attitude toward his father. Why doesn't Yosef send messengers to tell his father that he is alive? Much ink has been spilled on the answer to this question,<sup>1</sup> but beyond the many answers that have been given, it is clear that Yosef's conduct attests to a certain rigidity. Further evidence of this rigidity can be found in the words of *Chazal* (*Tanchuma Vayeshiv* 8), who criticize Yosef for curling his hair while his father was mourning over him. Even at the end of his life, when Yaakov's sons return from burying their father and ask Yosef to forgive them, Yosef tells them that in the end their actions had a positive result, but he does not say he forgives them. It does not appear that Yosef, immediately after his father's death, wished to be cruel to his brothers. Yosef lived in historical processes, immersed in his visions about the future, and does not assign much importance to the present. He sees no need to say to his brothers that he forgives them, for he explained to them that the process that they started was a positive one. The brothers, in contrast, do not live in the future. The historical process does not interest them so much,

and all they want is to feel that Yosef has forgiven them for the injustice they caused him.

This may be the reason why Yosef became a slave – to teach him to relate to others. After Yosef continued to curl his hair in the house of Potiphar (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 39:6), God caused him to be thrown into jail. And, indeed, when Yosef sees that the king's chief butler and baker are sad, he takes an interest in their situation and asks them what is wrong.

The highpoint of Yosef's actions as ruler of Egypt is the transformation of all of the Egyptians into Pharaoh's slaves, and spreading them out throughout the land of Egypt. The Torah does not offer a reason for this drastic step, but *Chazal* explain that Yosef wished to turn all of the Egyptians into strangers, so they would not relate to the family of Yaakov as exiles. In the end, Yosef's action had the precisely opposite effect. It is reasonable to assume that after the years of famine had passed, the Egyptians forgot that Yosef had saved them from starvation and remembered only that he had exiled them and turned them into Pharaoh's slaves. From here, it was only a short step (with the help of the new king who arose over Egypt) to the

subjugation of Israel, in the sense of "measure for measure" for the members of Yosef's family. From a broad historical perspective, turning all of the Egyptians into slaves, and leaving the people of Israel as the only freemen in the country (for Yosef fed his brothers during all the years of the famine), stoked the hatred that was directed at the children of Israel until it erupted into cruel enslavement.<sup>2</sup>

**“The Firstborn of Yaakov – Reuven”** – As stated in the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, Reuven was the eldest brother. It was he who would assume responsibility and determine the right thing to do. When Yosef comes to his brothers, and they want to kill him, it is Reuven who says: "Let us not take his life" (*Bereishit* 37:21). Earlier, he had slept with Bilha, his father's concubine, so that Yaakov would return his bed to Lea (*ibid.* 35:22; see Rashi). Reuven is the first to realize that there is no alternative but to bring Binyamin down to Egypt, and he offers Yaakov: "You shall slay my two sons, if I do not bring him to you" (*ibid.* 42:37). All this notwithstanding, Reuven is not the ideal leader. While he takes the initiative, he does not know how to persuade others to join him. When he

<sup>1</sup> See the articles of Rav Yoel Bin-Nun and Rav Yaakov Medan in the first issues of *Megadim*.

<sup>2</sup> Why, indeed, did Yosef act in this manner? Two explanations may be suggested: First, as was noted above, Yosef did not always know how to properly assess the way other people would respond to his actions. Second, it is reasonable to assume that Yosef was committed to Pharaoh, who had rescued him from jail. Yosef acted, then, in accordance with his loyalty to Pharaoh, despite the fact that this was liable to bring harm to him and to his family.

wants to save Yosef, he cannot convince his brothers to release him, and is forced to take a deceptive path and suggest throwing him into the pit.<sup>1</sup> Even when he proposes that Yaakov send Benyamin with him, he makes him a strange offer: "You shall slay my two sons, if I do not bring him to you," and *Chazal* attribute shock to Yaakov at this proposal: "Fool, are your sons not my sons?" (*Bereishit Rabba* 91,9). In both cases, Reuven is the first to recognize the proper way to act – but in the end, it is not his proposal that is accepted but rather than of Yehuda.

**“For Yehuda Prevailed Above His Brothers and He That is the Prince Came from Him”** – Yehuda is gifted with the ability to lead. His suggestions are always accepted, whether they are right or wrong. This was the case regarding the sale of Yosef ("Come, and let us sell him to the Yishmaelites," *Bereishit* 37:27) and regarding bringing Binyamin to Egypt ("I will be surety for him; of my hand shall you require him," *ibid.* 43:9). When he speaks before Yosef, he manages to break him and bring him to make himself known to his brothers. Even Yehuda's mistakes – such as his proposal to sell Yosef to the Yishmaelites – lead to positive results in the end. Therefore, it

is Yehuda who is sent before Yaakov to prepare the land of Goshen for him, and it is he who merits the crown of leadership in the blessings given to him by his father.

**The Difference Between Yehuda and Reuven** – We can learn about the essential difference between Reuven and Yehuda if we examine the story of the sale of Yosef. There is no doubt that the brothers threw Yosef into the pit to die there. It is not for nothing that *Chazal* determined there were snakes and scorpions in the pit, for Yehuda tells the brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and explains: "What profit is it if we slay our brother?" (*Bereishit* 37:26). The only one who tries to save Yosef is Reuven, as the Torah testifies: "That he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father" (*ibid.* 22). As was already noted, it was Yehuda's proposal that was accepted, and not that of Reuven. What is more, the brothers seem to have forgotten that Reuven sought to save Yosef, and Reuven has to remind them of this fact when they later discuss the sale.

In fact, Reuven's response to his brothers when they repent their sin – "Did I not speak to you, saying: Do not sin against the child, and you would not hear" (*ibid.* 42:22) – is not the

response of a leader. A leader does not say "I told you so" to his people when it turns out that his way is the right way. When the people get into trouble, it is a leader's job to remove them from their straits, not to prove that he was right in the first place.

Yehuda, on the other hand, we find in a severe crisis with his brothers immediately after the sale of Yosef. He leaves them ("And Yehuda went down from his brothers," *Bereishit* 38:1), and in a certain sense he leaves the house of Yaakov. He marries a Canaanite woman – a woman from the nation to whom Avraham and Yitzchak were careful not to marry off their children, this being more than a hint of the disconnect created between Yehuda and Avraham's legacy. Indeed, unsurprisingly, the son born to Yehuda and the daughter of Shua is evil in the eyes of God, and God kills him. The Torah refers here not only to the personal wickedness of Er, but to the deeper problem – Er's origins in an improper marriage.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is another reason for the deaths of Yehuda's children. As the one holding the scepter of leadership, Yehuda should have prevented the sale of Yosef. Yehuda's punishment for initiating the sale is the killing

<sup>1</sup> As the Torah attests: "And Reuven said to them: Shed no blood; cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him – that he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father" (*Bereishit* 37:22).

<sup>2</sup> So too in the case of King David, a descendant of Yehuda, we find that for marrying an inappropriate wife, he was punished with the death of his son.

of his children. To allude to this, the Torah sets the story of Yehuda adjacent to the story of the sale of Yosef.

Now we can understand Reuven's words to Yaakov, when he asks him to allow Binyamin to go down to Egypt: "You shall slay my two sons, if I do not bring him to you." There is no doubt that when Reuven spoke these words, all those present noted the comparison to Yehuda, who caused the sale of Yosef and was punished with the deaths of his two sons. Just as Yehuda failed to restore Yosef and his two sons died, so too Reuven says to Yaakov – you shall slay my two sons if I do not bring Binyamin back to you.

What is Yehuda's response to Reuven's accusation? He assumes responsibility, agrees to serve as surety for Binyamin in order to bring him down to Egypt, and in the end is the direct cause of Yosef and Binyamin returning to their family. Just as he came through the incident with Tamar and said: "She is more righteous than I" (*Bereishit* 38:26) despite the personal price he paid for his admission, so he accepts the blame in this case as well, assuming responsibility and correcting his ways. Indeed, when Yaakov blesses Yehuda before he dies, he does not say he was not a partner in the sale of Yosef; rather, "From the prey,

my son, you have gone up" (*ibid.* 49:9) – that is to say, you were a partner to the sale, but through your actions you have successfully cleansed yourself of that heinous act.

**Who Was Given the Birthright?** – When he examines his sons and considers to whom to give the birthright, Yaakov decides to divide it into three parts.

Reuven remains the eldest brother, but because of his recklessness, he is not given leadership rights. For this reason, he does not receive any special blessing, but suffices with being defined as "Reuven, you are my firstborn" (*Bereishit* 49:3).

Yehuda receives in his blessing the blessings that Yitzchak planned to give to Esav, the firstborn of his sons: "Be lord over your brothers" (27:29) corresponds to "The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda" (49:10); and "Let your mother's sons bow down to you" (27:29) corresponds to "Your father's sons shall bow down before you" (49:8). Rule and leadership were given to Yehuda explicitly, and he was even assured that they would not be removed from his descendants.

Yosef – the third contender for the birthright – did not receive leadership and authority. He received the blessing of God ("From the God of your father,

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Who shall help you," 49:25),<sup>1</sup> and the blessings of the Patriarchs ("The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my progenitors," *ibid.* 26). Just as Yitzchak chose Yaakov to be his successor, so Yaakov chose Yosef, and he gives him two parts in the inheritance (two tribes) like a firstborn.

What we have here is the continuation of an ancient struggle. Yaakov and Esav, in their day, engaged in a twofold struggle: On the one hand, who would merit being the firstborn, and on the other hand, who would receive Yitzchak's blessings. In the first struggle, Yaakov grabs onto the heel of Esav and tries to stop him from emerging first from their mother's womb, and in the end purchases the birthright for a pot of lentils. In the second struggle, Yaakov masquerades as Esav and receives the blessings from Yitzchak through deception.

In the next generation, two pairs of sons compete for the birthright: Yosef had two sons in Egypt, and Yehuda had twins from Tamar. A "struggle" over the birthright takes place between the two sons of Yosef and the two sons of Yehuda. Yaakov chooses Yosef's younger son, and he receives a greater blessing than the older son. Yehuda's two sons fight for the right to go out first, and after

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that this blessing is one of the blessings of Yitzchak to his firstborn son that was not given to Yehuda.

Zerach emerges and a scarlet thread is bound upon his hand, Peretz pushes him aside, comes out first, and earns the birthright. It is possible that this is a repair of the stealing of the blessings: Yehuda's sons also struggle over the leadership, but the son who would have been younger emerges first and merits the birthright.

Indeed, hundreds of years later, the firstborn Yosef merits having Shaul, the first king, rise up from among his descendants. This expresses the birthright of Yosef, who was chosen by Yaakov as his successor. Eternal leadership was not given to him, and therefore in the aftermath of the fall of Shaul, David, a descendant of Yehuda, ascends to the throne, becoming the king of Israel. *(Translated by David Strauss)*