



Parashat Miketz



English version

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THE ART OF BEING AN IVRI

R Shimshon R. Hirsh writes that the first prophecy in the Torah was **יַפֶּתְ אֶלְקִים לְיִשָּׁכָן בְּאַהֲלֵי-שָׂם**. Noach blessed his two sons, Shem and Yefet, with the following: *May G-d expand Yafet, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem.* The word **יַפֶּת**, in its basic translation, means, *expansion*. But it also means *develop*, פִּיתוּחַ. It also means to *persuade*. פִּיתוּי. (See B'Maglei Hashana 1; 188) The prophetic vision of Noach, that in the future, the culture that would dominate the world would be Western culture. Western culture is Greek culture, evolved over thousands of years. The Greek, Yavan, is a descendant of Yefet, and Greek culture is the cradle of modern, western culture.

What do we have in today's western culture from Greek culture? After a bit of research, here is what the world has today from Greek culture: Philosophy, education, math, science, alphabet, libraries, literature, fashion, poems, myths, joke books, standardized medicine, art, architecture, maps, democracy, juries, astronomy, theater, drama, Olympics, sports, entertainment, pillars and umbrellas, to name more than a few. Yefet, Greek, Western culture, is the culture responsible for developing aesthetics and etiquette, distinguishing humans from animals. I will never forget how 10 years ago, when I was in the London Eye, with my family, I opened a conversation with the head of filming of football games for NBC. He told me the reason why they have Monday Night Football. Mondays is the most depressing day of the week, because people need to return to work after the weekend. America wants there to be something

that people can watch in the bars, so that they do not kill each other, when drunk on gloomy Monday nights. No wonder the violence of Black Lives Matter was immediately after the cancelation of sports in USA due to Covid.

Shem and Yefet, just as they partnered in covering the animalistic shame of their father Noach, they will both develop the world in differentiating human from animals, each in their own way. While Yefet will lead humanity into developing the physical component of man, using Western culture to tame and cover over the animalistic side of humans, Shem, on the other hand, will develop G-dliness in mankind, and the sanctification of G-d's Name in the world.

This is what the Yeshiva of Shem and his grandson Ever was about: how human beings are different from animals, and how we are soul-driven. We are referred to as Hebrews, or Ivriim, (see Shemot 3;18) partially after Ever, our grandfather, who developed the teachings of Shem, and partially because we are the people who are ready to go through the sea, at any time, to sanctify G-d's Name, **עוֹבְרֵי יָם** (Shemot Rabbah 3;3, 8), and partially because we are ready to stand steadfast to our beliefs, even if we have to stand solo, on the "other side of the river", different from the rest of the world, **מַעְבַּר לְנָהָר**.

What is the connection between all these reasons? We find that when Yosef was accused by the wife of Potiphar, she made sure to mention that he was an Ivri. When the Butler of Pharaoh introduced



Yosef, he referred to him as Ivri. And when Yonah explains to the sailors that he is not like the rest of them: He says that he is an Ivri.

What is the significance of making mention, in all these places, that we are an Ivri? And why is it that whenever hatred is expressed against a Jew, it is called antisemitism; we are reminded that we are descendants of Shem. And what is so bad about all the things mentioned above that have developed into Greek culture? Doesn't Judaism accept and embrace many of the things on the list?

Yefet, Greek, and western culture, maintains that everything that is beautiful, is good. Judaism, also, believes that beauty is good, as long as it is beauty with meaning, beauty that brings more G-dliness to the world. Judaism also believes in self-development, but from a different point of view. A G-dly view.

Ever wonder why the Hebrew word for *passing through* is עובר, “oveir”, while the Hebrew word for an embryo, is עובר, Ubar? What is the connection between a child in its mother's womb and passing through? The answer is obvious. The baby is coming from the upper world, passing through its mother's womb to come to this world. This is why we are called Ivriim. We are just passing through this world, to get on to the next world. A fundamental principal of Judaism. (Messilat Yesharim intro) If something is beautiful here, in this world, but it is not beautiful in the next world, it is not beautifully Jewish. A Yehudi believes, that all the Hod, the glory and splendor, is if it begins and ends with G-dliness, as י-הוה-י is surrounded by G-d's Name on both sides. And that we always admit, מודה, that all of our self-development, is from G-d.

We are unique that we are Ivri, that we are different than the rest of the world, (this is the lesson of the oil separating from the water in our Chanuka candles), that we stand for G-dliness, live with G-d in our lives, and trust that G-d can save us at any time. This explains why Yosef did not just interpret the dream of Pharaoh. He also made sure to pray for the wisdom to do so and mention that the wisdom of interpretation he has, is from G-d. The way of the world is that when people obtain wisdom, they take the credit for having it. *I*

deserved the wisdom, because I did my homework. Judaism is very different. I became wise, not because I did my homework, but because, after I did my homework, G-d gave me the wisdom and the ability to understand. There is nothing that is more of a gift from G-d than wisdom. It is the only blessing that we declare each day, that אתה חונן אותה חונן לאדם דעת ומלמד לאנוש בינה. *You grant to man wisdom and teach to humanity understanding.* Judaism maintains that wisdom is something that you pray for, not only “do homework” for. (Niddah 70b) Even Moshe Rabbenu, had wisdom, only because G-d gave it to him. (Nedarim 38a) According to Judaism, there is nothing more humbling than wisdom. If I have plaques on my wall, it means G-d gave me this wisdom, so that I can be His vessel, to bring that wisdom to the world, and help others with it. Yosef was telling Pharaoh, if G-d gave you wisdom, it is for you to use it to be His vessel, in our case, to save the 7 years of plenty, to provide throughout the 7 years of famine. Your wisdom is not just so that you can say you are so smart, so great, that the future was revealed to you. This explains why Yosef also gave Pharaoh advice what to do with the dreams.

This is why we are called by G-d עוברי ים, “passers through the sea”, even before the Splitting of the Sea took place. Because we are not dependent on nature. We are indestructible, a miracle, at our core. Nothing about our existence makes sense, a proof that G-d is amongst us. There is no other way a sheep (the Jewish Nation) could survive among 70 wolves. (The seventy nations of the world) (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 35)

We are reminded, that even if the Jew falls so low that he is sold as a slave for stealing something he can't pay back, he is reminded that he is not just an Eved, a slave. He is an Eved Ivri, reminded by the Torah that he is very different from the rest of the world. No matter how low a Jew falls, he is reminded that this world is just a corridor leading to the next world; that wherever he is, he has an opportunity to bring G-dliness into the world. That G-d could split the sea for him, at any time.

THE ART OF BUILDING TRUST (2020)

Covidland is a place where fear, doubt, insecurity are rampant. People trust less political leaders, governments, news, leaders of medicine, disease experts, the FDA. The invention of the vaccine is only half the solution. The other half of the solution is to invent the people's trust. We need a majority of the people taking the vaccine to get Planet Earth back to normal.

Trust is the secret weapon behind branding, marketing, and advertising. The competitor who builds the most trust, wins. This is because people do business with people they know, like and trust. In marketing, offering value is only half of the solution of making a sale. No matter what you are selling, it is hard to sell, in general. It is even harder to sell services, harder during times like Covid, and still harder when selling on line. Your net sales will be based on the amount of trust you and your brand have earned.

Building the trust muscle in what you are marketing and in your relationships takes patience, skill and giving in. People follow people they know, like and trust. Rabbis and mentors want to make a spiritual influence, religious parents want their families to follow in their footsteps. It is not enough to try to help people change by showing them the truth, or showing them and proving that you discovered a better way. You need to build trust, to connect with the emotion, if you want to help people change. If you want your daughter to dress with modesty, even when she is alone with her friends, you need her to trust you that modesty is the best thing *for her*, to protect her, physically, spiritually, emotionally. If you want your son to learn, pray, to guard his eyes and spiritually strive, you need to build trust that this lifestyle is *in his* best interest.

Yosef and Pharaoh wanted to make a change in Egypt. Archeologists found there hundreds, if not thousands, of massive, deep, cementlike walled pits, dating to Yosef's times. Yosef built these under the tremendous food warehouses, all over Egypt, to be prepared for the 7 years of famine. Yosef and Pharaoh wanted the people to do what seemed insane: to be frugal in the 7 years of plenty, to live לֶקְמָצִים, eating only handfuls, small rations

of food, so that they could survive the 7 years of famine. (Rashi 41:47) To accomplish this task, to pull off this national economic plan, Yosef and Pharaoh would need to build ALOT of trust with the Egyptians. Even though Pharaoh was king, and he enforced this frugality by law, with appointed officials who would go around to peoples' houses collecting one fifth of produce. Even Pharaoh could not do whatever he wanted to do, without the approval and trust of his people. As we know, Pharaoh was taken down from his position, when the ministers wanted him to enslave the Jews, and he was not yet ready to do so.

Pharaoh hired Yosef for the job, right out of jail. Yosef never did business before. He had no prior experience in politics. All Yosef proved was that he knew how to translate dreams, he knew 71 languages, and had G-d with him. Wouldn't it be the right thing to hire a politician from Capitol Hill, or at least someone with an MBA? Why did Pharaoh trust Yosef? He trusted Yosef with the job, because Yosef had mastered being an אִישׁ נְבוֹן וְהַקָּם, a man who sees into the future, who has a long-term perspective and knows how to live the present with the self-discipline needed, who feels, in the actions of the present, the reactions of the future. Something that is more valuable than an MBA, or 50 years' experience as a Senator. Pharaoh trusted Yosef's character, even without Yosef's having experience. Because character builds trust faster than experience or education does. But how did Yosef and Pharaoh gain the trust of the nation? At the outset, the basis for this massive, 14-year plan was just the king's dream, and the interpretation of a slave with a questionable reputation?!

Step 1: Yosef and Pharaoh needed to clear up Yosef's record with Potiphar and Potiphar's wife. This is why it says that Pharaoh first, married Osnat, the adopted daughter of Potiphar. Yosef wanted to marry Osnat, anyway. Osnat, Dina's daughter from Shechem, threw into Yosef's chariot the necklace that her grandfather Yaakov had given her for protection. Yosef immediately recognized Yaakov's handwriting on it. The Torah tells us that *Pharaoh* got involved and gave Osnat to Yosef. Potiphar, now, is titled the Priest of On, probably for clarifying Yosef's innocence, by giving his

adopted daughter to Yosef in marriage. Why was Paraoth getting involved in Yosef's marital affairs? Because he wanted to clean Yosef's name, Yosef's past, first, so that Yosef could gain the trust of the people.

Step 2: The Torah mentions, that Yosef goes out to the people, again and again. He begins to understand the people, what their physical needs are, what their emotional needs are. He goes out to see if Pharaoh's dream is beginning to materialize, if the years of plenty have begun! Yosef now has evidence, for himself and for the nation, that Pharaoh's dream, and his interpretation, was more than an ordinary dream... It was a prophecy!

Step 3: Yosef not only preaches frugality in years of plenty. He lives it, and he asks Pharaoh to live it, as well! *וַיַּעַשׂה פַּרְעֹה וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְחָמַשׁ אֶת־אֲרָץ* *Pharaoh should do, and he should appoint watchmen over the land, ...* Why does Yosef first mention that Pharaoh "should do"? Just say, *יִפְקֹד פַּרְעֹה*, Pharaoh should appoint watchmen!! **What** should Pharaoh do? Yosef told Pharaoh, that this is not going to work, without Pharaoh, himself, keeping the script, practicing the frugality he preaches.

4: When Yosef eventually supports his siblings and father, he gives his own family the same rations that he gives the simple citizens. *לָהֶם לֶפְי הַטָּף*. Yosef refuses to give his brothers positions of power, when introducing them to Pharaoh.

5: *הַמַּשְׁבִּיר* The words Hamashbir, also means, Masbir, as in Beseber Panim Yafot. Yosef would not only sell the food. He would also cheer up the people, and give them great service. Also, Yosef, himself, sold all the food. There were no middlemen, places where the money can get lost. *וַיֵּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בְּיָתֶהּ פַּרְעֹה* Nothing went into Yosef's pocket. Everything went to the Egyptian treasury. You could never bribe Yosef.

6. After Yosef succeeded running Egypt with a strict frugality in the first 7 years of plenty, he built

a trust system to prevent panic and insecurity in times of famine. He opened all the warehouses, for everyone to see that there was no shortage. *וַיִּפְתְּחֵהּ* *יֹוֹטֵף אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בְּהֵם* No hoarding: You could not enter or leave Egypt with more than one donkey per person. A slave or a man who was not financially independent was not allowed in to Egypt, so that new immigrants would not fall on Egypt's support system. Yosef invented the passport system, and every person who entered needed to prove his identity, his father's, and grandfather's. This way, Yosef protected Egypt from black markets, and built transparency on the amount of international buyers, and their whereabouts.

There is a Chanuka joke. What present do you give someone who has everything? A burglar alarm! You could have everything, but if you don't feel safe or secure, you don't feel like you have anything. Yosef knew that for people to actualize their potential, to function, people need feelings of safety and security. The Talmud tells us that all the signs of Mashiach's arriving sum up in one question. Who do we have anything at all to rely on? On our Father in Heaven. (Sotah 49b) But people don't rely on G-d and don't feel safe. People have traumas, because they went through times that they were insecure, unprotected, unsafe, and alone. But if we learn to trust G-d, that He is our Father in Heaven, protecting us, loving us, we can actually bring the Mashiach!

Ever wonder why Yosef's brothers sold him as a slave, and specifically to Egypt? Egypt had two laws. 1. A slave can never become king. 2. An Egyptian slave can never leave Egypt. Yosef's brothers were making sure that Yosef's dreams, that they would bow to him, would never, ever, come true. But as we say in Hallel, that it is better to trust in G-d, than trusting in any other source of protection. *טוֹב לַחֲסוֹת בַּיהוָה מִבְּטֹחַ מַבְטְחִים* ... *מִבְטְחִים* Because G-d helps us, sometimes, through the people who were out to hurt us. You were/are never alone.

PREPARED FOR THE WORST

The most powerful way to teach someone a lesson, to change his story, his perspective, is through the

power of a parable, a *marshal*, a story of some imaginary, made-up man. Because when someone

tries to change how we think, we are too close to our own perspective, we cannot see ourselves or our way of thinking from an objective point of view. But we *can* see things differently when we come from a subjective position, when we hear something that is actually “our story”, but it is related as being about someone else.

One of the most perplexing parts of the story of Yosef and his brothers is the fact that Yosef did not tell his brothers right away, the first time he met them, “I am Yosef; is my father still alive?”. Why did he put them through so much mental anguish, confusion and pain?

The Ramban answers according to the words of the Passuk. ויתנכר אליהם... ויזכור חלומותיו. Yosef remembered his dreams, the dreams that he repeated to his brothers and his father. And now was the chance for those dreams to come true. If Yosef would put down all his cards now, the possibility of all his brothers – including his brother Binyamin – his father and Leah, coming and bowing down to him, would be lost. And those dreams were precious to Yosef.

The Kli Yakar asks, does the end justify the means? Did Yosef put his brothers through such pain just for the sake of his dreams? How does that make any sense?

The answer is a lesson for all of us. Yosef’s dreams were not just dreams, as the brothers thought – they saw the dreams as Yosef’s self-centered thinking about himself. Those dreams were actually prophecies, as Yosef believed. But Yosef was not going to put his brothers and father through all their suffering just so that the prophecy would come true. There was something much deeper than that. The prophecy held within it a lesson that was dear to Yosef, a lesson that was Yosef’s ideology, his essence.

Yosef’s father and brothers were comfortable in Eretz Yisrael, living as Jewish people are supposed to live on their land. But Yosef did not believe that that was the ultimate goal. He believed that if there was an upcoming Exodus, there was going to be a Galut of hard times, and in the end, everything would happen for the best. The present is not the future. Life is not about being settled. We need to

go into a Galut, and whatever G-d puts us through, even if everything looks dark, it is all leading toward a great outcome that we will see only at the end. Yosef lived in the optimistic future. That is how he dealt with all his hardships in life, and that is how he helped Pharaoh build the richest empire in the world.

Yosef believed this because it was his essence, and this is why his mother called him Yosef. His mother, Rachel, named him Yosef אסף אלוקים את יספה ה' לי בן אחר חרפתי – חרפה. G-d will eventually erase the חרפה, the embarrassment and shame that we need to go through in such a way that there will be no trace left of it. G-d will ultimately add another child. He will bring even greater happiness. Only good will come from this.

Yosef wanted to teach his brothers that the purpose of the hard times that G-d brings upon us is the only way to get to the amazing future that is our destiny. Yosef also wanted to teach them that all of Galut is the same. In Galut, it seems that G-d, our King, is a stranger. But He has everything orchestrated for something amazing to happen at the end. Something that only in the end we will be able to understand.

We know that Yosef learnt five out of the six books of the oral Torah with his father. The Baal Haturim writes that this can be seen as an acronym of the words פִּי-בְנוֹן-לְנִי'הוּ הוּא לֵן. For he (Yosef) was the son of (Yaakov’s) old age. ז-זרעים (subjects regarding land and it’s produce) ק-קדשים (regarding sacrifices) י-יגשים (regarding women) י-ישועות (litterally salvation, but referring to subject of damages) מ-מועד (holidays). ט-טהרות (Purity) was not learnt by Yosef, for he was not of age to learn about family purity. But why is ישועות for נזיקין? Why are “damages” referred to as salvation?

The answer is because Yosef saw damages as some sort of salvation. That is how he was able to go through all his challenges and trials and stay strong in his belief that G-d was with him. Yosef wanted his brothers to learn the lesson that they could not have done anything to him, without G-d’s permission. And in the end of all the drama, Yosef told his brothers. ‘I don’t take it as a personal offense that you sold me. I never looked at my downfalls as permanent. Because G-d was with me,

I dedicated myself to being optimistic throughout. And in the end, אסרף ה' את הרפתי. *Hashem swept away my shame.* Because G-d has a plan, and anything that happens has a reason. The only way for Yosef to get this message over to them, was by putting his brothers in the position of coming down to Egypt and bowing down to him. They had to see, with their own eyes, how being put through all

his hardships was the only way he could become the king he became. And this was the only way to get them to start the Galut with the right step.

Yosef left them with the message, פקוד יפקוד אלוקים, אתכם. G-d will surely remember you... G-d doesn't forget His Shevatim. Getting that message across was Yosef's mission in the world.

THE BELIEF OF A DEAD MAN

Beliefs are powerful. A fellow walked into the office of the psychiatrist, looking healthy, successful, but concerned. After an hour of therapy, the psychologist could not figure out what was bothering the person. "What is it that you are concerned about?" "Dr., it is strange, but I believe that I am dead. Do not let out my haunting secret to anyone, for they will think that I am retarded, or something."

The psych. asked the "dead" fellow. "Do dead people bleed?" The fellow responded, "Of course not! They are dead!" With that, the psych. smiled, and pulled out a long sharp needle from his desk drawer. He walked over to the fellow, pricked his finger, and let out some blood. The man stared at his bleeding finger in shock, turning white. He gulped, and said, in somewhat of a whisper, "My goodness! Dead people bleed! Dead people bleed!"

In coaching I know that when I found the belief, I found the problem. But I can't change it by pricking a finger, or some other quick fix, for the negative and mistaken belief the client has built up and repeated to himself again and again is too powerful. When the subconscious has resistance, you can't go against it. Still, with silk gloves, or rather silk questions, you can alter it, if you are persistent.

The greatest thing that we can do to help ourselves and others is by changing a negative, discouraging or ineffective belief that governs us. Successful people, in any area of life, have the successful beliefs about that field. From stopping smoking (see Alan Carr's book) to becoming a genius (register to my Effective Learning Course). Making a harmonious home, effectively parenting a wayward teen, or functioning as a good negotiator,

knowing how to keep one's cool in heated situations – all boil down to adopting effective beliefs of those who succeed in these areas, and disregarding the ineffective beliefs that bring us to where we do not want to be. For example, a person who is successful in keeping his cool in heated situations has two core beliefs. The method that is widely used for helping people to get over their lifelong angers is The Four Questions. The originator of this method stated, at the end of her book, that the two core beliefs behind the method are, 1 – G-d is everything, 2 – G-d is good. We Jews recite those beliefs twice daily, ואתה מושל בכל, טוב ה' לכל and still get angry. Why? Because, in that minute, we were not living with those beliefs. For just a moment, we thought that אני מושל בכל, *I am running everything*. Or, I know better than G-d what's best for me. Or, He does not care about what's best for me.

Try to calm someone down while he is very angry, whispering to him, "Don't worry, don't fret. G-d is everything and G-d is good". Then duck, because he might punch you in the face. At that moment, the belief that governs him is that **he** is running the show, and you are standing in the line of fire of his belief, contradicting it. Our rabbis tell us, אל תרצה, *Don't calm someone when he is angry*, and this is why.

Beliefs come and go, they intensify and shrivel, depending on how much we think about them. The only way we can be of help is if, somehow, we can get a person to change his belief, on his own. When the heavy negative belief softens a little, the negative beliefs can be questioned, and replaced by new, positive ones. And then, hopefully, prepping those beliefs every now and then, until they are

second nature. If we would only daven right, we would find that many of the “gem beliefs” of Judaism and of the successful are hidden in the words of the Siddur. Prayer is replete with positive thinking, thankfulness and appreciation for what we do have in life. The יג עיקרים, the thirteen Ani Maamins, are the thirteen beliefs of a perfect Jew. By intensifying these beliefs, one can change himself and the world.

Yosef’s brothers came down to Egypt with two goals in mind: to buy food and to find Yosef and bring him home, no matter what the cost. They got to Egypt and they saw their brother, but didn’t recognize him. The last time they had seen him was when he was 17, more than twenty years before, when he did not yet have a beard.

The question is obvious. Wouldn’t you be able to recognize your brother, even if you had not seen him for twenty years? They were looking for him, and now they were looking right at him! They knew he was going to look a little older, probably with a beard by now. So, how could they have missed him?

The deep answer is that they never used to look at Yosef. They would look at his coat! That is all they remembered about him. His coat. They did not even know how he looked, because that’s what jealousy does. It makes you oblivious to your own sibling, because you see only that the sibling has more than you.

The deeper answer is that they believed, with every bone in their body, that Yosef deserved to die for attempting to be Yaakov’s only inheritor, cancelling out the other Tribes. They believed that he lied to their father about them, and so he needed to be eliminated! Yaakov did not report to Yitzhak about Esav’s bad ways, so why should Yosef tattle on his brothers? The Tribes, holiest of men, would never have done what they did to Yosef had they not believed that he deserved it. After seeing how much pain this caused Yaakov, they needed to bring Yosef back. They believed that he was in the pits of Egypt, for that was where he belonged.

They even looked for him in “the clubs of prostitutes”, as he was handsome.

When they faced him, they could not believe that his dreams had come true, because they believed he was wrong, wrong, wrong. A belief can be so strong, that you can look your brother in the face and not recognize him.

When Yosef attempted to change their belief, he knew there would be resistance. He needed to have them question if their actions had been just. He cried about putting his brothers in such pain, in order to do so, but there was no other way. His first question after revealing his identity was, ‘Is my father still alive?’ *Selling me, may have been correct, but did my father deserve the agony you caused him? You care about him so much in regard to Binyamin and Shimon, but you did not care about him when you sold me!*

And then, Yosef landed the atom bomb on their belief about what they did to him. *G-d sent me. G-d wanted this. You did not do anything. It was all G-d. You thought that you changed my destiny, but this was my destiny.* The ultimate belief of the ultimate Jew is that G-d is the One who writes each and everyone’s script.

The Maccabees, a mere thirteen men, stood up against the mightiest army of the world. How? Because of their motto – Maccabee. מי כמוך באלים ה’ Maccabee stands for, *Who is like You, among the mighty?* They believed that not even tens of thousands of Greek troops, could come anywhere near the might of G-d, and they called out to all who accepted this belief to join their army. They altered the negative belief (Greeks are most powerful) to the effective belief (G-d is most powerful) with a question format, “Who is...” That is the only way you can change a belief. Ask yourself the question each and every day of your life, before, during and after praying, *Do I really believe that G-d is running my show? Do I really believe that He is good, even when it looks otherwise? Do I really believe that what my brother has, and what I don’t, is all G-d?*

A PITIFUL THOUGHT

In a talk that I had recently with a teenager, I asked him how he spends his spare time. When he answered “being bored”, we took the topic farther. I asked him how he would feel if he discovered that he would be bored for the rest of his life. 24/7. He took about a minute and a half to consider the answer, and then blurted out a summary of his thoughts. **“That would be the worst curse ever.”**

The Torah actually mentions boredom as one of the curses in the Tochecha. **יככה ה' בשגעון ובעורון** (Behukotay 28;28) The Targums (Onk. and Y.B. U.) translates **שיעמום** **בשגעון ובעורון**, boredom. This is odd, for it seems, then, that even some of the curses mentioned in the Torah leveled against those who sin are actually *things that people bring upon themselves*. Things that *are* in our control. I also believe that in our generation, people have reached the height of this curse of being bored.

There is **another** curse that our generation suffers from, a much greater curse. And it, also, involves actively taking the curse upon oneself. However, if you take responsibility for this particular issue, you will not suffer. That curse is **self pity**. Let's start from the bright side. Imagine, for a minute, that I made a magical grey button in the middle of this page. If you push it, you will be happy for the rest of your life. Even in hard times. And you can be a source of strength to those who need it. Would you push the grey button? There will be no going back to being sad, griping or moaning. You have to be crazy not to push the grey button. Still, some people would choose not to. They'd rather stay sad for the rest of their lives. If you want to be happy in life, you need *to want to be happy*. Not just want. **Really** want. **Secret recipe to happiness**: plan out something that **you can do** – that you will enjoy – **and do it**. Enjoy it. Simple. There is one thing that will stop you from living life this way. Self pity.

You see, these people need to feel pitied in order to feel loved. That is their technique, even though its real identity is often disguised, and they, themselves, may not be aware of it. They have become used to manipulating **love, things, care, time, interest and more** in their relationships with people in their lives by being piteous. Sometimes, it starts from early on, in school and at home with

siblings. Parents give attention and reward to some children for being good, and to others because they pity them. And it gets worse when the one who is pitied **gets even more** from the parent than the others. **If you are good, you get rewarded, but if you whine, your reward is even greater**. Often, a teacher focuses all his attention on the 30 percent of the class who are troublemakers and “C-“ students. In addition, the teacher designs the way he presents the material and the reward system for achievement to meet the needs of that same group of weak students – weak in studies and in their behavior. The behavioral part of the subconscious adopts the belief that it is **“better to be pitied if you want life to be easier.”** If you are unfortunate enough to meet someone in the *self pity zone* on the street, he will tell you how pitiful his situation is, even if, objectively, he has more things, talent, brains, and anything else possible, than you do. How pitiful. Self pity and happiness are mutually exclusive. And such people prefer self pity.

This is a major factor in our generation that holds people back from being happy, accomplishing, feeling positive and successful, and, of course, from enjoying the moment. Allow me to ask you a question. What is worse than experiencing a tragedy? **Self pity about the tragedy!** As a holocaust survivor who was very successful in building a beautiful family put it, perhaps the only thing worse than actually enduring the Holocaust is the post-Holocaust inability to move forward from that time of pain and suffering. **The worst curse is to be full of self pity**. The most depressing neighborhood to be in is Victimhood. *Nothing can beat you to a pulp more than self pity*. A person who has self pity is in constant pain, 24/7.

Self pity is another curse that is actually in our control. If you want to be happy and take control of success in your life, **self pity** won't let you, unless you realize what it is doing to you. How does one overcome it? It all has to do with which question you choose to ask. The question that is in the mind of one in the *self pity zone* is “Do I deserve to be pitied or not?” **That** question will always produce the wrong answer, *because it is the wrong question*. **A question that won't bring about a positive effect**. The right question that

needs to be asked is, “*what can I do to make things better for myself?*”

We can learn this from Yosef. What is worse than being kidnapped by your own brothers and sold by them as a slave for a pair of shoes? What is worse than your master’s wife trying, for a year, to seduce you and, *after your having stood strong and having stayed innocent*, being thrown into jail for 10 years? Feeling bad for yourself and your past!

Imagine Yosef. Waking up in prison. In a nightmare. How did he get out of it? ***Through the opposite of self pity.*** Seeing outside himself, seeing how other’s are doing. When Yosef saw the pale, anguished faces of the Sar Hamashkim and the Sar Haofim, he asked them, “Why do your faces reflect such discontent and worry today?” They responded that they each had had a puzzling dream. One second. Wasn’t Yosef, himself, in a state of sadness? How was he able to notice someone else’s being sad? And, isn’t it obvious that they were sad because they were in jail?

Being in jail is not a reason to be sad. Self Pity is. Yosef did not pity himself, so he wondered why *they* were sad. When they told Yosef that they had had a bad dream, Yosef did not say to them, “Hah!! A bad dream?! I went through much more!!” Rather, Yosef listened empathetically to

them. Had Yosef been wallowing in self pity, *he would never have discussed the dreams with the two Egyptian ministers.* He did not perceive himself as an object of pity; thus, he was able to help others, and through helping others, he helped himself.

During this last month, I have been experiencing something completely new to me. Something that happens – only in Jerusalem! Lately, after finishing the Amidah prayer in Shacharit, I turn around to be sure that there is no one behind me who is still in middle of the Amidah, so that I can take three steps back. And, for the last month, there is this fellow behind me praying with a fiery intensity that I envy. He has been there every day, for a month. He is clean shaven, a nice looking 38-year-old man, dressed in casual clothing, adorned with his tallit and tefillin. He takes a few minutes more than I do to pray. He prays both with tears and with a smile, and looks as if he is full of gratitude to G-d. But all this is not nearly as interesting as his pants. He has the most interesting thing written on his pants, for a man who is so full of gratitude. **עיריית ירושלים אגף התברואה**, Jerusalem City Municipality, the Division of Sanitation. That’s what is emblazoned on his pants. Look at that: a grateful garbage man!

KEEP DREAMING

One of the greatest gifts G-d bestowed on mankind is the ability to dream and imagine. Imagination is a tool that – when properly utilized – can transform the present into the future, helping us move from pain to pleasure, from confinement to liberty. It can trigger in us both the ambition and drive to do what seemed impossible. Unfortunately, many dreams have been destroyed because they were never “supported.” No less important than dreaming and imagining is learning how to support the dreams of those who are close to us. This ability may be needed by a parent who does not really know how to support the dream of a child, or a husband/wife who does not really know how to support the dream of a spouse, or a friend or mentor who does not want to crush the dream of

one who has turned to him. Often, just listening properly can do so much good.

Let us go a bit deeper. Imagination is constructed mostly of ideas or information that we already know or experienced. We draw on personal experiences and past knowledge to construct the blueprints of our future. Everyone has gone through different life experiences and perceived things from their unique personal perspective. Thus, no two dreams or goals can be identical. This is why when someone tells us of a dream or an imagined future, it is so important *to hear him or her out till the end.* We should be looking for something in the dream that can be put into effect – even if it is only a minor element. This can bring

out the greatest in the dreamer, and greatly encourage his or her success.

This uniqueness of dreams – both “sleeping and waking” dreams – can be seen in the story of Pharaoh’s dreams, and the difficulty of interpreting them. Pharaoh dreamt that he was standing on the bank of the Nile River observing seven scrawny cows devouring seven hefty cows. Then he dreamt about seven thin bundles of grain swallowing seven hefty ones. These dreams troubled Pharaoh, and he looked to his advisors for an appropriate interpretation. One advisor suggested that the dreams meant that Pharaoh would have seven daughters, and then bury all seven. Another advisor interpreted the dreams as meaning that Pharaoh would capture seven countries, and then seven other countries would throw off his yoke. But the interpretations did not satisfy Pharaoh, as the Torah reports: *“No-one was able to interpret to Pharaoh”* (41:8). In other words, the interpretations were valid dream interpretations, but not for Pharaoh’s particular dreams. Why not?

Another question: When Pharaoh’s chief steward finally told Pharaoh about Yosef, the “Revealer of Dreams,” didn’t he throw away a great opportunity to make it big? All he had to do was pay a visit to Yosef in jail and tell him that he tried his best to get him released – but to no avail. Then, the chief steward could have said to Yosef in an innocent voice: *Oh, by the way, I had this really strange dream where I was standing on the bank of the Nile, and I saw seven thin cows swallow seven heavyset ones. And then another dream about seven thin stalks of wheat swallowing seven large ones. I would be forever grateful to you, Yosef, if you would interpret my dreams again, old buddy.* And then, with the interpretations in hand, the chief steward could have run back to Pharaoh with Yosef’s authoritative interpretations – without crediting Yosef. Surely Pharaoh would have given him a reward fit for a king. Why didn’t the chief steward go this route? He could have been the hero of the story instead of Yosef!

The answer is revealing. Pharaoh had heard enough interpretations. But he had not heard, as Rashi explains, *an interpretation appropriate for a Pharaoh.* This was Pharaoh’s dream, and he believed that if it was his dream, then the

interpretation should apply to him alone. If he dreamt it, there must be something in it that he could take action on – as a king. Seven daughters and seven funerals could happen to anyone, not only to a Pharaoh. And it was not something that required taking any action in the present. Neither was seven countries captured and seven countries rebelling. Pharaoh did not want to believe that his dreams were meaningless. He was determined to find out how he could make the most of them. None of his advisors were able to see out of themselves and into the psyche of Pharaoh. They simply could not see things from his point of view.

Now, the chief steward knew that if he would approach Yosef as if the dreams were his own, the interpretation would be one for a chief steward, not for a Pharaoh. This plan would simply not work. For this reason, he could only tell Pharaoh of the “Jew boy” who successfully interprets dreams.

Yosef himself had suffered from not being supported in his own dreams. He had revealed to his brothers his own dreams about them bowing down to him although he knew that this could get him into trouble. He did so because he believed that his dreams were nothing less than prophecy, and thus it would have been forbidden to conceal them. We can explain Yosef’s action on a deeper level. Yosef did not see in his dream of others bowing down to him any tinge of honor or fame seeking. This was not something for Yosef to act on as a seventeen year-old living at home. He did understand from his dream that he would one day have to be responsible for his parents and brothers. *This* was something for him to act on at present despite his youth and situation. This is why he would report his brothers’ actions to his father. He thought this was part of being responsible for them. His brothers, on the other hand, took his actions the wrong way, and felt that Yosef was attempting to edge them out of the picture and take over. They thought that Yosef was trying to distance them from their father Yaakov in order to become the sole inheritor and the next Patriarch of the Jewish People. They feared that this would undermine their spiritual growth and future. That is why they took pre-emptive measures against him. Yosef, in contrast, did not see his dream about rising to power as meaning anything more than

taking responsibility. Yosef was punished for not being sensitive to their feelings.

Yosef, Revealer of Dreams, was brought to hear the dreams of Pharaoh. Due to his own bitter experience, he would be taking special care to try to see what such dreams *could mean to a Pharaoh. Not what they could mean to Yosef.* Yosef heard the dreams, and interpreted them according to Pharaoh's life and position. The interpretation gave Pharaoh something to act on as well. If they would store grain during the years of plenty, then they could survive the years of famine. And the core dream was repeated to Pharaoh because they had to move fast. Pharaoh accepted this interpretation. And he commented that Yosef was the smartest person he had ever met because Yosef was able to hear someone else's dreams

from that person's perspective. He listened so well that he was able to figure out exactly what Pharaoh needed to understand.

*

We, too, can make better use of our dreams. Imagine if every dream we had of being successful actually came true! We would dream much more often! There is something true about every dream. We just have to tap into it. And we must listen very carefully to what we can take action on – and try to make those things happen.

Let's also listen carefully to the dreams of our children. Let's listen carefully to the dreams of our spouses. And let us listen carefully to our own dreams. We would then all be much more successful.

THANKS IN THE DARK

The main theme on Hanukah is not the lighting of the candles. That is the Mitzvah, but not the theme. The theme is להודות ולהלל, *to thank and praise G-d.* We recite the full Hallel during Hanukah. But, why is Hanukah a time to be thankful and praise G-d any more than Passover or Sukkot?

Hanukah is the holiday of lights, as it is the darkest time of the year, the time when the nights are longest. There is a story of the Bluzhever Rebbe in the Bergen – Belsen concentration camp. In secrecy, the Rebbe lit a candle. He made the blessings, *Blessed are You... that You commanded us to light the Hanukah candle. Blessed are You...that You performed miracles for our fathers, in those days, in these times. Blessed are You ... that You have kept us alive, and we have reached this time.* Behind the Rebbe was an onlooker, a non-observant Jew. "Rabbi, I understand why you bless G-d for the first two. But why are you thankful to G-d that we have reached this difficult time? What is there to be thankful for? What is there to be praised, when Jewish skeletons are being slaughtered by the Nazis?"

The Rebbe turned to his questioner and responded. "Maybe, You are right to ask! It took me a while to think what I could be thankful for in this dark time. But when I see the Jews here, ready to die in

sanctification of G-d's Name, I thank Him for keeping me alive. I thank Him for letting me be a part of this unique period in history and for giving me a daily opportunity to sanctify His Name."

When a Jew thanks G-d in the darkest of times, when a Jew says, after burying his dear ones, that the Name of G-d is great – there is nothing in the world more precious to G-d, for our thanks is testimony to our unshakeable belief that He loves us, even when it seems as if life is a disaster. Although the story of Hannukah is replete with tragedy, with war and bloodshed, the Jew – as his name, Yehudi, implies- always finds a reason to thank G-d, even if it is just for being able to light the Menorah with pure oil. Today's world is a pessimistic one. In contrast, the Torah outlook is full of optimism, searching out the light in the darkness. We thank G-d for the light we have, even if it is a single Hanukah candle in the darkness of the Holocaust. We stay positive about the circumstance, because we are positive and certain that He loves us. When the Jew says to G-d, "G-d, I know that You have a reason for all this, and I thank You from the deepest recesses of my soul for the good that I have, for I trust in You", the Kiddush Hashem is so great that the whole world was well worth creating just for that moment! And then, from the depths of the darkness, a new time

begins, for the purpose of the darkness has been achieved. When a Jew thanks G-d for the “bad times”, just as he does for the good, G-d changes things around, and a new era begins. להגיד בבוקר... הסדר ואמונתך בלילות *To tell of Your kindness in the mornings, and Your faith during the nights.* In his darkest hours, the Jew realizes that even though it is beyond his ability to understand it, G-d is being kind to him all through his travail.

One of the mitzvot that the Jews were forbidden to keep by the Greeks was Kiddush Hahodesh, establishing the onset of a new month with the testimony of people who had witnessed a new moon. This is odd. Why, of all mitzvot, was this mitzvah singled out by the Greeks? What was it in Kiddush Hahodesh that bothered the Greeks?

The Jewish nation is similar to the moon. We have times of darkness and times of light. Sometimes, we are hidden, and sometimes we shine out in our full glory. We have the ability to restart. Renew. The Greeks didn't like that. The Greek outlook and philosophy was that seeing is believing. Part of optimism is believing in G-d, believing that He can and will make a miracle happen, and that He can, in an instant, completely change reality.

The Divrei Chaim tells us something amazing about Hanukah. Hanukah is a time that repentance is effective, even for those 24 sins that the Rambam says are “non-repentable.” What is special about Hanukah? King David, a paragon of optimism, said, צרה ויגון אמצא ובשם ה' אקרא, I will find pain and agony, and I will call on the Name of G-d. How are pain and suffering a “find”? When we find the pain to thank for, then G-d turns things around. We do not run away when the going gets rough. We search for a reason to thank G-d, and then G-d sends the hard times away. Hanukah is a time to thank G-d for our pain and suffering, and

such thanks triggers, as it were, a Divine desire to give us a new beginning. On Hanukah, we got back the ability to declare the onset of a new month, and on Hanukah we got back the Nation's ability to renew itself. This ability for renewal that the Jewish Nation has is so great that even sins for which there seems to be no repentance can and do become absolved through repentance. But, only because the Jew, in his pain and suffering, thanks G-d.

In the siddurim it says that we should say the blessing on the new moon with happiness. We then say, ששים ושמחים לעשות רצון קוניהם *All the celestial beings, even the moon, who gets small, are happy and joyous about doing the will of their Creator.* And then, after being small, the moon, and symbolically the Jewish People, the Jewish Royalty, King David's family, who are similar to the moon, shines in all of its glory. (See Meharsha Sanhedrin 42a; See Rabeinu Bachye on Tsemach and Peretz.) Only after we are happy to do G-d's Will, in the darkest of times.

The midrash, on Shir Hashirim, tells us. הדודאים נתנו ריה ועל פתחינו כל מגדים. *The mandrakes gave their fragrance*, - this is Reuven, who saved Yosef from the pit. And “...at our doors there are all sorts of delights”, referring to the mezuzah and the Hanukah candles. Reuven threw Yosef into the pit, making things look very bleak for Yosef. But, despite those hard times, Yosef found a way to bring G-d into his life, and thank Him for his difficult circumstances. And then, Yosef rose to power. All as a result of being thankful to G-d, even in the dark. Similar to the lesson we can all learn from the Hanukah candles, of seeing the light in the darkness.

GALUT AMERICA

In the days of the wicked Greek rule over Israel, it was decreed that every Jew whose house had a beam (to lock the door, as was the custom in those days) had to inscribe on it that he has no portion in the G-d of Israel. Immediately, the Jews got rid of the beams in their homes. Then, the Greeks

decreed that anyone who had an ox must write on its horn that he has no portion in the G-d of Israel. The Jews sold their oxen. This obviously affected the financial situation of the Jewish people. If there is no lock on the front door, the house is an open target for thieves. If there are no oxen, plowing

becomes impossible, and the Jews would no longer be able to use their oxen for any purpose, whatsoever.

It is obvious that the aim of these decrees was to prevent the Jews from having a livelihood. As the Rambam mentions in the beginning of Hilchot Hanukah, the Greeks made the Jews lose their money. What was the reason for these decrees? What did they hope to gain? We know that the Greeks wanted the Jews to give up their faith and believe in Greek gods. How would these decrees make that happen?

The plan was to stop the Jews from serving G-d, by threatening them with loss of their financial security. The anti-Semites know this better than we do. The biggest blow to the belief of the simple Jew is the blow to his bank account. To his wallet. If a Jew is threatened with either giving up his financial security or giving up his religion, unfortunately, many Jews will choose the latter. If you wanted a secure front door, if you wanted to keep your money, you needed to give up your religion.

For a big part of Jewish history, if we wanted to remain faithful religious Jews, we needed to be poor. That is extremely hard for the Jew. Because it is amazing what a Jew is willing to do to save a couple of dollars. All anti-Semitic plans throughout the generations were first aimed at the Jew's finances. "You can't leave Spain and take your money with you." "It is illegal to buy from a Jew in Germany." "You can't work here in New York, if you need to leave office on Friday afternoon." (Yes. Rabbi Beryl Wein taught that the amount of anti-Semitism in New York immediately before World War II was equal to that in Germany. The only difference was that in Germany, it was accompanied by violence.) And there was always a common pattern: money was always step one, before the violence. This is always the first step of psychological warfare against Judaism.

Every Galut has its primary test. And it is important to know and be clear about the test of the particular Galut you are in. The Galut of America

is the test of money. How much are you willing to pay for your religion? How much money are you willing to give up for your religion? This is a question that needs to be asked by every religious Jew, especially in the western culture we live in. Are you ready to be overworked and underpaid, just to stick to your religious status? That question is many times the deciding question of how much you are willing to give of yourself to G-d.

To be a religious Jew has a price. It is not just tuition, it is not just time, it is not just expenses. It is what type of office you are willing to work in, it is about what type of internet or phone you are using, it is about what type of relationship you are willing to have with your fellow employees.

But times are a lot easier than they once were. Not having bulls, not having a lock on the front door made the financial status of the Jews back then impossible. Anyone can break into your house, at any time. That was then. But now, times are different. People have secure bank accounts, and people have cars with bumper stickers that say Ein Od Milvado. But there are still some common denominators. Pay attention, and you will notice that the Jews in the days of Greek rule were not given the ultimatum – *sin* or lose your money. *Convert*, or lose your money. All that was required of them was to write in the most conveniently inconvenient places, that they did not have a part in the Jewish religion. That is not a sin. It is much worse than a sin, because it brings to the greatest sins. It is an identity shift. The ultimatum of those days was similar to the ultimatum often offered tacitly by western culture: "Either identify yourself as not religious, or be prepared to find that business will be more difficult."

But the Jews who truly love G-d stood strong, and will stand strong, today. They were willing to pay the price then. And they are willing to pay the price now. בכל מאורך ... אלוקיך ה' וזהב את ה' You have a mitzvah to love G-d with all of your belongings, possessions and wealth. With your whole bank account. With everything you have in your wallet. Even if it means less restaurants, less vacations,



less fancy lifestyle; but that is sometimes how much the love of G-d costs.

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