



Parashat Miketz



English version

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## THE ART OF BUILDING A TEMPLE IN MY HEART

Next week, we are going to fast on Erev Shabbat the unique fast of Assarah Betevet. It is the only time that we fast on Friday, on Erev Shabbat, for something that happened in the past. This fast commemorates the beginning of the Destruction of the First Temple, the day when the Babylonian enemy surrounded Yerushalayim, and after two-and-a-half years, they broke through the walls. This fast is **בַּעֲצַם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה**, a fast that cannot be pushed off, even if the fast falls out on Shabbat. Why?

The Hatam Sofer says that although one is allowed to fast on Shabbat only for things of the future, like Yom Kippur at the beginning of the New Year, or a fast for a bad dream, something that someone is worried about, Assarah Batevet is different. It is not only that we fast about something that happened in the past. On Assarah Betevet, we are being judged, *if the third Bet Hamikdash will be rebuilt this year or not!*

Assarah Batevet is perfectly situated immediately after Hannukah. Hanuka is a holiday on which each person is to make his house into a Beit Hamikdash. It is a holiday on which we are all Kohanim Gedolim, lighting up the spirituality in our families. This is because a Jew without a Bet Hamikdash is not a complete Jew, at his core. The choice of lighting the Menorah as the part of the Temple Services through which we make our home into a Bet Mikdash is found in the Torah: it is the appointing the candle lighting of the Menorah to Aharon that appeased him, and not the sacrifices of the Nessiim we read throughout. Because the candle lighting of the Menorah is a sort of payback

of gratitude, lighting up the Mishkan for G-d, Who does not need our light; it is an expression of appreciation to G-d for having lit up the way for us in the desert for 40 years. The whole Menorah lighting, at its core, is not a sacrifice as much as it is an expression of our indebtedness to G-d.

There is no mitzvah on Hanuka to make a Hanuka party like there is to make a Purim feast. This is because on Purim, the enemy was out to hurt our bodies as well as our spirit. On Hanuka, the enemy was out to *extinguish our spirituality*. The Jews were punished on Purim by having their lives at risk, because they allowed themselves to enjoy the Seudah of Ahashverosh. What, then, were the Jews in the times of Greeks guilty of, that the services of the Temple were taken away from them, and their spirituality was threatened?

The answer is that they were lacking in their Spiritual drive, in their care for the Bet Hamikdash and their Temple Services! So, after their victory, although they were exempt from using pure, uncontaminated olive oil, they made the extra effort to obtain it, because they wanted to correct what they had done wrong; they wanted to replace what they had lacked in their services! And that is why it makes so much sense that Hanuka is the perfect holiday to precede the judgement of Assarah Betevet, to determine whether or not we will merit the building of the Bet Hamikdash this year!!!

So, what does this all mean? How do I build a Mishkan in my heart and light inside it a Ner



Tamid, and bring my soul as a Korban on its Mizbeach? This sounds like the song of Bilbavi Mishkan Evneh. But it is much more than just a song! Every day, three times a day, at the apex of our requests in Shemoneh Esreh, before thanking G-d for what He gave us, we say the Retzeh prayer, a prayer that the services come back to G-d's Bet Hamikdash. In it, we mention something so interesting: והשב את העבודה לדביר ביתך . ואשי ישראל . There are two ways to read these words and the meaning they have. Either, we are asking that the Fires of Yisrael should be brought back to the Bet Hamikdash, or, the words ואשי ישראל belong to and refer to the following words: that G-d should accept the Jewish Fire offerings, along with their prayers. It all depends where you put the words - the beginning of the sentence or the end of the sentence, something that is a discussion in Halacha. (Tosafot Menahot 110a; O"H 102) What does that even mean, that there are fires of sacrifices of Yisrael, even in times when there is no Bet Hamikdash? The answer is something unbelievable! Michael, the Angel, is a Kohen Gadol in the Temple in Yerushalayim in the sky, and he brings on the Mizbeach the souls of the Tzaddikim!

We know that every Hebrew word that ends with -ayim, instead of -im, is not just a plural masculine noun, but a plural that works in sync. For example: Sussim, Hamorim, Sefarim, are horses, donkeys, and books. While Enayim, Sefatayim, Shinayim, Raglayim, Yadayim, Nehirayim, Ofanayim, etc., are all plurals that reflect duality: Eyes, lips, teeth, feet, hands, nostrils, bicycle (two wheels), are all things that work in sync. Why, then, is Yerushalayim, also, plural, but -ayim? Because Yerushalayim is not just any other city. It is יְרוּשָׁלַיִם , a city that is connected to Yerushalayim in the sky! And the two Yerushalayims are in sync, the one above is paired with Yerushalayim here, down below! Whatever we do *down here*, we can be bringing korbanot with our Messirut Nefesh that Michael Kohen Gadol will bring for us, on the Mizbeach *up there*! Those are the fires of our souls, and with those fires, we “burnt” physical and material desires for the sake of something more heavenly and more spiritual! You might feel, sometimes, that the good deeds you’ve done have gone unnoticed, and have

not gone anywhere. But NO! Michael, the Kohen Gadol, has sacrificed them on the Mizbeach in Yerushalayim, upstairs!!!!

The Messilat Yesharim tells us the secret recipe to bring the best sacrifices: והאדם כבר ידעת, שהנרצה יותר בעבודת הבורא, יתברך שמו, הוא חפץ הלב ותשוקת הנשמה. You should know, that the most accepted by G-d, more than all the service of G-d, is the desire of the heart, and the yearning of the soul!!! (Chapter 7) G-d and Yitzhak had no more blessings for Esav after Yaakov took them all. But Esav cried; he wanted a blessing so badly that G-d made a special blessing, just because of Esav's desire in his heart, a yearning in his soul!!! Why do we think that if we pray for serving G-d a little more, if we pray to appreciate Him a little more, if we beg Him for another Bet Hamikdash, that G-d can't turn over the Heavens for us, if He did it for Esav!?!?

יְפֵה אַתָּה רְעִיתִי כְּתִרְצָה נְאֻמָּה כִּירוּשָׁלַם : *You are beautiful, My beloved, when you desire a connection, when you yearn, you are beautiful like Jerusalem!* G-d wants us to want! That is all He wants from us! Of course, the Yetzer Hara is going to do everything to break our spirit! He is going to make us sin and sin again and again, so that we wonder if we really want! But we can't stop wanting to get close to G-d, no matter how low we have fallen! Because those wants, those desires to keep serving G-d are our sacrifices, the ones that Michael offers for us in Yerushalayim shel Ma'alah!

This is the meaning behind the Hasidic story/parable: There was a man who had no money to support his wife and kids, so he made an agreement with his wife that he would go on a year-long business trip to see what he could do, to better the family finances. On his way back with a bag of cash, at the forest in the outskirts of his city, he was stopped by a thief, who pulled out a gun. “Please don't take the money that I made! This is the money I worked so hard for!” The thief said, with his drawn gun, “You work for your money, and this is the way that I work for my money! Hand over everything you got!!” The man handed over the bag, and the thief, with joy, smelled the many bills, with delight! The poor man then turned to the thief and said, “How am I going to come back, after a year, to my wife and kids, with nothing! They will think that I just wasted my

time! They will never let me back home! What a failure I will be!” The thief said, “I feel bad for you, but what do you want me to do? This is my job!!” The poor man said, “At least help me make it *look* that I fought you! Here! I will take off my jacket and hang it on a tree! Please, shoot some holes in it with your gun, so that I can show my wife and prove my story that I fought to bring back some money!” The thief said, “Sure! No problem!” With that, he shot a bunch of gunshots through the man’s coat! “Thank you so much. You know what, maybe you can also shoot some more in my hat, as well, so that she can see how hard I tried to defend myself and the family finances!” The thief shot some more through the hat, but then he ran out of bullets! The moment the gun ran out of bullets, the poor man jumped on the thief and beat him up! He took back his bag of money and ran home with his year’s worth of work!

The same is true with the Yetzer Harah! He tries to take everything we worked hard on; he shoots his bullets at us, until he runs out of tests. Then, we can pick ourselves up and fight for everything that we have worked so hard for, and we run home with it. Our will to serve Hashem, he can’t take from us, if we just let him shoot at our clothes, but not at us, ourselves, at our spirit. Because it is the spirit, the Ratzon, that will make G-d take us out of Galut so

### THE ART OF HANUKA CHANGE

The beautiful song, Maoz Tzur, that we sing each Hanukka night after lighting the candles, has many beautiful insights. As it goes through the ages, the dark periods of time, that G-d saved the Jews from their oppressors, it refers to the Jews of the times of Hannuka, as Shoshanim, roses. ומנותר קנקנים נעשה גם לשושנים. *And from the remainder of the jugs of oil, a miracle was done for the Shoshanim, for the Jews.*

Why are the Jews referred to on Hanukkah as Shoshanim?

In regards to the Purim miracle, by the piyyut read after the Megillah reading as well, we find that the Jews are called Shoshanim, roses, שושנת יעקב צהלה. ושמה. What is the connection to roses?

King David sings a psalm about all those who do Teshuva, and calls them Shoshanim, roses, לְמַנְצֵה

fast, it is all G-d is waiting for! Just like when Yosef was taken out of jail, he was rushed, וְיָרִיעָהוּ מִן־הַבּוֹר, because no matter where he was, or what test he was in, he only wanted to serve Hashem, so Hashem hurried him out of the mess he was in, ויריצהו.

The only part of the Temple that man could not create, that Moshe could not figure out, was the Menorah! G-d told him again and again, how to create it, but Moshe could not figure it out; he could only *want* to make a Menorah, but G-d will have to actually make it for us! (That is why out of all the utensils of the Temple, only the Menorah is round, because G-d only makes round things. רבן שמעון בן גמליאל [אומר] אין מרובע מששת ימי בראשית. Yerushalmi Maasrot 5;3, Nedarim 3;2, Shavuot 3;8, and more in Yerushalmi)

Hanuka’s purpose is to fix the lack of spiritual will, the lack of service of the heart. And that is what we need to take from Hanuka, going forward. As the Maggid of Mezritch, taught us, יִקְרִיב אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְרַצּוֹנוֹ לְפָנֵינוּ. He shall bring it, his Ratzon, in front of G-d. (Vayikra 1:3)

The more we talk about our gratitude, and how we are indebted to G-d, the more we will be able to bring about our Will to serve Him. יהיו לרצון אמרי פי

על־שְׁשׁוּנִים לְבַנְיָמִן. (Psalm 45) In the Yalkut Shimoni, 671, it states, “ Anyone who does Teshuva from a sin, G-d will add him a beloved name, as we see that that sons of Korah who did Teshuva, were called Shoshanim. Roses.”

The Shem Mishmuel (תרע"ג Purim) writes that the word שושנה is from the word שינוי, change. Change is so rose like, because roses are so soft, and so easy to bend. Shir Hashirim tells us, that the Jewish people are considered amongst the nations as a thorn amongst the roses, כשושנה בין ההוחים. Why? Because we have the rose like ability to bend, the power to start again, to forgive each other, to accept G-d’s ways even when they don’t make sense to us.

This is why, on Purim and Hannuka, the Jews are called Roses. The passing of the royal signet ring from Achashverosh to Haman caused the Jews to

repent more than all the rebuke of the 48 prophets that rebuked them. (Megillah 14a) In the times of the Hashmonaim, the Jews were so afraid of the Greeks, they all did Teshuva! They all began doing Chessed, and studying Torah day and night! (Sheiltot R Achai Gaon)

When a person does Teshuva, he becomes so beloved to G-d, he becomes a Shoshana, a rose. Ever wanted to give G-d a bouquet of flowers? Its easy! Just try to be a better Jew! And when you do bring Him a bouquet of flowers, He will make you miracles! When one learns more Torah and does more Chessed, G-d forgives all their sins! And that is what the words mean, that G-d made the miracle of Chanuka, He made the miracle of Purim, to those who did Teshuva, to those who did more Chessed, to those who learned more Torah!

The Zohar starts off by saying that the Jews are compared to roses, as mentioned earlier from Shir Hashirim. Why? Because there are two roses, red and white. Red is the Judgement, and White is Mercy. And just like the rose has thirteen pedals, so too, the Jewish people are surrounded by the 13 Attributes of Mercy.

When we bend, G-d bends towards us as well. When we change, He changes the evil decree. The grandfather of the Hida, R' Avraham Azulai, writes in Hessed LeAvraham, that the Eighth day of Hanukka, is a special time to hurry up the coming of Mashiach. The Passuk says, in the portion we read in the Torah on that day, זָאתוּ הַנֶּבֶט הַמְצִיחַ בַּיּוֹם, הַמְשִׁיחַ אֵתוֹ, as the letter הַמְשִׁיחַ hint to (בן דוד) משיח. The letters of משיח are the first letters to the words of מדליקין שמונת ימי חנוכה.

There are so many hidden secrets to doing Teshuva in these days of Hannuka. It is found in the first Sefer written after the Talmud, the first Sefer of the Geonim, the Sheiltot, the following. גר חנוכה משמאל The Hannuka candle should be on the left when you enter the house, while the Mezuzah on the right, and the household owner, with his Tallit of tzizit, in the middle. (Sheiltot Vayishlach) The question is asked, isn't the time of lighting Hannukah candles at night time, when one is not obligated to wear Tzizit?!

The answer that is given, is that the person is surrounded by the Mitzvot that spell Needle, מחט. מ' - מזוזה. ה' - חנוכה. ט' - טלית. The Mitzvah of Hannukah, is specifically in the doorway, in the פתח, for this Mitzvah is the Entrance to the Mashiach. This is to teach us the secret way to Teshuva, פתחו לי פתח כחודו של מחט ואני אפתח לכם פתח, Open for me an opening the smallest size, the size of a needle hole, and I will open for you, an opening the size of a banquet hall!

There are so many Segulot and Hidurim, in Hannuka, but all the magic of Hanukka does not start from the lighting of the candles, alone, but from the meaning behind it all. Which is gratitude. להודות ולהלל, to thank G-d, and to praise Him.

What does thanking and praising G-d have to do with change? With Mashiach? With all the Segulot?

Every change, for good, begins with a person thinking, of awareness. Awareness of G-d, of Olam Haba, but most of all, of all the good that G-d gives you. The root of all sin, of being stuck in life, of stopping the Mashiach from coming, is not being aware of all the good that G-d has done, is doing, and will continue to do. When you give flowers to someone, he knows they will die, but that does not bother the recipient, because it is the thought of the flowers that will live on forever. Every flower that was given, was because there was a thought behind it. And that thought is eternal. The same is true about change. It is the thought of change, that is more important than the change itself. Because the change was just an outcome of a thought.

This is because change is a three-step process that I call Triple A. Awareness, Acceptance, and Action. We need to become more aware, about the situation. Who is involved, What exactly the problem is, When the problem occurs, Where it occurs, Why it occurs, and How it occurs. Then we need to Accept this new reality, and find what to be thankful for, in this new reality. Only then, when we are in a positive state about the new reality, we can discover what is the best solution to the problem, that we can take Action on, that will finally solve the problem. What is that small needle hole size change, that will eventually open up massive change, performance and results? The

best seller today in self help, is a whole book on finding that needle point size change, a book called Atomic Habits. Change needs to be the smallest thing, the size of an Atom. But in the days of our Rabbis, that was the size of a needle point. There was nothing smaller.

## THE ART OF BEING AN IVRI

R Shimshon R. Hirsh writes that the first prophecy in the Torah was *יִפֹּת אֱלֹקִים לְיִפֹּת וַיִּשְׁכַּן בְּאֶהֱלֵי-אֶשֶׁם*. 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 *יִפֹּת*, in its basic translation, means, *expansion*. But it also means *develop*, *פיתוח*. It also means to *persuade*. *פיתוי*. (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

When we go through this process of change, we will be the Shoshanim, the roses that G-d loves most. And the Chanuka candles will burn brighter than ever.

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, *עוברי ים* (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, *מעבר לנהר*.

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 Ivrim. We are just passing through this world, to get on to the next world. A fundamental principal of Judaism. (Messilat Yescharim 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 הוד-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 הונן 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 גְּבוּר וְהַקָּדָם*, 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 Pharaoh 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! *יַעֲשֶׂה פְּרֹעָה וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְהַמֶּשֶׁל אֶת־הָאָרֶץ*! *Pharaoh should do, and he should appoint watchmen over the land, ...* Why does Yosef first mention that Pharaoh "should do"? Just say, *יִפְקֹד פְּרֹעָה*, 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 לֶפֶי הַטָּף*. Yosef refuses to give his brothers positions of power, when introducing them to Pharaoh.

5: *הוּא הַמִּשְׁבִּיר* 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. *וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בֵּיתָה פְּרֹעָה* 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. *וַיִּפְתְּחָה* *אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם* 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 Mashiah'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 Mashiah!

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 מִבְּטוֹחַ בְּאָדָם... מְבֻטָּח* *בְּגִדֵי־רִימָה*: 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 *mashal*, 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. ויתגבר 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 הרפתי – יסף ה' לי בן אחר. G-d will eventually erase the הרפה, 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 קייבון קנינים' הוא לו. For he (Yosef) was the son of (Yaakov's) old age. זרעים-ז (subjects regarding land and its produce) ק-קדשים (regarding sacrifices) י-גנשים (regarding women) ישויות (litteraly salvation, but referring to subject of damages) טהרות (Purity) was not learnt by Yosef, for he was not of age to learn about family purity. But why is ישויות for damages? 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, אסף 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. Still, even though we Jews know it, we 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 אדם בשעת כעסו *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 ובתמהון לבב (Behukotay 28;28) The Targums (Onk. and Y.B. U.) translates שיעמום אתמהון לבב, 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 NileRiver 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... *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 ריח 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 מאוּדך ... אלוקיך ה' ואהבת 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.

## THE ART OF SEEING THE LIGHT

Ever noticed how all of the parashiot of Sefer Bereshit, from Lech Lecha, the time G-d promised Avraham that his descendants would be going down to Egypt, until it actually happened - all begin with the letter Vav? (Except three). וירא, ויצא, ויחזי וישב, ויגש, וישלח. Nowhere else in the Torah are there so many parashiot, in a row, that begin with the letter Vav. The only three of Bereshit, that do *not* start with the letter Vav are the parashiot ויי חיי . The initial letters of these parashiot spell חתם, which means “sealed”. G-d “sealed” the plan for the Jews to go down to Egypt, to fulfill His Word to Avraham. The whole Sefer Bereshit, from the covenant of the 400 years of being a stranger in a strange land, until the very end of Sefer Bereshit, were all to fulfill that prophecy, in a mindboggling way.

Yitzchak’s birth, his life, and Yaakov’s life, were the beginning of the 400 years of living as a stranger in a foreign land. From the point of the Brit Ben Habetarim onward, by Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov and the tribes, they lived as a גר, a stranger. ויגר אברהם, גור בארץ הזאת, ויעקב גר בארץ חם. (See Rashi 15;13) The lengthy mention of Esav’s family “dwelling” was to illustrate that he wasn’t willing to go through the 400 years of being a stranger in a foreign land. (Rashi 36;7) (And the episode of Akeidat Yitzhak was to clarify, that Yitzhak was the true inheritor of Avraham and not Yishmael.) Every time the Torah mentions Yitzhak or Yaakov settling, being וישב in their lives, something very *unsettling* happened: with Avimelech, the dispute over the wells, Yaakov losing Yosef.

All the episodes in Bereshit were either a fulfillment of the prophecy of being a stranger in a foreign land, or of a domino effect of the Jewish family descending to Egypt. Yitzhak needed to marry Rivka, sister of Lavan, and specifically to have twins, one, Yaakov, and the other, Esav - the child that came from Lavan’s gene. (Mention of Lavan is important for the fact that most sons resemble, in their nature, the mother’s brother.) (B. Batra 110a) And it was important that Yaakov was born second, not Esav, so that Esav would want to kill Yaakov for stealing the blessings that “belonged” to him. This was important, to make Yaakov run away from home and come, empty-

handed, to Lavan’s house. Yaakov coming empty-handed gave Lavan the leverage to trick Yaakov into marrying Leah, and not Rachel. This forced Yaakov to have 6 children from Leah and two from Rachel, which caused politics within the twelve brothers. Rachel needed to die early, so that Reuven would tamper with the beds and be downgraded from firstborn, adding to the politics. Rachel’s death also caused Yaakov to give Yosef more TLC (tender loving care), which brought about even more politics, making the brothers to think that Yosef was a Yaakov’s favorite, and that Yosef wanted to be considered the only continuation of Jewish lineage and push his brothers out of the picture. This caused them to sell Yosef in bondage to Egypt, (See Rashi 37,14) which brought about Yosef’s becoming the ruler of Egypt, which caused the Jewish family of Yaakov to come down to Egypt.

All this explains why Dina needed to be raped by Shechem, so that she would bear Osnat, who Yaakov sent down to Egypt, with a Kamiah on her neck, which she threw into Yosef’s chariot, so that he would find a Jewish girl to marry while in Egypt, who would bear Menashe and Efraim. (Pirkei DR Eliezer 38; Yalkut Shimoni)

G-d sealed - חתם - and hid, the destiny of the first Jewish family! All the parashiot begin with Vav, which means *and*, because they are all a continuation, they are all connected and lined up in perfect order, so that in the end, G-d’s Word is fulfilled, in entirety!!

What? So nobody really made a decision, everything was preplanned?!? They were all just puppets, to a much greater plan?!? Nothing actually *happened* - מקרה. It was all רקם ה', the letters flip around to say, G-d was weaving the tapestry. Why a tapestry?

After the Holocaust, people turned to Hazon Ish to explain G-d’s plan. He explained that their question could be compared to the question of a child, seeing his grandmother knitting. From the child’s view of all the strands of wool, which are so disorganized – a tangled mixture of many colors – it is no more than a hopeless mess. But, when the child climbs up on a table, and sees the product coming out of the needles his grandmother is so

deftly using, it looks very beautiful. As G-d says, כִּי לֹא מִחֲשָׁבוֹתַי מִחֲשָׁבוֹתֵיכֶם (Yeshaya 55:8) For *My* perspective is not *your* perspective.

When we are busy, G-d is busy, as well, pulling strings, weaving destiny. The passuk says that after Yehuda directed the brothers to sell Yosef, and their father Yaakov continued grieving over the loss of his son, Yehuda “went down” from his brothers. The Midrash tells us something amazing on that passuk from Yirmiyahu, כִּי אֲנֹכִי גֹדְעָתִי אֶת-הַמְחַשְׁבֹּת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי הֹשֵׁב עֲלֵיכֶם נִאֲמֵר יִקְוּ מִחֲשָׁבוֹת שְׁלוֹם אֶת-הַמְחַשְׁבֹּת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי לְרַעָה לְתֵת לָכֶם אַחֲרַיִת וְתִקְוָה: Yirmiyahu consoles the people before their descent to Babylon for seventy years, with this powerful passuk: *For I know the thoughts that I think about you, says YKVK, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope: Rabbi Shmuel B' Nachman said, the tribes were busy selling Yosef, Yosef was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, Reuven was busy with his sackcloth and fasting for not bringing Yosef back home to Yaakov, Yaakov was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, and Yehuda was busy finding a wife, and G-d was dealing with creating the light of the king Mashiach!*”

The only parts of the story of Bereshit, from the time of the prophecy to Avraham at the Brit Ben Habatarim, that are not part of the domino effect of descending the Jewish family down to Egypt, or the Brit Ben Habatarim, are the stories of Lot being saved from the destruction of Sedom and the story of Yehuda and Tamar. These stories, unrelated to the Jews going down to Egypt, are the two stories about G-d being busy, creating Mashiach. Out of Lot came Ruth, David’s grandmother; and out of Yehuda, came Boaz, son of Nachshon, David’s grandfather!

**P.s.** This is why, when people get engaged, they make an engagement party. A “vort”. Even though there is no religious, halachic, reason to celebrate. There is no Kiddushin then, הרי את מקודשת לי is not said. So why do we make a party?

*Since G-d created the world, what is He busy doing? He is busy doing two things. He is making shidduchim, and He is flipping ladders, (lowering the haughty, and lifting the humble). (Yalkut Shimoni) But why does it take so long for G-d to make Shidduchim?!*

When you think that G-d has forgotten about you, that is when He is thinking about you! When you think you are alone, He is closer than ever! You think G-d had “bad intentions”, with all these crazy things happening, but it was all happening for G-d to bring you an אַחֲרַיִת וְתִקְוָה, a happy ending!

In the whole Chanuka story, G-d is pulling the strings, for an entirely different story from the one we know. For a thousand years, G-d wanted an eight-day holiday, starting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, before the Maccabees were even born! How so?

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jews came running to donate materials for the erection of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev...but G-d told Moshe to dedicate it on the birthday of Yitzhak, on the first of Nissan. The inauguration celebration lasted 8 days, which is the Torah reading for the 8 days of Chanukka, days which were to have begun on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. The whole Chanuka story had to happen, in order to celebrate, the Menorah, the Mizbeach, and the closeness, because a thousand years earlier, the Jews were swift in creating something spiritual about of something physical, which we commemorate through making fire out of oil.

We light the Chanuka candles in the darkest time of the year. Because in the darkest darkness, G-d lights the brightest lights. When nothing makes sense, it is because G-d is doing His thing. When Yaakov, Yosef, Reuven are crying, G-d is weaving His tapestry. Before Mashiach comes, there will be a lot of darkness, because only in darkness, G-d performs. That is His way of being modest, He never brings attention to Himself. No one knows it was He, until after the fact. Just like a חתום, a signet ring, that is illegible, until after the stamp. Only then can it be recognized, that it was G-d, all along.

Forty days before a baby boy is formed, there is a Heavenly voice that goes out, and says, בת פלוני לפלוני. The daughter of so-and-so will go to so-and-so. (Sotah 2a) From that point on, everything that happens in the life of that boy and girl, all has to happen in order for them to meet and get engaged. The custom of making an engagement party is to celebrate that G-d's work, of making this shidduch come together, has come to fruition. Everyone thought that they were busy doing what they were doing, but G-d was bringing two people together, all along.

I did not get along in Yeshiva, where I learnt in America. So I left to Mikdash Melech, then in Bayit Vegan. The first day I prayed in Israel, I prayed in the Amshinov minyan factory, and I left my watch in shul, after putting on my Tefillin. I came back, and there was a sign on the wall, WATCH FOUND- come get it with the simanim, the signs that prove it is yours. I claimed my watch from the Israeli kids that had found it and wanted to do the mitzvah of returning lost items. I was invited to eat by them for Shabbat meals, and before going back to America, they asked me if I was interested in dating. They knew an English-speaking girl, who lived in the neighborhood. I dated the girl, and in two weeks we were engaged. I never thought, in a million years, that the reason why I had to go through a hard time in Yeshiva in America, was so that I would be able to be happily-ever-after married. לָמַת לָכֶם אֶתְרִית וְתִקְוָה

### Selfie steps to live with G-d's plan.

1. G-d's business is not your business. As Yeshayahu told Chizkiyahu about his decision not to have children, so as not to bring Menashe to the world: בהדי כבשי דרחמנא למה לך? מאי דמפקדת איבעי לך למעבד! (See Berachot 10a) We are not supposed to ponder or depend on what we believe is G-d's plan; we have to make the decisions that are most rational for us, knowing, all along, that G-d has His own plans, and only His plan will play out. (R Wolbe from Hovot Halevavot) Yosef felt that something bad was going to happen to him, after leaving his father to check on his brothers who hated him. After all, the last thing he learnt with his father was the laws of Eglah Arufah, of someone who was sent out on the road alone, and his blood was spilled. He knew that he had a bad omen hovering over him, but he listened to his father, anyway, and fulfilled his command. What was going to happen to him was G-d's business. Yosef just needed to listen to his father. He needed to do what made sense, what was rational.

2. Do the best you can, but stay balanced, calm and collective. No matter how many self-help tools you know, or how much hishtadlut you apply, it is all up to G-d whether or not you will be successful, and how much. It is all predetermined from Rosh Hashana.

3. Stay positive. You are just a puppet. You might as well be, a positive puppet.

### THE ART OF SPIRITUAL COMEBACK (2020)

Covid has taken a toll on the spirituality of the system. During Covid, 30 percent of Yeshiva students in Israel did not return to Yeshiva. Some, because they dropped out. Some, because they didn't fit in, to begin with. Some, because they were on the verge of outgrowing the system or because their families feared someone catching Corona. Out of 80,000 yeshiva students in Israel, 24,000 were out on the streets.

Covid has taken a toll on the spirituality of the individual. Corona did not only cause inactivity in the gym and in the arena of exercise, shopping, or getting out. It caused us to be inactive spiritually as

well. If a person has an excuse not to pray with a minyan, not to recite *Shema* on time, Corona makes it all the harder to do what we're supposed to do.

People want to be spiritually motivated again. People want the tools to motivate others spiritually. Chanuka is a time for a spiritual comeback. That is what Chanuka is all about, to look for whatever spiritual motivation you have and light it up. Make something out of the little that you have, no matter how small it is. How so? There is a fundamental difference between Purim, where we have a mitzvah to make a meal, and Chanuka, when we

don't. On Purim, we celebrate that our lives have been spared from the decree that came because we participated in Achashverosh's party. We contrast that to Chanuka, when we celebrate that our spirituality was spared from the decrees that came because we blended with Hellenistic culture. On Chanuka, we commemorate our spirituality's re-ignition and that we got a chance to serve G-d and do His Mitzvot again, with the highest level of adherence.

It is so interesting. We celebrate the miracles of the miraculous jug of oil. We had good excuses back then, either not to light the Menorah, or to light with impure oil because of the rule *טומאה הותרה בציבור*. But still. We celebrate that we found the one jug and had the 8-day miracle. We rejoice that, despite the circumstances, we were still able to serve G-d in the best way possible. The Chanuka miracle that we celebrate was that we did the best we could, with the little we had, and G-d took care of the rest. As the *Al Hanissim* prayer on Chanuka dictates, the war that we won was for the sake of preserving our spiritual level. Chanuka is the message of spiritual motivation, to gravitate towards G-d, like the candle's oil, that gravitates towards the flame.

Judaism teaches us that the things you notice least, the things you take for granted most, are the things you should thank G-d for first. Through these things, one connects to G-d, no matter where the person is, spiritually. Like the ability to breathe, to exist, to have a soul, and... the ability to think and differentiate. Each morning, after blessing G-d for your body, for your soul, the first blessing is *הַנוֹתֵן לְשִׁכְוֵי בְּיָמָה, לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה*: *The one who gives the rooster (Rashi), or the heart (Rosh), the understanding, to distinguish and differentiate between day and night*. Both in the blessings in the morning (Sephardic version) and in the Amidah prayer, the prayer for being able to understand and differentiate, is immediately after the blessing of holiness and the blessing of the soul, and for a good reason. G-d gave us the wisdom to be able to differentiate between day and night and between anything else that is symbolic to day and night. Between truth and false, good and bad, what is important and what is not as important. Between Mitzvah and Sin, a Talmid Hacham and a

simpleton, a Jew and a Gentile, between *Olam Haze* and *Olam Haba*.

Chanuka teaches us the first step to a spiritual comeback. Chanuka is the holiday of differentiation, of how oil is different from water, how a Jew is different from a gentile, and how the spiritual realm is different from the material one. With Aristotle's mathematical philosophy, the Greeks challenged the Jewish philosophies of spirituality with mathematical logic. *Prove* that Shabbat is holier than Sunday, *prove* that a circumcised man is holier than a man without circumcision, and *prove* that a spiritual Rabbi has the authority to control the calendar and determine Rosh Hodesh. Prove that the G-d you can't see exists. The Greeks are referred to by the Torah as Dark, *חשך זה יון*, because they challenged us to differentiate between holidays, holiness, holy people, and those that are not. Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and Brit Milah. The letters that spell *חידוש* ש'בת ל'ורח... The acronym of which is *חשך*, darkness... The Greeks took anything that was spiritual and made it dark.

The first step to reigniting spiritual motivation is to shine the light through the darkness and differentiate between what is spiritual and what is not, what is important and what is not. To differentiate what are the main things in life, and what is secondary. Our answer to the Greeks, is, that we don't have all the answers, but G-d does. G-d tells us the realities that we don't see, and that is how we differentiate. Shabbat is holy because G-d made it so. Circumcised men are holier, because G-d said so. Rabbis have the authority to establish the calendar because G-d empowered them. G-d tells us, *לא בשמים היא*, the Torah is given to Man, and the greatest Rabbis are the ones who have the authority to differentiate what is right and what is wrong. (B. Metziah 59b) This is the lesson of Chanuka. It is not always easy to differentiate between people. Between who is good to be in a relationship with, and who is not. When Yosef got lost while looking for his brothers, *וימצאם איש... וישאלהו האיש* *And a man found him, and the Man asked him*. Rashi says this "Man" was the Angel Gabriel. The question is, how does Rashi know that this Man was Gavriel? Earlier, Rashi says that when Yaakov went back for some jugs, he fought

with the **שׂא**, the Man, ... that Man was the Angel of Esav. How do we know that the previous **שׂא** is the Angel of Esav, and the **שׂא** here is the Angel Gavriel? The answer is because the way a Man responds to a situation tells us who he is. A “Man” who comes to help is a good angel. But a Man who, when you ask him to bless you, says, I have no time; I have to sing to G-d - this Angel is the Angel of Esav. If a person makes helping other people part of his serving G-d, that makes him G-dly. The way you know how holy or spiritual a man is - is according to how he *responds* to adversity, disturbances, difficulties, and expenses. (see Eirubin 65b)

It is not always easy to differentiate between who has a future and who does not. Yosef knew that the dream follows the interpretations. Why did Yosef interpret the dream of the wine butler that he would Selfie Steps for a spiritual comeback:

1. There are six elements of persuasion and influence, for oneself and for others: The first is **Reciprocity**. People are influenced by favors and encouraged to return favors done for them. REALIZE how you don't realize how much G-d has given you, is giving you, and will give you, and sing Hallel to Him.
2. **Scarcity**. When a person realizes how there is no one else like him in the world; that today will never come again; there is no place other than here - this will motivate him.
3. **Authority**. Often, we can't differentiate between what is important in life and what is less important. G-d differentiates for us, and He gives us Rabbis to guide us.
4. **Consistency**. People are influenced to do what they are already doing. Get out of the inactive zone by forcing yourself into activity; people tend to need routine, to do what they are already doing.
5. **Liking**. People are influenced by the people they like. Make friends with spiritually motivated people, and you will become spiritually motivated.
6. **Consensus**. People are influenced to do what they see others doing. Get into a Yeshiva, a Kollel, a learning program, even if it is just on Zoom or Phone Conference.

## THE ART OF BEING HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Honesty is a huge part of self-improvement. To be honest with yourself means to examine your personal narrative. Subconsciously, people tell themselves stories about themselves. Some stories are true, and some are not. Our stories came from different places, from things our parents, teachers, siblings, or friends told us. Stories form in our

come out of jail and release him? Why not interpret the dream of the baker for good? The answer is, Yosef differentiated between what they said they saw in the dream. In the wine butler's dream, the butler was active in pressing the grapes and serving Pharaoh. While in the dream of the baker, the baker was passive. The ones who are active, have a future. The ones who are passive, do not.

Chanuka has in it the power to make us active again. If only we would spin ourselves around, we could bring the Mashiach. The letters on the Dreidel, 'נ'ג'ה'ש' have the same numerical value as משיח. The words מדליקים שמונת ימי הנוכה begin with the letters of Mashiach. One should run to see a king of the Gentiles to differentiate between their kings and our kings when Mashiach comes. (Berachot 9b)

minds from what our spouses say and from how we compare ourselves to others. Stories form in our minds from what our ego tells us we should be, do or have.

Self-improvement begins when you step back from yourself, and stop the running story of your version of life that is going through your head, your

personal narrative. Only then can you ask yourself the four questions. *Is my story true? Is there anything truer? What do I gain by keeping my story? Where would I be in life without my story?*

Being honest with yourself, is the trademark of the Jew, of the Yehudi. On Yaakov's last day, he made it clear to his sons, through the way he rebuked them and blessed them, that Yehuda was the only son worthy of having Kingship stay in his family. *לֹא יִסּוּר שֶׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה* *The staff (of royalty) should not be moved away from Yehuda* (Bereshit 49.) Why did Yehuda deserve to have Kingship stay in his family, more than in the families of Reuven, Shimon, Levy and Yosef? The Onkelos explains the words, *יהודה את אודיתא ולא בהיתתא* *Yehuda, you admitted (your blunder with Tamar) and you were not embarrassed.* Rashi comments on the words *מִצָּרַף בְּנֵי עֲלִיָּה* *You rose from killing, my son.* Yehuda's ability to admit is what made Yehuda's gene the only one worthy of royalty.

The royal, priestly, Hashmonai-Maccabee dynasty needed to go extinct, because they were descendants of Levi, and royalty is reserved to Yehuda's descendants, alone. Why is it so important that royalty remain by Yehuda? It seems that being honest with yourself is the heavyweight trait that deserves royalty, as King David admitted immediately that he sinned with Bat Sheva. If you don't have this gene, if honesty is not your second nature, you can't be royalty.

But why did the Hashmonai dynasty need to go extinct? Why is being honest with yourself the most important condition for royalty? Why not the ability to learn Torah with uninterrupted study (Yissachar), or the ability to manage big businesses (Zevulun), or the ability to judge alone (Dan)?

And, another question. The Torah commands *שׂוּם תִּשִּׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ* *You shall place a king over you* (Devarim 17,15). Isn't Hashem our King? Aren't we supposed to listen to our prophets and rabbis, who tell us the word of G-d? Why did Yaakov even think to bless Yehuda with royalty?

The answer is that the job of the Jewish King is to be a human representative of G-d's Kingship. Although the king is powerful, he has someone who he has to answer up to: G-d. This is so deep.

The story on the outside, is that the Jewish King is king, but the story on the inside, behind closed doors, the ideal Jewish King knows that he has his own King to answer up to, the King of all kings. The ideal Jewish king knows that he is nothing without the King of Kings. As King David said *כִּי מִמָּךְ הַכֹּל וּמִיָּדֶךָ נִתְּנוּ לָךְ* *Because everything is from You ...* (Divrei Hayamim 1, 29;14). To be a Jewish King, the deciding trait, the trait upon which kingship depends, is to be honest with yourself. To admit the truth, that above you is an Almighty G-d, and you are nothing without Him. The Hasmonaean royal family needed to go extinct, because they did not have this trait in their gene.

We are all called Yehudim, for we all have an aspect of Yehuda in our identity, of being able to be honest with ourselves and admit. The first thing we do as a Yehudi each morning is say *Modeh Ani*, we admit. The word *Modeh* has two meanings. To thank and to admit. How do we know which it is? If it says *מודה ש*, then it means "I admit that..." When it says *מודה על*, then it means "thanks for..." When you get up in the morning, the first feeling you have, the message from your subconscious is, your personal narrative is, I am because I am. So, we need to admit that this core belief, this story, is so wrong. I admit, that I am, **because You put a soul in me today.** *מודה אני לפניך ... שהחזרת בי נשמת*. Every night, before you go to bed, you give your soul back to your Creator. *בִּידְךָ אֶפְקִיד רוּחִי*. *In Your Hands, I put my soul for safe-keeping.* While I sleep, I am no more than a body without a soul. And when I awake, I admit that it is G-d Who put my *neshama* back in me.

Ever wonder why it says, *שהחזרת בי נשמת* I admit that you put back **in** me, my *neshama* - and not *שהחזרת לי נשמת* that you returned **to** me my *neshama*? The answer is that before I wake up, my body is just a lifeless box. A box that G-d, in His kindness, puts a soul in each morning. There is no me that G-d returns something to, without the *neshama*. I, me, only exists because of the soul that G-d gave me, this morning. There is no greater admittance to the truth, there is nothing you could be more wrong about in your personal narrative, than the belief that you exist today, without G-d having given you back your *neshama*, today. Today is the day that G-d gave you. This is a very

different Modeh Ani, different from a Modeh Ani of thanks. All because of a *didkuk* rule, of מודה ש as opposed to מודה על.

Ever wonder why we bless G-d every day of our lives for the way He made us: שלא עשני גוי, שלא עשני אשה, שעשני כרצוני? *That He did not make a gentile, that He did not make me a slave, that He did not make me a woman, that He made me as He willed?* Wouldn't it suffice to bless this blessing just once in a lifetime? The answer is, because each day, G-d recreated you, because He knows you have more to learn, and you still have a deeper truth in life left to discover.

According to Judaism, admitting the truth, saying I was wrong, is not only a royal trait. It brings you up to a more elevated level as a person. מטרה בני עליה. Admitting is the only way to becoming human and real. People are afraid to admit that they were wrong, out of fear that it might make them vulnerable or look dumb. Kingship is reserved for the bravest of all. There is nothing braver than admitting you were wrong. There is nothing smarter that you could ever do. One of the signs of a wise man is that *"on what he doesn't know, he says, I don't know, and that he admits to his mistake."* (Avot, 5:7) Why is that such a fundamental part of being wise? The Mishna continues to say that if someone lacks these traits, he is a fool! Why is that so?

A wise man is wise, because he knows that there is still much more in life to learn, improve and achieve. There are deeper levels of truth we can achieve each day. If G-d put my soul back inside me today, it means that there is much more for me

## LEADERSHIP WAZE

Most people think that the qualities necessary to become a leader are virtues such as honesty, integrity, the ability to be committed and passionate, communication skills, decision-making capabilities, accountability, delegation, creativity, etc. etc. Those are all important, but they are not the key virtue.

According to President Eisenhower, *Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.* The difference between a leader and a manager is that a

to achieve. The wise have this motto: *instead of crying, I keep on trying.* It is fine that I don't know something, it is fine that I made a mistake, I can keep trying to improve my performance, my thinking, my knowledge... The wise man prefers to cut his losses and admit his mistakes, so that he can take advantage of the new day and renewed *neshama* that Hashem has given him.

Here are the Selfie-Steps to aid us in recognizing what causes us to be dishonest with ourselves.

- 1- **Ignorance is bliss.** Not knowing the Halacha does not mean that you are keeping it. Not knowing how you make people feel, does not mean you are a nice person.
- 2- **Reality denial.** Not accepting the way events have turned out, does not mean that your world did not change. Not accepting that you have fallen spiritually, does not mean that you haven't.
- 3- **Overconfidence.** 90 percent of all drivers think they are above average drivers. Macho thinking. Unrealistic optimism.
- 4- **Self-handicapping.** Under-confident. Believing that you can't succeed in an area where you really can.
- 5- **Filtering.** People embrace information that supports their beliefs and stories, and reject information that contradict the beliefs they wish were true.

leader is able to set a vision for someone else and inspire him to reach that vision. A manager just manages, but does not lead. The traits listed above may be important for managing, but not as crucial for leading.

People ask others to lead them, in all areas of life. It could be not such important decisions, such as choosing the right dish in a restaurant. My wife does not like it when I ask the waiter what is the most common dish in the restaurant. She says that I should just order what I want, not what most



people want. But I like my food fresh, and usually the freshest is the item that sells the most. Or, it could be bigger life decisions, like what type of partner in life is most suitable, what type of career to choose, or how to bring up children and direct students. And it is up to you to decide if you want to help those people do what you want them to do *because they want to do it*. So, the golden question is, how do we genuinely lead others?

Rav Yeshaya from Krastir, a.k.a the “Rat Rabbi” (famous for his picture that repels rats, ridding infested areas of them), was among the most humble of Hassidic Rebbes. Someone approached Rav Yeshaya and confided in him. “Rabbi, I want to commit suicide.” “How do you want to do it?” “I want to jump out of the window of my fourth-floor apartment.”

The Rabbi responded, “Oh. What a shame. Such a respectable man. To die in such a fashion. Eyes here, nose there. Arms and Legs scattered on the floor. Isn’t there a better way to do this?” The man thought a bit. “Okay, Rabbi. So, I’ll jump into the raging river.” “Oh. What a shame. Such a nice, sweet guy like you, not to have even a proper burial! Isn’t there another way?”... Until the person realized his worth. Until he realized that someone accepts him, someone respects him, and someone loves him. He finally found a person who would admire him for who he is, and not judge him for who he is not. This is an example of subtly leading a person to the choice that he subconsciously wants to make. The R Yeshaya was able to help this suicidal character by treating him like a person, a friend, not like a “character”.

Ever wonder how, when Yaakov came to Charan with nothing but a walking stick, the first thing he did was to rebuke the local shepherds at the well? הָן עוֹל הַיּוֹם גְּדוֹל לֹא־עֵת הָאֶסְף הַמִּקְנֶה הַשְּׂקוֹ הַצֹּאן וּלְכוּ רְפוּ: *The day is still long; it is not yet time to gather in the flocks; water the sheep, and let them graze ...* Why would they listen to him? Would you listen to a homeless foreigner who told you what to do or what not to do?

The answer is simple. Yaakov did not *first* give rebuke. Before he gave rebuke, he said... אָהֵי מֵאַיִן אַתֶּם. *My brothers, where are you from?* He first showed Affection, by calling them “my brothers.”

And then, Attention, by asking *where they are from*.

It is so interesting to watch Yosef’s life unfold. What got him into trouble was telling his brothers his prophetic dreams. The Malbim helps us understand the conversation between Yosef and the brothers. After Yosef tells them the first dream of the sheaves, that his bundle of grain will rise amongst his brothers’ bundles, and the brothers’ bundles would surround the bundle of Yosef and bow down to it; the brothers’ response was הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־מְשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ Will you be king over us? If you will rule over us? What was the double talk? And why aren’t the words in both cases parallel? Why, in the Hebrew, does the word “if” appear?

The Malbim writes that there is a difference between a מֶלֶךְ and a מוֹשֵׁל. A מֶלֶךְ is someone who is appointed out of the will of the people, a leader (the word מֶלֶךְ is similar to the word מוֹלִיךְ), while a מוֹשֵׁל is a ruler that rose to power by force. So, the Malbim continues... The brothers were challenging Yosef’s prophecy by bringing his attention to the contradiction that the dream entailed. וְהָיָה קִמָּה אֶלְמִתִּי וְגַם־יִנְצָבָה וְהָיָה תִסְבִּינָה אֶלְמִתִּיכֶם And behold – my bundle arose (amongst the bundles), and it also stood strong. While your bundles surrounded my bundle... The first part of the dream connotes that Yosef would rule his brothers against their will. And behold – my bundle arose. But then, the dream says, *while your bundles surrounded my bundle, and bowed to it*, which seems to indicate that the brothers willingly accepted Yosef as their ruler...

This is the meaning of the two-part question; *Will you be king over us (a leader), if you are a ruler over us?* Yosef, once you try ruling, you can’t lead! Being above, managing, is contradictory to leading. The same person cannot be both a leader and a ruler! (Ultimately the prophetic dream turned into a reality. Yosef actually started off as a ruler to his brothers, but eventually they accepted his leadership.)

So, Yosef burnt his relationships with his brothers by telling them of his dreams - that he would be above them and by giving them the feeling that he wanted to rule over them; by giving them the

feeling that he did not care if they wanted his guidance or not. And once the damage was done, no matter how much Yosef wanted to restore the feeling of brotherhood, אֶת־אֶחָיו אֲנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ, it was too late. No one wanted Yosef as a brother anymore.

Fast-forward 12 years. Yosef finds himself in jail, as a slave who was accused for immoral behavior with his master's wife. What got him out of his mess? What got the ball rolling, to take him from the bottom of civilization to becoming the leader of the world? Listen closely to his first words, when he met the Butler and the Baker in prison. When he saw them looking confused in the morning after their dreams, he asked them מָדּוּעַ פְּנִיְכֶם רְעִים הַיּוֹם *why do you look so sad today?* From there, Yosef became known as the interpreter of dreams, and was brought to Pharaoh... and the rest is history.

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COULD

*Anyone who blesses Yehuda is disgusting to G-d.* (Sanhedrin 6b) If Yehuda had the power to persuade his brothers to sell Yosef, he had the power to bring Yosef back to his father, as well. (Rashi ibid.) And because he did not take responsibility when he had the power to do so and did not finish the Mitzvah, he was punished by losing his wife and two children. (See Sotah 13b) For if he had the power to start, he had the power to finish. This is so true in our own lives, not only as a halacha (Haye Adam 1; 68), but also as an axiom of productivity.

People who start things and finish them are fueled by an inner sense of responsibility. Not taking responsibility for our given abilities brings us great stress. David Allen, the stress-free productivity guru, once said, *much of the stress that people feel doesn't come from having too much to do. It comes from not finishing what they've started.* Why is that so? Because if you have the power to start, you have the power to finish. Potential that goes undeveloped is a great cause for stress. I have found this to be true when helping teenagers find themselves. Instead of focusing on all the things that are negative in their lives, I focus on self-development on each person's terms. Voice lessons, speed reading, sports, music, karate, art, dancing, etc. This is why coaching is one of the

Real leadership is not taking over the steering wheel. It is more like being the Waze for the driver. It is about putting your will aside, so that the will of others will shine. It has been said that the Hebrew word רִשָּׁע, is an acronym of the words רִצּוֹן שֶׁל עֲצָמִי. Concentrating on one's own desires negates one's ability to recognize the needs of others. And it negates one's ability to recognize the Will of G-d. Without the awareness of the will of others, one can never be a true leader.

So, if you want to lead those you love, instead of asking yourself what *you* need in the relationship, ask what *they* need in the relationship. Instead of asking yourself what is bothering *you*, ask yourself what is bothering *them*. Instead of thinking of how you wished your dream spouse/ child/ parent/ boss would be, think of what *their dreams of you* would be... Then, and only then, will you be able to lead.

best therapies. It builds self-esteem, while focusing on potential and responsibility. It is amazing how the stress level of my clients drops, just when we discover together their potential, power and responsibility. Planning together an awesome life plan of productivity, of actualizing potential, helps so many clients and teenagers who feel that part of them has been left undeveloped. Why? Because they had difficulty with just that. Actualizing. Finishing. Achieving "coulds."

Nobody ever wrote down a plan to be broke, fat, lazy, or stupid. Those things generally result either from not having a plan of "coulds" or not taking responsibility to reach your goal.

Why do many people with power not take commensurate responsibility for it? There are various reasons; we will mention four, below. The main reason is lack of belief that "with great power comes great responsibility." If you can do something, you do not have the option do it when you feel like it, *when you are in the mood*. It means you are held responsible to do whatever you are able to do. R Chaim Shmulevitz expounded on this at length, especially regarding one's level of spirituality and consistency in learning Torah. Despite R' Akiva's lofty Torah learning, he was punished with an extremely painful death for not learning another level of Torah from R' Eliezer.

Let's take this a step further. Why aren't people aware of the fact that responsibility comes along with power? I believe that the answer is that they feel that if they do nothing wrong or bad in life, they are good. Flying under the radar. This can be the greatest mistake of your life. G-d holds it against you, if you are not striving to be the best YOU that you can be. Yehuda, after all, did a good thing by selling his brother Yosef. Yet, he was punished for not doing more. Esther was held responsible for doing her "thing" in the palace, and not staying complacent, quiet or comfortable. וַיֹּאמֶר מֶרְדְּכָי לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־תְּנִימֵי בְנִפְשׁוֹ לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְהוּדִים. כִּי אִם־תִּהְיֶה שִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רְנוּחַ וְהִצְלָה יִעָמֹד לַיהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאֵת וּבֵית־אֲבִיהָ תֹאבְדוּ וְיָמֵי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לֵעֵת כָּזֹאת תִּגְעַת לַמְּלָכוֹת. (Esther 4:13,14) All this teaches that if you are in the position to do something great, and you don't, you are held accountable. As the Yerushalmi teaches, *Any generation in which the Temple was not built in its day, it is considered that it was destroyed in its day.* (Yoma Chapter1),

One of my favorite things is to meditate on all the things I could do in life. This gives me hope, power, and motivation. I realize that I could be on time for Shacharit; so, as a servant of G-d, אני עבדך, בן אמתך, it is my responsibility to be there on time. Not just "If I want to, I could." I could sleep on Shabbat and still find X amount of time to learn. So, it is my responsibility to make sure that I am woken up with ample time to learn. This thought gave me motivation. Because all motivation is dependent on three questions, which are the three tools in the motivation tool box... Why? (Why is it important? And why is that reason important?) How? (How can this be achieved? How did others achieve this goal?) Can? (Can I reach this goal? Do I believe in myself?)

What stops us from taking responsibility for our "coulds," from reaching the clouds?

1. We do not tap into our inner power because F3 – Fear, Frustration and Failure-takes over and weakens us. As Rabbenu Bachye says, שהדאגה והיראה מחלישין כח האדם, Worry and fear naturally weaken the power of man, and bring closer his death (R Bachye Ki Tisa 30, Intro.)

2. We do not have a clear perception of what we really can or cannot do. We see what others are doing, or not doing, and learn from them. It has been said, *The No. 1 reason people fail in life is because they listen to their friends, family, and neighbors.* (Napolean Hill) *Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.* (Mark Twain) Do you have a Rebbe? He is the only person you should be listening to. That was the power of the Maccabees: they listened to their Rebbe, their father Mattityahu, and they did not listen to or look at anyone else. And this was the reason Yehuda failed the test with selling Yosef, because he did not have his father, his Rav, to ask for advice.
3. The everlasting lie that obsessively controls our thinking, is that we can live forever and that we are not time-bound. This saps our potential. Our Rabbis teach, אל תאמר לכשאפנה אשנה שמא לא תפנה (Avot 2;4) Put off until tomorrow only what you are willing to die having left undone. (Pablo Picasso)
4. We doubt that we have the ability to do something that is, actually, within our reach. Yirmiyah did not believe in himself, saying that he was but a lad, and G-d told him not to say that again. וַיֹּאמֶר יְקִיָּן אֵלַי אֶל־תֹּאמַר גֵּעַר אֲנִי כִּי עָל־כָּל־אִשָּׁר אֲשַׁלְחֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְאֵת כָּל־אִשָּׁר אֲצַוֶּךָ תִּדְבָּר חַ אֶל־תִּירָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם: כִּי־אֲתַקֵּן אֲנִי לְהַצְלִיךָ וְנֹאֲמִי יְקִיָּן *And Hashem said to me, don't say "I am a lad," for wherever I send you, you will go, and whatever I command you, you will speak. Do not fear them, for I am with you, to save you, the word of G-d.* (Yirmiyah 1; 7,8)

The Chida asks, in Chomat Anach, if Yirmiyah was a lad, a *na'ar*, why did G-d tell him not to say that? The answer is huge. G-d was telling Yirmiyah, who was about to face the world alone, you are not just YOU! You are MY MESSENGER!

You are much more than you! You are the mission that G-d brought you down to the world to accomplish!! Each and every Jew is a Yisrael, with the power to fight angels. Or to fight our Yetzer Harah, which is also an angel. The two most

empowering days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why. When you do find out, and you take responsibility for it, you become unstoppable!

## THE SECRET OF SELF-DISCIPLINE

Yosef, one of the most handsome men ever, was tested by Potifar's wife in a way that we cannot begin to fathom. The seduction was obsessive. This wicked woman threatened to kill Yosef, to defame him causing him harm. It would have been so much easier for him just to sin and get it over with. Whoever learns the Midrashim, cannot believe the trials that this woman put him through. What gave Yosef the strength to avoid being with this seductive, married woman?

R' Zacharia Wallerstein draws a beautiful concept from here, a concept that he teaches all teachers, the secret to being the successful mentor. "Never give up belief in your students that they can turn around and become successful! Once you stop believing in the student, you have lost him!" As a coach, I know that the only way a coach can be successful is if he internalizes the following mantra: "There is an invisible sign hanging on everyone's neck, that reads, 'Please! I beg of you! Believe in me!'"

When Yosef was at the threshold of sin, he "saw" the reflection of his father's face in the bedroom, and that gave him the power to run out. What did he "see" that gave him this superhuman strength? The passuk says וַיִּמָּאן, And *Yosef refused* the seduction. The *Taamim*, the *Trup*, the tune for that word, is *Shalsholet*. The *Shalsholet* looks like a chain, and it is linked to the previous word וַיִּמָּאן that is written in the Parasha earlier. When Yaakov was told by his sons that Yosef was dead, וַיִּמָּאן, *he refused to accept consolation*. We know that it is inappropriate to mourn for a longer period than is allowed by Torah law. So, why did Yaakov refuse to be consoled as long as he lived? The answer is because he just could not believe the news; he could not accept that his son, in whom he had invested so much, in whom he had placed so much hope, who was the source of his power to

stand up against Esav, was actually dead. He believed in Yosef, and he refused to give up on him. "Until I am shown his corpse, I will continue to believe that Yosef lives."

Yosef felt that! He felt that his father believed in him, long distance! He felt that his father did not give up on him, no matter where he would find himself! Egypt, the point of lowest morality on Earth, was not a place where Yosef would be weakened. Even in the face of almost irresistible temptation, Yosef knew that his father believed in him, and that he would remain the one and only, Yosef Hatzaddik! He is the only one with the title Tzaddik, for he is the only one who was able to remain righteous in a test like that, *where no one else believed in him!* No one else, except his own father! *If my father did not give up on me, how can I give up on myself?*

The greatest present you can give your son (or anyone), the biggest favor you can do for your disciple is to honestly, sincerely, believe in him. Express it in whatever way you can. Believe that he can make it, believe that he can turn around! That is what your son needs from you, more than anything else you can give him! I know; I've coached orphans, and the only thing that gives them the strength to face life challenges on their own is knowing that their deceased father believes in them, long distance!

Until our last moment, G-d does not give up on us, either. עד יום מותו תחכה לו, G-d waits for a person to do Teshuva, until the last day, until the last breath, until there is a lifeless body! This is the greatest motivator for all of us to do Teshuva. For as long as G-d keeps us alive, that means He still believes that we can become who we need to become.

## THE GREATEST SPIN ON YOUR LIFE

The Beit Yosef asks, "why do we celebrate the miracle of the candles for eight days?" There was no miracle on the first day, for all candles burn, naturally. So why don't we celebrate only seven days?

The answer of Rav Tzadok is a great lesson: when the miracle of the candles occurred, they realized that the very fact that candles burn is a miracle. (פרי צדיק – חנוכה כה) Because all of nature is a miracle. The Ramban, in Parashat Bo, (13;16) teaches that the reason why we mention the Exodus in so many mitzvot that we perform, (Kiddush, Sukkot, Pesach, Shema recital, Tefillin, tzitzit, Mezuzah, etc.) is because that is a sign that G-d rules every part of nature. G-d could have brought one plague and finished with the Egyptians. But G-d wanted to show the world, ONCE AND FOR ALL, that He controls all ten aspects of nature that He subjected to plagues (S. HaChinuch 21). Rav Chazkel recommends to learn this Ramban once every thirty days, because it is so easy to forget.

R Tzaddok continues. Why is the "miracle of nature" embedded within the Chanukah miracle? Why, specifically on Chanukah, do we need to remember this lesson that the laws of nature are nothing more than G-d's Will? The answer to this question is the underlying message of Chanukah, and what Yehuda HaMaccabee and his brothers put their lives on the line for: To fight the Greek philosophy that there is an independent concept of Science and Nature in the Universe, not related to G-d.

The Greek culture had its roots in the teachings of Aristotle. Aristotle was not only a philosopher. He was a forefather of education in all areas. He encouraged Alexander the Great to capture the world, in order to make it an educated one, instead of a barbaric one. Aristotle introduced the concept of logic to the secular world. Deduction. Math. Science. If you can't prove it, it does not exist. If you cannot prove that a *bris* makes someone holier, or that the Rabbis can rule nature by deciding when the new moon is, or that the seventh day is any holier than the sixth – if you cannot prove these things, *chas veshalom*, they do not exist. Aristotle taught his disciples to challenge and question everything. This makes Aristotle's teachings

problematic; in that they advocate questioning the existence of G-d. ממה למעלה ומה לאחור. (Tamid 32a)

Out of all the games possible, the children studying Torah in the caves on Chanukah pulled these dreidels out to play with. This always bothered me, especially because the letters נס גדול היה שם were not yet applicable. But the meaning is now clear. The message of the Dreidel was the idea that the problem with Aristotle's "science" and Greek Culture is: what exactly makes the science a science? What makes the world spin, fire burn, or heat rise? What is the difference, scientifically, between a live body and a dead one; if all the parts are there, what made it stop working? Who is making the heart pump, or the mind think? The world of science definitely does not have all the answers. The world is being sustained by G-d's Will. People are breathed by G-d! If G-d wants a sea to split, fire not to burn, the dead to live ... science is not an issue. Whether it makes sense according to scientific laws or not, His Will rules.

And this is the lesson of the Dreidel. When you do not spin the Dreidel "from above," it lies, lifeless, on the table. The fact that it is spinning, means that someone has made it spin! The world that we see is the greatest proof that it did not "happen on its own." And that is the miracle of nature, the miracle of the first candle and... the lesson of the additional night.

In last week's article I mentioned a quote from Napoleon Hill, author of "Think and Grow Rich", the forefather of modern-day self-help books. I got an email complaint, asking how I could have cited wisdom from a man who himself was not successful in making money other than by teaching others how to. Why take the advice and the wisdom from someone who, himself, was not successful?

I replied that the fact that he did not make money in his lifetime, does not mean that he had no wisdom. לא להכמים להם. *Bread does not belong to the Wise.* (Kohelet 9 11) This common irony, that those people who write best-selling books on self help and advice, were not successful in those areas, exists because G-d wants to show the world that success is up to Him, not up to your wisdom. For success is not a science. If G-d does not spin your

Dreidel, no matter how good your plan and efforts are, your Dreidel will not spin. If G-d wants something to happen, it will happen. G-d wanted Bill Gates to become rich, so He made him the owner of Microsoft. It is not that because Bill Gates owned Microsoft, he became wealthy. There were others who could have done it or may have tried to do it as well, but G-d did not want them to become wealthy, so they failed. “Results” are not due to science that is independent of G-d. So, even if Napoleon Hill was right about the secrets of success, if G-d does not put His seal of approval on those methods, it just won’t happen.

It was almost certain, and completely logical, that the butler would have remembered Yosef earlier. Every time he went to tell Pharaoh, as he entered the palace, he forgot. When he left the palace, he remembered, and when he reentered, he forgot, again and again. Everyday. For two years. Because when G-d does not want something to happen, He simply does not spin the Dreidel. Even the Dreidel of your knowledge. Aristotle once asked R’ Yossi, “What is a wise person?” According to Judaism, G-d is the one who spins the Dreidel of success and knowledge. Who is wise? Is the amount that I was able to come up with through “logic” also dependent on G-d? And if according to Judaism, G-d is in control of what I remember and what I forget, and when, so who then is considered wise? To that R’ Yossi answered, being considered a wise person is not determined by how much you

### THE MAGICAL DREIDEL

An incredibly interesting question was asked by R’ Zacharia Wallerstein. The letters on the Dreidel, on the סביבון, are the letters ש' ג' ה' ש', that are an acronym of גדול היה שם, *a great miracle happened there*. Now, the legend goes, that at the time of the Greek oppression, the Greeks outlawed Torah learning. The Torah students went into hiding to learn Torah. And when the Greek soldiers discovered them in the caves or other hiding places, the students hid their Holy books and started playing Dreidel, so that they would not be caught learning Torah.

Asks R’ Zacharia, what in the world was written on the Dreidel that they played with? It can’t be just a Dreidel without letters, for then it is not a game, it is just a spinning device. And the meaning of the

know or how much you use your logic. Your wisdom is determined by your willingness to live according to the principles of truth that you have learned. Because the only success that we are in control of, is becoming a better person. (בראשית 189 רבתי פרשת מקץ) (Aristotle was caught behaving differently than some of his moral teachings.)

The Talmud mentions a conversation between Aristotle’s student, Alexander the Great, and the Sages. Alexander asked, who is wise? The Rabbis answered... One who can foresee the outcome. ...Who is strong?... One who overcomes his inclination... Who is rich?... One who is happy with his lot... (Tamid 32a)

Alexander wanted to hear the Torah perspective of self-help and productivity. He wanted to learn a fresh outlook on what is considered success. Because if G-d is in charge of results, then who is considered a successful businessman? It could be that the successful businessman ends up being a poor person, who never made a dollar! The victor could be the weaker of two combatants, just because G-d wanted him to win! So, who is really the Mighty? The Rabbis answered, that “your” success is not defined by external results, which are in the hands of G-d, but on how you better your nature, and by working on becoming a better person.

letters ש ג ה ש, *a great miracle happened there*, had not yet happened! They were still under Greek oppression!

The answer R’ Zacharia brings from the Seforim Hakedoshim is even better than the question. The letters on the Dreidel were the same then as they are today. The letters stood for גשנה. Goshen was the town where Yehuda and Yosef built the Yeshiva for the Jews to learn in in the dark times of the Egyptian exile.

Some Jews believed that in this dark time of the Greek oppression, if it is forbidden to learn Torah, then the Yeshivot will have to close, and Torah learning will be only by individuals, without a structure of people getting together. But then, there

were those who believed that in order for Torah to be learnt properly, especially in Exile, we would need Yeshivot; we would need another Goshen. We would need to follow in the way of Yosef and Yehuda! The people in the Egyptian oppression survived spiritually in the merit of Goshen. So, they invented the Goshen game, or the Dreidel that we know. And then, the most amazing thing happened. G-d spun this Dreidel, and turned the letters from ג ש נ ה , Goshna, to נ ס גדול היה שם , *A great miracle happened there!* The merit of the Torah spun for us the miracle that we call Hanukah.

When we hear of terrorist attacks in Israel, we tend to miss the miracles that happen at the attack. A onetime attack in France, in California, a plane of Russians that was blown up – and the numbers are terribly tragic. But in Israel, for some reason, the attacks have far less casualties, if any. Ask the people that were in the upstairs shul at the Har Nof Massacre; they will tell you. As sad and tragic as it was, it could have been much worse. We see miracles in the dark. And as important as the IDF is, as important as the police force is, there are just some things they cannot control. Even the Iron Dome can stop only certain types of missiles. So, what do we have to rely on? We can rely only on Miracles. On נס גדול היה שם . And the way we get G-d to spin those miracles for us is by having גשנה .

This is not just a nice little Dvar Torah. This is life. If you want to learn, go to the Beit Midrash. Stay in Yeshiva. Join a learning program. Get a study partner that you won't miss for anything, even if you have to pay him. This is the secret for staying in learning. Structure, Goshen. One student told me that his goal for learning in Israel for the year is to be able to learn on his own, to be self-motivated when he goes back to America and starts “real life”. He wants to develop self-discipline; he wants to be able to read Gemara, on his own. “Rabbi, teach me how!”

The answer is structure. Goshna. Get a Beit Midrash you can fall in love with. Get a learning program you can fall in love with. You are in Yeshiva, not to become a Rosh Yeshiva, but because being in Yeshiva gives you the structure that makes it easier to learn, here, than not to learn. You are not learning in Yeshiva so that you can get

ready to learn for life. That is just a side gain. Yeshiva is where the real, genuine, authentic learning is.

Yeshiva students' parents often get disappointed at the Yeshiva their son is in, when the student does not end up learning in his Bein Hazmanim time at home. They feel as if he wasted his time in Yeshiva, and they wasted their hard-earned money. As if he did not “grow”. What is so shocking? No structure, no chance! At home, it is easier for you not to learn than it is to learn, whereas in Yeshiva it is easier to learn than not to learn. Distractions at home are dumbfounding, literally.

Yeshiva's structure keeps the Torah pumping through us. And every minute that we learn, there is nothing, nothing in the whole wide world that is more precious. Over Chanukah, My father taught me a beautiful concept. Torah learning is what keeps the world spinning. How so? Our Rabbis teach that if there would ever be a time without Torah learning, the world would have nothing to stand on. This is why the world was created round, so that when Yeshivot in Israel are sleeping, the Yeshivot in America are learning. And when America is asleep, you have Torah learning in Israel. From his small cave, R' Shimon Bar Yochai knew that the world was round, and he wrote this in the Zohar (ויקרא פרשת ויקרא דף י עמוד א,) way before Columbus discovered America! It had to be so; otherwise, the world would not have merit to exist for 24 hour periods! There has to be a place that is light when it is dark in Israel! R' Shimon knew that there would be Yeshivot in those dark places in the future. So, there is nothing more appropriate to write Goshen on than on a toy that spins! For that is what keeps the world spinning!!

Greek wisdom taught that anything that could not be seen or measured, anything that was not a science, did not exist. So all spirituality, they claimed, was nonexistent. They believed that if one cannot see that Shabbat is holier than Sunday, if one cannot prove that a circumcised child is holier than one who is not circumcised, if the calendar needs Rabbis to decide what day of the month it is, then it was all a hoax! Aristotle, also, knew the world was round. His deduction was made from the way the moon reflects the sun's light when the

moon is not full. But, all the science in the world cannot reveal what is the force that is making the world revolve! Ask any kid who learnt in Yeshiva!

He knows! We all know that the world, like the Dreidel, spins on Yeshiva learning!

## THE MAN IN THE WINDOW

Six years back, I was walking out of the Argentinian Shabbat minyan in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, after the morning prayers, when I heard my name called out in a strong Spanish accent. I turned around to see someone running after me, someone whom I had never made acquaintance. I kept on walking, but more slowly. This fellow caught up to me, and asked, “Are you related to Yosef Shabtai Farhi?” I told him that I had no idea, though my father once told me that most Farhis are related. This fellow, about twenty eight years old, was a collector of old books. He had found a book written by Yosef Shabtai Farhi in a rare ancient book sale in Buenos Aires. The book was (and looked) about 100 years old, and bore the name **תקפו של יוסף**. This book was written in a time where in Sephardic countries, the European Enlightenment, Reform and Conservative thinking, started to be the “in thing”. The author writes the entire story of Yosef according to all the midrashim, with all the emotions in story style, all in a beautiful rhyme. I read it with passion; it moved me to tears. In the introduction, the author writes that the reason he wrote such a book was for the teens of his generation that were faced with the new temptations of intermarriage. They, and I believe all of us as well, should learn from Yosef how to stand strong in the face of the trials and challenges the “new era exile” may bring. When we want to know how we can stand strong in the face of temptation, we can learn from Yosef, who provided us with the perfect model. Each word is a gold mine.

In the Talmud Sotah (36b), we find the following quote: “*At that moment (when Yosef was at the height of his test with the wife of Potifar and about to sin), Yosef’s father’s “reflection” appeared in the window. He (the visage) said to*

*him, Yosef! Soon, your brothers will be written on the garments of the High Priest and your name will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased to be called an “agent of harlots”?*”

We must ask ourselves, who cares where in the bedroom of his master’s wife in Egypt Yosef saw his father’s reflection? What difference does it make if it was seen at the top of the bed *or in the window?*

The answer is amazing. Our rabbis tell us that Yosef had the exact facial appearance of his father, Yaakov. We can feel safe to say, then, that Yosef *did not* see his father’s face: **he saw his own reflection in the mirror!** He saw himself as he would be in the future. He saw what he could become. He saw that he could become like his father. He saw that his name could be written on the holy breastplate – and *this* is what G-d showed him in the window.

The reason why Yosef merited this “wake up call” was not without a firm base. The Midrash Rabba tells us that the following is how Yosef refused Potifar’s wife: “*G-d regularly comes and chooses from the members of my family, from the best of them, someone to be brought up as an Olah sacrifice (Yitzhak). He regularly comes and reveals Himself in prophesy in the middle of the night. If I listen to you and sleep with you, G-d might come to me in the middle of the night and find me impure.*”

This is the way, and the only way, a person can endure temptation. He must look ahead at what he could be, and see that this temptation will stop him from getting to his rightful destination. This lesson can be learnt from just one word that jumps out at us here in the Midrash. Every word is a gold mine. And every one of us is a gold mine, as well.

## SUCCESSFUL DEAD

I know that this title will catch people’s attention. But that is not why I chose it. I chose it because there are many ways that people understand what

success is. When everyone in the shul says in Hallel, **אָנָּה ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא , אָנָּה ה' הַצְּלִיחָה נָּא** “Please, G-d, give us salvation quickly; please, G-d, make



us successful quickly,” there are different things going through the different minds of the worshipers. Some people, of course, are not even thinking about what they are saying. But even the ones who are, have different definitions of success.

There was a *Kollel Avreich* that I was coaching who found himself successful in a certain business field. He felt that if he was making money, then this must have been what G-d wanted him to do with his life. When people are making money, or when they are becoming famous, it is common for them to feel that this is G-d’s will. After all, they reason, had He not desired this outcome, they would not have achieved their success. But this is very wrong. The *Hovot Halevavot* makes this very clear. In many instances where G-d makes a person rich, his wealth is not a blessing. It is a test. So it turns out that from a Torah perspective, making money is not at all the definition of being successful. Some hope that they can “make it”, “get to the Hall of Fame”; but this is similar to the case of the rich: that they are not being “successful”, but, rather, being put to the test. If you notice, in all the prayers we make, we almost never ask G-d to make us rich and famous. Such a request can be made only in a personal, voluntary prayer that we may add in *שמע קולנו*. This is because, for most people, being rich and being famous are not always blessings – or even at all good for them. On the contrary, it takes them away from what our religion considers to be real success. There is only one success in our religion: sanctifying G-d’s Name at all times. To “be” – to live and to die *על קידוש השם*. It is easy to forget this all-important goal when thinking about “making it big”. And the only time it *is* acceptable to ask to become rich, to ask G-d that we become well-known or acclaimed, is when we want to use that wealth or fame to make us attain a greater degree in being *מקדש שם שמים*. And, the intent behind the person’s prayer becomes very clear through his expression of thanks, if his prayers are answered. What does he say? “I was successful,” or “G-d granted me success”?

This reminds me of a personal story that I had with my Rosh Yeshiva, R’ Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt”l. This story actually sheds light on R’ Nosson Tzvi, what he was all about, and how he ran the Yeshivas

Mir, the biggest yeshiva in the world. It was about six years ago when I heard of a prominent community member, also a family friend, who got into big financial trouble. As this person donated appreciable sums to important funds in Israel, I asked if the Yeshiva could say *Tehillim* for his success – specifically for his *ישועה*. The Rosh Yeshiva told me, “We do not know how things will turn out. We should daven only that *Kiddush Hashem* be the result, and not *חס ושלום*, a *Chillul Hashem*.” At the time, I did not realize what he meant. Now, I do. I realize that all of our *Tefillot* are in essence not for what *we* consider success or salvation. Not that the sick feel better. Not that the poor have sustenance. Not even that we learn Torah with more fervor. Even though this is what we actually ask in our prayers, still, that is not the *essence of prayer*. Money comes, and money goes. People come, and people go. But the *כבוד שמים* is always at stake, either a *Kiddush Hashem* or a *Chillul Hashem*. The essence of prayer, all prayer, is to be, *מקדש שם שמים* and in all our supplications, we are actually asking that there be a *Kiddush Hashem*. We ask for specific things, for when Hashem hears our *Tefillot*, when He answers our prayers, there is a *Kiddush Hashem*, because we prayed to Him, and then He granted our requests. And then, we attribute the “success” to Him. This is how we end the first blessing of the *Amidah*. *למען שמו באהבה* – not for us, but for Him. *We are even willing to die for Him*, (one of the *כטוונות* that we are supposed to have in saying those words) *and that would be our success*, because that is what we are all about. Although we might know this, we tend *not* to lead our lives according to this principle.

The Talmud in *Sotah* (10) says, Yosef that *sanctified G-d’s Name* in private, by withstanding his test with Potifar’s wife, merited having the letter *ה* from G-d’s Name added to his – *עדות ביהוסף שמו*. Yehuda, who *sanctified G-d’s Name* in public, merited having his whole name the Name of G-d. Since he admitted that Tamar became pregnant from him, the Heavenly Voice said, “You saved Tamar and her two boys; I will save *הנביא מישאל ועזריה* from the fire of *Nebuchadnezzar*.” We see from here that the way to be *מקדש שם שמים* is by doing everything we do and living our lives the way G-d asks of us. And

there is a difference as to whether our actions are in public or in private. We forget that living the way we are supposed to, with every challenge we face, is in essence putting **שם שמים** on the table. Our every act is either a **קידוש ה'** or a **חילול ה'**. And we find that Yosef, was the only one in the Torah to be called successful, **וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מְצַלִּיחַ**—*When? When he was in the house of Potifar, working as a slave. Why? Because וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף* G-d was with Yosef. Yosef was able to make a Kiddush hashem, despite the unenviable position in which he found himself. The position was irrelevant to success; the end result – sanctification of G-d's Name – defined it!

The Tzafnat Paneach writes that the mitzvah of lighting the Chanuka candles is a double mitzvah. There is a commemoration of the miracle of the oil. And, we light the candles outside, in public, to commemorate the miraculous victory. This **פּרְסוּמֵי נִסָּא**, lighting outside, is taken very seriously in the Charedi homes in Israel and is to be done in the best possible way. People are particular as to when to light and where to light. This is not being fanatic. This is the whole mitzvah of Chanuka. It is showing that the victory was not just a victory at war. It was a victory of sanctifying His Name. **וְאֵתָה עֲשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ**...

## LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Many of us, at some point in our lives, feel despair and sorry for ourselves over situations in which we find ourselves. We may imagine that if we would have been in so-and-so's shoes or possessed someone else's *mazal* then we would be more successful and content. These feelings may be felt as one struggles in their learning in yeshivah or seminary but rationalizes failure: *if only I would have been in a different school or environment before I came here, I would have been much better off*. Similar regrets may be harbored by one who watches friends getting married, starting families, as one feels “left behind”. A person may blame business or life partners, relatives, friends, teachers or religious and other authorities for “ruining my life,” “messing me up.” However, these attitudes and reactions handicap and hamper the fulfillment of one's potential. They greatly affect the decisions one makes for his/her future, especially if the response is to sit around and wait for the good times to start.

I would like to draw on an observation about the mindset of Yosef in similar circumstances. The Midrash relates how Yosef's master, Potifar, noticed how Yosef would constantly whisper to himself while executing household chores. Potifar suspected that the Jewish boy was casting spells on his home and family. The master confronted Yosef

about his peculiar behavior. Yosef replied that a request to G-d was always on his lips: *My constant prayer is that every action I do will find favor in my master's eyes*.

One may wonder why Yosef cared so much to find favor in his master's eyes. After all, he did not owe anything to his master, Potifar. Yosef, a mere teenager at age 17, had been kidnapped, *messed over* and sold as a slave by his own brothers. We would expect him neither to exert himself nor be particularly productive while thinking about his bitter state. Apart from G-d, Yosef was alone in the world. We would not be surprised if Yosef had lost all trust in his family and religion. After all, his older brothers were great and holy men. How could such people treat him so abominably and unjustly? Yet, despite the circumstances, Yosef did not let these thoughts take him away from acting properly and effectively. Yosef lived in the present. If G-d doomed him to be a slave, then he will not only perform his best; he will constantly pray to G-d that he finds favor in the eyes of his master *since that is the best thing he can do in his present situation*.

Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Peshischa would say: a person who denies that the dirt under his feet was put there by G-d for a purpose is a *kofe*r (non-believer) in regards to *hashgacha pratit* (divine

providence). Where we are is exactly where G-d wants us to prove ourselves to ourselves. So many successful people are not necessarily successful because they had resources of money, good family, emotional support, friends and contacts, high IQ, etc. that brought them to success. More often it is because they employ a character trait we may call resourcefulness. They choose from what they can do. They look around, noting how they can achieve the most they can with what they have and where they are – *and do it*. It is even *strange* how frequently people blame things upon reasons which they believe cause them to be stuck. This prevents them from moving forward in their lives. There are so many decisions one can make and actions one can perform where free will

can be exercised and many of our dreams may be attained. G-d gives everyone a lot of room for this.

On a final note, Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen, in *Tzidkat Hatzaddik*, deduces that if G-d invests so much in each and every one of us it is because he believes in each and every one of us. It is as important to believe in ourselves as it is to believe in G-d. This is what we mean when we say *Ani Maamin* (I believe). א-ל-אמונה ואין עוול ... means that G-d put His belief in His Creation that it will reach Its purpose. He believes in each and every one of us as well. We first have to believe in the *Ani*. Only then can we be a *Maamin*. May we learn from Yosef's belief in himself. And, maybe, then we can learn from his belief in G-d.

## THE INNOCENCE OF CHEESE

There is a custom on Chanukah that women refrain from doing work while the candles of the Menorah are burning. This custom commemorates the miraculous routing of Syrian Greek troops by Yehudit, daughter of Mattityahu (Maccabee), the Kohen Gadol. Yehudit's victory took place on her wedding day in that terrible period when all Jewish brides were forced to be with the Greek general just before starting their marital life.

On that fateful day, Yehudit approached the general with a bag containing a flask of wine and a block of cheese. Once in seclusion with him, Yehudit opened her bag and offered the general a taste of enticing cheese. The general could not resist, and ate the salty cheese – which made him thirsty. Yehudit then made her next move: she offered the general the wine she had brought along so that he could quench his thirst. As she had hoped, the wine got the better of the general, who fell into a deep slumber. When the Greeks soldiers were shown that their leader had been assassinated, they fled for their lives. This well-known episode is also the source of the custom to eat dairy products during the eight day holiday of Chanukah.

Although this custom and story are well known, the deeper meaning is not. *Why do we commemorate the cheese, but not the wine? If Yehudit's plan was to get the general to sleep, then the main ingredient of her plot was wine. The cheese was just a means to the end of getting the general to thirst for wine. Why, then, do we ignore the wine, and make a big deal about the cheese?*

The answer is inspiring. Every *general knows not to drink wine in wartime*. Cheese, however, is not necessarily on the radar screen of a general at war. If Yehudit would have brought only wine, then her plot would not have gotten off the ground. The only way to have gotten the general to drink wine was to first give him some cheese that would make him thirsty. The failure of the general was in thinking that he could eat cheese, but not get thirsty enough to need a flask of wine to quench his thirst. This is why we commemorate the cheese, but not the wine.

We are all 'generals' in a battle to be better, more G-d fearing, observant Jews. Often we are confronted with temptations that could cause us to make mistakes. The obvious sin is more easily avoided. No one is ordering 'bacon and eggs', but



sometimes we could fall into a trap of something (metaphorically, 'the cheese'). We may say to ourselves, 'There is nothing really wrong with this' or 'Only this one time' or rationalize to ourselves 'I know my limits, I won't go too far'. These and

other similar situations cross the minds of many 'generals' in the battle for Torah values.

It is not the "wine" that we have to fear. "Cheese" is much more of a threat because it is, we tell ourselves, "only cheese."

## DOOMED TO ORDINARINESS

*The same changes that even the greatest Tzaddikim cannot achieve during the moments of Neilah on Yom Kippur, any simple Jew can achieve with the power of a prayer and a tear that he sheds next to the candles of the eighth day of Chanukah. (Rebbe from Ruzhin. One of the greatest Hassidic Rebbes of all time.)*

What? How does that make sense?? What is the power of the candles? And what is there in this time of the year that gives even a simple Jew the power to achieve more than what the greatest men of our people can achieve?

*Adam Harishon saw that the days (of the winter months of his first year) were getting shorter and shorter. And he said, "Woe is to me! Maybe because I sinned, the world will become dark for me and return to emptiness and nothingness! Maybe this is what G-d meant when He said that death will be my punishment from Heaven?!" He spent eight days in fasting and prayer... Once he realized that this was just the month of Tevet, and he saw how the days started getting longer again, he said, "This (seasonal change) is the way of the world". He went and made eight days of holiday. The next year, he made both series of eight days into holidays. He made these days holy days, for Hashem's sake, while the gentiles make these days (of cold and lack of sunlight) holidays for their religions (Avodah Zarah 8a).*

One second. This means that Chanukkah is a holiday that Adam Harishon kept?!! What are we supposed to learn from Adam's Chanukkah?

Adam thought that his sin was going to destroy G-d's world. He fasted and prayed, **and then realized that he had no control over the world.** He realized

that a person is just a cog in G-d's huge machinery of all time. This is the way Hashem wanted His world to be, to have seasons. To have some sort of death, whether the death of mankind, or the death of winter. *G-d created death and called it טוב מאוד (very good)* Bereshit Rabbah 9;5).

There is a divine plan, and we are all part of it. Even the sins that we have committed are sins that G-d was well aware that we would commit. מביט לסוף דבר בקדמותו (Adon Olam) – It is up to us, though, to recognize that our past is part of our destiny, our unique story of bringing out G-dliness in the World in our own way. Similar to a flame. A flame needs something to burn for its combustion. So too, sometimes we need to go through difficulties, through failure, through some sort of ordinary life, in order for something extraordinary to shine.

This is the concept of the Minhag of the Dreidel game, where, in contrast to the Grogger – noisemaker – of Purim held from underneath, you need to spin the Dreidel from above. To show that the miracle of Hannukah was a manifestation of the One Above spinning our world, our life, our destiny. The Jews could not get together and pray to G-d to annul the Greek decrees, for they were hiding in caves. But G-d, on His own, even without our prayers, spun the events and brought about our miracles. We are puppets in His divine plan, or better yet, we are all just Dreidels being spun by G-d, for 120 years.

Let us take Reuven's life-story, for example. His story was one of the saddest stories of Tanach. We know of only four episodes of his life, and in all four, he tried to be a good, responsible firstborn,



but all his efforts resulted in somewhat of a whiplash. He was born as Firstborn, but Yaakov felt that he had really intended that night of his wedding to be with Rachel, so Firstborn rights of double inheritance portion go to Yosef, instead. Reuven saw that his mother really wanted as many children as possible, and when he saw the mandrakes in the field, the flowers known to be auspicious in enabling one to have children, he brought them home to his mother, Leah. This brought about some sort of dispute between his mother and his aunt. When Rachel saw what Reuven brought home, she asked her sister Leah for them, and Leah said to her, *Is it not enough that you take my husband from me, you also want to take my son's mandrakes?*

After Rachel died, Yaakov placed his bed next to that of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant. Reuven could not see what he saw as something shaming his mother, Leah. *How could Rachel's maidservant have precedence over my mother Leah?* When Reuven moved the beds around, the Torah intentionally uses exaggerated terms, to stress the severity of meddling with one's father's personal matters. "And Reuven slept with his father's maidservant." And, on his deathbed, his father rebuked him for tampering with the placement of his couch.

Reuven saved Yosef from being killed by the Tribes. He threw him into the pit so that they would not make a hasty decision (See Seforno). But, when he came back to the pit with a rope to rescue Yosef, Yosef was not there. The brothers wanted to kill Yosef when Reuven was absent. But Yehuda got them to sell Yosef as a slave, instead. In the blessings of Yaakov on his last day, Yaakov said that for Yehuda's having saved Yosef's life, royalty would go to Yehuda – *מִטְּרָף בְּנֵי יְעֻדָה*. *Reuven would need to lose out on royalty.*

The Maharshal explains why. Reuven was not only concerned with saving his brother Yosef for Yosef's sake. He was worried, because he would not know how to come back home to his father Yaakov, not having taken responsibility for his brother Yosef. *וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלֵד אֵינֶנּוּ וְאֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי-בָא* .

Royalty cannot be given to someone who has side-agendas (Siftei Hachamim). And then, in this week's Parasha, when the Tribes needed to persuade Yaakov to let them take Binyamin down to Egypt, Reuven offers to take responsibility for Binyamin. *If I do not bring back Binyamin, two of my sons will die.* Yaakov refuses Reuven's proposal chastising him, *Foolish Firstborn!!! Your sons are only your sons, and not also my sons?!* (Rashi)

As much as Reuven tried to be a responsible firstborn, he was doomed to be ordinary. But, hidden in his ordinariness, G-d had a much bigger plan that He was spinning.

*הַדְּוָדָאִים בְּתַנּוּרֵיהֶם וְעַל-פֶּתְחֵיהֶם כָּל-מִגְדִּים הַדְּשִׁים גַּם-לְשָׁנָם וְהַדְּרִי צִפְנָתִי לָךְ* *The Mandrakes gave their scent, and on our doorways, all types of delights – new ones and also old ones, My beloved, I have stored away for you* (Shir Hashirim 7). The Midrash tells us on this passuk of Shir Hashirim, *To whom do the "mandrakes" refer? This is Reuven, who saved Yosef. "And on our doorways – all types of delights" – This is the candle of Chanukah.* What is the connection?

The Rebbe from Liska explains this Midrash, in line with the teachings of the Alshich... The Tribes suspected Yosef of being a Rasha, and they felt that it was a Mitzvah to kill him. Reuven saved Yosef, because he felt that from Heaven, he had a part in the birth of Yosef, because it was the mandrakes that he brought home to his mother Leah, that brought about Rachel giving birth to Yosef. He felt that it was not for nothing that he had this feeling, this emotion, that he was a part of Yosef's existence. And he felt that this was from Heaven that he was to be there at just the right moment to discourage his brothers from killing Yosef. On Chanukah, each person needs to understand which direction he needs to take in life, according to how he or she is guided from Heaven. Those things that seem to be unplanned and unexpected in life, the miracles that are from Heaven, your past, are G-d guiding you, to your mission in life. Your Tafkid. (Mishneh Sachir. Killed in Aushwitz) This is the continuation of the

Passuk... *New ones and also old ones, My beloved, I stored for you.*

ordinary anymore, and our deepest prayers will be answered.

Everything that we went through and go through is the fuel that needs to be combusted in order for our light to shine. Once we understand that we are ordinary puppets in a divine script, we won't be so

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