

THE NEW JEW

by Shlomo Katz

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Miketz

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Today's Learning: Sponsored by
Yadaim 1:5-2:1 The Vogel family
Orach Chaim 32:6-8 on the yahrzeit of
Shekalim 5 mother and grandmother
Yerushalmi Beitzah 21 Miriam bat Yehuda Leib a"h
(Mary Kalkstein)

R' Shneur Kotler z"l writes: When the Greeks issued decrees against our observance of the Torah, it was not the case that they were primarily interested in oppressing us and attacking the Torah was a convenient method of doing so. Rather, the Greeks' very goal was to divest us of our unique character as a nation of the Torah; for this reason, they wished to introduce us to Greek wisdom.

The Greeks also wanted to translate the Torah into Greek as part of their plan to create a new kind of Jew, the Hellenist. Hellenists were Jews who took on the appearance and the character of the Greeks, and they were a greater thorn in our side than were the Greeks themselves.

R' Kotler continues: Our redemption from the Greeks was different from our salvation from other oppressors. In this instance, unlike all other redemptions, it was not necessary to build a new Bet Hamikdash. It was, however, necessary to purify the interior of the Temple. What is the significance

of this fact?

When G-d commanded the building of the mishkan (the forerunner of the Temple), He did not say, "I will dwell in it," but rather (Shmot 25:8), "And I will dwell amongst them." We are the "Temple"; purifying the interior of the Bet Hamikdash is merely evidence of the fact that we purified ourselves.

The Torah reading on Chanukah tells of the dedication of the mishkan by the twelve Princes of the Tribes. Perhaps, suggests R' Kotler, it was specifically necessary that the mishkan be dedicated, not by the whole nation, but by individuals who had already purified their souls. (Noam Siach p.106)

"Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamed a dream, but no one can interpret it.' (41:15)

R' Nosson Meir Wachtfogel z"l asked: What did Pharaoh mean, "no one can interpret it"? Rashi writes that Pharaoh's advisers did offer him several different interpretations!

He answered: The gemara (Berachot 55b) states that the meaning of a dream depends on the interpretation given to it. Some dreams are neither good nor bad; rather, their fulfillment depends on their interpretation. If a person interprets his dream as a good "prophecy", that good may actually come to him. On the other hand, if he interprets the dream as bad tidings, that bad may befall him.

In a Pharaoh's case, his advisers did offer him several interpretations for his dreams. For example, they suggested that he would father seven daughters who would then die. However, Pharaoh did not want to have seven daughters who would die and he did not like the other interpretations either; therefore, he insisted that no one was able to interpret his dreams.

R' Nosson explained further: When Hashem causes a person to dream, He is giving the person raw materials with which the person can "build" a future. This is why there are prayers by which a person asks that a "bad" dream turn "good"; one cannot simply wish a dream away, just as one who has his hands full of building materials cannot pretend that his hands are empty. The building materials must be used for something - whether good or bad - and so must the dream.

The gemara teaches that a person should wait as long as 22 years for a dream to come true. Just as a dream may be compared to building materials, so it may be compared to a seed, and we all know that a person who plants seeds must wait for them to germinate. [Twenty-two is the number of years that Yosef had to wait after his dreams until his brothers bowed to him.] (Kovetz Sichot II)

"They said to one another, 'Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has come upon us.'

"Reuven spoke up to them, saying, 'Did I not speak to you saying, "Do not sin against the boy," but

you would not listen'." (42:21-22)

The above verses describe the reaction of Yosef's brothers when the Egyptian viceroy (i.e., Yosef) accused them of being spies. R' Aharon Kotler z"l observes that Yosef's brothers did not express regret for condemning Yosef to death or to slavery. They had believed, and they continued to believe, that Yosef posed a threat to the developing Jewish nation, and, as such, it was necessary to "get rid" of him.

However, Yosef's brothers did regret their callousness when Yosef had pleaded for mercy. They viewed their present troubles as a punishment for that hardheartedness.

Reuven alone thought that the brothers were wrong about Yosef. Ironically, it was Reuven who had the most to lose if Yosef lived, because Yosef (the firstborn of Rachel) was destined to claim the birthright in place of Reuven (the firstborn of Leah). Yet, the very dream that so angered Yosef's brothers was precisely what caused Reuven to love Yosef.

Specifically, Yosef dreamed that eleven stars - his eleven brothers - bowed down to him. Most of his brothers resented this, but to Reuven, the dream was good news. Previously, Reuven had been distanced by Yaakov because of a sin (see Bereishit 35:22 and Rashi), but the fact that Yosef saw eleven stars in his dream meant that Yosef, at least, did count Reuven among the brothers.

Why did Reuven reach a different conclusion about Yosef than did his other brothers? R' Kotler explains that this happened because they started their analyses from different points. The brothers (other than Reuven) saw themselves as Yosef's equals. They were humble people, but they took pride in their ability to serve Hashem (see Divrei Hayamim II 17:6). Therefore, when it appeared to them that Yosef possessed the trait of haughtiness, when it appeared that he considered himself a better servant of Hashem than they were, it offended them.

Reuven, however, did not consider himself his brothers' equal, for he knew he had sinned. Since he considered himself less worthy than Yosef (and the other brothers), he was not offended by Yosef's dreams. To the contrary, he was able to see good in the dreams (as explained above).

We, too, can learn a lesson from this, i.e., that there are two ways of looking at events. Often, the conclusions one reaches are determined by where one starts. In particular, recognizing that another person may be greater than oneself can influence an entire chain of events. (Mishnat Rabbi Aharon I, p.235)

R' Nosson Meir Wachtfogel z"l

This week marks the shloshim since the passing of R' Nosson Meir Wachtfogel, the mashgiach

ruchani/dean of students of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey (commonly known as the "Lakewood Yeshiva").

R' Nosson (as he was known) was born on 9 Adar 5670/1910 in Kuhl, Lithuania. His father, R' Moshe Yom Tov was a student of the Slabodka Yeshiva and was one of the 14 original students of the yeshiva in Slutsk. (Another of these students was R' Aharon Kotler, later rosh yeshiva of Beth Medrash Govoha.)

R' Nosson himself began his education in the yeshiva in Kelm. When he was fifteen, he came to the United States - his father had accepted a rabbinic post in Montreal - and enrolled in Yeshivat Rabbenu Yitzchak Elchanan (forerunner of the Talmudic division of Yeshiva University). After two years there, he returned to Lithuania to study at the Mir Yeshiva. He also studied under R' Shimon Shkop, who gave him semichah/rabbinic ordination, and in Kamenetz, under R' Baruch Ber Lebowitz. It is said that before R' Nosson left Kamenetz, R' Lebowitz asked to see the semichah/rabbinic ordination that R' Nosson had received from R' Shkop. Upon reviewing the diploma, R' Lebowitz determined that it was not effusive enough in its praise of R' Nosson, and he (R' Lebowitz) replaced it with a new diploma. As for R' Nosson, his humility caused him never to look at the diploma from R' Lebowitz.

As a Canadian citizen, R' Nosson was able to escape Europe when World War II broke out. Soon after, he married and settled in New York. It is said that one night thereafter, R' Nosson dreamed that the students of the Kelm yeshiva were running down a road as he struggled to keep up with them. Suddenly, the students entered a building and slammed the door shut, only to open it again and hand R' Nosson the remains of the "Alter of Kelm" (the yeshiva's founder, who had died in 1898). Later, R' Nosson learned that on that very day the Nazis had destroyed Kelm, and he took this as an omen that it was his task to preserve the legacy of that yeshiva.

Beginning in 1941, R' Nosson joined with R' Aharon Kotler to develop the Lakewood Yeshiva into one of the largest and most influential yeshivot in the world. As mashgiach, R' Nosson's role was to care for the spirit of the yeshiva, including delivering lessons in mussar (character development). R' Nosson also was the force behind the establishment of branches of the Lakewood Yeshiva in many cities, and the founding of community kollelim where young married men learned and are available to teach the local baalei batim/laymen.

R' Nosson was known for his yearning for mashiach. Like the Chafetz Chaim, R' Nosson kept a suit ready to wear when greeting mashiach.

After R' Aharon Kotler's passing in 1962, R' Nosson continued to lead the yeshiva with the former's son, R' Shneur (died 1981), and grandson, R' Malkiel. In his last years, R' Nosson brought R' Mattisyahu Solomon from Gateshead, England as his own successor.

R' Nosson passed away on 2 Kislev, the yahrzeit of R' Aharon Kotler. He left several children, including R' Elya Ber Wachtfogel, rosh yeshiva of the Yeshiva Zichron Moshe in South Fallsburg,

New York. (Sources: Yated Ne'eman 8 Kislev 5759; R' Julius Hyatt shlita, a high school chavruta/study partner of R' Nosson; R' Pinchos Idstein shlita, a graduate of Lakewood)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
