

# THE LOST JEWEL

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Vayeishev & Chanukah

### The Lost Jewel

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Today's Learning:  
Peah 7:8-8:1  
O.C. 306:4-6  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Me'ilah 22  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kiddushin 41

Last week's parashah ended with a list of Esav's descendants and their family groupings. Our parashah opens (37:1): "Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan." Rashi writes: "After the Torah has described the settlements of Esav and his descendants in a brief manner . . . it explains clearly and at length the settlements made by Yaakov and his descendants and all the events which brought these about, because these are regarded by the Omnipresent as of sufficient importance to speak of them at length. Thus, too, you will find that in the case of the ten generations from Adam to Noach it states, 'So and so fathered so and so,' but when it reaches Noach it deals with him at length; Similarly, of the ten generations from Noach to Avraham it gives but a brief account, but when it comes to Avraham it speaks of him more fully. This may be compared to the case of a jewel that falls into the sand; a man searches in the sand, sifts it in a sieve until he finds the jewel; When he has found the jewel, he throws away the pebbles and keeps the jewel."

What is Rashi adding with the parable about the lost jewel? Moreover, couldn't the Torah have told us the history of Yaakov's family without telling us the history of Esav's family?

R' Tzaddok Hakohen z"l (1823-1900; rebbe in Lublin) explains: Yaakov's family is discussed alongside Esav's family to allude to the Jew who is lost among the gentiles-the jewel lost in the sand. Even that "jewel" still sparkles with the glow leftover from the revelation at Har Sinai, Rashi is telling us. Even that Jew is not really lost, for he will someday return to us. (Quoted in Mi'gedolei Ha'chassidut Vol. VII, p.61)

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*"They took Yosef's tunic, slaughtered a young goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood." (37:31)*

R' Elchanan Wasserman z"l (rosh yeshiva in Baranovitch, Poland; martyred in the Holocaust) writes: It is a very wondrous phenomenon that, for thousands of years, Jews have been the victims of blood libels. There is no nation that is more careful not to eat blood than are the Jews. Does not the Gemara teach that a lie cannot gain a foothold if it does not have some small basis in fact? How, then, have blood libels been propagated successfully?

He answers: Obviously, this is a punishment for the Jewish People for some sin. "If I were not unworthy [of reaching such a conclusion]," R' Wasserman writes, "I would say that it is a punishment for the sin of dipping Yosef's tunic in blood." ("And if I have erred, may Hashem forgive me," he concludes.)

(Kovetz Ma'amarim)

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"Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work -- no man of the household staff being there in the house." (39:11)

Rashi quotes an opinion from the Gemara which says that Yosef was prepared to give in to Potiphar's wife on that day, but a vision of his father's face appeared to him, and he resisted temptation and did not sin.

The Gemara (Yoma 35b) teaches that Yosef's example will "convict" sinners who fail to overcome their desires. How so? The Heavenly Court will say: If Yosef could refrain from sinning, although he was merely a teenager alone with Potiphar's wife, then certainly adults could refrain from sinning.

R' Shmuel Brazovsky shlita (the Slonimer Rebbe in Yerushalayim) asks: How can Yosef be an example for others? Can't every sinner say, "If Yaakov had appeared to me when I was about to sin, I also would not have sinned"?

R' Brazovsky answers: We are taught that when Hashem tests a person, he takes away from the person the spiritual accomplishments and any deep understanding of G-d that the person

previously attained. If so, how did Yosef manage to see Yaakov? At a time when a person is tested, he is not able to "see" spiritual things!

The answer is that a person can never be deprived of the traits that are closest to him, for they are his essence. Yosef was able to "see" Yaakov because Yosef always kept Yaakov in his sights. Ever since he had arrived in Egypt, he had asked himself in every situation: "What would my father do?" This explains, too, why other sinners cannot claim that if Yaakov had appeared to them they too would not have sinned. The fact that Yaakov (or another tzaddik) did not appear to them is their own fault, for they did not constantly ask themselves, "What would so-and-so do in this situation?"

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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## Chanukah

Why did our Sages institute a holiday to recall the victory over the Greeks and not to recall other miracles, for example, Devorah's victory over Sisera (Shoftim ch.4) or the miraculous vanquishment of Sanchairev's army (Melachim II 19)? R' Levi Yitzchak of Bereditchev z"l (late 18th century) explains:

Our Sages saw that some miracles are one-time events, while others create spiritual forces that are reawakened each year when the anniversary of the event returns. The defeats of Sisera and of Sanchairev belong to the former category, while Chanukah belongs to the latter category. This is what the Gemara means when it relates the story of Chanukah and concludes, "The following year, they established a holiday." Only when Chazal saw that the spiritual awakening associated with the miracles returned on the miracle's anniversary did they establish a holiday. This is also what we mean when we recite the blessing, "Who did miracles for our fathers in those days, at this time." The miracle was not only "in those days." It returns in some form "at this time" as well.

(Kedushat Levi)

R' Baruch Zvi Moskowitz z"l (20th century rabbi in Budapest and Vienna) offers a different answer to R' Levi Yitzchak's question. He writes:

Our Sages instituted a holiday to recall the miracle of Chanukah more so than other miracles because they anticipated that Antiouchus's decree prohibiting Torah study and mitzvah observance would be repeated again and again later in history. They hoped that celebrating the Chanukah miracle would inspire Jews who found themselves subject to such anti-Semitic decrees. (R' Moskowitz writes that he said this at a time when it needed to be heard, presumably referring either to the Nazi or Communist periods in the history of Hungarian Jewry.)

[Based on this interpretation, the Gemara's statement that Chanukah was instituted "le'shanah ha'acheret" does not necessarily mean that it was instituted "the following year," as R' Levi Yitzchak

explains. It could mean that Chanukah was instituted "for another year."]

Based on the foregoing, we can understand why the obligation of Chanukah lights may be observed with one candle per household, but halachah states that it is preferable that each child light his own candle. R' Moskowitz explains: Any amount of light, representing Torah, can drive away the darkness of anti-Semitic decrees. However, to be truly successful in defeating the heirs of the Greeks, a person must ensure that not only he studies Torah, but that his children do as well.

(Tenuvot Baruch Vol. III p.8)

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## Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (then Chief Rabbi of Yaffo) on 10 Sivan 5665 (1905). It is addressed to a Dr. Seidel. It is printed in Igrot Ha're'iyah No. 20.

Regarding that which you asked about my statement [in a prior letter] that I do not demand control over people's thoughts-is that because I have no choice, or because that is the law of the Torah?

The words I used leave no room for doubt. I said, "Nowadays, no one would listen." . . . However, we need to define the limits [of when we demand that people think a certain way].

Know that one's own reasoning is an important foundation in rendering judgment, whether regarding practical matters [i.e., halachah] or matters of belief. . . . When we find a contradiction between two truths, there must be some fact or concept that tilts the ruling one way or another. Discovering that determining factor is what is meant by arriving at a chiddush / novel idea in Torah study. [One can apply his reasoning to discover novel ideas regarding beliefs as well.] However, one must know the limits of the intellect. Perhaps you will say there are no limits? That cannot be. Firstly, there is no trait in the world which is not harmful when carried to excess. Secondly, it is only natural that there must be a limit, for if one completely abandons accepted mores, the world will be filled with abominations. [Don't think that one can think whatever he wants and still act properly.] Separation between thoughts and deeds is impossible, for one's actions necessarily follow one's thoughts. Therefore, for example, it certainly would be sinful for man to conclude in his heart that murder is not bad, for if such a thought became commonplace, the world would destroy itself.

We learn from this that freedom of thought is not without its limits. The difficulty, however, is drawing the line. It is very possible that there is no absolute line, but rather it varies by society. For example, we agree almost uniformly that it is wrong to walk about in the street unclothed, but among aboriginal tribes this may be perfectly acceptable.

[In the continuation of the letter, R' Kook discusses how believing Jews draw the line between freedom of thought and heresy. That continuation will be presented next week.]

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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 **Torah.org** 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/>.

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