

A TORAH PERSPECTIVE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Vayeishev & Chanukah

A Torah Perspective

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Sponsored by
the Gottlieb family
on the first yahrzeit of father and grandfather
Ron Lipman (Chuna Reuven ben Moshe Chaim a"h)

Dr. and Mrs. Irving Katz
on the aufruf and forthcoming marriage
of their son Menashe to Nadine Cohen

Today's Learning:
Eruvin 10:12-13
O.C. 479:1-481:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Eruvin 80
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Pe'ah 14

Yosef's treatment at the hand of his brothers, the focus of this week's parashah, may be the most incomprehensible story in the Torah. Seemingly, writes R' Simcha Zissel Broide z"l (rosh yeshivah of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000), it is the cruelest act ever perpetrated on a single human being. Even the depraved and immoral Egyptians would have found the sale of Yosef to be unacceptable behavior; thus, we will read two weeks from now that before Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers, he ordered all Egyptians out of the room to save his brothers from embarrassment.

Yet, our Sages speak of the Brothers as holy individuals-- "Shivtei Kah" / "The Tribes of G-d." The

mere presence of their names on the Kohen Gadol's breastplate is said to bring atonement to their descendants. How can this be understood?

Many explanations have been offered for the Brothers' behavior. In particular, we are taught that they felt Yosef was trying to displace them as Yaakov's spiritual heir, much as Yitzchak had displaced Yishmael and Yaakov, Esav. So sure were they that their actions were correct that, when they needed a minyan to declare a cherem / excommunication on whomever would reveal their secret, they included Hashem as the tenth "man." (Only nine brothers were present, as Reuven had left for a time.)

It is striking, says R' Broide, that the Torah, which does not hesitate to criticize tzaddikim like Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu for their missteps, never criticizes the Brothers. Indeed, there is no hint in the Torah that the Brothers themselves ever decided that they had made a mistake. They were pained by their father's suffering and they regretted ignoring Yosef's pleas for mercy (see 42:21), but they never retracted their belief that Yosef was a "rodef" / "pursuer."

What are we to learn from this? One of the many lessons to take away, writes R' Broide, is that the Torah's perspective on events and that of a person steeped the Torah (in this case, the Brothers) may differ from our own superficial understanding of the same event. Obviously, our duty is to try to understand that perspective. (Sahm Derech p.305)

"Yosef was handsome in form and handsome in appearance." (39:6)

Rashi writes: "As soon as he saw that he was ruler [of the household], he began to eat and drink and curl his hair. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'Your father is mourning and you curl your hair! I will let a bear loose against you.' Immediately [as we read in the next verse], 'His master's wife lifted up her eyes'."

R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l (rabbi in Candia, Crete; died 1555) comments in his multi-volume treatise on the mitzvah of Kibbud Av Va'em / honoring one's father and mother: We learn from this that it is inappropriate for a person to partake of pleasures and be joyous at the same time that his parents are suffering. Rather, their suffering should cause him pain, as if a sharp sword rests on his throat.

We learn this same lesson from the behavior of Yosef's brothers, R' Capsali continues. We see that they regretted selling Yosef because they could no longer bear their father's pain. They even risked their lives to search for Yosef in Egypt. (This is evident from the fact that the Egyptian viceroy accused them of being spies. Although the charges were trumped up, they were based on the fact that each of the brothers had entered Egypt by a different route for the purpose of searching for Yosef.)

Our Sages say (based on Breishit 43:34) that the Brothers did not drink wine the entire time that Yosef was missing. Why? They should have rejoiced being rid of their enemy. The answer, writes R'

Capsali, is that they could not drink when their father was suffering.

(Meah She'arim, Ch.21)

"And Reuven heard, and he saved him [Yosef] from their hand; he said, 'Let us not strike him mortally . . . Throw him into the pit in the wilderness . . .'" (37:21-22)

The Gemara (Shabbat 24a) states that this pit was home to snakes and scorpions. The halachah is that if a man falls into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, he is deemed dead and his widow may remarry. Yet, the Torah refers to Reuven's act as saving Yosef!

In contrast, Yehuda convinced his brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and to sell him into slavery. Yet, the gemara (Sanhedrin 6a) says that whoever praises Yehuda for this angers Hashem. Why?

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) explained: Reuven caused Yosef to be lowered into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, but the pit was in Eretz Yisrael. Yehuda saved Yosef's physical life, but he caused Yosef to be taken out of Eretz Yisrael. It is far better, said R' Chaim, to remain in Eretz Yisrael surrounded by snakes and scorpions than to live outside of Eretz Yisrael.

(Quoted in the journal Yeshurun Vol. VI, p. 200)

Chanukah

R' Levi Yitzchak of Bereditchev z"l (1740-1810; famed chassidic rebbe) writes, citing the Zohar, that 36 "lights" are "lit" in Heaven to parallel the 36 candles that we light during Chanukah. Together, these 72 candles allude to a certain name of G-d that has 72 letters. [Ed. note: Although we do not understand the concepts presented by R' Levi Yitzchak, just knowing that there is more to the Chanukah candles than meets the eye is itself worthwhile.]

R' Levi Yitzchak continues: When we add to the foregoing the eight candles that we light as shamashim (plural of "shamash"), one each day, plus the eight shamashim that are lit in Heaven parallel to ours, there are 88 candles. This alludes to the word "pach" / "snare" in the verse (Tehilim 124:7), "Our soul is like a bird that escaped from the snare of hunters; the snare broke and we escaped." (The gematria of "pach" is 88.) Because we escaped from the snare of Antiochus, we cause these 88 candles to be lit. Eighty-eight also is the gematria of the initial letters of the phrase (Tehilim 33:20), "Our soul longed for Hashem." These are the same initial letters as are found in the blessing "Le'hadlik . . ." / "To light the Chanukah candle." [Ed. note: This is the text of the blessing according to the Arizal, omitting the word "shel."]

(Kedushat Levi: Drushim L'Chanukah)

Based on the above, writes R' Yaakov Yechizkiyahu Greenwald z"l (prominent Hungarian rabbi; died

1941), we can better understand the text of "Ha'nerot hallalu" / "These candles . . .," the paragraph customarily recited after lighting the menorah. The text of this paragraph presents several difficulties: Why do we say these "candles" (plural) on the first night? Also, why do we say this paragraph after lighting the candles? (In contrast, when we perform other mitzvot-- for example, when we don tzitzit and tefilin--the paragraph in which we describe the reason for the mitzvah is said before performing the mitzvah.) Finally, how can we say "These candles are holy," when the Gemara (Shabbat 22b) seems to state expressly that the candles are not holy? (They do, however, have the status of mitzvah objects which must not be treated disrespectfully.)

R' Greenwald answers: Even on the first night, when we light only one candle, there is more than one candle lit because our one candle has a parallel in Heaven. And, it is to those lights in Heaven that we refer when we say that the candles are holy, not to our own candles, which have no holiness.

Why do we recite this paragraph after lighting our candles, not before? Because only after we light our physical candles are we prepared to light the spiritual lights above.

(Quoted in Yemei Chanukah p.24)

"Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah"

("The Foundation and Root of Divine Service.")

This year, we are presenting excerpts from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794). In Sha'ar Ha'meffaked, chapter 1, the author discusses the holiday of Chanukah.

The sages of the Gemara spoke very emphatically of the care that one should take when performing the mitzvah of Chanukah lights and of the reward for doing so. They said (Shabbat 23b), "One who regularly lights [Chanukah] candles will have sons who are Torah scholars." Rambam writes in the fourth chapter of "The Laws of Megillah and Chanukah:" "The mitzvah of Chanukah lights is a very beloved mitzvah and a person must take great care with it in order to publicize the miracle and add to the praise of G-d and the acknowledgment to Him for the miracles that He did for us." . . .

R' Alexander Ziskind continues: Truth be told, there is no doubt that a person who has been given wisdom by Hashem to comprehend the deep secrets of the Arizal's meditations should take upon himself to meditate on those concepts. However, my intention in this work is to direct ordinary people like myself down the path that they should take so that they will not perform the mitzvot of Hashem Elokenu, may His name be praised, by rote. Therefore, I have come to counsel that one should not perform this beloved mitzvah without putting one's heart into it. Rather, it should be done with great joy and with simple intentions in mind, as appropriate for each of the blessings [that are recited]. . . When one says the words, "Le'hadlik" / "To light the Chanukah candle," one should feel immense happiness in his heart over the great miracle that took place at this time of year in the Bet

Hamikdash involving the flask of oil as related in the Gemara.

When one recites the blessing, "She'asah nissim" / "That He did miracles for our fathers in those days at this time [of the year]," he should give great thanks in his thoughts and great praise to our Creator for all the miracles and the salvations that He did for our forefathers at this time of year. One also should try to imagine that the miracles and salvations were done for him personally.

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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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