

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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Parshios Vayeishev & Chanukah

A New Perspective

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Today's Learning:
Shevuot 3:4-5
O.C. 47:11-13
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 91
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 26

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)

"My sheaf arose and remained standing . . ." (Bereishit 37:7)

Commentaries say that many people tried to store produce during the seven years of famine that are described in next week's parashah; however, their stores all spoiled. Only the grain that was stored by Yosef in Egypt remained.

R' Baruch of Kosov z"l (18th century chassidic rebbe) writes that this is alluded to in our verse: "My sheaf arose and remained standing." This is what caused Yosef's brothers to eventually bow down to him, as the verse continues, *"Your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."* (Yesod Ha'Torah)

"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)

"They [the butler and the baker] said to him, 'We dreamt a dream, but there is no interpreter for it.' So Yosef said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to G-d? Relate it to me, if you please'." (Bereishit 40:8)

Why did Yosef get involved? R' Hanoach Henach of Alesk z"l (chassidic rebbe; died 1884) explains:

We read in Tehilim (105:2), "Speak His wonders." Accordingly, Yosef wanted to bring honor to Hashem's Name by creating opportunities for the Egyptians to become aware of His wonders. And his plan succeeded, for Pharaoh said (in next week's parashah -- 41:39), "Since G-d has informed you of all this, there can be no one so discerning and wise as you." (Lev Sameach)

Chanukah

The following is an excerpt from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794), a work devoted to concentration and focus during prayer and other aspects of Divine service. 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, "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, "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.

Shemittah

This week we continue discussing the sanctity of the fruits of shevi'it / the seventh year. [As noted last week, applying the laws presented here also requires defining what is a "fruit of shevi'it," a discussion we leave for a future issue.] The halachot below are taken from chapter seven of Sefer Ha'shemittah by R' Yechiel Michel Tikochinski z"l.

When we say that the fruits of shevi'it have kedushah / sanctity, we do not mean the same thing that we mean when we say that a Sefer Torah has sanctity. Rather, the term, which does appear in the Torah with reference to fruits of shevi'it, means that money that is exchanged for these fruits takes on the legal status of the fruits themselves [and the laws below apply to the money as well].

The kedushah of the fruits is manifested in the following ways:

- (1)** They must be eaten. Some say that a mitzvah is fulfilled by eating them. In either case, they may not be wasted.
- (2)** They may not be fed to a gentile. If they are fit for human consumption, they may not be fed to animals.
- (3)** Those fruits which are fit for use by humans other than as food or drink may be used in that alternative manner provided that they are destroyed in the process. For example, oil may be used for fuel.
- (4)** Business may not be done with them.
- (5)** They may not be exported from Eretz Yisrael.
- (6)** As noted above, money that is exchanged for them attains the same legal status as the fruit itself.
- (7)** Any fruit that remains at a certain point in the year must be destroyed. [Many of the above laws will be discussed in greater detail in future issues.]

The foundation for all these laws, especially the last law above, writes R' Tikochinski, is to impress upon us that the world and everything in it belongs to Hashem. When one makes no preparations for next year and even destroys what he has at the end of shemittah, he demonstrates his total trust in Hashem.

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](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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