

# LIGHTS

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vayeishev

### Lights

#### Volume 27, No. 9

The Gemara (Shabbat 23b) teaches: "Rav Huna said: 'If one is meticulously careful in lighting candles, he will merit to have sons who are Torah scholars'." Rashi z"l explains: "This is based on the verse (Mishlei 6:23), 'For a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light'--through the mitzvot of Shabbat and Chanukah candles comes the light of Torah."

So many people light Shabbat and Chanukah candles, observed R' Kalman Winter z"l (long-time rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation-Knesset Yehoshua in Silver Spring, Maryland; passed away 8 Marcheshvan of this year), yet relatively few have children who are Torah scholars! Why? Because Rav Huna's promise is addressed only to those parents who want their children to be Torah scholars.

Not so long ago, R' Winter added, the concept of studying Torah "lishmah"/ as an end in itself was relatively unknown in America. If a young man announced that he wanted to remain in yeshiva and study Torah, his relatives would ask, "But what will you do with it? Do you plan to become a rabbi?" Rav Huna's teaching, which relates the mitzvah of Chanukah candles to the study of Torah, shows us that this attitude is wrong. Halachah states that one may derive no benefit from the Chanukah lights; one may look at the candles, but nothing more. Similarly, there is a concept of studying Torah lishmah, studying Torah without any material benefit in mind. This is the type of Torah study which creates real Torah scholars. (Heard from R' Winter, 23 Kislev 5762)

\*\*\*\*\*

"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) explains: 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)

\*\*\*\*\*

"Yosef was brought down to Egypt. Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh, the Chamberlain of the Butchers, a prominent Egyptian, purchased him . . ." (39:1)

R' Mordechai Leifer z"l (1824-1894; Nadvorna Rebbe) comments: "Yosef" represents the neshamah / soul. Sometimes, the neshamah falls to a lowly place, represented by "Egypt." Why? Because the soul has been taken over by food and drink, represented here by the "Chamberlain of the Butchers." (Divrei Mordechai p.4)

\*\*\*\*\*

"The prison warden placed all the prison's inmates in Yosef's custody, and everything that was done there, he would do. The prison warden did not observe anything that was in his charge inasmuch as Hashem was with him . . ." (39:22-23)

R' Moshe Cheifetz z"l (Italy; 1664-1711) explains: Prisoners on death row can be particularly difficult to manage, since they have nothing to lose. Therefore, the prison warden, who is usually held accountable for whatever happens in a prison, will attempt to shift responsibility onto someone else's shoulders. Here, the prison warden made Yosef responsible for whatever would transpire in the prison, which is the meaning of "everything that was done there, he would do"--i.e., he would be held accountable as if he had done it. But, Yosef was successful in managing the prisoners; hence, "The prison warden did not observe anything. . ." (Melechet Machshevet)

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chanukah

Why does our observance of Chanukah seem to commemorate the miracle of the oil burning for eight days more than the miracle of the few (the Chashmonaim) defeating the many (the Greeks)?

Rabbeinu Moshe ben Machir z"l (16th century) explains: "The primary miracle was the one involving the oil, for it revealed after the fact the great salvation which Hashem had brought about out of His

good will and His tremendous love for the Jewish People. That is why the Sages established that on these eight days, beginning with the 25th day of Kislev, all of the Jewish People should kindle lights in addition to the lights that illuminate the home." (Seder Ha'yom)

R' Aharon David Goldberg shlita (rosh yeshiva, Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland, Ohio) elaborates based on the words of Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263) in Sha'arei Teshuvah (I:42). R' Yonah writes:

A ba'al teshuvah / person who has repented should pray to Hashem to erase his sin like an ephemeral cloud. He also should pray that Hashem want a relationship with him as much as if he had never sinned. This is necessary because it is possible that one's sin could be forgiven but Hashem still does not want any connection with the person. Such a situation would be contrary to a tzaddik's greatest aspiration--that Hashem be pleased with him and desire him.

In this vein, R' Goldberg explains, the fact that the Jewish People defeated the Greeks in battle could have meant that they had been forgiven for the sin that led to their subjugation in the first place, but it did not necessarily mean that Hashem desired them. The miracle of the oil, though, since it otherwise was completely unnecessary, demonstrated that Hashem had regained His former affection for the Jewish People. (Meshivat Nefesh Al Sha'arei Teshuvah p.99)

\*\*\*\*\*

Ramban z"l (1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) writes in his commentary to Bemidbar (8:2) that the command to Aharon Hakohen to light the menorah is an allusion to "the lights of the dedication by the Chashmonaim, which will continue to be lit even after the destruction [of the Temple], when we are in exile."

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995) observes: It appears [from Ramban's statement that the lights \*of the dedication by the Chashmonaim\* continue to be lit every year] that the Chashmonaim somehow invested every person's Chanukah lights, each in his own home, with a quality equivalent to the Temple service. Similarly, regarding the Korban Pesach that was offered by Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, the Gemara (Pesachim 96a) says that every person's doorposts and lintel were his altars.

An additional observation: The lighting of the menorah in the Bet Hamikdash could be performed even by a non-kohen. Why? R' Auerbach explains that this alludes to the fact that Torah--to which the menorah alludes--is accessible to every person. (Halichot Shlomo Ch.13, note 2)

\*\*\*\*\*

## Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Yisroel Friedman z"l (1854-1934), the Chortkover Rebbe and the first

president of the Moeztes Gedolei Ha'Torah of Agudas Yisroel. The letter, which is printed as an appendix to Kol Sifrei R' Yosef Yaavetz [5750], is undated.

Seeking the peace, blessing and honor of my friends, anshei shelomeinu [a phrase used by chassidim to refer to members of the same chassidic group], the chassidim, honorable wealthy donors, worthy people, may Hashem be over you, may you live!

After inquiring regarding your welfare--How happy I was when I was informed by anshei shelomeinu, may their light shine, that your hearts are astir with a good thing and that the idea of settling in Eretz Yisrael, may it be rebuilt speedily, in a holy manner has started to agitate within you. Therefore, you plan to found an association of Torah observant individuals to purchase a plot of land from Agudas Yisroel and to settle people there, to work the land and plant fields and vineyards in order to keep its laws and its ordinances [i.e., the agricultural laws of the Torah]. The name you should call your settlement is "Bet David," and may my lot be with you to take part in your acquisition, for there lays my soul's desire. May Hashem cause my desire and your desire to succeed. . . In my opinion, working the land in Eretz Yisrael is an aid to setting aside times for Torah study, which is why the holy Patriarchs and Moshe Rabbeinu worked the land and were shepherds.

This land, over which a spirit of holiness hovers, has the ability to breathe into those who work it [the belief] that the land and everything in it belongs to Hashem and that man is merely a hired worker upon it who must keep the laws of its Master. This land, whose clods were broken up by lofty holy people, will breathe a spirit of emunah / faith into those who dwell upon it. Therefore, be strong and courageous to bring this idea to fruition, and from your awakening below may a spirit awaken from Above, and may Hashem have mercy on us and bring us to Zion speedily with song.

---

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.

*Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.*