

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

## VAYESHEB

DECEMBER 17, 2011 21 KISLEV 5772

DEDICATION: With Birthday wishes for Allen Pilevsky and Morris Dweck

Daily Minyan – 59<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue - 4PM Monday thru Thursday – 20 minutes Mincha and Arbit – Please join us, we could use your support. Artistic, 979 Third Ave, #1705 between 58<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> – More information ... call Rabbi Danny Greenwald 212-289-2100

### SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### FRIDAY NIGHT

- **Mincha** at 4:10 – Followed by Kabalat Shabbat and Arbit (Candle Lighting: 4:11)

#### SHABBAT SCHEDULE

- **Shaharith:** 9:00 Kiddush this Shabbat sponsored by Dr. Mel Isaacs in celebration of 3 generations of women in his life; The yurtzeit of his mother, Clara Isaacs - Chaya Gittil bas Reuven Hakohen; the birthdays of his wife Goldie and his daughter Elana. Dr. Isaacs will also be giving the Derasha.
- **Benai Asher Youth Program** 10:45 – 11:45 with Rikki Waldman
- **Mincha** following Kiddush
- **Women's Learning Group** 4:15 Alternating speakers, seudat shlishit served, at the Lemberger's 1 West Olive. Class is always cancelled if there is inclement weather.
- **Arbit** at 5:25pm followed by Havdalah – Shabbat ends at 5:11pm **Motzi Shabbat– 5:45 class – With Baruch Abittan – “The World Needs You – Each person's personal service of Hashem”**
- **LIGHTS CAMERA ACTION!** 5:45pm Getting ready for our Chanukah Play, led by Ariella Amiel, Riki Waldman, Yosef Kahn and Moses Bibi. Under the supervision of Rabbi Yosef Colish
- **Kids Movie Night - Melvah Malka** – 6:30 PM. Pizza from Dave's Famous Pizza. To sponsor please speak to Rabbi Yosef Colish or email [SephardicCongregation@Gmail.com](mailto:SephardicCongregation@Gmail.com). Its only \$75 to sponsor and last week we had over twenty kids, ken yirbu. Maybe next week, we'll need more pizza!
- **Karen & Alan Cohn would like to thank everyone** who made the Annual Sisterhood Dinner a success. We are deeply humbled and thankful for this honor. The shul website was a labor of love and we hope that you will visit it, enjoy it and provide feedback so that we can make it better and more meaningful to members and visitors. Please take a moment to visit the site: [www.benaiasher.org](http://www.benaiasher.org). Comments and feedback can be sent to: [SephardicCongregation@gmail.com](mailto:SephardicCongregation@gmail.com).
- **Elsa and Boris invite you to join them at the Sephardic Music Festival** - Congregation Shearith Israel in Manhattan, 8 West 70th Street (at the corner of 70th and Central Park West)
- Date: Wednesday, December 21 7:15 pm -
- Price: \$15 members, students and seniors, \$20 nonmembers, \$25 at the door. Register: [www.cslearning.com](http://www.cslearning.com)
- Celebrate Hanukkah with our annual Sephardic Music Festival. Enjoy Ladino songs and Middle Eastern rhythms. Two performance sets: Aviva & Dan present Beyond Carmen, a mesmerizing program for voice and flamenco guitar, drawn from Spanish and Ladino works. Drory Yehoshua, a renowned Jerusalem based Hazzan will present and teach piyutim from his native Kurdish tradition. Accompanied by Souren Baronian on Turkish clarinet, kaval and percussion and Dan Nadel on flamenco guitar and percussion.

WIN A FREE IPOD THIS CHANUKAH

- **YEHUDI** With Chanukah approaching, let's consider: What is the origin of the name, the meaning of the word, and what does it mean to you? Submit your answer to [ChouxBB@aol.com](mailto:ChouxBB@aol.com). *The best answer will be printed in the newsletter and the writer will receive the Ipod. To those adults who wanted to know why all our contests are only for the kids, this one is for EVERYONE!*

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

- **Shaharit** Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

- **Tefilla Class 8:45 AM Sunday Morning – This Sunday with** Rabbi Yosef Colish
- **“How to Retire Young & Wealthy” Mon-Fri 6:30 AM** - based upon The Duties of the Heart (Gate of Trust) Led by Rabbi Yosef Colish
- **Pizmonim Monday Nights 9:30-10:00** Led by Barry Pinto
- **Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30** Basar BeChalav.
- **Women's Learning Group Tuesday Night 8:00 -9:15.**

SPECIAL EVENTS

- **Fire Station Chanuka Safety Tour – Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup> 4pm** for children of all ages. Led by Sam Pinto. Meet at the shul at 3:45.
- **Sephardic/Young Israel Chanuka Carnival – December 26<sup>th</sup> 1 PM-3 PM.** Details to follow. Save the date
- **January 7 - movie night for the family.** Children's event at our shul and program for adults in conjunction with Lido Beach Synagogue. Details to follow
- **January 14 - melava malka guest speaker Rabbi Yaakov Reisman.** Details to follow.
- **Jan 28 - Rabbi's Yehrtzeit. The entire Abittan family will be with us for shabbat**
- **February 3 - friday night dinner at the shul to commemorate the Rabbi's yehrtzeit.** Program details to follow.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- **From Shimon and Lore Frank:** To all our Friends; B"H, We will be leaving for Israel on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, and want to thank everyone for their kindness shown to both of us. As soon as we have our permanent address we will send it and anyone coming to Jerusalem will be welcome.
- **Pls say tehillim for Rav Schneur Zalman ben Rochel Raizel,** Rabbi Seigel, the father of Rabbi Steven and Rabbi Aharon.
- With the help of Lloyd, the Bostoner Bais Medrash of Lawrence located at 878 off of Broadway has established a daily **Sephardic Minyan for Arbit at 11:00PM Sunday through Thursday night.** Please pass the word to any of your friends who may be interested or who may be able to publicize the minyan. The success of this Minyan depends on participation. 1109 Doughty Blvd. Lawrence, Tel. 516.371.6848

[ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)  
Editors Notes

This week's portion begins by telling us that, "Yaakov settled". Commenting on the verse, Rashi quotes the Midrash explaining that "Bikeish Yaakov leisheiv b'shalvah". Yaakov simply wished to dwell in peace. Yaakov wasn't looking to retire in Miami Beach. Yaakov wasn't looking to quit life. Yaakov Avinu simply wanted shalvah or tranquility. Not to rest, but to afford him the opportunity to spend more time engrossed in his spiritual life; to learn and to teach.

I told a friend today that simply learning and teaching is one of life's greatest pleasures. What a joy it would be to leave everything else behind and simply learn and teach. We taste this when we sit with our children and study with them. It brings such a smile.

My mother called me from Florida. I was sitting at a conference table in the midst of a meeting and excused myself for five minutes. She was with a whole bunch of friends at their card game. Sort of their little casino at Turnberry. Outside the window was a rainbow. What should they say and what did it mean, she asked.

She placed me on speaker and I told them that once they had seen it, they shouldn't stare at it.

The Zohar teaches that the rainbow represents the Shechina, the Creator's immanent Presence in this world. The Zohar quotes a verse from the prophet Yechezkel. There he compares the rainbow to the glory of Hashem: "Like the appearance of a bow that would be in the clouds on a rainy day...that was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of G-d." Thus the rainbow

can be understood is a symbol for the Divine Presence on earth.

I gave them the blessing word by word and together they all proclaimed, Zocher Haberit Vene'eman Bivrito Vekayam Be'ma'a'maro. And we translated it That means: Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, Who remembers the treaty, is trustworthy in His treaty, and fulfills His word.

Clarifying I explained that after the flood, Hashem assures Noach that He will never again destroy the whole world with a flood. As a sign, Hashem shows the rainbow and flashes it across the sky. This is the sign of the treaty between Hashem and Noach. As we were told in school, whenever we see a rainbow in the sky, it is there to remind us that the world deserves to be destroyed and it is only the covenant between Hashem and Noach that holds back the flood gates.

But how does this explanation mesh with what the Zohar tells us.

The Ramban mentions that the rainbow is a reminder of G-d's attribute of mercy. The Merciful One exercises restraint and refrains from destroying the world even though there may be reason to do so. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero teaches that people should emulate their Creator, especially His numerous attributes of Mercy. Thus is it fitting for us to emulate G-d by exercising restraint and being merciful to the world G-d created.

In many ways the rainbow reminds us that Hashem is here. He is in essence saying hello. Prompting us to recall that He is watching us and caring for us.

I think they were all pleased with the explanation. They apologized for interrupting me and thanked

me. But it was I who was smiling and I who owe them the thanks.

Wouldn't it be nice to dwell in peace, to simply learn and teach?

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: In the year 2216, Yakov was settled in Canaan. Yoseph was 17 years old and Yakov presented him with the multi-colored coat. Yoseph related his two dreams to his brothers.

2nd Aliya: The brothers conspired to kill Yoseph, but Reuven intervened. He suggested throwing Yoseph into a pit to buy time, during which he would have been able to save Yoseph.

3rd Aliya: During Reuven's absence, Yehudah suggested selling Yoseph into slavery. The brothers presented Yakov with contrived evidence of Yoseph's death, and he was inconsolable.

4th Aliya: The story of Yehudah and Tamar is related. In the end, their first son, Peretz, is the progenitor of Mashiach.

5th Aliya: Yoseph had been purchased by Potiphar and was quickly recognized for his managerial skills and integrity. He was appointed to run Potiphar's household.

6th Aliya: Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce Yoseph, but Yoseph withstood temptation and fled his mistress's presence. He was thrown into the royal prison and was soon chosen by the warden to run the prison.

7th Aliya: Due to his managerial position, Yoseph came in contact

with the former royal wine steward and baker. He successfully interpreted their dreams and the wine steward was re-appointed to his position. Yoseph asked the wine steward to intervene on his behalf with Pharaoh. In the year 2227, Yoseph is 28 years old.

In this weeks Haftorah, Amos the Navi chastised the Bnai Yisroel [Children of Israel] for the perversion of justice manifest in their behavior toward the widowed, orphaned and the poor. Yoseph's sale for a few pieces of silver is referenced as a prime example of such injustice. Regardless of whatever rationalization the brother's may have used to justify their actions, the money they accepted for the sale reduced their actions to nothing more than selfish and self-serving.

This same theme is repeated in the story of the 10 Martyrs. The Roman Governor accused the brothers of selling Yoseph for money. If their motives were in fact righteous, they should not have accepted any personal gain from their actions.

The Navi contrasted the injustices against the poor to the three most severe sins of: idolatry, adultery, and murder. Hashem [G-d] is willing to give a second chance when humankind fails due to personal failing; however, when humankind fails in the arena of social justice, there can not be a second chance. Judges are intended to do G-d's work of ministering justice, and the administration of justice should be a primary display of Hashem's manifest presence within society. When a judge perverts the power of his office he compromises much more than justice. He compromises G-d Himself.

## EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

### Rabbi Reuven Semah

"But from the leftover jugs a miracle was performed for [Israel who are likened to] roses." (Maoz Sur) ... There is a famous question of the Rabbi Bet Yosef. The miracle of Hanukah centers on a little jug of oil that was found in the Temple, which was pure and bore the seal of the High Kohen. The oil was used to light the Menorah in the temple. There was only enough oil to burn for one day. But, a miracle happened and it lasted for eight days, which was enough time needed to make more pure oil. The question of the Bet Yosef was that if they found a jar whose oil could last one day but burned for eight, the miracle was only for seven days, not eight, since the oil could burn naturally for one day. So why do we celebrate for eight days? We should only celebrate for seven.

Hundreds of answers were given to this question. Let's hear another one. The sefer called Mishmeret Eliezer (quoted in Torah Lada'at) explains that an answer can be derived from another question. There are two conflicting Midrashim. One says there was enough oil to burn for one day and another Midrash says there wasn't enough oil even for one day. We can explain this contradiction by noting a difference between oil and water. When you pour water from a jug to another receptacle, it all comes out. But when you pour oil, a small amount of oil remains on the bottom of the first jug. So we can explain the contradiction by simply saying that the Kohanim had to transfer the oil from the jug to the Menorah and a tiny amount was left in the jug. So actually a jug that contained one day's worth of oil was found, but it could only burn for less than a day,

since some remained in the jug. So according to this answer we can answer the original question of the Bet Yosef. The first day that it burned was also a miracle because there wasn't enough oil even for the first day, so a miracle happened even on the first day.

Now according to this we have a clearer understanding of the song of Maoz Sur that we quoted. From the remainder of the jug a miracle happened. From the fact that some remained in the jug a miracle occurred even on the first day. Therefore "men of understanding" instituted eight days for song and rejoicing.."

### Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

"Yosef came to them in the morning and saw that they were distressed." (Beresheet 40:6)

When Yosef heard the dreams of Pharaoh's ministers and interpreted them correctly, he gained a name for himself as someone who had prophetic powers to understand dreams, and this led him to stand in front of Pharaoh to explain the monarch's dream. This ultimately got him elevated to power and he was able to save his father's family and Egypt from starvation.

The Torah points out that all this began because Yosef saw that the ministers were upset. It's a remarkable trait in a person to be able to see someone else's problem even though he himself is suffering. Yosef was imprisoned for many years thus far, and had much cause to become withdrawn into himself and stop worrying about others. We see from here that Yosef was someone who noticed if others were suffering and was willing to get involved in order to help. This is the making of a leader and this is something we can learn from.

### REAL WINNER - Rabbi Raymond Beyda

It is difficult to control our desires. After all, the latest development in technology can make our lives easier, and the newest model of automobile can increase our comfort and safety while we travel. Still, many people do realize that they should control their desires and strive to develop defenses against the onslaught of advertising put forth by consumerism's advocates.

But there is more to living up to the standards of modern society than meets the eye. The great work *Chovot haLevavot*, written about one thousand years ago, says, "As the world becomes more sophisticated, the destruction becomes even greater; evil ways become good in men's eyes...The proper approach of making do with little is considered peculiar...and everyone copies what the other does...One who enjoys only as much as he needs is called lazy...One who chases after luxuries is called industrious..."

Written in another age, Rabenu Bachya's wisdom is even more applicable to our times.

We must realize that even if we overcome our base desires, we could still be exposed to the success of others. The competitive spirit will then kick in and create a whole new plethora of "needs." Even those who are satisfied with their standard of living will often strive for more only to avoid the jeers or pity of friends and family.

Hashem implanted a natural competitive spirit in the human being. Its purpose is to promote the spiritual competitiveness that produces spiritual growth. However, when aimed in the wrong direction, this natural competitiveness can ruin

our satisfaction with what we have and make us covet the possessions of another.

You certainly must earn what you need to live, but then you should direct your competitive spirit towards others who have surpassed your achievements – not in materialism, but in wisdom and character building. Keep up with the Levys in areas where the Levys are on target, racing towards genuine success. Ignore them when they are heading for "toys" that serve the body, but not the soul.

### RABBI ELI MANSOUR The Benefits of Misvot

We read in Parashat Vayesheb the difficult story of Yosef and his brothers. The Torah describes the enmity that the brothers felt toward Yosef, and their decision to sell him as a slave. Among the many questions that have been asked regarding this incident is how God allowed Yosef to suffer harm when, at his father's behest, he traveled to Shechem to check on his brothers. Our Hachamim taught us a famous rule known as "Sheluheh Misva Enam Nizokim" – people do not suffer harm while involved in performing Misvot. When a person goes to do a Misva, Hashem grants him special protection from harm. The question thus arises, how could Yosef meet this tragic fate, of being thrown into a pit and then sold into slavery, when he was fulfilling the Misva of honoring parents? His father instructed him to visit his brothers, and he obediently complied. Why was he not granted God's protection? What happened to the rule of "Sheluheh Misva Enam Nizokim"?

The Or Ha'haim (Rav Haim Ben-Attar, 1696-1743) suggested an answer that is very relevant to our lives. He explains that in truth, Yosef did not suffer harm as a

result of this Misva. Although he was sold as a slave, this sequence of events ultimately turned out to be a great blessing. It was decreed that Am Yisrael would endure exile in a foreign land, and as a result of Yosef's sale as a slave in Egypt, Beneh Yisrael moved to Egypt under the protection of the Egyptian government, as Yosef rose to the position of viceroy. And, because of Yosef, grain was stored in Egypt ahead of the years of drought, thus ensuring that Beneh Yisrael would be supported during this harsh period. Yosef himself tells his brothers later in Sefer Bereshit (50:20) that although they intended to cause him harm, Hashem worked it out for everyone's benefit. Thus, Yosef's experiences are entirely consistent with the principle of "Sheluheh Misva Enam Nizokim." Although he suffered short-term harm, in the long-run, his Misva of obeying his father yielded enormous benefit for himself, his father and his brothers.

We know situations where, unfortunately, a person was struck by tragedy as a result of a Misva. Such incidents can pose a enormous challenge to one's faith in the value of Misvot. The story of Yosef must remind us that Misva performance is always to our long-term benefit. We cannot always understand how, just as Yosef likely could not understand how his status as a slave in a foreign land would prove beneficial. But we must retain our faith under all circumstances that Misvot are beneficial. "Sheluheh Misva Enam Nizokim" – people involved in Misvot will always benefit from the Misvot they perform. Somehow, in the end, the Misvot will prove to have been to their benefit, even if in the short-term this benefit cannot be seen. We can draw inspiration and encouragement from the remarkable story of Yosef,

bolstering our faith in the ultimate value of Misvot, even when we cannot immediately recognize this value.

### Rabbi Wein

Appearances often times deceive the beholder. In this week's parsha this human tendency to rush to judgment on the basis of external appearances and physical circumstances plays an important part in the narrative of the Torah. The brothers of Yosef misinterpret the cloak given to him by their father as a symbol of hatred towards them. "Why should he be allowed to dress differently than we?" is their complaint.

Parents who are fortunate to have a number of children will immediately recognize this situation and the whining that accompanies it. Yet out of this seemingly minor event, a great and historical tragedy and a fulfillment of a dire prophecy emerges. Yosef's attitude and his dreams certainly did not help the situation, but in the judgment of the Torah and its commentators, the brothers misread the situation and badly overreacted.

They would pay a great price for this misjudgment. They would now take every action and statement of Yosef as being a direct threat to them and their roles in founding the Jewish people. He was "different" than they were and "different" people often and regularly have been misunderstood and oftentimes needlessly and wrongfully persecuted in the history of Jewish society.

Yosef's physical beauty, his attention to his appearance and his brilliant and charming personality only intensified the hatred of his brothers towards him. He was far too 'different'

than they – and in the words of the Torah itself, the brothers never really recognized Yosef as the great, noble and holy person that he was until very late in their relationship with him.

In the Torah, we are told of the instance where Yehuda sees a woman sitting at the crossroads of a highway. He does not recognize her even though she is his daughter-in-law. She is dressed in a "different" manner and he immediately comes to the conclusion that because of the circumstances, she must be a harlot. He will be eternally and publicly shamed for mistaking Tamar's appearance - and out of this unlikely union the future of the Jewish people will arise – but it is obvious that this was not Yehuda's finest hour. He judged the woman by her appearance and he was mistaken. He will later admit publicly that she was the more righteous one.

Yosef is attractive and charming and well liked by all who come into contact with him. He is entrusted with everything in Potiphar's house. The wife of Potiphar misreads Yosef's appearance and is convinced that he will succumb to her wiles and seductions. The brothers of Yosef, who could not see past his cloak of many colors given to him by their father, will also be unable to see past the royal garments of Egyptian power that he wears.

Yosef recognizes his brothers but they do not recognize him. They see only a person clothed in the garb of an Egyptian viceroy standing before them. How painful it is and how destructive it is to have to be judged merely by appearance and raiment. In truth, the Torah teaches us that "humans only see physically what appears before their eyes but that the Lord, so to speak, sees into the heart and essence of the person.

### Sir Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

One of the most fundamental questions about the Torah turns out to be one of the hardest to answer. What, from the call of God to Abraham in Genesis 12 to the death of Joseph in Genesis 50, is the basic religious principle being taught? What does the entire set of stories about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives, together with Jacob's sons and daughter, actually tell us? Abraham brought monotheism to a world that had forgotten it, but where do we see this in the actual text of the Torah itself?

Here is the problem. The first eleven chapters of Genesis teach us many fundamentals of faith: that God brought the universe into being and declared it good; that God made the human person in His image; that God gave us freedom and thus the ability to do not only good but also bad; that the good is rewarded, the bad punished and that we are morally responsible for our actions. Chapters 8 and 9 also tell us that God made a covenant with Noah and through him with all humanity.

It is equally easy to say what the rest of the Torah, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, teach us: that God rescued the Israelites from slavery, setting them on the road to freedom and the Promised land; that God made a covenant with the people as a whole on Mount Sinai, with its 613 commands and its purpose, to establish Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In short, Genesis 1-11 is about creation. Exodus to Deuteronomy is about revelation and redemption. But what are Genesis 12-50 about?

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all recognise God. But so do non-Jews like Malkizedek, Abraham's contemporary, described as "priest of God most high" (14: 18). So even does the Pharaoh of Joseph's day, who says about him, 'Can there be another person who has God's spirit in him as this man does?' (41: 38). God speaks to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but he does likewise to Avimelech king of Gerar (Gen. 20: 3-7), and to Laban (31: 24). So what is special about the patriarchs?

They seem to teach no new principle of faith. Other than childbirth and rescue from danger, God performs no world-transforming miracles through them. They deliver no prophecies to the people of their generation. Other than an ambiguous hint when the Torah says that Abraham took with him on his journey "the souls they had gathered" (12: 5), which may refer to converts they had made, but may equally merely refer to their servants, they attracted no disciples. There is nothing explicit in the text that says they sought to persuade people of the truth of monotheism or that they did battle against idolatry. At most there is a story about how Rachel stole her father's teraphim (31: 19) which may or may not have been idols.

To be sure, a persistent theme of the patriarchal stories is the two promises God made to each of them, [1] that they would have many descendants and [2] they would inherit the land of Canaan. But God also makes promises to Ishmael and Esau, and the Torah seems to go out of its way to tell us that these promises were fulfilled for them before they were fulfilled for the children of the covenant (see Gen. 25: 12-18 for the account of Ishmael's children, and Gen. 36 for those of Esau). About Esau's children, for

example, it says, "These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites" [36: 31].

So the question is real and puzzling. What was different about the patriarchs? What new did they bring to the world? What difference did monotheism make in their day?

There is an answer but it is an unexpected one. One theme appears no less than six (possibly even seven) times. Whenever a member of the covenantal family leaves his or her own space and enters the wider world of their contemporaries, they encounter a world of sexual free-for-all.

Three times, Abraham (Gen. 12 and 20) and Isaac (Gen. 26) are forced to leave home because of famine. Twice they go to Gerar. Once Abraham goes to Egypt. On all three occasions the husband fears he will be killed so that the local ruler can take his wife into his harem. All three times they put forward the story that their wife is actually their sister. At worst this is a lie, at best a half-truth. In all three cases the local ruler (Pharaoh, Avimelech), protests at their behaviour when the truth becomes known. Clearly the fear of death was real or the patriarchs would not have been party to deception.

In the fourth case, Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19), the people cluster round Lot's house demanding that he bring out his two visitors so that they can be raped. Lot offers them his virgin daughters instead. Only swift action by the visitors – angels – who smite the people with blindness, saves Lot and his family from violence.

In the fifth case (Gen. 34), Shechem, a local prince, rapes and abducts Dina when she "went out to visit some of the local girls."

He holds her hostage, causing Shimon and Levi to practise deception and bloodshed in the course of rescuing her.

Then comes a marginal case (Gen. 38), the story of Judah and Tamar, more complex than the others and not part of the overall pattern. Finally there is the sixth episode, in this week's parsha, when Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph. Failing, she accuses him of rape and has him imprisoned.

In other words, there is a continuing theme in Genesis 12-50, a contrast between the people of the Abrahamic covenant and their neighbours, but it is not about idolatry, but rather about adultery, promiscuity, sexual license, seduction, rape and sexually motivated violence.

The patriarchal narrative is surprisingly close to the view of Freud, that eros is one of the two primal drives (the other is thanatos, the death instinct) governing human behaviour, and the view of at least one evolutionary psychologist (David Buss, in his books *The Evolution of Desire* and *The Murderer Next Door*) that sex is the main cause of violence amongst humans.

This gives us an entirely new way of thinking about Abrahamic faith. *Eemunah*, the Hebrew word normally translated as faith, does not mean what it is taken to mean in English: a body of dogma, a set of principles, or a cluster of beliefs often held on non-rational grounds. *Eemunah* means faithfulness, loyalty, fidelity, honouring your commitments, doing what you said you would do and acting in such a way as to inspire trust. It has to do with relationships, first and foremost with marriage.

Sex belongs, for the Torah, within the context of marriage, and it is marriage that comes closest to the deep resonances of the biblical idea of covenant. A covenant is a mutual act of commitment in which two persons, honouring their differences, each respecting the dignity of the other, come together in a bond of love to join their destinies and chart a future together. When the prophets want to speak of the covenantal relationship between God and His people, they constantly use the metaphor of marriage.

The God of Abraham is the God of love and trust who does not impose His will by force or violence, but speaks gently to us, inviting an answering response of love and trust. Genesis' argument against idolatry – all the more impressive for being told obliquely, through a series of stories and vignettes – is that it leads to a world in which the combination of unchecked sexual desire, the absence of a code of moral self-restraint, and the worship of power, leads eventually to violence and abuse.

That domestic violence and abuse still exist today, even among religious Jews, is a disgrace and source of shame. Against this stands the testimony of Genesis that faithfulness to God means and demands faithfulness to our marriage partners. Faith – whether between us and God or between us and our fellow humans – means love, loyalty and the circumcision of desire.

What the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs tell us is that faith is not proto- or pseudo-science, an explanation of why the natural universe is at it is. It is the language of relationship and the choreography of love. It is about the importance of the moral bond,

in particular as it affects our most intimate relations. Sexuality matters to Judaism, not because it is puritanical but because it represents the love that brings new life into the world.

When a society loses faith, eventually it loses the very idea of a sexual ethic, and the result in the long term is violence and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. Women suffer. Children suffer. There is a breakdown of trust where it matters most. So it was in the days of the patriarchs. Sadly, so it is today. Judaism, by contrast, is the sanctification of relationship, the love between husband and wife which is as close as we will ever get to understanding God's love for us.

#### **AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL**

And his master saw that Hashem was with him, and that all he did, Hashem caused to prosper in his hand. (39:3)

This that Joseph prospered was not merely a gift from Hashem, but it was bestowed upon Joseph because he correctly utilized every circumstance. Instead of becoming depressed and embittered by the undreamed-of catastrophe, that a darling son of a wealthy father was suddenly snatched from his home and sold as a slave among foreigners, Joseph reacted with exemplary uprightness of character.

He had been brought up to understand that Hashem controlled and devised all circumstances, and therefore instead of falling into the degraded ways of a slave-boy, he sought to make the best of his life at every step.

He lived even now as a son of Jacob, with all the high aspirations that Abraham and Isaac had transmitted. He was faultlessly loyal to his new master, and everything that he did was performed with diligence and energy, in accordance with his father's ways of loyal service to Laban. Because all that Joseph did was approved by Hashem, therefore "all that he did, Hashem caused to prosper in his hand."

But the verse does not state merely that Hashem caused everything to prosper in Joseph's hand, but it states that "his master saw that Hashem was with him; and (his master saw) that all that he did, Hashem caused to prosper."

Joseph's success in everything was so phenomenal that even the Egyptian master recognized the hand of G-d. Joseph himself surely understood that his success was solely from G-d, despite Joseph's exceptional talents and his loyal devotion and diligence.

Pharaoh, too, said subsequently: "Could we find anyone such as this, that the spirit of G-d is in him?" (41:38). Joseph was very likeable and very capable. Yet his success in everything was so phenomenal that despite Joseph's talents it was clear that Hashem was prospering his efforts. This is a model provided by Hashem: He prospers the efforts of a conscientious man that fears G-d, even though G-d's hand is not always so openly demonstrated. (From The Beginning)