

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE VAYESHEB

Haftarah: Amos 2:6-3:8

DECEMBER 4-5, 2015 23 KISLEV 5776

Begin saying Barech Alenu on Saturday night, December 5 in Arbit.

Hanukah will be celebrated from Sunday night, December 6 until Monday, December 14.

**DEDICATIONS:** Refuah Shelemah for David Ben Rachel  
In memory Chaya bat Rachel - Mrs. Irene Gindi A"H  
And Hava bat Zakieh - Mrs. Yvonne Tawil, A"H,

Mincha & Arbit 4:10PM - Candle Lighting 4:10PM  
Friends – We need assistance and a commitment for Friday evenings

Shabbat NEW TIME FOR THE WINTER SEASON  
Class with Rav Aharon 8:30AM – Latest Shema 8:39AM  
Shahrit 9:00 AM, Torah not before 10:00 and Musaf not before 10:30AM  
Derasha by Rabbi Yosef - Chazot is 11:44

**We have no sponsor yet for Kiddush  
To Sponsor this week, email us or call Rebbetzin Ida**  
Please be generous and donate a Kiddush

As we pray Mincha after Kiddush during the winter, we need a sponsor every week  
Mincha Follows Kiddush – Amida after 12:08 PM

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30 with Jennifer Ages 2-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's program at Sephardic at 3:00PM – Ladies Class at the Lembergers at 4:00

Seudah Shelishi at Home  
Shabbat Ends at 5:10 Return for Arbit at 5:30 PM

SUNDAY MORNING Shahrith at 8AM  
DAILY MINYAN  
Monday, Thursday 6:55, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at 7:00AM

ANNOUNCEMENTS  
Hanukah Begins Sunday Night Dec 6th through Monday the 14th  
**Communal Lighting at City Hall  
5PM Sunday Night**  
**Thanks to John Dutra and Dunkin for providing Coffee**

We are happy to announce the return of movie night! Thank you to Rabbi Colish for his help arranging the movies, to David Freiden and Robert and Avital Yadgarov for volunteering to be "counsellors" and to Patti Azizo and Lisa Gaon for volunteering to do the pizza runs!

The first movie night will be Motzei Shabbat December 19th at 6 pm. Please join us and bring your friends!  
Special Thank You to Jack and Patti Azizo for sponsoring the pizza.

To be on the volunteer list or to sponsor a movie night please email Hindy - [HmizNY@Gmail.com](mailto:HmizNY@Gmail.com)

Please take the time to settle your outstanding pledges and obligations To make a payment or donate on line

Please visit <http://www.benaiasher.org/donate-online/>

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,  
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!  
 212-289-2100 – Mincha/Arbit –Give us 18  
 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!**

### Editors Notes PURPOSE

On Sunday I went to visit a friend, David, in the hospital. He had come into the hospital the night before as a result of a bad case of bronchitis touching on pneumonia which led to a fall. We recently celebrated David's 100th birthday. It was important for me to explain to the nurses that this wasn't a typical 100 year old (if there is such a person). David lives on his own, cooks, probably reads a book a day, does his 10,000 fitbit steps daily, climbs up and down the stairs, drives, regularly attends synagogue and is an integral part of the community. I could have mentioned that he is a brilliant man with a sharp mind, an inventor with many patents and a very, very successful businessman to boot. David's driver's license might state 100, but his mind and body could easily pass for 25 years less. The nurse told me that my friend, who was the doctor in charge, let everyone on the floor know already. The same advice to the hospital staff would come from each of those who visited David the rest of that day.

As I sat on the side reading some Tehilim while David slept, I wondered what it must be like to be 100. David's wife had passed away almost a decade ago as I was certain all of his longtime friends did too. When a person gets to be 100, they are in a pretty exclusive club. Less than 2 in 10,000 get to 100 and 80% of those are women. There has to be some sense of loneliness. How do people overcome the sense? How do they avoid depression?

My mind was drawn to a story in the Talmud about Honi HaMaagal – Honi was a miracle worker and the Talmud tells stories of Honi overcoming nature and negotiating with G-d as a partner might with his partner. His name HaMaagal or the circle drawer is from one of those miraculous stories. And in that moment in the quiet hospital room, I could actually hear Rabbi Abittan quoting from the Talmud. This is probably the origin of the Rip Van Winkle story.

*Rabbi Yohanan said: "This righteous man [Honi] was troubled by the meaning of the verse, 'When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers.' [Honi asked] Is it possible for seventy*

*years to be like a dream? How could anyone sleep for seventy years?"*

*One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked, "How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit?" The man replied: "Seventy years." Honi asked him: "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied: "I found mature carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted those for me so I too plant these for my children."*

*Honi sat down to have a meal and sleep overcame him. As he slept a rocky formation enclosed him. Hidden from sight he slept for seventy years. When he awoke he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and Honi asked him, "Are you the man who planted the tree?" The man replied: "I am his grand-son."*

*Honi exclaimed: "It is clear that I have slept for seventy years." Honi returned home. There he inquired, "Is the son of Honi HaMaagal still alive?" The people answered him, "His son is no more, but his grandson is still living." Thereupon he said to them: "I am Honi Honi HaMaagal," but no one would believe him.*

*He then went to the beit ha-midrash [study hall] and there he overheard the scholars say, "The law is as clear to us as in the days of Honi HaMaagal," for whenever he came to the beit ha-midrash he would settle for the scholars any difficulty that they had. Whereupon he called out, "I am he!" But the scholars would not believe him nor did they give him the honor due to him. This hurt him greatly and he prayed for mercy, and he died. Raba said: "Hence the saying, 'oh Chevrotah oh Metutah - Either companionship or death.'"*

I was always bothered by this story. I assumed that the lesson was that without friends, colleagues and learning partners who I could relate to and who could relate to me, there was no purpose to life. I saw this possibly as a generational lesson. As King Solomon said there is a time for everything. I can be in my generation, but not in another. I can relate to my generation, but not to another.

But in this hospital room, thinking of this very special man who although almost twice my age was my friend, who had told me on more than one occasion that he "had my back". When someone has your back, they are there to support you unconditionally. When life seems to blindsides you with undesirable events, they're there for you without complaint, supporting you in your moment of need, not for their

own selfish, self-gratifying reasons, but because your wellbeing to them is foremost in their mind and heart. My friend David shown this quality of having my back more than once and very publicly.

This week we read of Joseph who is hated by his brothers. He tells them of his dreams which causes them to hate him even more. Even his father Jacob is upset by the dreams. Jacob sends Joseph out to check on his brothers who decide to kill him and then relent by agreeing to sell him as a slave. He travels down to Egypt and is sold again and purchased and finally ends up in the house of Potiphar where he rises to become the assistant to his master. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph, and when he rejects her, she accuses him of trying to rape her. He is sent to prison. If anyone deserved to say oh Chevrutah or Metutah, either companionship or death, it was Joseph. Hated, denounced, abandoned and sold by his brothers into slavery and left to rot in an Egyptian prison, he may have wondered if he was the Yishmael or the Esav to be set aside and ejected from the household of the nation. He may have wondered if his father in response to his dream was part of the plot to be rid of him. Why would he not pray for mercy and to be taken from the world?

But Joseph finds purpose. Even if that purpose is temporarily becoming the chief slave of Potiphar and even if that purpose is rewarded with a false accusation. Perhaps it's his dreams or his faith which drive him. In prison, he does not give up nor despair. Joseph again finds favor, this time in the eyes of the warden who appoints him senior prisoner in charge of all who are brought there. It is there where Joseph meets Pharaoh's baker and butler and interprets their dreams. And next week we will see how this leads to his appointment as viceroy. Honi didn't need a learning partner. He needed to feel a part of the new world he woke up in and find a purpose. He couldn't.

My friend David may not have any of his schoolmates around, and of his learning partners or his friends of his youth. But he also refuses to be a relic of a generation gone by. He is part of this generation and he has his new friends. Each day is a gift, a gift with purpose, to give and help, to learn and to teach and to benefit the world. It took sitting in a hospital room with a sleeping centenarian to remind me of this.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Va'yesheb - The brothers sell Yosef

- 1- Yosef gets the ketonet pasim. Hatred and jealousy for Yosef develops. Yosef has two dreams and tells his family.
- 2- Yosef goes to find his brothers in Shechem. The brothers plan to kill Yosef.
- 3- Yosef is thrown into a pit, then sold, and eventually ends up by Potifar
- 4- The story of Yehuda and Tamar
- 5- Yosef finds favor in the eyes of Potifar
- 6- Potifar's wife accuses Yosef of trying to be with her. Potifar puts Yosef in jail
- 7- Yosef interprets the dreams of Sar Hamashkim and Sar Ha'ofim

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

**"[We thank You] for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds, etc." (Al Hanisim for Hanukah)**

If one studies the beautiful words of Al Hanisim for Hanukah, it is obvious that there is a great emphasis on the wars fought by the Maccabees and little mention of the miracle of the oil. Rabbi Ephraim Wachsman explains that there is no doubt that the military victory was a miracle from Hashem. But, the Al Hanisim also wants to teach us about the Maccabees. They faced that struggle heroically and found the strength to continue. We can learn from this that the most important factor in the life of a Jew is the struggles he must face and overcome. It is a fact that when a person is facing an emergency situation, he can reach deep inside himself and find strength he didn't know he had. The Maccabees discovered amazing powers they didn't know they had. This is hinted to us when Jacob battled the angel all night and as a result his name was changed to Yisrael.

A few years ago there was the famous storm known as Hurricane Sandy. In Lakewood a builder built a row of townhouses and planted a tree in front of each house. Ten townhouses, ten trees. After the storm, five trees fell down and five remained standing. The workers were intrigued as to the reason for this and decided to try to find out why this happened. It turned out that for the five that fell, a sprinkler system was installed, and for the five that remained standing there was no sprinkler system. The trees that had sprinklers had their daily water delivered to them and their roots were shallow. The trees that had no sprinklers were forced to send their roots deep down in order to get

enough water, thereby providing the anchor needed to survive the storm. So too the Maccabees had to dig deep to face the challenge of the enemy.

Once a young man who grew up in Russia came to apply to be accepted into the Mirrer Yeshivah in Jerusalem. The famous Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, was about to begin the entrance exam. But, before he started, the boy's father apologized that his son knows very little because they didn't have any books to study from. He "only" knows the tractates of Nashim and Nezikim, and "only" the tractates dealing with the holidays, and the entire Mishnah Berurah, and he only knows them by heart because they had no books. Rav Chaim began the test and discovered that this young man really knew all his father said he knew by heart. The Rosh Yeshivah was so overwhelmed that he began to weep. The father thought the Rabbi was crying because he won't accept his son into the Yeshivah because he didn't know enough, so he also began to cry and plead to accept his son, because they had no books. We see how much can be accomplished through struggles and wars. In truth, history has not yet recorded the saga of the Soviet Jew and how much they suffered and how much they succeeded. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**Though we Jews are only a small minority of the world's population**, we have been assigned the formidable, seemingly impossible task of enlightening the entire world. The sages have given us a hint as to how this is possible. The halachah states that if a person lit the hanukah lights and the lights subsequently went out, he is not obligated to relight it (although it is preferable if possible). The reason is that *vumn vaug veksv* - the kindling is the essence of the *misvah*. This symbolizes that we are charged with the responsibility to start the task of enlightening the world; G-d will see to its successful conclusion.

The lesson is that although we must do our share to promote and preserve Torah observance, and to be an example to the world, we need not be concerned if it seems that the task is not being accomplished. If we do our part, Hashem will intervene and He will see to it that the job is completed Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **RUSHING - Rabbi Raymond Beyda**

The world today is impressed with speed. A car is advertised for its ability to instantly go from zero to sixty; a computer is praised for its capacity to perform tasks at Pentium speed; and athletes are paid millions of dollars' compensation for their ability to run, skate, or throw at high velocity. In many areas

of life, speed does truly have positive results; but the old expression "haste makes waste" still applies, even in a wireless world.

The result of rushing is very often regret. "If only I had waited before making that career move..." "If only I had investigated more before buying that stock..." "If only I had asked my friends before..." When you rush to speak or act without proper thought, you are apt to make a mistake. Yes, there are times when a quick move will work out positively, but there will also be many incidents that don't work out because the necessary evaluation of the situation wasn't completed before action was taken.

When you are tempted to decide and to act even though you have not completed your analysis of the subject, stop and check your speedometer. You might be moving fast, but running in the wrong direction doesn't get you where you want to go. Quite the opposite, in fact. It takes you further from your goal more quickly.

It only takes a moment to consider your direction. If it is correct, by all means proceed at high velocity. However, if you see that continuing to speed along will not get you where you want to go, turn around! The fruit of rushing mindlessly is regret.

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR**

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
A Lesson In Showing Gratitude**

The Tur (Rabbenu Yaakov Ben Asher, Germany-Spain, 1275-1349) writes that the three pilgrimage festivals – Pesah, Shabuot and Sukkot, when all of Beneh Yisrael would go to the Bet Ha'mikdash – correspond to the three patriarchs. The festival of Pesah corresponds to Abraham, Shabuot is associated with Yishak, and the holiday of Sukkot relates to Yaakov.

The connection between Abraham and Pesah is reflected by the story of the angels' visit to his tent, which, according to our tradition, took place on Pesah. Shabuot commemorates the event of Matan Torah, the Revelation at Sinai, and our Sages teach that the Shofar sound that Beneh Yisrael heard at the time of Matan Torah was produced by a horn taken from the ram of Akedat Yishak. After Abraham placed Yishak upon the altar as a sacrifice, an angel ordered Abraham to withdraw his sword, whereupon he offered a ram as an offering in Yishak's stead. The horn from that ram was used as the Shofar when Beneh Yisrael received the Torah at Sinai, thus establishing an association between Shabuot and Yishak Abinu. Furthermore, Yishak embodies the

quality of self-sacrifice, which is the fundamental basis underlying Kabbalat Ha'Torah – committing oneself to Torah and Mitzvot, the commitment which we commemorate and renew on Shabbat.

But while these associations are fairly straightforward, the connection between Yaakov and the holiday of Sukkot seems far more obscure. The basis of this association is a verse in Parashat Vayishlah (33:17), which tells that when Yaakov arrived back in Canaan after his peaceful reunion with his brother, Esav, he constructed a house outside the city of Shechem. The verse then adds that Yaakov built "Sukkot," shacks, for his cattle, and on account of these shacks the site was called "Sukkot." These "Sukkot" that Yaakov built for his sheep form the basis of the connection between him and the annual celebration of Sukkot.

How are we to understand this connection? Why is it significant that Yaakov built huts for his herds, and how does this relate to the festive occasion of Sukkot?

Rav Bergman explained that Yaakov built shelters for his cattle because he felt indebted even to his animals. The importance of "Hakarat Ha'Tob," gratitude, was so deeply ingrained within Yaakov's consciousness that it led him to feel appreciative to his flocks, which were his family's source of livelihood. Remarkably, he felt he owed it to his sheep to provide them with comfortable living quarters, which would protect them from the elements.

Yaakov's greatness in this particular area of gratitude can help explain a famous, but perplexing, account in the Midrash concerning the experiences of Yosef after he was sold as a slave in Egypt. The Torah relates that his master's wife attempted to seduce him, but he resisted her advances and ultimately fled. The Midrash tells that Yosef nearly succumbed to his temptations, but then he saw the image of his father, Yaakov, at which point he immediately withdrew and fled. How did Yaakov's image help Yosef restrain his sinful impulse? How did this vision empower Yosef to resist?

Yaakov's image reminded Yosef of the extent to which the obligation of "Hakarat Ha'tob" extends. His father felt a debt of gratitude even to his animals. Certainly, then, he, Yosef, must show gratitude to his master, Potifar, who treated him well and cared for his needs. He was indebted to his master – how could he now commit adultery with his wife? It was by contemplating Yaakov's example of "Hakarat

Ha'tob" that Yosef garnered the strength and resolve to avoid sin.

This is why Yaakov is associated with the festival of Sukkot, when we celebrate to give thanks to the Almighty for all we have. When the time comes to say "Thank you" to God, we are reminded of the example of our patriarch Yaakov, who took this value so far as to feel indebted to his animals.

We perhaps cannot be expected to feel grateful to our material possessions, as Yaakov did, but we must learn from his example, at very least, to show gratitude to the people around of us, and to God, for all we have. It is easy and convenient to criticize and to complain, but this is not the attitude we've inherited from our great patriarch. He has taught us to be grateful, to appreciate all we've been given, and to be thankful for what we have, rather than complain about what we don't have. This is the great legacy of Yaakov which we are obliged to preserve and pass down to the next generation.

### VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

#### IN DEFENSE OF YOSEF

In order to properly evaluate the narrative which highlights the disconnect between Yosef and his brothers it is crucial to penetrate the manner in which each of them perceived their own spiritual role as leaders in Israel.

#### HOW DID THE BROTHERS VIEW THE ROLES OF YEHUDA AND YOSEF

The brothers acknowledged Yehuda as their King. As it says (Beresheet 49:8) "Yehuda, your brothers shall submit to you...your father's sons shall bow to you." They perceived Yosef's dreams of royalty as insubordination against the king; which in turn was insubordination against the Shekhina. This is why the brothers had traveled on to Dotan (which connotes a place of ruling); in order to devise a plan to rule against him, using Torah law. Yosef, they concluded, had disputed the authority of the future kingdom of David (Yehuda), and hence was guilty of death. Even his closest siblings, the sons of Bilha signed onto the ruling.

#### HOW DID YOSEF (AND YAAKOV) VIEW HIS SPIRITUAL ROLE

Yosef saw himself, rightfully so, as the earthly chariot to reveal and facilitate the spiritual channel known as Yesod. It is this channel that acts as a funnel to cascade downward divine light into the spiritual reservoir known as Malkhut. This latter grade was reflected by the Davidic Kings of

Israel as well as their ascendant Yehuda. This grade of Malkhut and its spiritual parallel Yehuda (David) are totally dependent on the channel of Yesod and its physical heir Yosef HaSaddik. It was this spiritual reality that Yosef had expressed to his brothers. Namely that his ascent is a required precursor to the establishment of the Royal Kingdom of Yehuda.

#### THE TORAH, SAGES AND HISTORY SIDE WITH YOSEF

The Parasha begins by advising that it is exclusively Yosef whom it considers the Toldot or development of Yaakov. (Beresheet 39:2). "This is the one who refines the spiritual energy generated by Yaakov, Yosef." All the forces and spiritual energy generated by the Avot (Yaakov) that needs to ultimately pass through to establish the grade of Malkhut (revelment of the Kingdom of Yehuda) can only be received after having initially funneled through the penultimate channel of Yesod (Yosef).

This primacy of the rule of Yosef before any ascendancy of Yehuda is hinted in the fact that the Torah appends the sale of Yosef with the report of Yehuda and Tamar and the beginnings of the Kingship of David. Both play a set role in the redemption of Israel. Initially it is Yosef who purifies himself maintaining the Berit of Abraham thereby channeling the energy of Yesod. It is Yosef who sets into motion the refinement of Israel in the iron crucible of Egypt, prior to the royalty of Yehuda to emerge. As it says in Tehillim (114) "When Yisrael went forth from Misrayim, only then will Yehuda become his holy one."

This is what Yosef revealed to his brothers later on in Egypt (45:5) "God has sent me ahead to provide sustenance" and again (45:7) "to provide refuge for you in the land and to keep you alive for the great rescue." Namely, I, as the physically expression of Yesod must channel all sustenance to you until the Monarchy of Yehuda is established.

Yosef in fact was not guilty at all, since he neither coveted Royalty for himself nor did he attempt to deny Yehuda's claim. R. Bahye suggests that the rule of Yosef preempting the rule of Yehuda is expressed in the fact that the Mishkan of Shilo (which was located in the territory of Yosef) proceeded the temple (and monarchy) of King David in Yerushalayim.

We in fact know that in the future it will be the Mashiah Ben Yosef who will be selfless in establishing the channel of Yesod, not in order to establish his own dynasty, but rather to preview the Malkhut of Mashiah Ben David.

THE BROTHERS ARE GUILTY OF INTERFERING WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHANNEL OF YESOD THROUGH THE PERSON OF YOSEF.

Yehuda was not justified in accusing Yosef of having personal designs in his ambition to be Ruler. Yosef was unjustly accused of harboring personal motives; when his real intent was merely to facilitate the bringing about of the Kingdom of David.

#### BROTHERS REQUIRE TIKUN OR CORRECTION DUE THEIR JEALOUSY AND SALE OF YOSEF.

Yosef assures his brothers that their correction for his sale will not occur "Now" during their lifetime. Hence he claims in 45:5 "Now, do not be distressed". The Sefer Hekhalot relates that the ten sages who were martyred at the hands of Rome were the reincarnated souls of the ten brothers of Yosef to rectify what is written in Shemot 21:16 "If someone kidnaps a person and sells him he shall be executed."

The Torah tells us that Yosef who was Rahel's firstborn son was sold by his brothers for twenty silver dinars. This also was something that needed to be rectified by Israel in the future. The Talmud in Shekalim (2:3) is clear in the assertion that the misvah of redemption of the first born son which is set at the same 20 silver dinars ( 5 Sela'im x 4 dinar per) serves as a tikun for the sale of Yosef. Furthermore each of the 10 brothers received 2 dinars or a half shekel. The same Talmudic source claims that the required half shekel payment of each man in Israel, serves as an atonement or tikun for a blemish caused through the sale of Yosef.

#### AFTER THE TIKUN

The sale of Yosef will soon be rectified. What will follow then is an era that is patterned after the faces (oz, lion, eagle) that appear on the Divine chariot. Mashiah Ben Yosef will be the first to rule. His ascendant Yosef is blessed by Moshe (Devarim 33:17) as the first born ox. He will pave the way for the lion; a reference to the rule of Mashiah Ben David. As it says (49:8) He lies like a lion,..like an awesome lion." At that time the Creator will carry us on the wings of Eagles. As it says in Exodus 19:4 "Carrying you on eagle's wings and bringing you to me."

#### Rabbi Wein FASCINATIONS

Parts of the Moslem world are currently experiencing a morbid fascination with death – their own and that of others. There is no long-term strategy to the terror that grips Western society and all of us here in the State of Israel. Stabbing a soldier or running down a policeman or pedestrian with an automobile has no strategic value and, in reality, accomplishes nothing for the cause of the perpetrator.

Killing one-hundred-twenty-nine innocent people in Paris in no way induces France to be more lenient and accepting of any Moslem caliphate. In fact, as we are witness, it does just the opposite, only hardening French opposition to the idea of a caliphate and to the acceptance of more Moslems into France itself.

The same thing is undoubtedly true here in Israel. The murder of innocent Jews, by people who are well aware by now that they will probably die in committing that act of murder, has no strategic value and gains nothing substantial for the Palestinian cause. Yet, logic plays no part in any of this.

Constant religious incitement, demonizing the "other," promising eternal reward and purely religious hatred all play into this current wave of terror. Why should children who are barely teenagers attempt to kill people whom they do not know and who have never directly harmed them? This is all part of this mental and spiritual fascination with death.

The killers are not soldiers who are trained for war and killing. In the famous words of Gen. Patton in World War II, "the object of war is not to die for your country, it is to make the enemy die for his country." But that type of logical thinking wanes in the face of this utter attraction to death and its expected rewards.

Part of the task of religion is to teach a person how to live a meaningful life coupled with an understanding that there is a spark of eternity within all of us that will exist after our physical demise. The Torah is a book of life, and living remains the supreme value in Jewish thought and law.

Though the Jewish people have a long history of martyrdom, it is the productivity and holiness of good living that remains the focus of all of the commandments and values that constitute traditional Jewish life. We all recognize that death is inevitable and must always be reckoned with, but it certainly is not something desirable – a goal to be pursued and treasured.

The fascination of Jewish life is with living. This is the emphasis that is present in all of the books of the Bible and is the core value in Jewish tradition. From this stems the Jewish attitude towards family, procreation and generations. Though we are well aware of the past and in fact are bidden to study it and know it, our attraction is always with the future.

The Talmud puts it succinctly and positively: "Tomorrow the Temple will be built." We are

absorbed with how and when that will occur but it is the appeal of life in progress, with its concept of redemption and hope that drives the Jewish society here in Israel and the world over to persevere and eventually to triumph.

I have no idea how to eradicate this cult of death, which seems to permeate so many of our enemies. It is caused by incitement against anyone who does not believe as they believe and justifies the most brutal and heinous acts of murder of innocents. The fact that it is somehow malevolently intertwined with distorted religious beliefs only makes the problem greater. If, as is clear from the events of the past few weeks, that the murderers are not afraid of death and are in fact captivated and accepting of it in almost joyful belief, then our weapons to defeat them are truly impotent.

It is difficult to defeat an enemy whose young people are willing to sacrifice their lives because of perceived religious beliefs, the belief that somehow death is more noble than life and murder is somehow a solution to the world's problems.

The fact that almost no moderate voices are heard in the Moslem world today to oppose this type of mindset is very disturbing and frightening. Only when human beings actually get down to the task of making something of their lives, of living for goals and with a vision of generations yet unborn, can we hope that somehow this fascination with death will be transformed into an appreciation of life and the realities that exist and govern us.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks How to Change the World**

In his Laws of Repentance, Moses Maimonides makes one of the most empowering statements in religious literature. Having explained that we and the world are judged by the majority of our deeds, he continues: "Therefore we should see ourselves throughout the year as if our deeds and those of the world are evenly poised between good and bad, so that our next act may change both the balance of our lives and that of the world."<sup>[1]</sup> We can make a difference, and it is potentially immense. That should be our mindset, always.

Few statements are more at odds with the way the world seems to us most of the time. Each of us knows that there is only one of us, and that there are seven billion others in the world today. What conceivable difference can we make? We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, dust on the surface of infinity. Is it conceivable that with one act we could change the

trajectory of our life, let alone that of humanity as a whole? Our parsha tells us that, yes, it is. As the story of Jacob's children unfolds, there is a rapid rise of tension between his children that threatens to spill over into violence. Joseph, eleventh of the twelve, is Jacob's favourite son. He was, says the Torah, the child of Jacob's old age. More significantly, he was the first child of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel. Jacob "loved him more" than his other sons, and they knew it and resented it. They were jealous of their father's love. They were provoked by Joseph's dreams of greatness. The sight of the many-coloured robe Jacob had given him as a token of his love provoked them to anger. Then came the moment of opportunity. The brothers were away far from home tending the flocks when Joseph appeared in the distance, sent by Jacob to see how they were doing. Their envy and anger reached boiling point, and they resolved to take violent revenge. " 'Here comes that dreamer!' they said to each other. 'Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a wild animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.'"

Only one of the brothers disagreed: Reuben. He knew that what they were proposing was very wrong, and he protested. At this point the Torah does something extraordinary. It makes a statement that cannot be literally true, and we, reading the story, know this. The text says, "And Reuben heard and saved him [Joseph] from them."

We know this cannot be true because of what happens next. Reuben, realizing that he is only one against many, devises a stratagem. He says, Let us not kill him. Let us throw him alive into one of the cisterns and let him die. That way, we will not be directly guilty of murder. His intention was to come back to the cistern later, when the others were elsewhere, and rescue Joseph. When the Torah says, "And Reuben heard and saved him from them" it is using the principle that "God accounts a good intention as a deed." [2] Reuben wanted to save Joseph and intended to do so, but in fact he failed. The moment passed, and by the time he acted, it was already too late. Returning to the cistern, he found Joseph already gone, sold as a slave.

On this, a midrash says: "If only Reuben had known that the Holy One blessed be He, would write about him, 'And Reuben heard and saved him from them,' he would have lifted Joseph bodily onto his shoulders and taken him back to his father." [3] What does this mean?

Consider what would have happened had Reuben actually acted at that moment. Joseph would not have been sold as a slave. He would not have been taken to Egypt. He would not have worked in Potiphar's house. He would not have attracted

Potiphar's wife. He would not have been thrown into prison on a false charge. He would not have interpreted the dreams of the butler and baker, nor would he have done the same two years later for Pharaoh. He would not have been made viceroy of Egypt. He would not have brought his family to stay there.

To be sure, God had already told Abraham many years earlier, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there" (Gen. 15:13). The Israelites would have become slaves, come what may. But at least they would not have had this happen as a result of their own family dysfunctions. An entire chapter of Jewish guilt and shame might have been avoided. If only Reuben had known what we know. If only he had been able to read the book. But we never can read the book that tells of the long-term consequences of our acts. We never know how much we affect the lives of others.

There is a story I find very moving, about how in 1966 an eleven-year-old African-American boy moved with his family to a hitherto white neighbourhood in Washington.[4] Sitting with his brothers and sisters on the front step of the house, he waited to see how they would be greeted. They were not. Passers-by turned to look at them but no one gave them a smile or even a glance of recognition. All the fearful stories he had heard about how whites treated blacks seemed to be coming true. Years later, writing about those first days in their new home, he says, "I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here ..."

As he was thinking those thoughts, a woman passed by on the other side of the road. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, "Welcome!" Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a tray laden with drinks and cream-cheese and jelly sandwiches which she brought over to the children, making them feel at home. That moment – the young man later wrote – changed his life. It gave him a sense of belonging where there was none before. It made him realise, at a time when race relations in the United States were still fraught, that a black family could feel at home in a white area and that there could be relationships that were colour-blind. Over the years, he learned to admire much about the woman across the street, but it was that first spontaneous act of greeting that became, for him, a definitive memory. It broke down a wall of separation and turned strangers into friends.

The young man, Stephen Carter, eventually became a law professor at Yale and wrote a book about what he learned that day. He called it *Civility*. The name of the woman, he tells us, was Sara Kestenbaum, and



she died all too young. He adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. "In the Jewish tradition," he notes, such civility is called "hessed – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God."

"Civility", he adds, "itself may be seen as part of hessed: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard."

"To this day", he adds, "I can close my eyes and feel on my tongue the smooth, slick sweetness of the cream cheese and jelly sandwiches that I gobbled on that summer afternoon when I discovered how a single act of genuine and unassuming civility can change a life forever."

A single life, says the Mishnah, is like a universe.[5] Change a life, and you begin to change the universe. That is how we make a difference: one life at a time, one day at a time, one act at a time. We never know in advance what effect a single act may have. Sometimes we never know it at all. Sara Kestenbaum, like Reuben, never did have the chance to read the book that told the story of the long-term consequences of that moment. But she acted. She did not hesitate. Neither, said Maimonides, should we. Our next act might tilt the balance of someone else's life as well as our own.

We are not inconsequential. We can make a difference to our world. When we do so, we become God's partners in the work of redemption, bringing the world that is, a little closer to the world that ought to be.

[1] Hilkhhot Teshuvah 3:4.

[2] Tosefta, Peah 1:4.

[3] Tanhuma, Vayeshev, 13.

[4] Stephen Carter, *Civility*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, 61-75.

[5] Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5 (original manuscript text).

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And Joseph came to them in the morning and he saw them, and behold they were sad." (40:6)

Joseph had troubles enough of his own to occupy his mind. First, being sold into slavery and afterward falsely accused and cast into prison. But he had a place in his heart for others and he interested himself in his fellow prisoners. It was this quality that delivered him and made him great.

"Why are your faces sad today?" (40:7)

Had Joseph not asked this question, he would never have been released from prison. No one would have known of his ability to interpret dreams. Pharaoh would never have heard of him and he would not have become a ruler in Egypt. Because he was

kindly and had compassion on others, he was moved to inquire in order to soothe their hearts. As a result he became the vice-regent of all Egypt and even more, he became the ruler over the house of Israel for 71 years.

The Torah hereby teaches that the quality of kindness is the prelude to greatness, "because Hashem desires kindness" (Michah 7:18).

Similarly, Moshe Rabbenu was chosen because "he went out to his brothers and he looked at their burdens" (Shemot 2:11). Yitro became elevated because he said "Call him, and he shall eat bread" (ibid. 2:21). Rivkah was chosen because of this quality demonstrated when she drew water for Eliezer's camels. Quoted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller ZT'L

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