

## SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYIGASH

DECEMBER 7, 2013

4 TEBET 5774

Fast of Asarah B'Tebet is on Friday, December 13.

Fast begins: 5:43am Fast ends: 4:49pm (no eating till after Kiddush)

And remember December 7, 1941 – 72 years ago – The Attack on Pearl Harbor

Baruch Dayan Emet – We are saddened to announce the passing of

Esther Weisner sister of our dear friend Herman Ovadia

The funeral will be at Sinai Chapel 16205 Horace Harding Expressway Fresh Meadows, NY

Friday December 6, 2013 11:30 AM

Shiva will be observed at the Weisner home at 1367 Kew Ave. Hewlett, NY 11557

Mincha and Maariv daily at 4:10PM

Many people are traveling for the holidays and we really need help with daily minyan.

Please make an effort to join us and let Rabbi Colish know which day or days you can commit to. Be there for those who need to say Kaddish.

In memory of my aunt Rachel Sutton, Rachel Bat Victoria who was Niftar on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Hanukkah. And in memory of Rabbi Ezra Labaton A'H – See article below

Candles and Mincha: 4:09 PM – From now til spring, Mincha is at candle lighting  
Communal Dinner for those with confirmed reservations tonight following services

SHABBAT 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:41

Shabbat Morning Children's Program ( We hope) 10:30 - 11:30

Morah Avital in the Playroom - Ages 0-5

Leah Colish and Nina Seigal in the Social Hall - Girls Ages 6-12

Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

KIDDUSH: We need a sponsor ... please let us know

Mincha at Noon – Amidah not before 12:10

Shabbat Ends – 5:09PM

Return for Arbit – 5:25 PM

*Please Join us this Saturday night for Family Game Night - 5:45 - 7:30 - Bring your friends and your favorite games. There will be pizza, raffles music, Torah and fun!*

### WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

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

Aliza, Rabbi Steven and Rav Aharon will be sponsoring a breakfast on Sunday morning breakfast this week for their father A'H, HaRav Shneer Zalman's yartzite.

### WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM –

Daily class with Rabbi Colish at 6:30AM

. SATURDAY NIGHT, - DECEMBER 7TH AT 7:30

FOR A VIEWING OF - THE DOCUMENTARY

PUNK JEWS Featuring our own, “Rabbi Michael Wagner”

“Profiling Hassidic punk rockers, Yiddish street performers, African-American Jewish activists and more, PUNK JEWS explores an emerging movement of provocateurs and committed Jews who are asking, each in his or her own way, what it means to be Jewish in the 21st century. Jewish artists, activists and musicians from diverse backgrounds and communities are defying norms and expressing their Jewish identities in unconventional ways.”

at the THE SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH Lafayette Blvd & Penn Street

Discussion & Refreshments to follow

SPONSORED BY THE SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION & LIDO SYNAGOGUE

**David is away this week  
Please print copies for the Synagogue**

**NEXT SHABBAT  
RABBI DR. MEYER ABITTAN WILL BE WITH US**

**Motzeh Shabbat -Saturday night,  
December 14 at 7:30pm.  
Dr. Reeva Simon - Whose Jerusalem? The role of  
religion and politics in the history of Jerusalem.**

**And Next Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup>  
SISTERHOOD DINNER –  
MEN AND LADIES INVITED**

**Please join us as we honor our very young  
matriarch Helen Tenenbaum at this year's  
Sephardic Sisterhood Supperette Monday,  
December 16th 7 pm at Chosen Island – Invitation  
is attached. These should have been mailed  
out....for further info please contact Patti @ 516-  
608-2320 or Tina @ 516-432-4232.  
Please get back to us with your reservation and  
journal ad this week.**

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### Editors Notes

For Hanukah this year I received two memorable  
gifts. The first was an unusual dreidel created using a  
3D printer. For those unfamiliar, 3D printing is a  
process where one creates a three dimensional item  
on a computer and that digital model is then formed  
using a process of building layer upon layer of  
material using the printer. I have marveled at the  
process for many years wondering how it could be  
utilized in furniture production.

The second gift was a century old publication of the  
works of Josephus.

We all learned in school as children that the dreidel  
dates back to the time of the ancient Greeks. We  
were taught that the Greeks outlawed the learning of  
Torah and any learning that took place had to be

done in a secretive way. So when children got  
together with their rabbi or when friend would get  
together to learn they would have their dreidels with  
them. Should Syrian-Greek soldiers burst into the  
forbidden study groups the troops would see a den of  
gamblers instead of group of scholars studying  
Torah.

When I sat down with my son Jonah's nephews on  
Wednesday night to play a game of questions and  
answers, they too retold the story that most of us had  
heard as kids. In fact a quick search of the internet  
shows the story repeated again and again by Ohr  
Somayach, Chabad,

So I looked into the book by Josephus that Chantelle  
bought me hoping to find something on the dreidel  
that Mikhayla had made for me, but as I expected, I  
came up with nothing.

A year ago I was sent images of some elaborate  
work of fine metals supposedly created by someone  
in Spain during the Marrano period. The piece  
housed everything from candlesticks, to a Kiddush  
cup, a megilah and a menorah, but the giveaway was  
the dreidel for I knew that there was no dreidel in  
16th century Spain. Jews from the Middle East never  
saw a dreidel until they arrived to the melting pot of  
the State of Israel or to the shores of United States.

And the reason for that is because the dreidel  
apparently only entered Jewish lore about 200 years  
ago in Europe, but for some reason we turned fiction  
into fact to make the story sound better and to give  
the dreidel a holy history. That's really quite  
dangerous.

Oh yes, many rabbis in the last century have written  
wonderful things about the dreidel. One of my favorite  
is that the letters nun, gimmel, hey, and shin have a  
numerical value of gematria which equals 358, which  
is also the numerical equivalent of mashiach or  
Messiah! They also represent the words Nes Gadol  
Hayah Sham – A great miracle happened there -  
although if the dreidel were really an artifact of  
ancient Israel I guess they should have replaced the  
Shin with a Peh as present day Israeli dreidels so  
telling us the great miracle happened here.

Others wrote how the four letters represent the four  
kingdoms which tried to destroy us  
The Nun stands for Nebuchadnetzar or Babylon;  
The Heh for Haman representing Persia or Madai;  
The Gimmel for Gog representing Greece;  
and the Shin for Seir, the home of Esav representing  
Edom or Rome.

All said and done, the dreidel game originally had nothing to do with Hanukkah. In fact its origins represent the opposite of what Hanukkah is all about.

In Great Britain there is a game called totum or teetotum. This game is especially popular around Christmas. In English, this game is first mentioned in the early 16th century as "totum". The name comes from the Latin "totum," which means "all." Which is what you get when you land on Gimmel,

The Eastern European game of dreidel which included a top with the letters nun, gimmel, hey, shin is directly based on the German equivalent of the totum game: Those letters remain part of the game today.

N stands for Nichts or nothing; while the G for Ganz or all. The H signifies Halb or half; and the S for Stell ein or put in. In German, the spinning top was called a "torrel" or "trundl," and in Yiddish it was called a "dreidel," This became sevivon in Hebrew.

While Hanukah represents the rejection of Hellenism and Greek influence, the victory of the spiritual over the physical, and a rejection of cultural assimilation, our celebrations today often represent the irony of it all.

We created 8 days of gifts. We celebrate with Hanukah parties. We send Hanukah cards and we turn their games into our own. Of course it's not like placing an idol in the Mikdash, but rewriting history is very dangerous; rewriting and giving reasons to customs is just as dangerous. We and our children need to always be aware. (And we wont even get into the dangers of gambling .... Yes every gambler starts somewhere.)

This week we read of the Jacob and his family going down to Egypt. Over the next six weeks we will delve into those 210 years where we began as princes and ended as slaves, finally being freed by G-d through Moses. We are told that we survived as a nation because we kept our names, our clothes and our ways. We didn't melt into Egypt. We have a special commandment to tell our children how G-d saved us. This has been passed from generation to generation, from parent to child and child to grandchild. Let's make sure we stick to the script.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

On Wednesday night as all the candles of the chanukiah were lit, we lost a bright light from our

community when Rabbi Ezra Labaton passed away. Joe Betesh wrote: With an unparalleled charisma, a love for knowledge, a courageous perspective on the fundamentals of our religion, and values that have transcended his home, Rabbi Labaton A'H was a man whose life is impossible to define in one sentence. His legacy will transcend his time on this earth and will undoubtedly influence the generations to come. May his memory be blessed forever.

The following was published by image magazine in June 2012 when the Rabbi was Honored by West Deal Shul

### **For 30 Years of Wonderful Service**

In 1982, the Israeli Defense Forces invaded Lebanon, the British Royal Navy sailed some 8,000 miles to retake the Falkland Islands from Argentina and the worlds most notorious terrorist was Carlos the Jackal. That same year Epcot Center opened, the first issue of USA Today was published and the first CD player was sold in Japan. And Time Magazines Man of the Year was none other than The Computer.

In 1982 the Man of the Year in the community of West Deal, New Jersey, was Rabbi Ezra Labaton. In August of that year, Rabbi Labaton was invited to become the full-time spiritual leader of Congregation Magen David of West Deal. Thirty years later, Rabbi Labaton remains a beacon not only to his congregants, but to the entire Syrian-Sephardic community.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, he attended elementary school at Magen David Yeshivah and high school at Flatbush Yeshivah. He studied under Hakham Baruch Ben Haim zl, as a young man before going on to get his semicha (ordination) from Yeshiva University. It was there that he studied under the renown Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik zl, (the Rav), whose teachings have guided Rabbi Labaton throughout his tenure.

His experience, rooted in our Halabi traditions, yet steeped in the rigorous method of one of the greatest Torah scholars of the past century, has enabled Rabbi Labaton to relate to his students the essential values of the Torah in his own personal way. Not only does he reveal to us the warmth and beauty of the mitzvot, but at the same time he makes obvious the Torahs relevancy and practicality in dealing with the challenges of our daily life. In so doing, he brings together the tools of history, science and philosophy as no other scholar in our community can.

Yet, neither his vast knowledge nor his skill at communication is his greatest asset. Rather, his greatest strengths are his humility, his sincerity, his compassion, his courage and his determination to do the right thing. Though able to quote chapter and verse about the Divine imperative to perform sedaka umishpat (justice and righteousness) Rabbi Labatons most compelling argument for living a life true to these ideals is the way in which he conducts his own.

From the outset, he has demonstrated a care and concern for others and has encouraged his students to bring their Torah to others in a way that will positively impact their lives. Through healthy times and through an illness that would have devastated those with less faith and self-discipline, he has persisted; leading minyan every morning and afternoon when he is not in treatment, giving numerous classes each week both day and night and focusing our energies every Shabbat with his sermons. All of this energy, all of this commitment is delivered with a smile and a kind word, as if he had not a personal care in the world.

If that is not enough, in another month or so he will be defending his doctoral thesis on his way to a PhD.

He is truly a marvel and for over 30 years has been an inspiration to thousands of people, who have incorporated into their own lives lessons learned not only by attending his lectures and classes, but simply by observing him.

Having had such an impact on us as individuals, it is no wonder that Rabbi Labaton has built a congregation which is as inclusive and welcoming as one can find anywhere. The programs he has created have involved all ages. One of his first efforts was Young Magen David, which he established in order to channel the energies of our young men and women toward hesed and educational programs. Another was our young adult barbecue, where for years hundreds of young men and women made dinner at the synagogue their last activity of each summer weekend, leading to a number of marriages. He also organized our Senior Hafla, in which each summer buses of senior citizens came to the synagogue for a day of music and dancing.

He has also taught us to be concerned with those far away from us. Though not the only means, he has shown us that political activism is an important way in which we demonstrate our cause and concern for others. Through the years, he has organized programs and participation in lobbying efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry, Ethiopian Jewry and Syrian Jewry. When a number of years later a new

Sephardic congregation was born after war in Croatia, it was no accident that his students responded to the congregations needs and donated its first Sefer Torah, arriving in person to deliver it.

All of these activities have created an energy which permeates our synagogue to this day and which has helped make our congregation a pre-eminent community institution.

It is only fitting that on the anniversary of Rabbi Labatons 30th year of service to the community, his congregation has decided to honor him with the dedication of a Sefer Torah in his name.

We hope that all of our extended family throughout the community in New York, New Jersey and in Florida will participate in this Sefer Torah project. More than that, together with Rabbi Labaton, we hope to greet you in our synagogue in the upcoming months.

As another summer approaches, our kahal is again busy preparing for our summer guests. Thanks to our Chairman, Charlie Saka, we will be experiencing our second summer in our beautiful bet midrash and our first in the brand new, expanded Sephardic Community Social Center. Our executive committee has assembled a terrific summer program of lectures and classes.

Yet the inspiration for it all, our spiritual leader and guide, is our Man of the Year, Rabbi Ezra Labaton.

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Yehuda confronts Yoseph in the aftermath of the stolen chalice. Yehuda reviews the past events, starting from Yoseph's suspicious interest in their family.

2nd Aliya: Yehuda's final plea, that he would remain a slave instead of Binyamin, triggers Yoseph to reveal himself. Yoseph mitigates his brother's shock and obvious shame by explaining to them the hidden hand of Hashem in all that had occurred.

3rd Aliya: Yoseph instructs his brothers to bring Yakov and the rest of the family to Egypt. Pharaoh, having heard the news of the brother's arrival, confirms Yoseph's offer.

4th Aliya: Yoseph sends provisions and transportation for Yakov's entire household. Yakov is told of Yoseph being, "alive and well and ruling the land of Egypt".

5th Aliya: Yakov wishes to see Yoseph, but first asks Hashem for instructions. Hashem reassures Yakov that the time of slavery and nationhood has begun, and that he must go to Mitzrayim. The 70 direct descendants of Yakov are counted.

6th Aliya: Yakov and Yoseph reunite after 22 years. Five of the brothers and Yakov are presented to Pharaoh. Yakov blesses Pharaoh. The year is 2238.

7th Aliya: The remainder of the Parsha is a flashback to the two years preceding Yakov's arrival. Yoseph's master plan for reconfiguring Egyptian society is detailed. Yoseph follows the broad outline of his advice to Pharaoh regarding the administration of the 7 years of plenty. The famine must have been of enormous intensity for Yoseph to accomplish his plan in just two years. Although the people "sell" themselves to Pharaoh in order to get food, Yoseph's plan maintains their sense of dignity and independence.

Ezekiel 37:15-28.- This week's haftorah mentions the fusion of the kingdoms of Judah and Joseph during the Messianic Era, echoing the beginning of this week's Torah reading: "And Judah approached him [Joseph]."

The prophet Ezekiel shares a prophecy he received, in which G-d instructs him to take two sticks and to write one on each, "For Judah and for the children of Israel his companions" and on the other, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions." After doing so he was told to put the two near each other, and G-d fused them into one stick.

G-d explains to Ezekiel that these sticks are symbolic of the House of Israel, that was divided into two (often warring) kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom that was established by Jeroboam, a member of the Tribe of Ephraim, and the Southern Kingdom, that remained under the reign of the Davidic (Judean) Dynasty. The fusing of the two sticks represented the merging of the kingdoms that will transpire during the Messianic Era -- with the Messiah, a descendant of David, at the helm of this unified empire.

"So says the L-rd G-d: 'Behold I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land. And I will make them into one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be to them all as a king...'"

The haftorah ends with G-d's assurance that "they shall dwell on the land that I have given to My

servant, to Jacob, wherein your forefathers lived; and they shall dwell upon it, they and their children and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever."

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN "I am Yosef." (Beresheet 45:3)

In our perashah Yosef reveals his true identity to his brothers. The Midrash Rabah quotes Rabbi Abah Cohen Bardelah: Woe unto us when the day of judgment comes, woe unto us on the day of rebuke. If the brothers were unable to endure the rebuke of Yosef, the younger of the brothers (as the verse says, "The brothers couldn't answer because they were overwhelmed from him") when Hashem rebukes us, each one according to his ways, all the more so will we be unable to endure that rebuke!

The famous question is that if we look into Yosef's words we don't find a hint of rebuke to his brothers. He only said "I am Yosef." What was the rebuke? (Check out the Bet Halevi for his answer.) Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel, the Mashgiah of Lakewood Yeshivah, has a unique answer. He says that Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz z"l of the Mirrer Yeshivah used to say that if you take a horse and cover it with ten coats and with fifteen hats, another horse will always recognize it as a horse and greet it with the usual neigh sound. This was the rebuke of Yosef. It's as if he said, "I am Yosef! How was it that you didn't recognize me? After all of the hints that I dropped, how I knew so much of your lives, how could I fool you by merely attributing the knowledge to my mystical cup? How could it be that you didn't recognize me only because I had a beard? I must conclude the reason why you didn't recognize me is because the jealousy and hatred that you had, blocked the feelings of love of one brother to another. This caused each brother not to recognize his own brother." This was the powerful rebuke.

The Mashgiah adds, that in the future this will be our rebuke from Hashem. In the future Hashem will say, "I am Hashem. How was it that you didn't recognize me throughout the exiles? All the events of the exiles, even though they are cloaked with circumstances, always attributing everything to politics and wars between nations, why didn't you see that it was all really the hands of Hashem and not by chance? Anyone with eyes can see that all that transpired during the exile was the hand of Hashem. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

#### "WIDE-MOUTH BOTTLE

As you cruise up and down the supermarket aisles, you can't help being dazzled by the sizes,

shapes, and colors of the wide variety of packages filling the shelves. Billions of dollars are spent every year in order to present manufacturers' products in containers that will attract consumer attention and dollars. Convenience features such as twist-off caps or pull-off tabs may be the clincher in wooing customers to a particular maker's product over that of the competition.

One such feature is called the wide-mouth bottle. It lures potential customers into buying a particular brand of ketchup or honey or some other hard-to-get-out-of-the-bottle product by promising an easy exit by the otherwise difficult-to-access foodstuff.

The fact is that a wide mouth may be good for ketchup, but it is certainly a negative attribute for a human being. One of the health tips offered by our Sages is, "All of my days I have lived amongst the wise men, and there is nothing as good for the body as silence" (Abot 1:17). A more frightening rendition is, "Life and death are in the hands of the tongue" (Mishlei 18:21).

If you doubt the veracity of these statements, just think about your most embarrassing moments. You will find that they usually occurred when you were talking, and rarely happened when you were listening to someone else.

Before opening your mouth, stop to consider your spiritual and physical well-being. Hold your words in. A moment of thought will help keep the lips sealed, thus preventing great damage and yielding untold benefit for years and years to come. One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
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**[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)**  
**The Ultimate Rebuke**

We read in Parashat Vayigash of the dramatic moment when Yosef finally revealed himself to his brothers, announcing, "Ani Yosef." The brothers, who had sold Yosef as a slave twenty-two years earlier, would have never imagined that the Egyptian vizier was their brother. Naturally, then, as the Torah says, they were dumbfounded: "The brothers could not answer him, because they were terrified of him" (45:3).

The Midrash famously comments on this verse, "Woe unto us on the day of judgment, woe unto us on the day of rebuke." If the brothers at that moment were seized with horror and unable to respond to Yosef, the Midrash says, then certainly we will have nothing to answer when we leave this world and stand in judgment before G-d.

Many later writers have raised the question of where in this Pasuk Yosef speaks any words of "rebuke." He simply says, "I am Yosef," and then asks whether Yaakov is still alive. How did he "rebuke" his brothers?

Several answers have been given, one of which is that the brothers were at that moment shown that they had been conducting themselves on a fundamentally mistaken assumption. They had decided to sell Yosef not out of raw jealousy, but after careful consideration and upon reaching the conclusion that he posed a risk to the family and its future. They viewed his dreams of leadership as a dangerous threat, and therefore reached the drastic conclusion that he needed to be driven from the family of Yaakov. But when Yosef uttered those words, "Ani Yosef," the brothers suddenly realized that they had been mistaken all these years. Yosef's dreams had been fulfilled, his prophecies were correct, and he was indeed the chosen leader of the family. In an instant, the firm decision they had made was revealed as fundamentally mistaken.

This is the great "Tocheha" of which the Midrash warns. After 120 years, we will be shown that so much of our lives was lived on false premises. We spend the bulk of our time amassing material possessions, investing vast amounts of thought and energy into the pursuit of wealth and prestige, thinking that this is what is significant and meaningful. We accord such importance to the vain pleasures of life, to large homes, fashionable clothes, luxury cars and exotic vacations, working on the assumption that this is what matters. "Woe unto us on the day of rebuke." One day we will be shown how all this is false, how the course we charted for ourselves was predicated on fallacies and delusions.

The message the Midrash is teaching us is not to wait for that "day of rebuke." Let us ascertain already now that we are making our decisions and charting our course based on truth, and not on wholly misguided assumptions about life.

**Drasha**  
**by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

At the onset of this week's portion, Yehuda pleads with Yoseph, Egypt's viceroy, for mercy. Binyamin was framed for a crime he did not commit. Yoseph's agents had planted a silver goblet in the saddle-pack of Binyamin the youngest of Yaakov's children. Now Yoseph wants to mete justice, holding Binyamin to be his slave forever. And Yehuda will not let that come to pass.

And so, Yehuda begs for mercy. Even though it would have been the absolute truth, Yehuda's arguments do not utilize the lawyer's ubiquitous, "He did not do it; he was framed!"

Instead he employs a different approach: he asks for mercy, not for the accused, Binyamin, but rather for his and Binyamin's father, Yaakov.

"And now, if I come to your servant my father and the youth is not with us -- since his soul is so bound up with his soul: It will happen that when he sees the youth is missing he will die, and your servants will have brought down the hoariness of your servant our father in sorrow to the grave. . . . For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father!" (Genesis 44)

In truth, however, we must understand why Yehuda presented a case for Yaakov rather than for Binyamin. In modern terms, Yoseph could have easily answered, "You are the thief. Your father is not my problem."

More than twenty-five years ago, a particular Rabbi, of blessed memory, Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva, Cleveland, moved to Israel to establish a branch of Telshe Yeshiva there. During his tenure in Israel, he developed an extremely close relationship with the elder Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevez, Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach, of blessed memory. He often discussed matters pertaining to Klal Yisrael together with Rabbi Shach.

Once Rabbi Shach was disturbed by an endorsement that that Rabbi had made regarding a particular cause. Rabbi Shach felt that the Rabbi had made an error in judgment and Rabbi Shach decided to visit him personally to discuss the matter with him.

Rav Shach made the long trip from B'nai Beraq to that particular Rabbi's apartment in the village of Telshe Stone, (Abu Gush) on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He knocked on the Rabbi's door and was greeted by the Rebbitzin with surprise and with the utmost respect.

She offered him some tea as he sat down together with the Rabbi in the dining room of the small apartment. With the Rabbi's wife in the background, Rav Shach began his conversation discussing the destroyed world of Lithuanian Jewry. The Rabbi, a student of Telshe Yeshiva in Lithuania, was well acquainted with pre-Holocaust Europe. The Rebbitzin, herself a native of Lithuania, was intrigued as Rav Shach and her husband moved from topic to topic. The talk continued on every important topic -

except one. Rav Shach never even brought up the intended topic of his visit.

After 45 minutes, Rav Shach excused himself and left the the Rabbi's apartment.

Rav Shach's driver and confidante asked the Rosh Yeshiva how the meeting went, and if that Rabbi was receptive of the criticism.

Rabbi Shach explained, "I was there for nearly an hour, but I did not even broach the topic. You see, the Rebbitzin was in hearing range. How would I even think of criticizing her husband where his Rebbitzin could hear it? And so, I decided not to bring up the topic at all."

Every sentence involves many more parties than the accused. Yehuda was trying to give Yoseph a sense of perspective about to the ramifications of his judgment. He was not only going to sentence a young man to slavery, he would sentence his father to death. He pleaded for Yoseph to encompass more than just Binyamin into his decision. He asked him to think of the effect that the sentence would have on his elderly father.

In our own lives, we are constantly judging. We formulate opinions and we act. Our job, however, is to extend our vision peripherally. . Only the Almighty is the true Judge whose sentences encompass both the culpable party and all those who are in his or her sphere. However, as mortals, in every conclusion we make we must also try to remember that our actions surpass the intended party. In our quest for true justice, we must try to mete comprehensive justice as well.

### **Rabbi Wein**

There is a wickedly funny and enormously sad piece of satire making the rounds about a "Lithuanian" charedi father attempting to explain to his inquisitive child the story of the Hasmoneans and their triumph over the Greeks. On the one hand the Hasmoneans were staunch "Lithuanian" charedim who learned all day, while on the other hand they apparently had weapons, organized an army that they themselves led in actual warfare against the Greeks.

They also engaged in commerce and agriculture, albeit always wearing only white shirts. And, apparently, they wanted to establish an independent Jewish state in the Land of Israel. The child realizes the enormous disconnect between the traditional story of Chanuka and the Hasmoneans and what he has been taught at home, in school and amongst his

peers about the country and society he currently lives in.

The father admits to himself the existence of this savage disconnect with reality and the Chanuka story, but says one may not state so publicly lest one be accused of being a Zionist.

Here, as in all good satire, there exists more than a bit of exaggeration. But, there is no doubt that more than a kernel of truth also exists in this fictitious conversation. The charedi world in the main, especially the "Lithuanian" branch (with whom I identify myself as belonging to) has yet to come to grips with the realities of today. It is still fighting the battle of the nineteenth century against secular Zionism, a battle long ago ended and not relevant any longer in today's Jewish world.

Part of the problem is changing this mindset of complete disconnect with reality. We have grown so comfortable over the past centuries of Jewish life as being the persecuted victim, that we are frightened to shuck off that protective mantle. We see the world in black and white colors only – the good guys and the villains. There is no room for nuance or moderation in such a worldview.

If we are involved in rabbinic scandal, financial misdeeds, abusive physical and sexual behavior, violence against police, corrupt elections (and those elected thereby) and are caught by the authorities for so doing, the immediate knee-jerk reaction is that we are being persecuted because of our religious practices, different dress, traditional lifestyle and distinct societal mores.

Somehow we have forgotten that idleness, poverty and a persecution complex all are, in the long run, self-destructive conditions. These were the conditions that secularized much of Ashkenazic Jewry over the past three centuries. Eventually a system built on declining governmental welfare allotments and unending charity from others - a system decried by Maimonides and other great rabbinic sages and religious leaders throughout the ages – is a Ponzi scheme that inexorably will collapse of its own weight.

And we are ill served by religious political leaders and the handlers of old and revered great Torah scholars who, for purposes I have never really understood, oppose any change of the current miserable status quo. And, there is never any plan advanced to help rescue their adherents from the deepening abyss of poverty and personal despair.

So, a little clever satire can be a good thing for us. A good look at the absurdity of some of our societal practices, at the disconnect with reality, at an educational system that impoverishes its students for life and stifles creativity and different opinions can only help us in the long run to advance the cause of Torah in Israel and in the Diaspora!

A middle-aged person recently came to see me before embarking on a trip to the United States to raise money to pay for his crushing debts accumulated over the years that he has not worked. The irony is that he graduated university and is a qualified engineer and is easily employable. So when I asked him why he doesn't go to work instead of undergoing the humiliation of canvassing door to door in the American winter for a month to receive charity, much of it given begrudgingly, I sighed deeply at his answer: "I have daughters to marry off and the husbands they want to marry will not accept daughters of someone who is working!"

I wanted to answer him harshly: "But they will accept daughters of someone who begs others for charity!" However, I bit my tongue and wished him success (?) on his journey. I was impotently outraged all day at how this type of mindset has corrupted such a wonderful people. Perhaps we need more satire to have the truth of the situation sink into our society.

### Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

I was once present when the great historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, was asked to predict the course of events in the Middle East. He replied, "I'm a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is passé." Predictions are impossible in the affairs of living, breathing human beings because we are free and there is no way of knowing in advance how an individual will react to the great challenges of his or her life.

If one thing has seemed clear throughout the last third of Genesis it is that Joseph will emerge as the archetypal leader. He is the central character of the story, and his dreams and the shifting circumstances of his fate, all point in that direction. Least likely as a candidate for leadership is Judah, the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave (Gen. 37: 26-27), whom we next see separated from his brothers, living among the Canaanites, intermarried with them, losing two of his sons because of sin and having sexual relations with a woman he takes to be a prostitute. The chapter in which this is described begins with the phrase, "At that time Judah went down from among



his brothers" (Gen. 38: 1). The commentators take this to mean moral decline.

Yet history turned out otherwise. Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, disappeared from the pages of history after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE, while it was Judah's descendants, starting with David, who became kings. The tribe of Judah survived the Babylonian conquest, and it is Judah whose name we bear as a people. We are Yehudim, "Jews." This week's parsha explains why.

Already in last week's parsha we began to see Judah's leadership qualities. The family had reached deadlock. They desperately needed food, but they knew that the Egyptian viceroy had insisted that they bring their brother Benjamin with them, and Jacob refused to let this happen. He had lost one child (Joseph) of his beloved wife Rachel and he was not about to let the other, Benjamin, be taken on a hazardous journey. Reuben, in keeping with his unstable character, made an absurd suggestion: "Kill my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back safely." It was Judah who with quiet authority – "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him" – persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them.

Now in Egypt the nightmare scenario has unfolded. Benjamin has been found with the viceroy's silver cup in his possession. The official delivers his verdict. Benjamin is to be held as a slave. The other brothers can go free. At this point Judah steps forward and makes a speech that changes history. He speaks eloquently about their father's grief at the loss of one of Rachel's sons. If he loses the other he will die of grief. I, says Judah, personally guaranteed his safe return. He concludes:

"Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father." (Gen. 44: 33-34)

No sooner has he said these words than Joseph, overcome with emotion, reveals his identity and the whole elaborate drama reaches closure. What is happening here and how does it have a bearing on leadership?

The sages (Berakhot 34b) articulated a principle: "Where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand." The Talmud brings a proof-text from Isaiah: "Peace, peace, to those far and near" (Is. 57:

19) placing the far (the penitent sinner) before the near (the perfectly righteous). However, almost certainly the real source is here in the story of Joseph and Judah. Joseph is known to tradition as ha-tzaddik, the righteous.

Judah, as we will see, is a penitent. Joseph became "second to the king." Judah, however, became the ancestor of kings. Hence, where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.

Judah is the first person in the Torah to achieve perfect repentance (teshuvah gemurah), defined by the sages as one who finds himself in a situation to repeat an earlier sin but who does not do so because he is now a changed person.

Many years before Judah was responsible for Joseph being sold as a slave:

Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed. (Gen. 37: 26-27)

Now, faced with the prospect of leaving Benjamin as a slave, he says, "Let me stay as a slave and let my brother go free." That is perfect repentance, and it is what allows Joseph to reveal his identity and forgive his brothers.

The Torah had already hinted at the change in Judah's character. Having accused his daughter-in-law Tamar of becoming pregnant by a forbidden sexual relationship, he is confronted by her with evidence that he himself is the father of the child and immediately admits: "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38: 26). This is the first time in the Torah we see a character admit that he is wrong. If Judah was the first penitent, it was Tamar – mother of Perez from whom king David was descended – who was ultimately responsible.

Perhaps Judah's future was already implicit in his name, for though the verb le-hodot from which it is derived means "to thank" (Leah called her fourth son Judah saying "This time I will thank the Lord," Gen. 29: 35), it is also related to the verb le-hitvadot, which means "to admit, to confess," and confession is, according to Maimonides, the core of the command to repent.

Leaders make mistakes. That is an occupational hazard of the role. Managers follow the rules, but leaders find themselves in situations for which there are no rules. Do you declare a war in which people

will die, or to you refrain from doing so at the risk of letting your enemy grow stronger with the result that more will die later? That was the dilemma faced by Chamberlain in 1939, and it was only some time later that it became clear that he was wrong and Churchill right.

But leaders are also human and they make mistakes that have nothing to do with leadership and everything to do with human weakness and temptation. The sexual conduct of John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton was less than perfect. Does this affect our judgment of them as leaders or not? Judaism suggests it should. The prophet Nathan was unsparing of King David when he sinned with another man's wife.

What matters, suggests the Torah, is that you repent – you recognise and admit your wrong, and you change as a result. As Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, both Saul and David, Israel's first two kings, sinned. Both were reprimanded by a prophet. Both said chatati, "I have sinned." But their fates were radically different. Saul lost his throne, David did not. The reason, said the Rav, was that David confessed immediately. Saul prevaricated and made excuses before admitting his sin.

The stories of Judah and of his descendant David tell us that what mark a leader is not necessarily perfect righteousness. It is the ability to admit mistakes, to learn from them and grow from them. The Judah we see at the beginning of the story is not the man we see at the end, just as the Moses we see at the burning bush – stammering, hesitant – is not the mighty hero we see at the end, "his sight undimmed, his natural energy unabated." A leader is one who, though he may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble and courageous than he was before

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

"And he raised his voice in weeping" (45:2)

Why did Yosef weep? His brothers did not weep. In the Midrash Raba it states: Just as Yosef wept, so also will we weep when we return to Hashem after the Galut. He wept not out of remorse/Teshuba but because of lost opportunity. All the years he lost by not being in his father's house and learning from Yaacob Abinu.

When we lose an opportunity to learn Torah or perform Mitzvot, it can never be made up. Whereas, should a person commit a sin (which is terrible) there are prescribed remedies such as Teshuba and Yom

Kippur or imposed ones such as affliction and Gehinom.

The worst type of sin is a 'Chet'. The word 'Chet' means 'to miss'. As it states: "Each one could sling a stone and not miss- "velo yachate" (Shoftim 20:16). The sin of not accomplishing in this lifetime is the most terrible since one cannot make up for Mitzvot which they did not perform when they had the opportunity. The reward for doing a Mitzvah is forever while the punishment for most sins is limited and they will be removed.

Therefore, our great purpose in life is to thank Hashem for the opportunities He gives us by bestowing on us the gift of life each day. To take full advantage by picking up the many diamonds/Mitzvot which are available only at this time. Each one is our ticket to unlimited and eternal reward and pleasure which Hashem has guaranteed.

Yosef Hatzadeek, our great hero and model, had learned this fundamental principle from Yaacob while he was still in his home. For the past 22 years Yosef could not learn from his Great father. Therefore he 'missed out' eternally and hence he wept.

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