

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYESHEB / HANUKAH - Haftarah: Amos 2:6-3:8
NOVEMBER 22-23, 2013 23 KISLEV 5774

Hanukah will be celebrated from Tuesday night, November 27 to Wednesday, December 5.

In Memory of Lea Levi Lerman – condolences to her family
Daughter of our passed president Joseph and Anita Levi

This week's newsletter is again dedicated by Abraham J. Jerome of TD Bank. I've known Abraham my entire life. Give him a call and let him be your Personal and Commercial Lender. 329 1st Avenue in Manhattan, Please email him at abraham.jerome@td.com I am sure he can help!

Candles and Mincha: 4:14 PM – From now til spring, Mincha is at candle lighting
Communal Dinner for those with confirmed reservations tonight following services

We are pleased that Richard Altabe, Headmaster Yeshivat Shaare Torah in Brooklyn and a former congregant whose father was a past president and close friend of Rabbi Abittan ZT"L and whose mother designed the beautiful stain glass windows in the front of our Synagogue, will be joining us as scholar in residence.

Mr. Altabe will be speaking at the dinner and leading us in a discussion on "What Sandy Taught Me". Those joining us should prepare a short thought on the subject.

SHABBAT 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:32

New Shabbat Morning Children's Program with Morah Avital. For children ages 0 to 5. 10:30 to 11:30 in the playroom. We are looking at putting together a new program for the older girls.

KIDDUSH SPONSORED BY: In honor of Richard Altabe who will be speaking to us during lunch

Mincha at Noon – Amidah not before 12:05

Shabbat Ends – 5:14 PM

Return for Arbit – 5:30 PM / Havdalah – 6: 00 PM / Children's Program – 7:00 PM
Movie Night sponsored by The Azizo Family

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

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

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM –
Daily class with Rabbi Colish at 6:30AM

Family Chanukah Party

Please join us Sunday Morning December 1st for a Family Chanukah Party with Games, Prizes, Music, Latkes, Bagels, Doughnuts and more! 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM. Please speak with Rabbi Colish for more details.

We are working on securing the recreation center field for Thursday morning Thanksgiving Football. Details to follow

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

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100



Hal, Bobby and David, representing Benai Asher, traveled to Washington this week and met with a number of senators and congressman ... it was a very interesting trip. See Caroline Glick. Her thoughts were echoed by many in Washington



Editors Notes

Chantelle and I enjoyed an extended weekend in Miami for some work and a mini vacation. On Shabbat I had the pleasure of praying at the Porto Vita Synagogue during the evenings and the Safra Synagogue for their vatikin or sunrise minyan each morning.

Rabbi Abittan z'sl always taught the best way to really learn is when one must prepare in order to teach. If each time we learn something we imagine that we will need to give this over, we are certain to delve deeper into the subject. While in Florida I was honored to be asked to speak or give a class at each service. I thoroughly enjoyed the back and forth with people who are not only wiser than me, but who have experience in years that we all pray to one day reach.

On Monday morning we were discussing the opening chapters of this week's portion. The brothers decided that Joseph was a danger to the family and planned on killing him. Reuben steps in and convinces them to throw Joseph into a pit rather than bloody their own hands. He intended on returning and retrieving his younger brother. Judah, who was unaware of Reuben's thoughts, is concerned that they would leave Joseph to die suggests they sell him to the passing caravan of slave traders. Although he is credited with saving Joseph's life, the following chapter begins with the term that Judah went down. Judah is criticized because he probably could have convinced the brothers to completely abandon their plan. He is destined to be the leader, yet his leadership skills are obviously still incomplete.

It takes the incident with Tamar and Judah's later defense of Benjamin to cement his role. With that his descendants would become kings and eventually Mashiach.

Adam HaRishon sinned but his greater iniquity was in his lack of appreciation combined with an inability to admit his guilt. When Adam is confronted by G-d, not

only does he refuse to face up to his actions and beg for forgiveness, he throws the gift of Chava back into G-d's face with his response that it was "the woman you gave me". His blame game goes so far that he is in essence saying to Hashem, "this is all your fault."

There is a word in Hebrew with a number of meanings. It is the word modeh. We begin each day with the words Modeh Ani. Modeh connotes appreciation and we often translate this verse as "I am appreciative or I am thankful. We also use Modeh during the high holidays we state again and

again, Modeh VeOzeb Yerucham, "He who admits (his sin) and leaves (his sin), finds mercy."

The question we asked Monday was how the two meanings relate? To be appreciate and to thank or to admit and understand my lacking?

The Rabbi would explain that most people don't appreciate what they have until they don't have it anymore. A gift that fills a need and desire is worth an infinite amount more than one that is either not needed or worse, not wanted.

Imagine sitting in a restaurant and enjoying a great meal. You finish your cup of tea and dessert and you are stuffed; you couldn't have another bite. Then the waiter comes out with a huge piece of the finest steak money can buy, loaded with beautiful grilled vegetables and French potatoes and announces, "Compliments of the house, bon appetite". Thanks, but no thanks.

Each day we thank G-d many times. We are called Yehudim or Jews from the name Yehuda or Judah. When Leah names Judah, she gives him the name as a play on the word thank you. This way each time she looks at her son and thinks about or mentions his name, she is reminded to appreciate Hashem and all that he has and will do for us. The name Yehudah may remind us to appreciate, but at the sale of Joseph, Judah seems to not yet take hold of the aspect of lacking or admitting that is needed to really give it power.

Let's examine the story of Judah and Tamar for a moment that begins with the words mentioned telling us Judah descended. Judah had 3 sons, the eldest Er married a beautiful woman named Tamar. He didn't want to mar her beauty by allowing her to conceive. Er died and then his younger brother Onan married Tamar. Onan refuses to allow her to become pregnant either. When Onan died as well, Judah's youngest son Shelah should have married Tamar, but Judah refused them to consummate the marriage. One could imagine he was afraid that she was a black widow.

Tamar, who is bound to the family and unable to marry another, disguised herself and with Heaven's help and in the guise of a harlot, tricked Judah into performing a form of levirate marriage with her. Playing the part of a prostitute she strikes a deal with Judah who leaves as a security deposit, his staff, his seal, and his cord. Soon after Judah sends a goat sent to Enaim, in order to collect his staff and seal, but the woman was nowhere to be found and no one knew of any prostitute in Enaim.

Three months pass and Tamar became noticeably pregnant. She was accused of being unfaithful to Judah's family. Tamar in her humility does not embarrass Judah. She seems willing to die, rather than announce that he made her pregnant. She ambiguously sends a message that she was pregnant from the person who gave her these three items as security.

One could only imagine how embarrassed Judah was. One could also imagine that someone in power facing that humiliation would do anything in his power to keep the mess covered. Judah could have quickly had her killed, seemed justified in his actions and forget that anything happened. But instead he admitted that the items were his and he bore responsibility. He was Modeh. Tamar is judged to have acted righteously and gives birth to twins, Perez and Zerach. Perez is the ancestor of King David.

We all heard the story of how Adam was meant to live 1000 years. When he sees that the great soul of David is set to pass from existence in moments he gives that soul seventy years of his own life. David who completes with his 70 years, Adam's thousand, in many ways is Metaken or fixes the error of Adam.

Where Adam failed to appreciate, and where Adam failed to admit, David does the opposite. His book of Psalms is a book very often associated with thanksgiving and when he is pressed on the issue of Bat Shevah, he admits that he was wrong. He may be King, but he knows that without G-d, he is nothing.

Where did David learn this from? It was in his DNA as a descendant of Judah. And we too as Jews are descendant from Judah. We too have built into our DNA this aspect of being Modeh. We use the word every day. Let's not forget what it means. Let us recognize that without Hashem we are nothing, let us admit to Him our guilt and let us truly thank him for what he does. If we can play our proper role, then we can have faith that the descendant of Judah, the son of David, will come speedily in our days, Amen.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

**COLUMN ONE: The demise of Pax Americana
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The US remains the most powerful actor in the world. But last week, American credibility was shattered. What happened in Geneva last week was the most

significant international event since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union signaled the rise of the United States as the sole global superpower. The developments in the six-party nuclear talks with Iran in Geneva last week signaled the end of American world leadership.

Global leadership is based on two things – power and credibility. The United States remains the most powerful actor in the world. But last week, American credibility was shattered.

Secretary of State John Kerry spent the first part of last week lying to Israeli and Gulf Arab leaders and threatening the Israeli people. He lied to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the Saudis about the content of the deal US and European negotiators had achieved with the Iranians.

Kerry told them that in exchange for Iran temporarily freezing its nuclear weapons development program, the US and its allies would free up no more than \$5 billion in Iranian funds seized and frozen in foreign banks.

Kerry threatened the Israeli people with terrorism and murder – and so invited both – if Israel fails to accept his demands for territorial surrender to PLO terrorists that reject Israel's right to exist.

Kerry's threats were laced with bigoted innuendo.

He claimed that Israelis are too wealthy to understand their own interests. If you don't wise up and do what I say, he intoned, the Europeans will take away your money while the Palestinians kill you. Oh, and aside from that, your presence in the historic heartland of Jewish civilization from Jerusalem to Alon Moreh is illegitimate.

It is hard to separate the rise in terrorist activity since Kerry's remarks last week from his remarks.

What greater carte blanche for murder could the Palestinians have received than the legitimization of their crimes by the chief diplomat of Israel's closest ally? Certainly, Kerry's negotiating partner Catherine Ashton couldn't have received a clearer signal to ratchet up her economic boycott of Jewish Israeli businesses than Kerry's blackmail message, given just two days before the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

Kerry's threats were so obscene and unprecedented that Israeli officials broke with tradition and disagreed with him openly and directly, while he was still in the country. Normally supportive leftist commentators

have begun reporting Kerry's history of anti-Israel advocacy, including his 2009 letter of support for pro-Hamas activists organizing flotillas to Gaza in breach of international and American law.

As for Kerry's lies to the US's chief Middle Eastern allies, it was the British and the French who informed the Israelis and the Saudis that far from limiting sanctions relief to a few billion dollars in frozen funds, the draft agreement involved ending sanctions on Iran's oil and gas sector, and on other industries.

In other words, the draft agreement exposed Washington's willingness to effectively end economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for Iran's agreement to cosmetic concessions that will not slow down its nuclear weapons program.

Both the US's position, and the fact that Kerry lied about that position to the US's chief allies, ended what was left of American credibility in the Middle East. That credibility was already tattered by US fecklessness in Syria and support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

True, in the end, Kerry was unable to close the deal he rushed off to Geneva to sign last Friday.

Of course, it wasn't Iran that rejected the American surrender. And it wasn't America that scuttled the proposal. It was France. Unable to hide behind American power and recognizing its national interest in preventing Iran from emerging as a nuclear armed power in the Middle East, France vetoed a deal that paved the way a nuclear Iran.

Kerry's failure to reach the hoped-for deal represented a huge blow to America, and a double victory for Iran. The simple fact that Washington was willing to sign the deal – and lie about it to its closest allies – caused the US to lose its credibility in the Middle East. Even without the deal, the US paid the price of appeasing Iran and surrendering leadership of the free world to France and Israel.

Just by getting the Americans to commit themselves to reducing sanctions while Iran continues its march to a nuclear weapon, Iran destroyed any remaining possibility of doing any serious non-military damage to Iran's plans for nuclear weaponry. At the same time, the Americans boosted Iranian credibility, endorsed Iranian power, and belittled Israel and Saudi Arabia – Iran's chief challengers in the Middle East. Thus, Iran ended Pax Americana in the Middle East, removing the greatest obstacle in its path to regional hegemony. And it did so without having to make the slightest concession to the Great Satan.

As Walter Russell Mead wrote last week, it was fear of losing Pax Americana that made all previous US administrations balk at reaching an accord with Iran. As he put it, "Past administrations have generally concluded that the price Iran wants for a different relationship with the United States is unsustainably high. Essentially, to get a deal with Iran we would have to sell out all of our other allies. That's not only a moral problem. Throwing over old allies like that would reduce the confidence that America's allies all over the world have in our support."

The Obama administration just paid that unsustainably high price, and didn't even get a different relationship with Iran.

Most analyses of what happened in Geneva last week have centered on what the failure of the talks means for the future of Obama's foreign policy.

Certainly Obama, now universally reviled by America's allies in the Middle East, will be diplomatically weakened. This diplomatic weakness may not make much difference to Obama's foreign policy, because appeasement and retreat do not require diplomatic strength.

But the real story of what happened last week is far more significant than the future of Obama's foreign policy. Last week it was America that lost credibility, not Obama. It was America that squandered the essential component of global leadership. And that is the watershed event of this young century.

States act in concert because of perceived shared interests. If Israel and Saudi Arabia combine to attack Iran's nuclear installations it will be due to their shared interest in preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear arsenal. But that concerted action will not make them allies.

Alliances are based on the perceived longevity of the shared interests, and that perception is based on the credibility of international actors.

Until Obama became president, the consensus view of the US foreign policy establishment and of both major parties was that the US had a permanent interest in being the hegemonic power in the Middle East. US hegemony ensured three permanent US national security interests: preventing enemy regimes and terror groups from acquiring the means to cause catastrophic harm; ensuring the smooth flow of petroleum products through the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal; and demonstrating the credibility of American power by ensuring the security of US allies

like Israel and Saudi Arabia. The third interest was an essential foundation of US deterrence of the Soviets during the Cold War, and of the Chinese over the past decade.

Regardless of who was in the White House, for the better part of 70 years, every US government has upheld these interests. This consistency built US credibility, which in turn enabled the US to throw its weight around.

Obama departed from this foreign policy consensus in an irrevocable manner last week. In so doing, he destroyed US credibility.

It doesn't matter who succeeds Obama. If a conservative internationalist in the mold of Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy or Ronald Reagan is elected in 2016, Obama's legacy will make it impossible for him to rebuild the US alliance structure. US allies will be willing to buy US military platforms – although not exclusively.

They will be willing to act in a concerted manner with the US on a temporary basis to advance specific goals.

But they will not be willing to make any longterm commitments based on US security guarantees.

They will not be willing to place their strategic eggs in the US basket.

Obama has taught the world that the same US that elected Truman and formed NATO, and elected George H.W. Bush and threw Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, can elect a man who betrays US allies and US interests to advance a radical ideology predicated on a rejection of the morality of American power. Any US ally is now on notice that US promises – even if based on US interests – are not reliable. American commitments can expire the next time America elects a radical to the White House.

Americans uninterested in surrendering their role as global leader to the likes of Tehran's ayatollahs, Russia's KGB state and Mao's successors, must take immediate steps mitigate the damage Obama is causing. Congress could step in to clip his radical wings.

If enough Democrats can be convinced to break ranks with Obama and the Democratic Party's donors, Congress can pass veto-proof additional sanctions against Iran. These sanctions can only be credible with America's spurned allies if they do not

contain any presidential waiver that would empower Obama to ignore the law.

They can also take action to limit Obama's ability to blackmail Israel, a step that is critical to the US's ability to rebuild its international credibility.

For everyone from Anwar Sadat to South American democrats, for the past 45 years, America's alliance with Israel was a central anchor of American strategic credibility. The sight of America standing with the Jewish state, in the face of a sea of Arab hatred, is what convinced doubters worldwide that America could be trusted.

America's appalling betrayal of Jerusalem under Obama likewise is the straw that has broken the back of American strategic credibility from Taipei to Santiago. If Congress is interested in rectifying or limiting the damage, it could likewise remove the presidential waiver that enables Obama to continue to finance the PLO despite its involvement in terrorism and continued commitment to Israel's destruction. Congress could also remove the presidential waiver from the law requiring the State Department to move the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Finally, Congress can update its anti-boycott laws to cover new anti-Israel boycotts and economic sanctions against the Jewish state and Jewish-owned Israeli companies.

These steps will not fully restore America's credibility. After all, the twice-elected president of the United States has dispatched his secretary of state to threaten and deceive US allies while surrendering to US foes. It is now an indisputable fact that the US government may use its power to undermine its own interests and friends worldwide.

What these congressional steps can do, however, is send a message to US allies and adversaries alike that Obama's radical actions do not represent the wishes of the American people and will not go unanswered by their representatives in Congress.

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.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“It was at that time that Judah went down from his brothers.” (Beresheet 38:1)

The two parashiyot of Vayesheb and Mikess tell the story of Yosef being sold to Egypt and his subsequent rise to power as second in command to Pharaoh. Hanukah always coincides with the Shabbat on which we read either Vayesheb or Mikess, or both. Let us study our perashah which has a profound lesson for us in relation to Hanukah.

In our perashah we read how after the brothers had sold Yosef into slavery, Judah married a Canaanite woman and had three sons. His first two sons died, because of their sins, and then shortly thereafter his wife died. The Seforno explains that Judah was made to suffer in this way as a father, because of the grief he had caused his own father, Jacob, by instigating the plan to sell Yosef to the Ishmaelites.

This is strange, when we read what actually happened, for Judah's proposal to sell Yosef was a device to save Yosef's life. In fact, later on (49:8), when Jacob is blessing his sons and predicting the royal destiny of the house of Judah, his words are interpreted by Rashi as praising him for saving Yosef's life. How can we reconcile these two

viewpoints? Was Judah being bad or good in instigating the sale of Yosef to save his life?

The answer is given by Rashi (38:1) that it was both. Of course he did a good deed in saving his brother's life. But his great sin was in trying to judge how far his brothers would be willing to listen to him and how much he should compromise on his position accordingly. We should never limit anyone on how far one is willing to go. Judah felt they wouldn't listen to him to free Yosef completely, and so he calculated a compromise and sold him. He limited the brothers' ability to rise to the challenge. Do not underestimate others, especially a Rabbi about a kahal, or do that to yourself.

On Hanukah, every Jew, no matter what his level is, can connect with Hashem.

A delegation once went to the Chozeh of Lublin to pour out their hearts about a vicious Jewish informer. They entered the Rebbe's room with a small piece of paper on which they had written their terrible suffering as well as the full name of the informer. The Rebbe read the paper carefully and said, "This person is illuminating all the worlds." They were baffled and asked the Rebbe's assistant how to proceed. "Go in to the Rebbe again," he advised. The next morning they went in with a paper identical to the first one. He read it carefully. "Now I see everything. Last night, at the exact moment I read the paper, the informer was probably lighting the Hanukah lights, and no matter how low, when he lights he illuminates the very heavens"

We need to stop and internalize the message and ponder the fact that we too light up the heavens when we light the Menorah. Do not underestimate your greatness. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

After Yosef was sold into slavery, the brothers, led by Yehudah, sent Yosef's multi-colored coat, dipped in goat's blood, to their father. They asked him "tb rfv, Recognize if you please, if this is your son's coat." Later on, when Tamar sent the staff and the ring belonging to her father-in-law, Yehudah, she also said to him these same words, "tb rfv, Recognize please if these are yours (so it shall be known that I conceived from you)." The Rabbis tell us that Yehudah was punished vsn sdbf vsn, measure for measure. He used words which caused anguish to his father and Tamar used these very words which caused him embarrassment. The concept of measure for measure is indeed very powerful, and is one of the ways by which Hashem's Providence is shown throughout all the generations. If we study this perashah well, we will see that what Yosef did to his brothers was also done to him, measure for measure.

When the Jewish people were lax in the service of the Temple in the times of the Syrian-Greeks, they lost the privilege of service in the Bet Hamikdash. When the Hashmonaim showed sacrifice and went above nature to rededicate the Temple service, Hashem also went above nature and gave us the military miracle and the miracle of the lamps lasting eight days.

We have to know that this is the way Hashem works, measure for measure. This should encourage us and inspire us to do the correct things and not do something against Hashem or against other people, because the element of measure for measure is always active. May we be privileged to see the Hand of Hashem for only good things. Shabbat Shalom and Happy Hanukah. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

PEACEFUL WATERS

The benefit of water to human health is an oft-discussed and rarely debated issue. Drinking about eight glasses a day will keep your body clean and remedy the effect of many toxins you will ingest in the food you eat and the air you breathe.

There was once a couple who constantly argued. Their relationship was stressful not only for themselves, but also for their children. At the advice of a concerned friend, they went to see a Rabbi who seemed to have a talent for bringing peace even to the most difficult of domestic battle zones.

The husband and wife were both pretty surprised when, after patiently listening to their emotional tirades about their respective spouses, the Rabbi reached for a large bottle of water and said, "This is Shalom Bayit water and is the answer to all of your problems."

"How can water solve the deep differences between us?" asked the curious wife.

"It is quite simple," replied the Rabbi. "You both have short tempers and a definite knack for pouring fuel on the fire. What I humbly suggest is that the next time you are ready to scream back at your spouse, take a mouthful of water and hold it in your mouth for a full ten seconds before swallowing."

We all know people who can get on our nerves and ruin an otherwise pleasant day. Keep a bottle of water handy in your "battle zones" – the office, the car, the dinner table. Next time you are about to lose your temper, fill your mouth with water and hold it for ten seconds. This will undoubtedly be the healthiest drink you will ever swallow. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

COMPLETING THE VICTORY

"After that Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleaned Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary." (Al Hanisim)

Why did the Rabbis who authored this prayer include the two words "v'achar kach – and after that," which seem to be superfluous?

For a moment let us picture the situation: We find a might army ready to do battle with the people of Israel, who are absolutely unprepared militarily. They possess neither the numbers nor the arms to prevail against the enemy. We can imagine what took place when a man left his home to go to the battlefield, knowing his side was outnumbered and unprepared to win the war. His family, of course, is broken-hearted. His wife, children, brothers and sisters bid farewell to the young man with trepidation, not knowing whether or not they would see him alive again.

Finally the battle takes place and a miracle occurs. The tide is turned. Instead of the many being victorious over the few, the mighty over the weak, it is the other way around. Matityahu's sons and the Hashmonaim armies are victorious and win the war. Now, it stands to reason that the first reaction from the soldiers should be to immediately rush back home and tell their families that they are alive, safe and sound.

However, it wasn't so. After winning the war, these men first went to the Holy Temple to rid it of impurities, reestablish its sanctity and try to bring back the G-dly light of the Menorah. Therefore, our Rabbis tell us "v'achar kach – and after that" – i.e. after it was over – they did not run home to their families and bring them the good tidings. No, they first went to the Holy Temple, for they knew that winning a physical battle wasn't everything. They felt that until the House of Hashem was put in order, their victory was not complete. Our Rabbis wanted to impress upon us that these men who went out to battle realized that the greatest accomplishment would be to put the House of Hashem back in order. And this was the first obligation they proceeded to fulfill immediately after claiming victory. (Vedibarta Bam)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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"Don't Bother Me With the Facts"

Differences of opinion are part of life. No two people think exactly alike, and thus in any relationship there will be times when the two parties will disagree. A verse in Parashat Vayesheb provides us with a simple and important lesson how to ensure that valid differences of opinion remain respectable and civil and do not deteriorate into hostility.

Parashat Vayesheb tells of the tension between Yosef and his brothers. Our Sages explained that this

was not a childish fight among siblings. Far from it. These were great men, and the issue involved serious halachic matters. Yosef suspected his brothers of grave violations, which he reported to his father, and the brothers, knowing the allegations were not true, determined that Yosef posed a threat. This is what led them to the drastic measure of selling him as a slave.

We read in the Torah that on that fateful day when Yosef came to check on his brothers at his father's behest, "They say him from afar, and before he drew near them they conspired against him to kill him" (37:18). The decision to eliminate Yosef was made specifically "before he drew near them," when the brothers "saw him from afar." This is a phenomenon with which we are all familiar – people stick to their decisions and say, "Don't bother me with the facts." Quite often, once we've made up our minds, we stick to our decisions and block out any information which might convince us we're wrong. We don't have the patience to be "bothered with the facts." We want to enjoy the comfort of knowing our minds our made up, and thus stay away from any counterarguments. Yosef's brothers made up their minds about him without waiting for him to approach and give his side of the story. And thus the tensions resulted in tragedy. If they had been a bit more patient and open-minded, they would not have reached their verdict "before he drew near." They would have waited to hear all the facts.

Usually, when people are not interested in hearing the facts, this is the clearest indication that their arguments are weak. If we are confident in our decision, the facts would not "bother" us. If we fear they will be a "bother," then it must be that our decisions were made prematurely. And if this is the case, then we can only benefit from hearing the other side of the argument, as it will help us arrive at the truth, which must always be our ultimate goal.

This is one of the invaluable everyday-life lessons that we can and should learn from the tragic story of Mechirat Yosef. Disagreements within families and communities are inevitable, but the complete breakdown of relationships is not. When we do find ourselves in disagreement, it is crucial to wait until the other party "draws near," to hear the other side of the argument and consider all sides of the issue before arriving at a final decision.

Rabbi Wein Yaakov and the Land of Canaan

The Torah parsha begins with the simple narrative statement that Yaakov settled and "dwelled in the land of the sojourn of his forefathers, the Land of Canaan." That last clause in that sentence – the Land of Canaan – seems to be superfluous. We are already well aware from the previous parshiyot of Bereshith that Avraham and Yitzchak dwell in the Land of Canaan. Since every word and phrase in the Torah demands our attention and study, the commentators to Torah throughout the ages examined this issue and proposed a number of different lessons and insights.

I believe that the lessons for our time from these words that open our parsha are eerily relevant. Yaakov is forced to live in a hostile environment. The story of the assault on Dina and the subsequent violence and bloodshed between Yaakov's family and the Canaanites serves as the backdrop to this type of life that living in the Land of Canaan entails.

Yaakov is living in a bad neighborhood, amongst many who wish him and his family ill. He is forced to rely on the sword of Shimon and Levi to survive but that is not to his liking or ultimate life purpose. The Land of Canaan is not hospitable to him and his worldview.

The Philistine kings who wished to kidnap and enslave his mother and grandmother are still around or at least their cloned successors are. At the funeral of his father at the Cave of Machpela he must have ruefully mused as to how his grandfather was forced to pay such an exorbitant price for a burial plot.

The Land of Canaan had many unpleasant associations connected to it for Yaakov to contemplate: a king's ransom to Eisav, a rock for a pillow, and crippling encounters with an anonymous foe. All of this and more was his lot in the Land of Canaan.

So what is Yaakov's stubborn attachment to living in the Land of Canaan? Why does he believe that he will be able to eventually dwell there in serenity and security? The answer to these issues is that he realized that this was the land of his ancestors and that the Lord had entered into a covenant with them to grant them that land.

Now it could be that it is called the Land of Canaan but eternally it would be called after his name, the Land of Israel. The land would know many populations and rulers but that would never change

its eternal nature of being the Land of Israel. The land is home for Yaakov – the land of his past and his future. It is what binds him to his great ancestral heritage and mission - and he will demand to be buried there as well.

Yaakov overlooks the difficulties and challenges inherent in the Land of Canaan because he lives not only in its geographic confines but rather in the ideal land of his forefathers – in a land of Godly revelation and holy purpose. Yaakov will undergo much more pain and suffering in the Land of Canaan before he returns there in final tranquility. But his descendants, the Jewish people will always know it to be the land of their fathers, the Land of Israel.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

Reuben is the leader who might have been but never was. He was Jacob's firstborn. Jacob says of him on his deathbed, "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power" (Gen. 49: 3). This is an impressive tribute, suggesting physical presence and commanding demeanour.

More significantly, in their early years Reuben consistently appears to be the most morally sensitive of Jacob's children. He was Leah's son, and keenly felt his mother's disappointment that she was not Jacob's favourite. Here is the first description of him as a child:

During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. (Gen. 30: 14)

Mandrakes were thought to be an aphrodisiac. Reuben knew this and immediately thought of his mother. It was a touching gesture but it misfired because he presented them to Leah in the presence of Rachel and unintentionally caused an argument between them.

The next episode in which we see Reuben is far more tragic: Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem) ... While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept [vayishkav] with his father's concubine Bilhah ... (Gen. 35: 22)

If understood literally this would amount to a major sin. Sleeping with your father's concubine was not only a sexual crime; it was an unforgivable act of treason and betrayal, as we discover later in Tanakh.

Absalom decides to rebel against his father David and replace him as king. Ahitophel gives him the following advice:

"Sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute." (2 Samuel 16:21)

According to the sages (Shabbat 55a-b), the text about Reuben is not to be understood literally. After Rachel died, Jacob had moved his bed to the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. This, felt Reuben, was an intolerable humiliation for his mother. It was hard for Leah to bear the fact that Jacob loved her sister more. It would have been altogether unbearable for her to discover that he even preferred Rachel's handmaid. So Reuben moved Jacob's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's. The verb *vayishkav* should therefore be translated not as "slept with" but "changed the sleeping arrangement."

At this point, however, the text does a strange thing. It says, "Reuben went in and slept with (or changed the sleeping arrangement of) his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it ..." and then signals a paragraph break in the middle of the sentence. The sentence ends: "Jacob had twelve sons." This is very rare indeed. What it suggests is an audible silence. Communication had completely broken down between Jacob and Reuben. If the sages are correct in their interpretation, then this is one of the greatest tragedies in the whole of Genesis. Jacob clearly believed that Reuben had slept with his concubine Bilhah. He cursed him for it on his deathbed:

Unstable as water, you will not excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it. (Gen. 49: 4)

Yet according to the sages this did not happen. Had Jacob been willing to speak to Reuben he would have discovered the truth, but Jacob grew up in a family that lacked open, candid communication (see *Covenant and Conversation Toledot*). Thus for years Reuben was suspected by his father of a sin he had not committed – all because he cared about the feelings of his mother.

Which brings us to the third episode, the most tragic of all. Jacob favoured Joseph, son of his beloved Rachel, and the other brothers knew it. When he gave Joseph a visible sign of favouritism, the richly embroidered cloak, the brothers resented it yet more. When Joseph began to have dreams of the rest of the family bowing down to them, the brothers'

animosity reached boiling point. When they were far from home, tending the flocks, and Joseph appeared in the distance, their hatred made them decide, there and then, to kill him. Reuben alone resisted:

When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father. (Gen. 37: 21-22)

Reuben's plan was simple. He persuaded the brothers not to kill Joseph but rather to let him die by leaving him in a pit to starve. He intended to return later, when the brothers have moved on, to rescue him. When he returned, however, Joseph was no longer there. He had been sold as a slave. Reuben was devastated.

Three times Reuben tried to help but despite his best intentions, his efforts failed. He was responsible for the one recorded quarrel between Leah and Rachel. His father wrongly suspected him of a major sin and cursed him on his deathbed. He failed to save Joseph. Reuben knew what is the right thing to do, but somehow lacked the confidence or courage to carry it through to completion. He should have waited to give Leah the mandrakes when she was alone. He should have remonstrated with his father about his sleeping arrangements. He should have physically taken Joseph safely back home.

What happened to Reuben to make him lack confidence? The Torah gives a poignant and unmistakable hint. Listen to these verses describing the birth of Leah's (and Jacob's) first three children:

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. (Gen. 29: 32-33)

Both times, it was Leah not Jacob who names the child – and both names were a cry to Jacob to notice her and love her – if not for herself then at least because she has given him children. Jacob evidently did not notice.

Reuben became what he became because – so the text seems to imply – his father's attention was

elsewhere; he did not care for either Leah or her sons (the text itself says, "the Lord saw that Leah was not loved"). Reuben knew this and felt intensely his mother's shame and his father's apparent indifference.

People need encouragement if they are to lead. It is fascinating to contrast the hesitant Reuben with the confident, even over-confident Joseph, loved and favoured by his father. If we want our children to have the confidence to act when action is needed, then we have to empower, encourage and praise them.

There is a fascinating Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers (Avot 2: 10-11):

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh. He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.

Why does the Mishnah, whose aim is to teach us lasting truths, give us this apparently trivial account of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's pupils and what he used to call them? The answer, I believe, is that the Mishnah is telling us how to raise disciples, how to be a coach, mentor and guide: by focused praise.

The Mishnah does not simply say that Yochanan ben Zakkai said good things about his students. It uses an unusual locution: "He used to count [moneh] their praise," meaning, his positive remarks were precise and accurately targeted. He told each of his disciples what their specific strength was.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus had an outstanding memory. At a time when the oral law was not yet written down, he could recall the teachings of the tradition better than anyone else. Elazar ben Arakh was creative, able to come up with an endless stream of fresh interpretations. When we follow our particular passions and gifts, we contribute to the world what only we can give.

However, the fact that we may have an exceptional gift may also mean that we have conspicuous deficiencies. No one has all the strengths. Sufficient if we have one. But we must also know what we lack.

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus became so fixated on the past that he resisted change even when it was decided on

by the majority of his colleagues. Eventually he was excommunicated for failing to accept his colleagues' ruling (Baba Metzia 59b).

Elazar ben Arakh's fate was even sadder. After the death of Yohanan ben Zakkai, he separated from his colleagues. They went to Yavneh; he went to Hamat (Emmaus). It was a pleasant place to live and it was where his wife's family lived. Apparently he was so confident of his intellectual gifts that he believed he could maintain his scholarship by himself. Eventually he forgot everything he had ever learned (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 14: 6). The man more gifted than his contemporaries eventually died while making almost no lasting contribution to the tradition.

There is a delicate balance between the neglect that leads to someone to lack the confidence to do the necessary deed, and the excessive praise or favoritism that creates overconfidence and the belief that you are better than others. That balance is necessary if we are to be the sunlight that helps others grow.

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 un-dreamed 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 Isaac and Abraham 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 (see 31:38) 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 by prospering the efforts of a conscientious man that:

- A. Fears G-d (as in 39:9) & "It is G-d whom I fear" (42:18)
- B. Possesses good character (as Joseph demonstrated by showing concern for the other prisoners in jail)
- C. Must have Energy in order to accomplish (Joseph was a leader in all stages of his life)

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