

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYESHEB

Haftarah: Amos 2:6-3:8

DECEMBER 8-9, 2017 21 KISLEV 5778

Hanukah begins on Tuesday night, December 12 and ends on Tuesday, December 19.**DEDICATION: Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther**

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EDITORS NOTES

We had a great class tonight at Safra. If you're in the City, please join us on Wednesdays at 6:00PM

From the Archives/ 5776 - PURPOSE

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

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

My mind was drawn to a story in the Talmud about Honi HaMaagal – Honi was a miracle worker and the Talmud tells stories of Honi overcoming nature and negotiating with G-d as a partner might with his partner. His name HaMaagal or the circle drawer is

from one of those miraculous stories. And in that moment in the quiet hospital room, I could actually hear Rabbi Abittan quoting from the Talmud. This is probably the origin of the Rip Van Winkle story.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But in this hospital room, thinking of this very special man who although almost twice my age was my friend, who had told me on more than one occasion that he “had my back”. When someone has your back, they are there to support you unconditionally. When life seems to blindside you with undesirable events, they’re there for you without complaint, supporting you in your moment of need, not for their own selfish, self-gratifying reasons, but because your wellbeing to them is foremost in their mind and heart. My friend David shown this quality of having my back more than once and very publicly.

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

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

Honi didn’t need a learning partner. He needed to feel a part of the new world he woke up in and find a purpose. He couldn’t.

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

It took sitting in a hospital room with a sleeping centenarian to remind me of this.

Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi

American Jews: Look in the mirror

There are some unpleasant facts and bitter truths about a large component of Diaspora Jews that are being swept under the carpet.

The reality is that many of those who classify themselves as Jews live in an environment in which being Jewish has become associated with endorsing a meaningless universalism dominated by liberal mumbo jumbo.

An ever-increasing number of American Jews in this category describe themselves as secular but they lack the cultural and national characteristics of their secular predecessors who rejected religion but in most cases retained a national identity. Having said that, some of their secular predecessors were Bundists, and until the creation of Israel, most American Jews were non-Zionist.

Today’s middle-aged Jews grew up in a postwar world where anti-Semitism was receding and many concluded that it was becoming extinct. The generation born between 1950 to 1980 was not exposed to the vicious anti-Semitism that their parents endured in the prewar era. In addition, with the passage of time, the horror of the Holocaust and what it implied for the Jewish people has become a dim statistical historical memory rather than a collective experience. This generation of American Jews never experienced the pre-State of Israel feeling of powerlessness.

This was further accelerated by the decline of Jewish education, with most youngsters not having even a rudimentary knowledge of their Jewish heritage or culture.

The greatest factor affecting today’s Jews is the massive acculturation that has taken place due to the open society in which they live, where, in contrast to the past, prejudice does not inhibit intermarriage. Today it is estimated that over 70% of non-Orthodox Jews intermarry – an astronomical figure. Surveys

show that the vast majority of children of intermarried couples are hardly conscious of their Jewish identity. The relevance of Israel as a haven from persecution simply does not resonate today as it did to previous Jewish generations. According to a recent Pew survey, only 43% of American Jewish youth have visited Israel and as many as 31% said that they had no attachment to Israel.

We must therefore acknowledge that a substantial and growing proportion of American Jews cannot be relied upon for support, and for many younger Jews, concern for Israel's security has become a low priority.

Indeed, for some, displaying an anti-Israel attitude is considered chic and a means of socially integrating into the liberal community where opposition to Israel is required for eligibility. This has led some Jews, utterly ignorant of their heritage, to express their Jewish identity by attacking Israel and becoming darlings of anti-Israel agitators on college campuses and in the left-wing media.

This disturbing trend was accelerated by then-U.S. President Barack Obama, who created a rift between many of his Jewish supporters and Israel. They remained silent while he treated Israel like a rogue state and fawned over Iran.

Today, a considerable number of Jewish students choose to identify with Black Lives Matter or endorse terrorist-sympathizers like Linda Sarsour as preferable to supporting Israel. Some even prattle about keeping all Jews in the "big tent" and justify dialogue with anti-Israel Jews and those who actively campaign for the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

Taglit-Birthright Israel has somewhat ameliorated this situation but the tragedy is that in order to curry favor with the Left, both the Conservative and Reform Jewish leaderships have been heading the charge against Israel on a host of secondary political issues. When Donald Trump was elected president, the Jewish progressive establishment lost all sense of proportion and reacted with utter hysteria. In addition to its unprecedented bitter partisan campaign against his administration, it intensified its attacks against the elected Israeli government by accusing it of being extremist and promoting fascist legislation.

The issue climaxed when, to save his government, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu capitulated to pressure from haredim and rescinded an earlier deal that approved egalitarian prayer at a designated area at the Western Wall. Even though 60% of Reform and 40% of Conservative Jews had never visited Israel and most of them were utterly indifferent toward mixed-gender prayer at the Wall, the progressive leaders fanned the flames of hysteria over this issue and effectively declared war on the Israeli government, demanding that it reinstate the

deal – some even threatening to boycott the Jewish state.

With Netanyahu facing immense pressures from all sides, one would expect responsible Diaspora Jewish leaders to display understanding of his predicament and not declare war over an issue that most of their constituents are completely uninterested in – as are most Israelis who put up with far greater irritations from extremist haredi politicians that impact on their lives. Regardless, the majority still prefer Netanyahu to act as their leader rather than any other politician. The issue was further polarized when Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely inelegantly told the truth of what has hitherto been considered politically incorrect to express. The outcry against her reached hysterical levels with demands for her dismissal and allegations that, by telling the truth, she was promoting anti-Semitism. Hotovely was expressing facts, but even if she was merely conveying an opinion, she is surely entitled to do so.

American Jews live a life so different from their Israeli kinsmen that most of them – other than those with close family in Israel – cannot possibly appreciate or identify with the challenges confronting us. They are not surrounded by enemies calling for their annihilation; they do not experience the threat of frequent terrorism; and in the absence of conscription, only a miniscule number of Jews serve in the armed forces, in contrast to Israelis who are drafted to the IDF and who often face life-and-death situations.

Progressive American Jewish leaders behave with no restraint and feel free to publicly condemn Israel and criticize the policies of its democratically elected government despite being aware of the immense, even existential threats it is facing. But when Israelis say anything uncomplimentary about American Jewry, progressives immediately accuse them of destroying the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. The hypocrisy is offensive and it is time for us to stop pandering to these groups that are far more concerned about establishing their bona fides within the far-left liberal community than backing Israel.

But even setting aside our contrasting lifestyles, American Jews would do well to look in the mirror and moderate their triumphalist manner. Despite proclaiming their pride of residing in the "goldene medina" and claiming to be the most influential minority in America, they have not been able to stem the extraordinary rise of anti-Israelism and anti-Semitism among leftists and liberals. With all their wealth and huge scholarship endowments, they have failed catastrophically on the campuses, many of which have been transformed by Muslims and leftists into centers of hatred, promoting anti-Israeli agitation and anti-Semitism.

The truth is that much as we seek the support of all Diaspora Jews, an ever-increasing number of people in non-Orthodox American Jewish communities are so utterly ignorant of their heritage that they simply feel no empathy for Israel.

We should therefore concentrate on the Orthodox and committed Jews whose support for Israel has never waned and many of whom are engaged in Israel advocacy programs. At the same time, we must be aware that despite their leaders, there are many Reform and Conservative Jews who remain loyal and committed to Israel and we must encourage and support them.

We should concentrate on our real supporters – and emissaries from diverse backgrounds should be handpicked for either strengthening the committed or trying to educate those who define themselves as Jewish but are in fact ignorant of their Jewish heritage.

We should cease referring to American Jews as a group and distinguish between those for whom Israel is a priority and the many “Jews” whose Judaism is based on liberal stances including supporting positions hostile to Israel.

We should also stop prostrating ourselves to those who publicly attack us. Many of the “leaders” would reconsider their attitudes if they knew that when they visited Israel, they would be politely ignored by the establishment.

The time has come to stop cringing when these fringe Jews abuse us and concentrate our efforts on offering greater support to those actively promoting our cause.

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Via Philip Rosen

Summary of the Parasha Nathan Dweck

In this week's parasha we begin the story of Yosef and the brothers. The pesookim tell that Yosef was Yaakov's favorite child. Perek 37, pasook 4, tells us "the brothers saw Yosef was the favorite and they hated him ve'lo yochlu dabero le'shalom (and they were unable to speak with him peacefully)". And if we analyze closely the words of the pasook we can learn an important lesson. The pasook tells us that because the brothers hated Yosef they were "unable" to speak peacefully with him. And I saw from Rav Hirsch that because they hated Yosef so even the things he did with friendly intentions they interpreted as negative. And this is so true in our lives as well. When we don't like someone we don't give them the benefit of the doubt and we interpret the things they do as negative even when they are not so. We are blinded by our negative feelings. And those negative feelings just continue to build as we continue to see

the things they do toward us as being done with negative intentions. And at that point, once we don't like the person, it is nearly impossible to treat the person the way we should be treating him. We are “unable” to speak with them peacefully. It becomes so hard not to react in a harsh tone with them. It becomes so hard not to get constantly frustrated from the things they do. And further when we are not nice to them so they in turn are not nice to us. And this ruins our happiness. But a person who loves others sees the things people do as good and they in turn live a happier life. A life where they are able to treat others well and for the most part others do the same in return.

Va'yesheb - The brothers sell Yosef

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

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“Yehudah recognized and he said, “She is more righteous than me” (Bereshet 38:26)

Once a group of people representing another town came to visit the Chafetz Chaim. They came to ask for his help on a very important spiritual matter. They also asked that he come personally to their town to resolve the problem. Even though he was very old, the Chafetz Chaim was known to extend himself for the sake of the people.

Since the town was not so far, it was assumed he would go right away. However, a long time passed and he did not go. It seemed that he forgot all about it. Suddenly one day, right after shul, he went to the nearest wagonmaster and hired him to take him right away. He went to the town and came back three days later. When he got back, people asked him where he went in such a rush.

He revealed that he went to that town and hadn't forgotten for a moment to go. However he couldn't go all this time because there was a problem. The Rav of the town was someone he didn't want to visit (presumably the local Rabbi either didn't conduct himself in an appropriate matter, or perhaps had inaccurate views on hashgachah). “However,” the Chafetz Chaim said, “if I came to his town without

paying him a visit, it would cause him to be embarrassed in front of his community. Therefore, despite the great importance of the issue, I decided not to travel to the town at all. Three days ago, I happened to hear that the Rav had left for his summer vacation. Once I knew that the Rav was not at home, I could no longer delay my journey even by an hour. I hired the first wagon driver I saw to take me there. Baruch Hashem, I was successful in rectifying the matter."

This week our Sages teach us from Tamar that "it is preferable for a person to throw himself into a fiery furnace rather than let his friend's face turn pale from shame in public." Tamar had very powerful reasons to take a different course. It was a matter of life and death and the future of the Jewish people, since one of her children was the ancestor of King David. But she chose not to embarrass Yehudah.

From the story of the Chafetz Chaim we see it's not only for mundane matters that this rule applies. Sometimes when there is a spiritual obligation, it must not be done to spare a person's shame. At times a synagogue needs to take a certain step to make the people happy. Their happiness takes a back seat to someone's shame. Rabbi Reuven Semah

Yosef was faced with a tremendous test. The wife of his master, Potifar, tried continuously to get him to sin. Here he was, sold by his brothers and taken to a foreign country. He had nowhere to turn for help, and yet he was still able to pass the test. As we know he suffered the consequences by being thrown in jail for ten years. To the casual observer, it would seem unfair that he should get such a severe punishment after battling the yeser hara and passing such a difficult test. Where is the reward for his great accomplishment?

Our Rabbis teach us that the reward was very great, but it came at a much later time. We say in Hallel הַלֵּל וְנִסְיָאָהּ – "the sea saw and fled" and Hazal teach that this refers to the Yam Suf, which split when it saw the bones of Yosef being brought out of Egypt. The Jewish nation had not been worthy for the sea to split on their behalf, but due to the zechut of Yosef who went against his natural desires, the sea also went against its nature and split, allowing the Jews to pass through.

We see that even though the reward for our misvot may not be evident, and sometimes it may even look like things became worse after we made sacrifices to uphold the Torah, we don't see the whole picture. Hashem is trustworthy to give everyone their full reward for their actions, and we just need to be patient. The zechut is being stored for the proper moment, and it could be that it will be needed one day to save the entire nation! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Keep Your Shoes On

The Torah in Parashat Vayesheb tells the story of "Mechirat Yosef"—the sale of Yosef as a slave by his brothers. The brothers, we read, sold Yosef to Yishmaelite merchants for a price of twenty coins. Curiously, the Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel commentary to this verse adds a seemingly trivial point to this story, relating that the brothers took the money they received for Yosef and purchased shoes.

Why did this need to be mentioned? What difference does it make to us if the brothers used the money for shoes or for some other commodity?

The question is magnified when we consider the Haftara portion selected for this Parasha, a prophecy from the Book of Amos. Different explanations have been given for the connection between this prophecy and Parashat Vayesheb, but according to one view, the connection relates to the very first verse of the prophecy, in which G-d warns that He will punish Beneh Yisrael "for selling a righteous person for money; a poor man for shoes." Some commentators explain this as a reference to the brothers' selling Yosef for shoes.

Once again, we must wonder, why is this important? What is the significance of the fact that the money received from the sale went toward shoes?

The work Pelah Harimon explains that ever since the sin of Adam and Hava, when G-d cursed the ground, there is a force of impurity that emanates from the ground. If one stands barefoot directly on the ground, he exposes himself to this force. Thus, for example, the Sages teach that the sorcerers in Egypt were able to perform their magic only while standing barefoot on the ground, which enabled them to access this force of impurity. Yaakob's sons saw that unlike in the generations of Abraham and Yishak, each of whom had one wicked son (Yishmael, Esav), they were all righteous. They thus initially figured that the forces of impurity had finally been eliminated from the world, and they could thus walk barefoot without fear of direct exposure to the ground. But then they saw the way Yosef conducted himself, and they concluded that he was like Esav in the previous generation and Yishmael and in the generation before that – that he was an impure son, demonstrating that the forces of impurity still existed. And thus at the time of the sale of Yosef they realized that they had to purchase shoes to serve as a buffer between them and the ground, in order to protect themselves from the forces of impurity.

There is, however, an even deeper level to the significance of the shoes. Beneh Yisrael spent 210 years as slaves in Egypt, and miraculously, nobody intermarried. The Torah speaks of one woman who acted in a slightly flirtatious manner and had an encounter with an Egyptian man, but otherwise, Beneh Yisrael did not engage in relationships with the Egyptians for over two centuries. To put this into proper perspective, Jews have been living in the United States in large numbers for far less than two centuries, and millions of Jews, tragically, have already fallen to intermarriage and assimilation. The fact that Beneh Yisrael existed in Egypt without intermarrying for such an extended period is truly miraculous. This was made possible by Yosef, who paved the way for their separateness by refusing the advances of Potifar's wife. When he withstood temptation and overcame his Yeser Hara, he generated a powerful surge of Kedusha into the promiscuous, corrupt environment of Egypt, which empowered Beneh Yisrael to resist temptation and avoid intermarriage. It was Yosef who paved the way for Beneh Yisrael's spiritual and ethnic survival in Egypt by refusing Potifar's wife, whereby he created a powerful force of holiness that had a profound effect upon Beneh Yisrael for 210 years.

We can now begin to understand the deeper significance of the shoes purchased by Yosef's brothers after his sale. Often, an act done by a Sadik in this world triggers a spiritual effect in the heavens. When the brothers purchased shoes to protect themselves from the forces of impurity emanating from the ground, they unknowingly triggered a "blockade" that protected Yosef from the impurity of Egypt. Their placement of shoes resulted in a protective shield that guarded Yosef from the corrupt influences of Egypt, thus enabling him to resist the temptation of Potifar's wife. And this is why these shoes are so significant. Without them, there would be no Exodus, and, in fact, there would be no Am Yisrael. The brothers' purchase of shoes set in motion a process which would eventually serve to protect their descendants from assimilation in Egypt, thereby ensuring the survival of the Jewish people.

One practical lesson we may perhaps learn from this insight is the urgent need for "shoes" to protect us in our exile, in our generation. We live in a society characterized by immorality and permissiveness, whose culture is ever so pervasive and all-encompassing. Most of us wear on our belts devices that grant us access to both the holiest texts, but also the lowest depths of depravity. We need protection from the impurity that bombards us from all sides. And the "shoes" that we need to wear to block these forces are Torah study, classes, and the books and

discourses of Musar that inspire us and reinforce our religious commitment. In our generation, more than ever before, we need to wear these "shoes" at all times and try to never take them off, so we can retain our stature of purity and not fall prey to the powerful forces of spiritual contamination that abound.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
THE UN AND ISRAEL**

The state of Israel and the United Nations have a long and tortured history in dealing one with the other. Some seventy years ago the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution that became the basis in international terms for the creation of Israel. The United Nations thereby became the godfather of the Jewish state.

It was an unlikely combination of diplomacy and circumstance that allowed this to happen. The adoption of the partition plan for Palestine in 1947 was practically the only major issue upon which both the United States and much of the Western world combined with the Soviet Union and its satellite nations. The Arab world denounced that resolution and attempted a number of times to reverse its adoption by war and violence.

The story of how the resolution was adopted and how many countries were swayed to vote for it has been told in many books, but no matter how many times this story is told it remains wondrous and even miraculous.

As far as the history of millennia of Jewish existence and human civilization is concerned, that moment when the United Nations General Assembly assented to the creation of the Jewish state became the finest hour for this august body. However, after having parented Israel, the United Nations soon came to treat it as a very unwanted child.

The Moslem world and especially the Soviet Union came to dominate the committees and makeup of the United Nations and turned it into an unrelenting foe and incessant critic of the Jewish state.

Because of the constant enmity expressed by the United Nations organization and its various departments, Israel began to take a very negative view of the entire organization itself. Israel decided

decisions of the United Nations taken against it and always relied on the veto power of the United States in the Security Council of the United Nations to protect it from economic and diplomatic harm.

As in the case of the last days of the Obama administration showed, support for Israel was not always forthcoming, even from the United States. In a truly remarkable zigzag path of diplomacy, negotiation and perseverance, Israel has somehow escaped the worst attempts to delegitimize it.

Everyone is aware that the United Nations, collectively and as an organization, is no friend of Israel. Yet in a strange way, the United Nations has provided Israel with a platform to express and defend itself against its enemies. The United Nations has been useful in ending wars initiated by Arab governments against Israel and has, almost against its own will, allowed Israel to benefit from its military successes and economic creativity.

Winston Churchill summarized the benefits of the United Nations succinctly: "It is better to jaw, jaw, jaw than to war, war, war!" Nevertheless, the unrelenting bias and prejudice against Israel constantly emanating from the United Nations has caused Israel create cost and pain, not to mention territory and human lives. It is truly shameful that Israel occupies so much time, space and attention in the workings of an international body that faces enormous challenges throughout the world.

The decades of Soviet influence in the United Nations, and in fact in much of the Moslem world, have proved devastating to the cause of peace and reconciliation here in the Middle East. The poison of Soviet anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli policies has seeped so deeply into the fabric of the United Nations that the collapse of the Soviet Union itself did not end its nefarious influence in the international scene.

The Moslem world has suffered greatly from the United Nations even though on the surface it has always been supported by that body, both diplomatically and economically. The refugee problem, now about to enter its eighth decade, has been perpetuated by the United Nations and its committees. The United Nations has to a great extent created the Palestinian refugee camps and their unfortunate inhabitants through its unending support for the Arab countries that refused to integrate their own brothers and sisters into their societies.

We cannot really hope for any sort of lasting settlement of this issue as long as the United Nations remains such a biased and provocative part of the

problem. Israel has come a long way in the diplomatic and international world that it is forced to inhabit. Nevertheless, it certainly is wary of the attitudes and resolutions of the United Nations. It helped create Israel but has also attempted numerous times to destroy it as well. Only time will tell whether there will be a change in relations between Israel and the United Nations. I hope it will be for the better but I am not that optimistic.

Rabbi Sacks' statement on the status on Jerusalem

I welcome today's decision by the United States to recognize as the capital of Israel, Jerusalem, whose name means "city of peace." This recognition is an essential element in any lasting peace in the region. Unlike other guardians of the city, from the Romans to the Crusaders to Jordan between 1949 and 1967, Israel has protected the holy sites of all three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam and guaranteed access to them. Today, Jerusalem remains one of the few places in the Middle East, where Jews, Christians and Muslims are able to pray in freedom, security and peace.

The sustained denial, in many parts of the world, of the Jewish connection with Jerusalem is dishonest, unacceptable and a key element in the refusal to recognize the Jewish people's right to exist in the land of their origins. Mentioned over 660 times in the Hebrew Bible, Jerusalem was the beating heart of Jewish faith more than a thousand years before the birth of Christianity, and two-and-a-half millennia before the birth of Islam.

Since then, though dispersed around the world, Jews never ceased to pray about Jerusalem, face Jerusalem, speak the language of Jerusalem, remember it at every wedding they celebrated, in every home they built, and at the high and holiest moments of the Jewish year.

Outside the United Nations building in New York is a wall bearing the famous words of Isaiah: "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." Too often the nations of the world forget the words that immediately precede these: "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Those words, spoken twenty-seven centuries ago, remain the greatest of all prayers for peace, and they remain humanity's best hope for peace in the Middle East and the world.

Improbable Endings and the Defeat of Despair

We live life looking forward but we understand it only looking back.

As we live from day to day, our life can seem like a meaningless sequence of random events, a series of accidents and happenstances that have no shape or inner logic. A traffic jam makes us late for an important meeting. A stray remark we make offends someone in a way we never intended. By a hair's-breadth we fail to get the job we so sought. Life as we experience it can sometimes feel like Joseph Heller's definition of history: "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open in a wind."

Yet looking back, it begins to make sense. The opportunity we missed here led to an even better one there. The shame we felt at our unintentionally offensive remark makes us more careful about what we say in the future. Our failures, seen in retrospect many years later, turn out to have been our deepest learning experiences. Our hindsight is always more perceptive than our foresight. We live life facing the future, but we understand life only when it has become our past.

Nowhere is this set out more clearly than in the story of Joseph in this week's parsha. It begins on a high note: "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age, and he made a richly embroidered robe." But with dramatic speed, that love and that gift turn out to be Joseph's undoing. His brothers began hating him. When he told them his dream, they hated him even more. His second dream offended even his father. Later, when he went to see his brothers tending their flocks, they first plotted to kill him, and eventually sold him as a slave.

At first, in Potiphar's house, he seemed to be favoured by fortune. But then his master's wife tried to seduce him and when he refused her advances she accused him of attempted rape and he was sent to prison with no way of proving his innocence. He seemed to have reached his nadir. There was nowhere lower for him to fall.

Then came an unexpected ray of hope. Interpreting the dream of a fellow prisoner, who had once been Pharaoh's cup-bearer, he predicted his release and return to his former elevated role. And so it happened. Joseph asked only one thing in return: "Remember me when it goes well with you, and please show me kindness: mention me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this place. For I was forcibly taken

from the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing to deserve being put in this pit."

The last line of the parsha is one of the cruelest blows of fate in the Torah: "The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph; he forgot him." Seemingly his one chance of escape to freedom is now lost. Joseph, the beloved son in his magnificent robe has become Joseph, the prisoner bereft of hope. This is as near the Torah gets to Greek tragedy. It is a tale of Joseph's hubris leading, step after step, to his nemesis. Every good thing that happens to him turns out to be only the prelude to some new and unforeseen misfortune.

Yet a mere two years later, at the beginning of next week's parsha, we discover that all this has been leading to Joseph's supreme elevation. Pharaoh makes him Viceroy over Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world. He gives him his own signet ring, has him dressed in royal robes and a gold chain, and has him paraded in a chariot to the acclaim of the crowds. A mere thirty years old, he has become the second most powerful man in the world. From the lowest pit he has risen to dizzying heights. He has gone from zero to hero overnight.

What is stunning about the way this story is told in the Torah is that it is constructed to lead us, as readers, in precisely the wrong direction. Parshat Vayeshev has the form of a Greek tragedy. Mikketz then comes and shows us that the Torah embodies another worldview altogether. Judaism is not Athens. The Torah is not Sophocles. The human condition is not inherently tragic. Heroes are not fated to fall.

The reason is fundamental. Ancient Israel and the Greece of antiquity – the two great influences on Western civilisation – had profoundly different understandings of time and circumstance. The Greeks believed in moira or ananke, blind fate. They thought that the gods were hostile or at best indifferent to humankind, so there was no way of avoiding tragedy if that is what fate had decreed. Jews believed, and still believe, that God is with us as we travel through time. Sometimes we feel as if we are lost, but then we discover, as Joseph did, that He has been guiding our steps all along.

Initially Joseph had flaws in his character. He was vain about his appearance;^[1] he brought his father evil reports about his brothers;^[2] his narcissism led directly to the advances of Potiphar's wife.^[3] But the story of which he was a part was not a Greek tragedy. By its end – the death of Joseph in the final chapter of Genesis – he had become a different human being entirely, one who forgave his brothers

the crime they committed against him, the man who saved an entire region from famine and starvation, the one Jewish tradition calls "the tzaddik."^[4]

Don't think you understand the story of your life at half-time. That is the lesson of Joseph. At the age of twenty-nine he would have been justified in thinking his life an abject failure: hated by his brothers, criticised by his father, sold as a slave, imprisoned on a false charge and with his one chance of freedom gone.

The second half of the story shows us that Joseph's life was not like that at all. His became a tale of unprecedented success, not only politically and materially, but also morally and spiritually. He became the first person in recorded history to forgive. By saving the region from famine, he became the first in whom the promise made by God to Abraham came true: "Through you, all the families of the land will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). There was no way of predicting how the story would end on the basis of the events narrated in parshat Vayeshev. The turning-point in his life was a highly improbable event that could not have been predicted but which changed all else, not just for him but for large numbers of people and for the eventual course of Jewish history. God's hand was at work, even when Joseph felt abandoned by every human being he had encountered.

We live life forward but we see the role of Providence in our lives only looking back. That is the meaning of God's words to Moses: "You will see My back" (Ex. 33:23), meaning, "You will see Me only when you look back."

Joseph's story is a precise reversal of the narrative structure of Sophocles' Oedipus. Everything Laius and his son Oedipus do to avert the tragic fate announced by the oracle in fact brings it closer to fulfilment, whereas in the story of Joseph, every episode that seems to be leading to tragedy turns out in retrospect to be a necessary step to saving lives and the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams.

Judaism is the opposite of tragedy. It tells us that every bad fate can be averted (hence our prayer on the High Holy Days that "penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil decree") – while every positive promise made by God will never be undone.^[5]

Hence the life-changing idea: Despair is never justified. Even if your life has been scarred by misfortune, lacerated by pain, and your chances of happiness seem gone forever, there is still hope. The next chapter of your life can be full of blessings. You can be, in Wordsworth's lovely phrase, "surprised by

joy."

Every bad thing that has happened to you thus far may be the necessary prelude to the good things that are about to happen because you have been strengthened by suffering and given courage by your ability to survive. That is what we learn from the heroes of endurance from Joseph to the Holocaust survivors of today, who kept going, had faith, refused to despair, and were privileged to write a new and different chapter in the book of their lives.

Seen through the eye of faith, today's curse may be the beginning of tomorrow's blessing. That is a thought that can change a life.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 84:7; see Rashi to Gen. 37:2.

[2] Gen. 37:2, and see Bereshit Rabbah 84:7.

[3] Tanhuma, Vayeshev, 8.

[4] Yoma 35b.

[5] Shabbat 55a

Rav Kook on the Perasha The Conflict Between Joseph and Judah

Having overcome the difficult challenges posed by Esau and Laban, Jacob looked forward to more peaceful times. But intense resentment among his sons shattered these wishful hopes, and led to the sale of his favorite son, Joseph, as a slave in Egypt.

How could the brothers sell Joseph, and even consider killing him? Is it possible that they were motivated by petty jealousy over a colorful coat?

Also, is there a connection between the story of Joseph and the holiday that falls out this time of the year — Chanukah?

Integration versus Separation

The root of the disagreement among the brothers was in fact ideological. There were two schools of thought in Jacob's family, one championed by Joseph, the other by Judah. Joseph stressed the mission of the Jewish people as "a light unto the nations." In order to fulfill this goal, Joseph felt that we must interact with the nations of the world and expose them to the monotheistic teachings of Judaism.

Judah, on the other hand, was concerned about the negative influences when intermingling with pagan cultures. He emphasized the separate sanctity of the Jewish people, "a nation that dwells alone" (Num. 23:9). Judah feared that Joseph's philosophy of openness and integration would endanger the future

of the Jewish people. But how to safely neutralize this threat?

Simon and Levy, who had already fought against assimilation when they decimated the city of Shechem for kidnapping Dina, planned to simply kill Joseph. Judah objected, "What profit is there if we kill our brother?" (Gen. 37:26). The true danger is not Joseph, but his school of thought. Let us put his theories to the test. We will sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, and let him assimilate among the nations. Then all will see where his ideas lead to.

The Tabernacle and the Temple

These conflicting views are reflected by the contrast between the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in Shiloh and the Temple in Jerusalem. In Shiloh, offerings could be eaten outside the walls, as long as the city of Shiloh was in sight. Temple offerings, on the other hand, could only be eaten within the Temple walls. Why this difference?

For Joseph, the primary mission was to publicly demonstrate the sanctity of Israel and educate the nations. Thus, the holiness of the Shiloh Tabernacle — in Joseph's portion — spread beyond its walls. The Temple in Jerusalem, however, was located in the land of Judah and followed his view. It is necessary to build walls and restrict the dissemination of Torah, in order to protect the sanctity of the Jewish people.

The Hellenists versus the Hasmonean Priests

The holiday of Chanukah commemorates a similar struggle, the conflict between those seeking integration with the rest of the world, and those striving to preserve the distinct sanctity of the Jewish people. The Hellenistic Jews demanded adoption of Greek customs, the prevalent culture of the day. They claimed to be following Joseph's path of openness. Their slogan was, "Write on the ox horn that you have no share in the God of Israel" (Vayikra Rabbah 13:5). Why an ox horn? This is an allusion to Joseph, who was compared to a powerful ox (Deut. 33:17).

The Hellenists called for the people to continue in Joseph's path of openness and assimilation.

However, they ignored Joseph's underlying goal, to educate the nations. The Hellenists "broke down the walls of my towers." They breached the walls protecting Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, and allowed the idolatrous nations to defile the holy Temple.

The Hasmonean priests, kohanim from the tribe of Levy, naturally followed the path of Judah and Levy, that of separation. As kohanim, they benefited from the special sanctity of priesthood separating them from the rest of the Jewish people. The ultimate victory for the Hasmoneans was the discovery of a ritually clean jar of oil, with the seal of the High Priest intact. This jar of pure oil was a sign that the inner sanctity of Israel remained undefiled by pagan contact.

In the future, the nations will recognize the necessity for the walls of the House of Jacob that separate the Jewish people from the other nations. The nations will accept upon themselves the mitzvot of the Torah, while the entire Jewish people will be elevated to the level of kohanim. Then the Jewish people will relate to the nations of the world in a fashion analogous to the current connection of kohanim to the rest of the Jewish people.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah 10, 5630 (1929))

Rabbi Meyer Laniado **Hanukkah and Qiddush Hashem**

It is the year 166 BCE, and as you sit around the Shabbat table with your family, enjoying your meal, there's a loud knock at the door. You open the door to find Greek soldier's ordering you to worship idols on their altars. They are burning incense at your door, its odor filling your nostrils, and mixing with the aroma of your Friday night dinner. You are stunned, at a loss for what to do next. They have come to your home; you can no longer ignore them. They call out to you by name. They order you to come outside to the town square. There, everyone from the community is standing and watching. They are waiting in anticipation of how you will respond. You walk through the crowd until you see before you a Greek general flanked on both sides by soldiers.

The general addresses you by name as you stand with your family before the assembled community.

"You are a respected leader in this town, and you have the support of your sons and relatives. Be the first to sacrifice to Zeus. If you do, you and your children will be honored with the title of Friends of the King, and you will be rewarded with silver, gold, and many gifts[1]."

How would you respond? Recognize that if you refuse to follow the Greek general's orders to

sacrifice to the Greek god, you are refusing an order of the king, and would surely be put to death. You feel a rush of adrenaline, you feel the blood running through your body, your heart is pounding out of your chest, and you can feel the pulse of the veins in your temples. You know this is a make or break moment, not solely for you, but for your family and all of those watching. If you sacrifice to the Greek god, you will sacrifice all that your forefathers have stood for, but if you do not, you will have signed your own death sentence. What is the decision that you will make? This is exactly the qiddush Hashem scenario, and Mattitiah responds masterfully. He takes the opportunity to make a bold speech before his family and all of the people:

"My children, my relatives, and I will continue to keep the covenant that God made with our ancestors. With God's help, we will never abandon his Law or disobey his commands. We will not obey the king's decree, and we will not change our way of worship in the least[2]."

Mattitiah being a traditional Jew, views the scenario he is in through the eyes of the Tanakh and models Moshe's action at the golden calf. When Moshe saw the nation worshipping the golden calf he took action and proclaimed: "Whoever is for God, come to me[3]." Moshe then directs these Jews to draw their swords and fight against those who have desecrated the name of God by worshiping the golden calf. Similarly, when Mattitiah finishes his speech and a Jew approaches the pagan altar sacrificing a pig to the Greek deity, Mattitiah draws his swords along with the family members who are standing beside him and kill the Jew along with the Greek general and his soldiers. He then proclaims: "If anyone is zealous for the laws of his country, and for the worship of God, follow me![4]" He runs to the hills with his family and all those dedicated to Torah. They prepare themselves to fight, against all the odds, for the freedom to practice Torah and misvot, and reestablish proper worship of God in the Beit haMiqdash.

Mattitiah's response shows that he lives a life focused on sanctifying and glorifying God's name. His life goal is to make God's name distinct and known. This dedication to showing that our God is not like all of the other 'gods,' and serving Him is what our life is about, is the misva deoraita of qiddush Hashem[5]. When challenged to offer a pig to a pagan god, Mattitiah's entire life's purpose is being challenged. If he brings the sacrifice, he has thrown away his entire life, expressing the message that God is just like the other gods. This would be a hillul Hashem, a desecration of the distinctness of God. Mattitiah's

only choice is to fight. Whether he wins or dies during this fight, he has conveyed the message to his children and all those who would hear about him that our God is the only God. That it is God who we live to serve, and that we are willing to put everything, including our life, on the line to achieve the goal of sanctifying His name. The question then is: What do we live for? Is there something we are willing to sacrifice our life for?

We use the expression 'giving it our all,' but in what situation are we willing to? Mattitiah was willing to dedicate his life for the Torah, and he instructs his five sons on his death bed to do the same: "...as to be ready, when it shall be necessary, to die for your laws (Torah)[6]." Mattitiah literally lived for qiddush Hashem, dedicating his life for the glory of God and his laws.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

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

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

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

Had Joseph not asked this question, he would never have been released from prison. No one would have known of his ability to interpret dreams. Pharaoh would never have heard of him and he would not have become a ruler in Egypt. Because he was kindly and had compassion on others, he was moved to inquire in order to soothe their hearts. As a result he became the vice-regent of all Egypt and even more, he became the ruler over the house of Israel for 71 years.

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

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

Quoted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller ZT'L