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Parshat Vayeshev

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Bringing G-d into the Conversation

Adam Frieberg

In this week's parshah we are introduced to a new figure: Yosef. While there is much to say about this unique man, one detail, or lack thereof, jumps out, especially when looking at Yosef's life in its biblical context.

A common denominator amongst our ancestors, about whom we have read week after week, was their direct communication with G-d. They lived in a world where G-d provided them with clear counsel at points of tension, often guaranteeing success in their different ventures; not so for Yosef. He is seemingly ignored by G-d while sitting at the bottom of a pit thinking he has been left for dead, and when he is sold as a slave to a foreign land. At these, and other, critical junctions in Yosef's life, G-d's direct communication is surprisingly absent. What must have made this reality that much harder for Yosef is the fact that his father, grandfather and great-grandfather all communicated with G-d multiple times. Yosef finds himself in countless perilous situations, situations in which he probably expects Hashem to communicate with him, and he is seemingly left out to dry.

Yosef's response to this lack of direct Divine communication is educational, as pointed out by Rabbi Shmuel Goldin in his *Unlocking the Torah Text*. After being sold into slavery, Yosef is bought by Potifar, a courtier of the Pharaoh. Potifar's wife continually attempts to seduce him; standing for what he knows to be right, despite the wrong that has been done to him, Yosef pushes off multiple seductive attempts. Time after time, Yosef rejects

her, saying, "Since you are his wife; how then can I perpetrate this great evil and sin against..." We might expect the verse to end with "my master", referring to Potifar. Yet the verse ends "against Elokim" - against G-d. This is one example of how Yosef had the name of G-d constantly on his lips (Rashi, Bereishit 39:3).

Yosef responds to the absence of direct communication with the Divine by bringing G-d into his life. A similar phenomenon is seen in Yosef's approach to interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners, as well as Pharaoh's dream.

Perhaps this is one reason why our Sages refer to Yosef as "the righteous one", *hatzadik*. Perhaps Yosef's righteousness is his unique ability to bring G-d into his life, especially when G-d's hand is not easily visible.

On Wednesday evening we will light the first candle on our menorah, reminding ourselves, for the first of eight times, of the miracle that occurred to our ancestors. This miracle enabled us to perform the mitzvah of keeping the public menorah, which stood in the temple, lit. On every night of Chanukah, we will light our menorah at home in line with the Talmudic dictum, presented in its opening line describing the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles: "Our rabbis taught: a menorah must be lit in each person's home." (Shabbat 21b)

A question must be asked: if the original miracle happened in the Beit HaMikdash, and our synagogues are our miniature temples, why isn't the main mitzvah today to light in shul? In

fact, halachic authorities dance in circles trying to explain why we should be allowed to recite a blessing at all when we light the menorah in shul, yet take for granted that we should make a blessing upon lighting at home. Shouldn't the opposite be true?

Perhaps the focus is directed towards the candles we light at home because we are each responsible for our own *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing of the miracle. Each person, and each family, must make sure to place their menorah in the window, testifying that G-d was there for our people nearly two thousand years ago. Only if we each make our own personal declaration, can we come together as a community to light the menorah and publicly commemorate the miracle.

Like Yosef, we live in a world where we don't experience Divine revelation. Even in moments of deep crisis, when we pray for a sign that G-d is listening, we aren't answered with clear, direct communication. Despite this frustration, we are asked to follow in His footsteps and to strive to bring G-d into the public conversation. We attribute our success to G-d, ask Him for help when we need it, and thank Him along the way. And we must take this mission of publicizing G-d's role in history, and His role in our daily lives, as a personal mission. We dare not abdicate, leaving the mission to "the rabbis" or "the schools". Thus, the primary mitzvah of the menorah is placed upon each one of us, as individuals.

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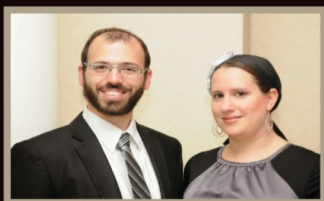


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613 Mitzvot: #318, 319, 321, 323 Observing Succot and Shemini Atzeet

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

We have already listed the Torah's mitzvot of refraining from *melachah*, and creating a day of rest, on the first and last day of Pesach (mitzvot 297-301), Shavuot (308-309), Rosh haShanah (310-311) and Yom Kippur (315, 317). We now arrive at the final occasions in the set: Succot (318-319) and Shemini Atzeret (321, 323).

As with the special occasions we have discussed previously, *Sefer haChinuch* emphasizes the importance of creating time to participate in the mitzvot of the day and to contemplate its themes. In the case of Succot, these include the shelter Hashem gave us in the dessert, gratitude for the year's harvest, prayers for rain and celebration with the *arba minim*. Shemini Atzeret constitutes its own celebration, a unique occasion on which G-d requests that the Jew remain "with Him" for an extra day. (Rashi to Vayikra 23:36) As *Sefer haChinuch* notes regarding Jews living outside of Israel, "Even though you see all of Israel dwelling in their *succot* for one of the two days of Shemini Atzeret, this does not mean that Shemini Atzeret is part of Succot. We explicitly state in our blessings, 'the eighth day, the celebration of Atzeret', and

there is no mention of Succot at all. It is only because of the enactment of two days of Yom Tov in exile that we need to dwell in the *succah* for eight days..."

Our Sages (Succah 48a; Yoma 3a) note six ways in which Shemini Atzeret is marked as a unique holiday. Here are the six, per Rashi's explanation:

- After all of the kohanim rotate through their service on Succot, they hold a special lottery to determine who will bring the bull offering of Shemini Atzeret;
- We recite Shehechyanu at the start of Shemini Atzeret;
- We don't sit in the succah as part of Shemini Atzeret, as noted above;
- The korbanot of Succot fit a particular pattern, which does not continue into Shemini Atzeret;
- The Levites sing a unique song in the Beit haMikdash for Shemini Atzeret;
- There is a special blessing recited for the king on Shemini Atzeret.

[See Tosafot ibid. for a slightly different list.]

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Biography
Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin
Josh Gutenberg

Rabbi Chaim Itzkovits (also known as Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner) was born on 7 Sivan 5509 (1749) in Volozhin. As a child he studied with Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ginsburg, author of *Shaagat Aryeh*, and Rabbi Raphael Ziskind of Hamburg. At the age of 19, he traveled to Vilna to study with the Vilna Gaon. In the introduction to the Vilna Gaon's commentary on *Shulchan Aruch* (written by the Vilna Gaon's children), Rabbi Chaim is singled out as the most prized disciple of the Vilna Gaon.

In 1774, Rabbi Chaim returned to Volozhin to serve as rabbi of the city, and he remained there for the rest of his life. In the beginning of the 19th century, he started a yeshiva called Eitz Chaim. The goal of the yeshiva was to have a centralized place of learning where the students would be able to fully devote themselves to studying Torah for its own sake. The idea was revolutionary, as until this point most boys who pursued Torah study beyond the years of *cheder* would do so with their local rabbi. Although the yeshiva opened in 1802 with just ten students, as its fame grew it attracted hundreds of students from all over Europe. The yeshiva closed in 1892, but its legacy continues; the Volozhin yeshiva serves as the archetype for many of the modern day yeshivot around the world.

Rabbi Chaim's philosophical magnum opus is *Nefesh HaChaim*. In this work, he emphasizes the centrality of Torah study and performance of mitzvot in Jewish life, and he stresses these as the main tools bringing one closer to G-d. The book includes an attack on the Hassidic notion that cleaving to G-d is the main necessity for a relationship with G-d. He also wrote a commentary on *Pirkei Avot* titled *Ruach Chaim*. Some of his responsa were collected by his students and printed in a book titled *Chut HaMeshulash*, although many more of his responsa were destroyed in a fire in 1815.

Rabbi Chaim passed away on 14 Sivan 5581 (1821).

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Torah and Translation
Did the Avot Keep the Torah?
Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin

Nefesh haChaim 1:21
Translated by Josh Gutenberg

...וזהו היתה גם כל ענין עבודתם של האבות וכל הצדיקים הראשונים שקיימו את התורה קודם נתינתה. כמו שדרשו ז"ל ע"פ "מן הבהמה הטהורה וגו'" ואמרו מכאן שלמד נח תורה. ואמרו (יומא כח:) קיים אברהם אבינו את כל התורה.

לא שהיו מצווים ועושים כך מצד הדין -- דא"כ לא היו מעמידים ח"ו על דעתם והשגתם, אף שהשיגו שלפי ענין שרש נשמתם ההכרח להם לעבור ולשנות אף מקצת מאחת מכל מצות ד', ולא היה יעקב אע"ה נושא ב' אחיות ולא היה עמרם נושא דודתו ח"ו. רק מצד השגתם בטהר שכלם התקונים הנוראים הנעשים בכל מצוה בהעולמות וכחות העליונים ותחתונים והפגמים הגדולים והחורבן והריסה ח"ו שיגרמו בהם אם לא יקיימום.

וכן נח הקריב דוקא מן הבהמה הטהורה כי ראה והשיג הכח והשרש העליון של כל בהמה וחייה, איזה מהם כח שרשו מצד הקדושה והקריבה ואיזה מהם כח נפשה מצד הטומאה והס"א. ולא בחר בה הקריבה לפניו ית' כי לא ירצה.....

לכן כשהשיג יעקב אבינו ע"ה שלפי שורש נשמתו יגרום תקונים גדולים בכחות ועולמות העליונים אם ישא השתי אחיות אלו רחל ולא, והמה יבנו שתייהן את בית ישראל -- יגע כמה יגיעות ועבודות להשיגם שינשאו לו. וכן הענין בעמרם שנשא יוכבד דודתו שיצאו ממנה משה אהרן ומרים:

וזה גם כן אחד מהטעמים שלא ניתנה התורה לנח והאבות הקדושים. שאם היתה ניתנת להם לא היה יעקב רשאי לישא ב' אחיות, ולא עמרם דודתו, אף אם היו משיגים שכן ראוי להם לפי שרש נשמתם.

And this was also the [explanation of the] matter of the service performed by our forefathers and the early righteous men, that they observed the Torah before it was given. As our rabbis taught regarding [the instruction to Noach to take] "Of the clean animals" (Bereishit 7:8) from which they extrapolated that Noach studied the Torah. Similarly, they taught, "Our forefather Avraham observed the whole Torah." (Yoma 28b).

It is not that they were obligated [to observe the Torah] and they acted in accordance with the strict law, because if so it they would never have depended upon their own intellect or understanding [to violate the commandments], G-d forbid, even if they were to understand that it was necessary for the essence of their soul to violate and deviate even slightly from one of G-d's commandments. Our forefather Yaakov would not have married two sisters, and Amram would not have married his aunt, G-d forbid. Rather, with their pure intellectual understanding they grasped the tremendous improvements accomplished with [the fulfillment of] every commandment in the upper and lower worlds and powers, and the great defects, destruction and demolition, G-d forbid, that would be caused if the commandments were not fulfilled.

And so, Noach sacrificed exclusively from the clean animals because he saw and understood the heavenly power and essence of every domesticated and wild animal, which of them have their source of strength in holiness, and he sacrificed them, and which of them derive their soul's strength from impurity and "the other side", and he chose not to sacrifice them before G-d, for it would not be accepted...

Therefore, when our forefather Yaakov comprehended that according to the essence of his soul he could effect great improvements in the upper powers and worlds if he would marry these two sisters, Rachel and Leah, who together would build the house of Israel, he exerted much effort and work so that they would marry him. And so, too, was the case for Amram who married his aunt, Yocheved, from whom came Moshe, Aharon and Miriam.

This is also one of the reasons the Torah was not given to Noach and the holy forefathers. If it had been given to them, Yaakov would not have been permitted to marry two sisters, and Amram his aunt, even if they had understood that it would be proper to do so according to the essence of their souls.

This Week in Israeli History: Kislev 25, 1882
The Founding of Zichron Yaakov

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The 25th of Kislev is Thursday

In the late 1870's, a new Jewish organization called BILU (from Isaiah 2:5, "Beit Ya'akov Lekhu Ve-nelkha" "House of Jacob! Let's go!") was formed. BILU's founders, who were part of the *Hovevei Zion* movement, believed that the time had come for Jews not only to live in Israel, but to make their living independently in Israel as well. The "Bilu'im" were influenced by pogroms against Jewish communities in Europe, and their ideology was inspired by Marx as well as the Bible; they hoped to establish Jewish farming cooperatives in Palestine.

The fourteen former university students who came to Rishon l'Tzion in the first group of immigrants were new to farming, and they found it very difficult. Within a few months, the Bilu'im faced starvation as well as malaria, and many left; eventually, some of them would begin a new farm

in Gadera, where they would face difficult farming as well as Arab attackers. However, on the 25th of Kislev, 1882, the winery of Zichron Yaakov was established near Haifa, with funding by Baron Edmond de Rothschild. The baron provided not only funds for the vineyard, but also agricultural experts, French grapevines, and funding for a deep well.

Unfortunately, the French vines were not a good match for the climate and soil. Further, the agricultural experts clashed with the BILU pioneers. Ultimately, the Bilu'im left Zichron Yaakov, but the winery ultimately succeeded, and it remains in use today. Further, Zichron Yaakov became the base of operations for the Jewish "Nili" spy ring which aided the British against the Ottomans during World War I.

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Highlights for November 23 – November 29 / 20 Kislev - 26 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
SHABBAT NOV. 23 Shabbaton in Clanton Park and Or Chaim				
7:45 AM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Moral Values in Bereishit	Or Chaim	
10:20 AM	Josh Gutenberg	Why Chanukah?	Clanton Park	
Derashot	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Can Jews Learn from Greeks?	Clanton Park	
	R' Baruch Weintraub	Dreams, Wishes, Nightmares	Or Chaim	
Lunch	An Ensemble Cast for Shiur Theatre	Religious Coercion: From Rachel to Matityahu	Clanton Park	
SUNDAY NOV. 24				
9:15 AM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Parshah Revisited	Zichron Yisroel	Hebrew
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Panelist, <i>Living with Dementia</i>	Shaarei Shomayim	Part of Nishmat's Women's Health and Halacha Day
After maariv	R' Baruch Weintraub	Greek Wisdom	Clanton Park	Hebrew
8:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	13 Attributes	4 Tillingham Keep	Hebrew
MONDAY NOV. 25				
8:00 PM	Rav Shlomo Gemara	The Prophets of Israel	Bnai Torah	
8:00 PM 8:00 PM 9:30 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub R' Mordechai Torczyner R' Baruch Weintraub	Parshah not this week Principles of Faith	Shaarei Shomayim	Community Beit Midrash Night Maariv at 8:45 PM
8:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Halachah: Malpractice	Shaarei Shomayim	CME Accredited Open to All
TUESDAY NOV. 26				
12:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Living Midrash	Shaarei Shomayim	with Mekorot
8:45 PM	Adam Frieberg	Laws of Shabbat	Shaarei Tefillah	
WED. NOV. 27				
8:00 PM 8:00 PM 9:00 PM 9:00 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub R' Mordechai Torczyner R' Yehoshua Weber R' Baruch Weintraub	Prophecy for Our Time Business Ethics: Lending Responsa: Yom Tov Sheni Chabura: Sanhedrin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Community Beit Midrash Night Maariv at 9:50 PM
THU. NOV. 28 Chanukah!				
8:40 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Learning and Latte	Ulpanat Orot	
8:30 PM	R' Baruch Weintraub	Chabura: Sotah	Clanton Park	