



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Miketz 5783

It's Dark Outside

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered December 6, 1975)

The enemies of Israel are in a state of exclusion, grinning from oil-well to oil-well. Former friends are now hostile, or at best turn away from us. Israel's one great ally, the U.S.A., is showing signs that she is beginning to desert her. Economically we are in deep trouble. Psychologically we are anxious and depressed. The situation of the Jew in the Diaspora, because it is to such a great extent contingent upon the State of Israel, gives cause for much concern. It's dark outside.

What does a Jew when it is dark outside? "It is better," goes an old saying, "to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Judaism has institutionalized that wise insight. The Talmud teaches: מצותה משתשקע החמה, the mitzvah of lighting the Hanukkah candle is from the time that the sun sets. The Hanukkah light has no function during the daytime. When the sun shines, there is no need for candles. When things are going well, faith does not represent a particularly great achievement. The מצות נר חנוכה applies only משתשקע החמה, when it is dark outside.

It is easy to answer ברוך השם ("thank God") when asked how you are, if you are basking in the sunshine of good fortune. But it is infinitely more difficult to say ברוך השם, or recite the blessing ברוך דיין האמת ("blessed is the True Judge"), when black clouds have darkened the light in your life and you are in deep gloom.

So, on these dark days, Judaism does not despair but rather lights candles. I am not offering nostrums, cheap consolations. I do not underestimate the gravity of the situation--although I believe it is not as terrible as most of us feel. But I believe that 3500 years of experience in the course of history should have taught us something about how to act and react when it is dark outside.

The spiritual alternative--which is implied in the idea of the Hanukkah candles--is not meant to be exclusive. I am

not recommending that all Jews pull inwards and turn their backs on the whole world. Diplomacy, security, economics, politics, production--all must continue on the highest level possible. But the spiritual dimension of our lives must be enhanced. Jews have learned throughout history that when life is difficult on the outside, then you must build up your inner resources and buttress the spiritual aspects of your existence. משתשקע החמה, when the sun sets, there is one imperative: נרות חנוכה. When it is dark outside, light a candle.

How do you go about it? Where do you light the candles? The Talmud (Shab. 21b) teaches: מצוה להניחו על פתח ביתו מבחוץ ... ובשעת הסכנה מניחה על שלחנו ודיו.

Preferably, one should place the Hanukkah menorah at the entrance to his home, on the outside--so that the miracle of Hanukkah be proclaimed to all the world. However, during the Babylonian period, whilst the Talmud was being written, the Zoroastrian religion prevailed, and because they were fire-worshippers they forbade non-believers to light torches or candles during this season, the Winter equinox. Since this was prohibited under pain of death, the Rabbis said that we may light the Hanukkah menorah indoors, placing it on the table, and that is sufficient.

It is our major mission as Jews to light candles for the entire world--על פתח ביתו מבחוץ. But if the whole world, has turned anti-Semitic and has institutionalized its Jew-hatred in one organization and declared a סכנה (danger) for the Jew to hold aloft his Hanukkah menorah, then even it is dark outside, we shall make it light and warm inside.

If the outside world makes a virtue of darkness and aggressively pursues a policy of forbidding light, so be it. We shall remove the נר (lamp) from מבחוץ (the

outdoors) and place it on our שלחן, on our table which is the symbol of family and home interiority. Let the table become the laboratory in which we fashion the life of our families; the “shtender” of the academy on which we study Torah; the foundry where young souls and personalities are formed; the source from which light will suffuse all our lives.

If on the outside we are plagued by enemies who bear us שנאה (hatred), let us on the inside increase our mutual אהבה, our love and concern for each other. Let husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, draw closer together, forgive each other, act with more mutual respect and patience.

If on the outside we find that friends betray us, then on the inside let us do the reverse: let us act with greater loyalty to our own people. Whom then do we have if not each other?

If on the outside hypocrisy prevails in the world, then on the inside let us do the reverse: let us study and practice Torah, the repository of truth and decency.

Two weeks ago Friday I woke up in my hotel room in Jerusalem and turned on the radio. The news was traumatic. It informed us that during the night Palestinian terrorists had broken into a Yeshiva in an isolated area, Ramat Magshimim, and there murdered three nineteen-year old students. It was an especially devastating piece of news for me, because all three were classmates of one of my sons when we were in Israel several years ago. One young man, Shelomoh Mochah, had been captured by the guerillas and wounded in his head, and the murderers intended to kidnap him and take him to Syria, but he escaped. It was he who told the story of what happened. That Saturday night, the television news informed us that the T.V. interviewer had gone to Ramat Magshimim to look for and interview Shelomoh Mochah. He was not to be found in the office of the settlement. Where, the T.V. man inquired, could he find the young man? Was he perhaps in the hospital, recuperating from his wounds? No, Shelomoh Mochah was not in the hospital. Had he possibly gone home, to reassure himself in the warmth of his friends and the bosom of his family? No, he was not home. Had his parents possibly taken him on vacation to recover from his terrible trauma? No, he was not on vacation. Well, then, where was he? The T.V. interviewer found him: in the Beit Hamidrash, in the study hall, studying Torah! What was he doing there? The answer was simple: “I and my friends

came here to study Torah. They were killed, but had they lived they would be doing this. So now I am studying for them too.” The interviewer looked at the camera and told his audience, with begrudging incredulity: זהו כחה של תורה, “This is the power of Torah!”

Indeed, when it is dark outside, and it is dangerous to light candles בחורץ, then מניחה על שלחנו ודין, we shall light the candles on the table, we shall create and illuminate an enlightened world within.

Permit me to add one more item for your consideration concerning the gravity of our situation. This too deals with Hanukkah, and is a point that I take quite seriously.

We all know the classical controversy between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai concerning the lighting of the candles. The House of Shammai teaches that פרוחת והולך, we begin with eight candles on the first day, and diminish it each day by one candle. The House of Hillel taught מוסיף והולך, we begin with one candle, and each day add another candle until we reach eight. What is the underlying theme of this controversy?

One of the greatest and most beloved of Hasidic teachers, the Apter Rav, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, known as the אהב ישראל (lover of Israel), explained the controversy as follows: Consider that first menorah in Maccabean times, the one in which the miracle was performed. With each successive day that the flame continued in the menorah, although there was no oil to support it, the miracle seemed greater and greater. If on the second day the second day the miracle seemed impressive, then on the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth day it seemed even more amazing. On the seventh day it was almost incredible--the menorah was still burning! On the eighth day, the miracle reached its overwhelming climax, for one day's oil had already lasted for eight days. Hence, insofar as our perception of the miracle is concerned every day it grew greater. However, the miracle itself took exactly the reverse course. Only a drop of oil was left after the first day, and that had to support eight days' worth of miracle. Thus, on the second day, for instance, the oil had to support six full days to support only four more days of light--a miracle of course, but not quite of the proportions of the first day or so. On the eighth day, the miracle was still there--a day's worth of light coming from but a drop of oil--but the miracle was quantitatively much smaller than the first day, when it had to stretch for eight days of light. Hence, the House of Shammai follows the reality of the miracle, which

decreased with every day, whereas the House of Hillel follows the awareness of the miracle, which increased day by day.

So there is a discrepancy and a distinctiveness between the facts of the miracle and the perception of them, between reality and appearance. The miracles of Jewish survival and redemption are paradoxically most obvious when they are least effective, and least apparent when they are most profound and far-reaching. When we are most conscious of the wonder of our salvation, that is when the miracles are all but spent, and we must beware of the future. And when we are in the depths of gloom, and seem to find no reason for light or confidence, then we may be sure that deep, deep someplace, God is preparing the greatest miracle for Israel.

I take this to be the deeper meaning of a key verse in today's Sidra. The most dramatic highlight of a highly dramatic Sidra takes place when Joseph and the brothers meet, and Joseph recognizes the brothers but they don't recognize him. So the Torah tells us: **ויכר יוסף את אחיו והם לא** "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." That verse is somewhat difficult. Only a few verses earlier we were told that Joseph recognized his brothers, and the context itself informs us that they did not recognize him. Why, therefore, repeat it?

Perhaps what the Torah is referring to is not recognition of facial features, of mere physiognomy, but an existential recognition of a far deeper kind. Joseph was not second only to Pharaoh, the ruler of all of Egypt. But he had just come up from the most agonizing period of his life. He was in the pit, enslaved, abandoned, all alone, a stranger forgotten by his family and world. From the depths of misery, he now sat on the throne of Egypt, at the pinnacle of his career. The brothers were in the reverse situation. While Joseph was suffering, they went about their business and their daily pursuits with a total neglect of and unconcern with him. But now they were suffering, now they were caught in a terrible vise: torn by their fidelity to their father, their search for food and survival, their guilt over what they had done to Joseph, their worry over Benjamin. Things looked black indeed for them. So, "Joseph recognized his brothers"--having come through the same experience, that their difficulties were the prelude to their salvation (**כי למחיה שלחני לפניכם**) as he later told them: God has prepared this as a way of providing life-giving sustenance for you). But while Joseph recognized

their predicament, and understood that the miracle of their survival was at its height when they were most pessimistic, "they did not recognize him"--not having undergone this tremendous experience, as Joseph already did, they could not appreciate the situation, they could not know what he knew--and that is, the teaching we have been presenting in the name of the Apter Rav.

Take but one example from modern history. Do you recall how in 1947, or thereabouts, the Prime Minister of England, Ernest Bevin, of unblest memory, refused to allow 100,000 Jews who were D.P.s to enter Palestine? Just think of it: One hundred thousand straggling wrecks of humanity, emerging from the Holocaust which had consumed six million Jews--and the most civilized country on earth fused to allow them a haven in Palestine. It was not only scandalous and outrageous, but totally depressing. Jews felt sunken, abandoned, in the greatest despair ever. Yet from the perspective of years later, the greatest miracle was being wrought at that gloomy moment. Had Bevin permitted the 100,000 Jews to come into Palestine, the pressure would have diminished for the founding of an independent Jewish State, and there would be no State of Israel today. Because he was stubborn, because he pressed us so much harder, from that oppression and that pressure and that pessimism, there came forth the miracle of the State of Israel reborn.

So it is with the State of Israel in the course of its history. At the time of greatest elation--such as in 1948 and 1967--we sometimes overestimated the good news, the **נס הצלה**, the miracle of survival. In times such as these, when there are little signs of the **ישועה** or salvation, when it's dark outside, when miracles are as rare as they are necessary, at these times we Jews must be confident that the divine will spins its own plot in the fibre of history on a pattern far different from the trivial designs conceived by piddling mortal men and their pompous conceits. And it is mysterious. And it is deep. And it is miraculous. And it leads to redemption.

When it is at its darkest outside, the lights are beginning to stir on the inside, and sooner or later they will pierce the gloom of the outside world as well.

For the Hanukkah candles are indeed the heralds of the light of redemption.

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Attracted to Problems

Dr. Erica Brown

Sometimes it's hard to understand what activities and traits distinguish a leader from a follower. This is especially true because the very word "leader" is used today to describe someone who runs a country and also someone who volunteers to run a bake sale. This indiscriminate range can lead to cynicism. If everyone's a leader, then maybe no one is.

In the years I've been working in leadership development, I've noticed anecdotally an unmistakable character trait that runs deep in high-impact leaders and is, I believe, a defining feature of leadership. Leaders are attracted to problems. They view issues and conflicts that stymie and repel others as interesting puzzles to be solved. They lean into dilemmas rather than lean back. Such attraction doesn't mean leaders can solve problems instantly, but they aren't intimidated by them. They don't experience despair or helplessness when they encounter a difficult problem or regard it as intractable.

In *Character Above All*, Doris Goodwin Kearns describes Franklin Delano Roosevelt as this type of leader; FDR was a confident problem-solver and decision-maker. Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor, said that FDR's "capacity to inspire and encourage those around him to do tough, confused and practically impossible jobs was without dispute." After she met with the President, Perkins did not always have a ready solution to a problem but, Goodwin Kearns describes, she felt "more cheerful, more determined, stronger than she had felt when she went into the room." Eleanor said this of her husband: "I have never known a man who gave one a greater sense of security. I never heard him say there was a problem that he thought it was impossible for human beings to solve." This is the first quote to appear at the FDR Memorial in Washington, DC. In his four terms as President, FDR faced problems on the national and international world stage that may have toppled those less self-assured. FDR's relationship to the Jewish community was, of course, more complex.

Parshat Miketz, this week's Torah reading, offers us a glimpse of this problem-solving capacity in Joseph. Joseph was a dreamer, but his salvation and that of his family actually came through dream interpretation. No one else had the confidence, expertise, or temerity to help Pharaoh understand his inner confusion. "And Pharaoh said to

Joseph, 'I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream (*tishma halom*) is to tell its meaning'" (Gen. 41:15).

Word traveled quickly about Joseph's abilities. Just hearing a dream revealed its significance. Rashi focuses on the verb to hear or to listen, translating it as "to pay attention." The word implies more than simple hearing; it suggests listening for understanding. Rashi cites two other prooftexts to support his reading, Genesis 42:23 and Deuteronomy 28:49. Seforno suggests that Joseph did not guess or speculate but thought carefully about Pharaoh's words, the context in which they were said, and their larger import and significance. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream on a national economic scale, thinking about the dream politically rather than personally.

Joseph's talent makes an appearance in another story about the ruler of a large empire and a Jewish courtier: Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. Chapter four of the book of Daniel opens with Nebuchadnezzar in a similar state to Pharaoh of confusion and fear: "I had a dream that frightened me, and my thoughts in bed and the vision of my mind alarmed me. I gave an order to bring all the wise men of Babylon before me to let me know the meaning of the dream" (Dan. 4:2-3). Nebuchadnezzar was desperate to have someone explain his own mind to him. When none of his own dream interpreters, magicians, or exorcists could help, he turned to Daniel, regarding him as a person of deep intelligence and intuition. He said to him, "Tell me the meaning of my dream vision that I have seen" and said of Daniel that "the spirit of the holy gods" rested in him and that "no mystery baffles him" (Dan. 4:6). Daniel was able to explain the dream successfully.

Deborah Ancona and Hal Gregersen in their article, "The Power of Leaders Who Focus on Solving Problems" (*Harvard Business Review*, April 16, 2018) studied leaders who were problem solvers to identify common threads in their behaviors and dispositions. "Most striking," they conclude, "is that none of these leaders has any expectation that they will attract 'followers' personally — by dint of their charisma, status in a hierarchy, or access to resources. Instead, their method is to get others excited about whatever problem they have identified as ripe for a novel solution." These leaders pursue "their own deep expertise"

and bring others along for the ride, seeking out talent and the kind of team that can take on complex issues. They got better by engaging in increasingly complicated work.

Joseph's skill at dream interpretation later spilled over into governance where many of the same tools were required: careful observation, listening, analysis, strategic vision, and execution. These bundled talents could easily have led Joseph to taut his own abilities. But as Joseph matured and his influence grew, he did not take credit for his problem-solving abilities: "Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, 'Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare'" (Gen. 41:16). Rashi on this verse explains that Joseph was telling Pharaoh, "The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer. He will put in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh's welfare."

Rumor Has It....

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

In this week's parsha, Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dreams as foretelling a period of seven years of plenty in Egypt, to be followed by seven years of famine. Yosef tells Pharaoh to store up food during the first seven years in preparation for the following seven, and to appoint a man of wisdom and understanding over Egypt to oversee the nation's economy during these years. Pharaoh decides that Yosef is the best person for the job, and appoints him as the second-in-command over the country. He then changes his name to Tzofnas Paneach, gives him Osnas, the daughter of Potiphar, as a wife. This choice of a bride for Yosef is interesting, because Potiphar's wife had accused Yosef, twelve years earlier, of trying to violate her, and it was because of that accusation that he was imprisoned. Why, then, would Pharaoh have Yosef marry the daughter of the very woman whom he had been accused of violating? Moreover, why would Yosef agree to such a marriage? The medieval commentators Da'as Zekeinim miBa'alei Tosafos and Chizkuni deal with these issues, and, in the course of their answers, cite an intriguing midrash, which gives us a different view of who Osnas actually was, and what role she was supposed to play in Yosef's life.

One explanation these commentators give is that both Yosef and Pharaoh wanted to avoid a scenario in which Potiphar would claim that Yosef's children belong to him, since he had originally purchased Yosef as a slave. If Yosef's children would actually be his own grandchildren,

Joseph answered to a higher authority than Pharaoh and, thereby, felt confident in summoning the God of the Hebrews into his conversation. In *Not in God's Name*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, "Every text needs interpretation. Every interpretation needs wisdom. Every wisdom needs careful negotiation between the timeless and time." Joseph brought wisdom into his interpretation, and, because of his intimacy with God, his insights became timeless. Joseph became more than a shrewd and capable vizier; he eventually became, in the court's eyes, a widely respected man of conviction because he was more than a problem-solver. He was a problem solver who gave God the credit.

What's the hardest problem you've ever solved? How did you solve it, and who got the credit?

however, he would certainly make such an argument. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, without citing the medieval commentators, gives a variation of this explanation, saying that Pharaoh wanted the Egyptians to respect and give honor to Yosef. Since it was the household of Potiphar, where Yosef had served as a slave, that was most likely be jealous of him and therefore try to disgrace him, Pharaoh neutralized this threat by giving Yosef his former master's daughter in marriage. Another explanation, given by Chizkuni, is that Yosef wished to quell the rumors that Potiphar's wife has spread, that Yosef had violated her. If Yosef married her daughter, he assumed, no one would give any credence to such rumors. We may note, as an aside, that in popular American culture, such an assumption is, sadly, not a given, and even the sense of uneasiness over such a scenario that was widespread less than forty years ago no longer exists. Whether what passes in popular culture reflects social reality in this country is a question that is discussed by Michael Medved in his astute work, *Hollywood vs. America*. In any case, the possibility that America's moral sense has sunk lower than that of the ancient Egyptians is something that must give us pause.

The explanations we have seen until now still do not answer another question, which is, how could Yosef, the son of Ya'akov, who displayed such moral strength when he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife, marry an Egyptian woman? Da'as Zekeinim answers this question by citing

a tradition that Osnas was, in fact, not the daughter of Potiphar and his wife, but, rather, the daughter of Dinah and Shechem. This midrash can be found in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 31, but there are some variations in detail between the way the midrash is brought there, and the way it is brought in the various medieval commentators. The basic account is that Ya'akov had Osnas removed from his home, deeming it a disgrace for the offspring of the union between Dinah and Shechem to be living among the rest of his children. However, Ya'akov placed a sign around her neck, saying that she came from the seed of Ya'akov. She was then led, through the workings of a heavenly angel, to Egypt, where Potiphar and his wife adopted and raised her. Thus, when Yosef married Osnas, he was actually marrying somebody who stemmed from the family of his father Ya'akov. What is intriguing about this, to my mind, more than the identity of Osnas herself, is the identity of the angel who guided the process along.

According to the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, it was the angel Michael who brought Osnas to Egypt. However, according to the version of the midrash cited by Chizkuni, it was the angel Gavriel who was involved. We noted, last week, that it was this same angel, Gavriel, who the midrash identifies as the 'man' who guided Yosef to his brothers in Dothan, from where he was sold into slavery in Egypt. Thus, it was the same angel, or, in a broader sense, the same force, that was working behind the scenes during the entire process of Yosef's odyssey. We explained last week that Gavriel represents the trait of *gevurah*, or perseverance in the

face of adversity. To expand on this idea, *gevurah* is a trait which is necessary when confronting the challenges of life within a wider society. In order for Yosef to fulfill his purpose in Egypt, which, according to Rav Kook, was to exhibit a moral and holy lifestyle within the context of a fully functioning state, he needed to develop this trait, which he learned from his father. If we follow the midrash and identify Osnas as the daughter of Dinah and Shechem, she was perhaps the person who was best equipped to serve as Yosef's wife and helpmate. The rabbis tell us that when Ya'akov went to meet Eisav, he hid Dinah in a box, fearing that Eisav would want to marry her. However, the rabbis criticized him for doing this, because Dinah, given her nature as one who liked to explore the outside world, may have been able to influence Eisav to change for the better. I believe that the idea being expressed here is that Dinah may have been able to help Eisav direct his trait of *gevurah* in the right direction. Because Ya'akov hid Dinah, he prevented this from occurring, and, moreover, suppressed the proper development of Dinah's outgoing character. As a result, when she left her environs and explored the outside world, she was unprepared for the challenge, and was taken advantage of by Shechem. The offspring of that union, Osnas, was now being given the chance, denied her mother, to channel the trait of *gevurah* for the purposes of holiness. Thus, it was the angel Gavriel, representing the trait of *gevurah*, who was behind the process that led Osnas to Egypt to become the wife of Yosef.

Viceroy Mussar

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Dec 1, 2021

There is something peculiar in this week's Parsha. Yosef throws all the brothers in jail and says: One of you should go back and bring back Binyamin, and then I will believe you. And after three days, he says: *zos asu ve-chayu. Es ha-Elokim ani yorei. I am yorei Hashem; I change my mind. Achichem echad ye'aser be-veis mishmarchem*—leave one brother here, and the rest of you would go home and bring Binyamin to me. And the next thing that happens is *Va-yomru ish el achiv aval asheimim anachnu al achinu asher ra'inu tzaras nafsho be-hitchan'no eileinu velo shamanu al kein ba'ah eileinu hatzarah hazos*. This is the first *mefurash pasuk* in the Torah

that brothers have *charata*. They say a *viduy*—It's our fault. We are guilty because of what we did to our brother. We saw him crying and begging us, and we didn't listen. And that's why this *tzarah* is now coming upon us.

Numerous *meforshim* ask a question. Granted that brothers see that Hashem is punishing them. Why else are these strange things happening? This must be the *onesh* for Mechiras Yosef. But why only now? It should've been when they were first put in jail for three days—after the whole incident when Yosef accused them of being spies and put them in jail. They should have said on the first day in jail, *aval asheimim anachnu al achinu asher ra'inu tzaras*

nafsho, etc. *al kein ba'ah eileinu hatzarah hazos*. Why is it only after Yosef was *meikil* and let them out of jail, did they suddenly realize that this was a Divine punishment for the *chet* of Mechiras Yosef?

There are numerous answers given by the *mefarshim*. The *sefer* Toldos Yitzchak of Rav Yitzchak Cairo, the uncle of the more famous Rav Yosef Cairo—the Mechaber—says: No. At first, they didn't think much of it. They attributed it to bad luck or the tendency of foreigners to get in trouble in foreign countries. But after Yosef said: *Es ha-Elokim ani yorei*—I fear Hashem. You all deserve to be locked in jail (and possibly even worse), but as a *yirei Elokim* I have *rachamim* on you, and I am going to let nine of you go back to your father. Then, all of a sudden, the brothers said to themselves: this guy is saying that he is *yorei Elokim* and he will have *rachamim* on us. And if he has *rachamim* on us, maybe we should have had *rachamim* on Yosef? When Yosef set the example of *rachamim* they started feeling guilty. We are also *yirei Elokim*; we should've had *rachamim* on Yosef. Asher *ra'inu tzaras nafsho*—he begged us, and we did not act with *rachamim*. And this is a fascinating *pshat* in terms of what's the best way to give Mussar to someone. Often, it's not to tell them that they did something wrong, since they would only get defensive and argue that what they did was right, etc. But if you set an example of doing the right thing, then people might start thinking: Maybe I should also be doing the right thing.

There is another fascinating *pshat* that I saw from Rav Shimon Schwab. He says: What did they see happen here? Clearly, Yosef did something here that made them realize something. What did Yosef do? He said: All of you must absolutely be in jail. However, after three days, he came and said: You know what? I was wrong. There is no need to jail all of you—one is enough. What did Yosef communicate? He said: I was sure I was doing the right thing, but I thought about it a little more and realized that I made a mistake. And Rav Shimon Schwab says: That's what real *yiras Elokim* is. Whenever we do something, we start justifying our actions, as illogical as they might have been. Yosef said that he is *yorei Elokim*. I recognize that there is someone above me in this world who really knows the truth. So let me make a *cheshbon ha-nefesh* and if I made a

mistake, say: I made a mistake, and act differently. So what did the brothers say? *Aval*—but. We thought one thing, but really it was something else. We thought that we were right and justified in our actions. If you look in the Acharonim, you can find a hundred different justifications for what the brothers did in Mechiras Yosef. But they were wrong. And I am sure they didn't want to feel guilty, and every year they thought of a new justification. Suddenly a viceroy of Egypt comes and says: You know what? I am not the smartest person in the world. I think I made a mistake because I am not perfect—and now I am correcting my mistake. There is a Hashem above me, and only He is perfect. And now, all of a sudden, they say: Wait a second. . .if this guy can say that he is wrong, then maybe we could think about whether we were wrong in something we did. And that's why only after Yosef set an example of being *modeh al ha-emes* were they able to get to that place when they said *aval asheimim anachnu*. They had *charata*, said *viduy*, and recognized they were wrong despite all their justifications. And what's going on in all these Parshios—Parshas Miketz through Parshas Vayigash—is, of course, the process of Teshuva for Mechiras Yosef.

I think there are two fascinating Mussar points for us here. Number one is the explanation of Toldos Yitzchak that sometimes the best way to educate is to set an example of the proper *midos*. Just by walking around the world and setting an example of the right *midos* other people will see and think: Maybe I should also have those *midos*. And sometimes it's more effective not to tell everyone how their *midos* are wrong and instead set an example of what's right. And if they are smart, they will pick up on their own. And number two—Rav Shimon Schwab. We shouldn't need this Mussar, but we *do* need it. *Es ha-Elokim ani yorei*—if we really believe in Hashem, then we must know that only Hashem is perfect, and we are not! Hashem always knows what is right, and we don't. Even when we convince ourselves that we know that what we are doing is correct, we should sit and make a *cheshon ha-nefesh*: did I really make the right decision, or did I convince myself of that to make myself feel better so that I wouldn't feel guilty about it? And do I need to do teshuva?

Shabbat Shalom.

Miketz and Chanuka

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week's parsha, Parshas Miketz, opens with the two dreams of Pharaoh. While Yosef is languishing in prison, Hashem is arranging events so that Yosef's fate will abruptly change. In his first dream, Pharaoh sees seven skinny, gaunt cows consuming seven healthy, robust cows along the shores of the Nile River. In his second dream, he sees seven ears of grain, beaten by the east wind, consuming seven healthy ears of grain.

וַיְהִי בַבֶּקֶר, וַתִּפְעֶם רוּחוֹ, וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-כָּל-חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם, וְאֶת-כָּל-חֲכָמָיָהּ; וַיִּסְפֹּר פִּרְעֹה לָהֶם אֶת-חֲלֹמוֹ, וְאִין-פּוֹתֵר אוֹתָם לְפָרְעֹה *and it was in the morning, and his spirit was agitated, and he sent and he called for all the magicians of Egypt and all her wise men, and Pharaoh told them his dream, but there was no one to interpret them to Pharaoh* (Bereishis 41:8).

When Pharaoh dreams dreams that no one can interpret to his liking, the Butler recalls that there is a Hebrew lad, a slave, in prison, who can interpret dreams. Immediately, Pharaoh sends for Yosef. וַיִּשְׁלַח פִּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-יוֹסֵף, וַיְרִיצֵהוּ *and Pharaoh sent and called for Yosef, and they rushed him out of the pit, and he shaved, and he changed his clothing, and he came to Pharaoh* (Bereishis 41:14).

Yosef explains the meaning of the dreams - there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine - and offers a solution as well: Pharaoh should amass food and fill the store-houses during the years of plenty, so that Egypt will survive the years of famine. Pharaoh accepts Yosef's words and suddenly, Yosef the slave becomes Yosef the viceroy.

What was it about his dreams that aggrieved him so?

R' Shlomo Zalman Bregman, in his Short and Sweet on the Parsha, writes, "Imagine for a moment you didn't know the import of the dreams. They were just some dreams about cows and ears of grain. Why couldn't Pharaoh simply dismiss his dreams in the same fashion as most people who have strange dreams do? What was it about the dreams that warranted an immediate assembly of the wisest men in the land?"

"Rav Shimon Schwab zt'l answers as follows: The ruler of Egypt had been living with the belief that 'might-makes-right' and that size, power and numbers are what is decisive and important in life. As the ruler of the most powerful nation in the world, Pharaoh felt quite comfortable with

his lot in life, and living in a world that was controlled by these types of norms; a world where power, might and strength always ruled over the weak.

"Therefore, what disturbed him profoundly was the symbolism of the dream. Skinny cows consuming fat cows? Thin ears of grain swallowing healthy and robust ears of grain? These images imply that the few can defeat the many, and that the weak can bring down the strong. In Pharaoh's mind, this was highly distressing, and threatening, news. It went directly against his worldview of 'might makes right' and 'survival of the fittest.' It was this that motivated him to assemble all the wise men of Egypt to explain the dreams."

Clearly, the connection to Chanukah is not lost upon us! Parshas Miketz is almost always read during Shabbos Chanukah. And Chanukah is the yomtov when we celebrate the victory of the few over the many, the weak over the strong, the impure into the hands of the pure.

R' Bregman concludes, "R' Schwab explains: The central themes of Chanukah include the notion of the many suffering defeat at the hands of the few, the strong being delivered into the hands of the weak, one small - insufficient - flask of oil lasting for eight days, and the concept that a little bit of light can dispel a great deal of darkness.

"All of these lessons are represented in the imagery of Pharaoh's dreams, and thus Parshas Miketz is an appropriate Torah reading during the holiday of Chanukah" (Short and Sweet on the Parsha, Feldheim Distribution, p.97-98).

We live in a world where power is revered, physical strength and beauty are lauded, wealth and success are praiseworthy, and the most powerful man is expected to always 'win.' This, too, was the world view of Pharaoh and ancient Egypt, and the view of ancient Greece.

When Pharaoh dreams tell him otherwise, his spirit agitated, and he is terrified. For though Egypt was the mightiest of ancient empires, Pharaoh realized there was no guarantee that they would not be conquered by small, weaker forces.

And indeed... after 210 years in mighty Egypt, that's exactly what happened. A (relatively) small, weak, slave society marched to freedom and along the way, decimated

Egypt. Pharaoh's dreams not only foreshadowed the imminent famine that was to come; they foretold of the great Exodus from Egypt as well.

And it is this very reality that gave the Maccabee army their victory. Because from the perspective of the RS"O, the might of man is nullified before Him, wealth belongs only to G-d, and physical prowess is utterly insignificant before Hashem.

When we light the Chanukah light, we must remember well the lesson of Pharaoh's dreams, and their application throughout our long and bitter exiles. From the Egyptian enslavement, to galus Yavan and the miracle of Chanukah, and b'ezras Hashem to our future redemption, it is the emes of Torah, the performance of mitzvos, and acts of chessed and tzedaka, that will always win over the physical strength of the umos ha'olam.

The Indelible First Impression

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Pharaoh was not satisfied with the interpretations of his dream given by his advisors. The שר המשקים (cupbearer) then spoke up, and recalled the dreams that he and the baker had dreamt in prison, which Yosef, their fellow inmate, had correctly interpreted. Pharaoh promptly summoned Yosef from the dungeon to interpret his dreams, which he of course did, to Pharaoh's satisfaction.

Rashi (41:12) comments that when the שר המשקים described Yosef, he did so with scorn and disdain, as a נער עברי עבד לשר הטבחים – emphasizing that Yosef was young (נער), a foreigner (עברי), and a slave (עבד). The cupbearer disliked Yosef, and so although he felt obliged to recommend his services to Pharaoh, he wanted to ensure that Pharaoh would not appoint Yosef to any sort of prominent position.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Eish Tamid, raises the question of why the cupbearer thought that his negative characterization of Yosef would have had any effect. He obviously assumed that Yosef would give a correct interpretation of Pharaoh's dream; this was his entire purpose in recommending him. Did he not realize that Pharaoh would admire Yosef's talents? How would his derisive portrayal of Yosef affect Pharaoh's perception of Yosef, once Yosef displayed his brilliance by correctly explaining the meaning of the king's dreams?

And so, what better way to commemorate the Chanukah miracle - and victory - than by lighting menorah? The Chanukah light is a reminder that one small flame, one small act of kedusha (holiness), and one measure of light in a very dark world, can - and will - triumph when we are faithful to Hashem. As we recite in the Al Ha'Nissim tefillah: רָבַתְּ אֶת־רִיבָם דִּנְתָּ אֶת־דִּינָם נִקְמְתָּ אֶת־נִקְמָתָם, *You fought their fight, judged their judgement, [and] avenged their revenge; מָסַרְתָּ גְבוּרִים בְּיַד חַלְשִׁים וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעֻשָׂים - You turned over the strong in the hand of the weak, and the many in the hand of the few... וְלָךְ עָשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ, *And for You, You made a great and holy name name in Your world; and for Your nation Israel you did a great salvation and redemption to this day.**

May we merit the ultimate redemption, may it be immediate and in our days.

Rav Druck answered this question based on the concept taught by the Chafetz Chaim and others regarding the severity of the sin of lashon ha'ra and gossip. Speaking negatively about people is so grievous because it makes an indelible impression in the listener's mind. If we hear unflattering information about somebody, then even if we get to know that person well, and we see that the negative characterization we had heard was incorrect, even so, we entertain doubts in our minds. As the saying goes, "You only have one chance to make a first impression." Our initial impression of somebody becomes imprinted in our minds. And so when a person shares a piece of gossip, or speaks of someone derogatorily, he paints a negative picture of that individual in the listener's mind which can never be completely erased. That first impression is likely to remain forever.

This explains the intent of the שר המשקים. He wanted to ensure that although Pharaoh would assuredly be impressed by Yosef's wisdom and talents, he would still have a somewhat negative picture of Yosef in his mind. The שר המשקים knew that if he imprinted in Pharaoh's mind a negative first impression of Yosef, Pharaoh would never be too impressed by Yosef, and would never afford him too much respect.

Pharaoh, to his credit, did not seem to be affected by the שר המשקים's disdainful characterization of Yosef.

He was truly impressed by Yosef, and held him in high esteem, disregarding entirely the *המשקים*’s attempts at besmirching him. Nevertheless, the lesson being taught is that we must exercise extreme care when speaking about

other people, because the way we portray people plants an image in the listener’s mind that could very likely remain for years to come.

Yosef, Chanukah and Assimilation

Rabbi Jared Anstandig

One could argue that Yosef was the very first “court Jew.” Yosef was made viceroy of Egypt and managed the highest levels of Egyptian government for nearly a decade. Throughout that time, however, his selfidentification appears murky. Does Yosef, with his new Egyptian name of Tzafnat Pane’ach, still identify as a Hebrew, or does he now see himself as a fullfledged Egyptian?

We can see evidence of this internal struggle within the names Yosef chose for his sons. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (*Emet LeYaakov Miktetz*, 41:51) highlights a distinction between Menasheh and Efraim’s names. Whereas Menasheh’s name, even as it is negative, still refers to Yosef’s previous life (“God has made me forget my troubles and my father’s house”), Efraim’s name is entirely Egyptfocused (“God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering”). Not only that, but Rav Kamenetsky argues that Efraim’s name, unlike Menasheh’s, is particularly Egyptian. He notes that many of the letters of his name are characteristically found in Egyptian names. Consider the similarity of “Efraim” to the names Pharaoh, Potiphar, Panea’ch, Shifrah, and Puah. From these opposing names one could conclude that Yosef struggled with his own identity: To what extent was he an Egyptian, with Egyptian names and culture, and to what extent did he remain a Hebrew, connected to the Land of Canaan?

This struggle, of course, is not unique to Yosef and Egyptian culture. Indeed, the Chanukah story asks us the same question: How are we to interact with “Greek culture”? Are we to reject it or accept it?

Regarding that question, the Sages themselves appear conflicted. The Talmud (*Megillah 9b*) quotes Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel who rules that the Torah may be translated into Greek. Yet, the end of *Megillat Taanit* lists various tragedies of Jewish history and includes Ptolemy’s Greek translation of the Torah in the list. Like Yosef’s sons’ names, it seems that the Sages also feel ambivalence toward the outside world.

One could suggest a resolution based on the writings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook. In a collection of his teachings (*Tov Ro’ee, Shabbat, 22a*), Rav Kook analyzes a curious midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah 13:5*). This midrash contends that when the Greeks began to oppress the Jews, the Greeks instructed them to “write on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the God of Israel.” Noting that the symbol of the tribe of Yosef is an ox, Rav Kook explains that the Greeks wanted the Jews to be like Yosef – completely assimilated into the surrounding secular society. The “horn,” that is, the Torah’s teachings, should be “on an ox” – that is to say, open and spread among the nations of the world, like Yosef. This, Rav Kook writes, was an incorrect understanding of Yosef. Yosef did not engage in Egyptian culture for his own personal pleasure, as the Greeks assumed. Ra

ther, Yosef’s approach was, “that Israel would be the guide for all the nations.” Yosef engaged in the secular world because he believed that would elevate and enhance the world.

According to Rav Kook, the Greeks misunderstood Yosef and so they also misunderstood how to apply his perspective. They believed that Yosef’s engagement in the broader world diluted his Judaism. Yosef did indeed engage in the outside world, but only in order to spread the word of God in it. According to this, the names of Ephraim and Menasheh reflect Yosef’s careful balancing act, living in both worlds.

Perhaps this distinction is at the core of the question of Greek translation of the Torah. When used as a means to spread the word of God, a Greek translation is a beautiful thing – making God’s teachings more accessible to others. But, when it is used as Ptolemy used it, to water down the Torah’s potency, that is a cause to mourn.

As the stories of Yosef and Chanukah intersect this year, we can consider this message of Rav Kook. Like Yosef, may we be able to bring the teachings of God more fully into the world.

In Those Days, in These Times

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

As we have previously noted, the story of Joseph may be seen as the story of an “assimilator” struggling with his identity. When Joseph, however, eventually proclaims loud-and-clear (Genesis 45:3), אָנִי יוֹסֵף, הָעוֹד אִבִּי חַי, “*I am Joseph, is my father still alive?*” he re-embraces his family and his tradition.

How timely it is then that parashat Miketz always coincides with the festival of Chanukah whose central theme is assimilation and the challenge of returning to one’s roots.

The basic story of Chanukah is that in the year 167 B.C.E. the Syrian-Greek monarch, Antiochus Epiphanes, set out to abolish the Jews’ observance of Shabbat, new moon festivals and the practice of circumcision. Many of the Jews of those days were deeply impressed by the Hellenist culture. They loved the intellectual pursuit of Hellenism as well as the centrality of aesthetics in the tradition of the Greeks. Many Jews became enamored with the Hellenistic “worship of the human body.” In fact, sources report that some Jews even underwent the painful operation of reverse circumcision so they would look non-Jewish during the naked wrestling matches. And, yet, despite the fearsome external enemy, Chanukah was not so much the battle of the Jews against the Syrian-Greeks, as it was a battle of the Chassidim—the Jewish Traditionalists, against the Mityavnim—the assimilationists, the Jewish Hellenists!

Although more than 2,000 years have passed since that fateful Chanukah victory, tragically, we are facing the same battle against assimilation today. In a sense, the battle today is even more heartbreaking, because the contemporary struggle is not against forced assimilation under duress from our enemies, but rather, assimilation through kindness. The blandishments of America are so subtle and powerful that the vast majority of Jews are not even aware of the battle taking place and, consequently, are unable to withstand the seductiveness of the dominant culture.

So, for instance, the average American Jewish child today surely knows who was the mother of Jesus, but has no clue of who was the mother of Moses (Yocheved). The average American Jewish child knows the words to “Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly...” but has no idea of the lovely Hebrew Chanukah song, “Maoz Tzur...” Assimilation in America has become so pervasive that perhaps 4-4½

million American Jews are at risk today of vanishing as Jews within one or two generations. Tragically, these losses are further compounded by the fact that the reasons for these losses can be relatively easily addressed by attending to the vast illiteracy and ignorance of basic Judaism that afflicts our people today, and by providing positive, joyous Jewish experiences to the unaffiliated masses.

While those in the committed Jewish community often speak forlornly of their unaffiliated and assimilated brothers and sisters, they fail to recognize that assimilation is a significant threat to the committed Jewish community as well. Slowly but surely, the dominant culture is impacting on the, so-called, “absolute values” of the traditional Jewish community.

Traditional Jews are becoming increasingly insensitive and indifferent to many of these vital values, especially to the value of the “sanctity of human life.” So, for instance, after a long period of decline in violent crime in America, crime has begun to rise significantly, becoming a political “hot potato” issue once again.

How are we being impacted? Think about this for a moment: The number of murders in New York City has declined from its peak of 2,245/year, to “only” about 457 in 2021, and we rejoice. Yet, how can we rejoice when 457 people (many totally innocent) lost their lives to violence? Every day in America, mothers are burying their children who are dying of gun violence in epic proportions, and we’re rejoicing over “only” 457 deaths in our city?. In 2020, in the entire country of Japan (population 127 million) there were 319 homicides! We’ve been reduced!

Furthermore, how can committed traditional Jews remain basically indifferent to the masses of homeless living on the streets of America and to the huge pockets of poverty and squalor in our nation? How can we sleep at night when millions of children go to bed hungry every night? We’ve been reduced! Of course, it’s hard not to become insensitive when 85% of American entertainment is either sex or violence. Even our tiniest children (some in their cribs!) play violent video games all day long, and we wonder why there is violence in our schools. Should we really be exposing our children to horrific stories of werewolves and vampires rather than sharing inspirational stories about the lives of ethical and moral people? We

Jews are being constantly bombarded by values that are thoroughly inimical to our Jewish tradition. We've been reduced, and in too many instances we've become hardened and indifferent.

It is this battle against the "subtle assimilation" that is very much an essential element of the festival of Chanukah. Chanukah proclaims the need to reaffirm commitment, to strengthen our resolve to heed the immortal values of our people. We must be certain not to allow ourselves to be swept away by the often-decadent marketing and the blandishments of the media, especially the contemporary electronic media.

A constant awareness is necessary to do battle with the pernicious assimilation. This awareness is what is reflected in the blessing that we recite over the Chanukah candles: שְׁשָׁשָׁה נְסִים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה, thanking G-d for

having wrought miracles to our forefathers, in those days, in these times.

In this time of Chanukah, it is incumbent upon all committed Jews to address the issue of the subtle assimilation which is exacting a heavy toll on our people. The committed community must kindle its lights more brightly than ever before. We must affirm and reaffirm our commitment to the ethics and morality reflected in our Torah. We must work assiduously to share the beauty of our tradition, and to stave off the blandishments of those alien values.

If we are prepared to make this commitment and to do our part, then we will surely merit to see the lights of the candles that we kindle be מוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ—grow stronger and brighter, as we inspire the entire world with our good and noble deeds.