

THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT VAYESHEV

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL
TAL Founder & Director

JUST SAY NO!

Imagine one of those typical days in London. The clouds are heavy, the wind is strong and the rain doesn't stop falling. You come into work after having fought with the wind, your umbrella broken and your coat drenched. Just then the door opens and a colleague of yours walks in. "What an awesome day it is today, the weather is great don't you think?"

What is your response? Two quick replies strike my mind.
The calm approach; "Interesting, I kind of thought it was raining and quite murky out there".
Alternatively you offer a more definitive response - "No!" you exclaim. "Its not great weather!" Then you begin to explain yourself. "Have you seen the weather? It's raining and cloudy and I was drenched this morning! How can you call this good weather?"
Which would you chose?

Let us take a look into the Parasha for some clues as to what you might be correct in answering. Yosef was sold as a slave to Potiphar - a great and mighty minister in Pharaohs regime. Potiphar was married to a beautiful wife, but as soon as she set eyes on Yosef, she desired him. She approached Yosef constantly and tried to coerce him. Each time Yosef would resist. One day Potiphar and all the people in the house were out; the only two people left were Yosef and Potiphars wife. She

took the opportunity to make her move. Yosef, a single young lad sold into slavery, was being severely tested. He passed with flying colours. He first refused, and then went on to explain how he could never do such a thing to his trusted master. Finally after she moved in on him, he ran away.

When reading this episode from the Torah one comes across an unusual cantillation over the word Vayema'en - he refused (Bereishit 39:8). This cantillation is called a Shalsholet and appears only three times in the book of Bereishit. Why is this cantillation used here? Furthermore there is a line representing a stop after the word Vayema'en, implying a pause. Why is this necessary?

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz zts'l explains that Yosef was in no doubt that succumbing to her desires would be immoral. He was being severely tested, it was difficult, but his response to such a test was an emphatic NO!

The statement, "Vayema'en" (with a Shalsholet and a Psik) implies that Yosef needed no process of logical deduction or calculation in reaching his decision.

The separation indicates that for himself, Yosef needed no explanation. Only in his response to Potiphars wife did he feel the need to explain. For Yosef, the very fact that a given action is forbidden was sufficient reason to abstain.

The way of the Yetser Harah is to try and convince us to sway to his side of thought. He uses manipulation, conviction and coercion to try and make us sin. Our answer, explains Rabbi Yerucham must be

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an emphatic NO!

If possible, in our war against our Yetser we should not try to get into a debate, we should be quick and certain to refuse at first. For once we open the door to doubt and debate with the Yester, and then we are playing on his ground and will find it harder to make a stand.

We find a similar idea when it came to burying Yaakov. The body of Yaakov was brought up from Egypt by all his sons. They came to the cave of Machpela to bury him and they were met by Eisav. He contested the fact that Yaakov should be buried there. The Tribes opened conversation trying to convince him that it was rightfully theirs. In the end they decided to send Naphtali (who was fast) to Egypt to bring the document that showed it belonged to Yaakov.

Chushim the son of Dan was also present at the time. He was deaf and couldn't follow the conversation. He asked what all the fuss was about; why were they not burying Yaakov? They

explained to him the situation. He was very zealous for his grandfather Yaakov and couldn't bear to see his body lie without burial for so long. He took action into his own hands and simply went and killed Eisav.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevits zts'l asks didn't the others feel for Yaakov. Why was it only Chushim that acted? He explains that once they entered into a debate with Eisav, then they were opening themselves up to manipulation. Eisav was able to buy time and try and conceive another way to cheat Yaakov out of being buried. Chushim on the other hand was deaf. He didn't hear the whole conversation. He still had that initial conviction and acted on it straight away. It was due to his conviction that Yaakov merited a quick and honourable burial.

Every day we say in our prayers 'En Kelokenu En Kadonenu' – there is no one like our G-d, no one like our Master. We continue and say Mi Kelokenu Mi Kadonenu – Who is like our G-d, who is like our Master?

Our sages ask why the prayer is in this order. Surely we should first state who is like G-d and then state there is none like G-d. Why do we say it the other way round?

Our Sages explain that a Jew has to build him/herself up so strong that their first reaction in life is En Kelokenu – there is none like Hashem. He is our Father, He is our Leader and He is the Creator of the Universe. There is none like Him. It is only once we have this understanding that we can then go on and ask who is like Him.

So when your friend walks in the room and says what a nice day it is outside, and it clearly isn't, then by choosing to answer with a clear no, might not be such a bad response. It shows your sincere belief in what you are stating.

Our first point in life is to build up our belief in Hashem. Our response when faced with tough tests must be swift and clear. We must state emphatically – "Everything is Min Hashamayim". It is the strength and clarity in our belief that will lead us through all of life's tests.



RABBI DANNY FISHER
Director - TAL Boys After School Programs

PARSHAT VAYESHEV

In this weeks sedra the possuk tells us "וישב ראובן אל הבור", that Reuven returned to the pit. But the question is why was he returning to the pit? Where had he gone, that he now needed to return?

Chazal explain that ראובן was returning from doing teshuvah after having switched his mother's bed. It goes on to say that since ראובן was the first person who had done a cheit and then teshuvah, as a reward he was promised that his descendent, Hosheyah ben Beri instigated the concept of Klal Yisroel doing teshuvah for their aveiros.

In the Haftorah of Shabbos Shuva we say the famous words "שובה ישראל עד"ה" "Return Yisroel to Hashem your

G-d because you have stumbled with your aveiros" Hosheyah perek 14. These famous words were said by Hosheah Hanovi, in his attempts to bring Yisroel back from their bad ways. The Yalkut Meamlloeiz asks a profound question, prior to ראובן there were many people who had done aveiros and consequently teshuva for those aveiros. Odom Horishon and Kayin both did teshuvah, why is it that ראובן is singled out for having been the first for doing teshuvah?

He answers that ראובן was the first to do teshuvah for an aveiroh which he thought was a mitzvah. Says Hosheiah "שובה ישראל", "return Yisroel" even when you think that which you have done is a mitzvah, but in reality it is in aveiroh, you must still do teshuvah for that.

This is a huge challenge, to change ones mind-set toward actions, which they previously thought were aveiros,

and do teshuvah for those very things. This takes effort and perseverance.

This is the concept which ראובן was mechadesh, and was therefore zocheh to a descendent who also personified this idea and who's nevuah is used as a stereotype for teshuvah.

We say in Maariv " והסר שטן מלפנינו "ומאחרינו" "remove the Soton from in-front of us and from behind us". What is the Soton in front of and behind us?

The Soton in front of us is the obvious Soton, which makes us slip up repeatedly. In comparison the Soton behind us, is the Soton, which pretends to us that, that which we are doing is moral and correct. That Soton is a lot harder to combat and to fight, and we need tremendous amounts of siyatah dishmayah for that.

May we all be zocheh to discern that which is correct and just in Hashem's eyes.

Good Shabbos



RABBI BENJI STONE, TAL Chavruta Program

Tehillim for Our Times; Chapter 14: למנצח לְדוֹד אִמֵּר נָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין אֱלֹקִים

AN UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTION - PART 2

In this chapter, King David faces an unforgiving enemy who are reprehensible in almost every way. They deny Hashem's existence (14:1) and those of their member who do show kavod shamayim (glory to heaven) do so only externally, without genuine Emunah (faith) (14:3).

לא קראו: ד'און אקלי עמי אקלו לחם הלא ידעו קל-פעלי

ים בְּדוֹר צְדִיק: קפְהָדוּ פָּחַד כִּי-אֱלֹשִׁם
Surely they knew, those evil-doers who consume my people, those who ate bread without calling on Hashem; There they felt fear - because G-d was in a righteous generation (14:4,5)

The Malbim writes that in this verse King David is referring to an unusual episode which occurred during his reign and which is detailed in the midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 18:21). A plague had spread amongst the people and tragically, one hundred people were dying every day. In response, the chachamim of the time decided that every Jew should recite one hundred brachot (blessings) every day. They believed that the plague had occurred as a result of the widespread

neglect of the reciting of brachot before and after eating. The requirement to recite berachot is based on the biblical requirement to recite birkat hamazon, the purpose of which is to express thanks to Hashem for His kindness in providing us with food - as the verse states "you shall eat, be satisfied and then bless Hashem" (Devarim; 8,10). Therefore, in the neglect of the reciting of brachot the chachamim perceived a deeper problem. They felt that the Jews were lacking in the middah (attribute) of hakarat hatov, - recognizing the good that they had received from Hashem - and as a result they sought to encourage the Jews to improve in this area through the reciting of numerous brachot each day.

The first words of the above verse reference the background to the tragic plague which spread amongst the Jews of the time;

שם פְּחָדוּ פָּחַד - ".....(the Jews) had eaten bread without calling on Hashem (without reciting birkat hamazon)"

But when they saw that a plague had broken out they realised that they were being punished and therefore

שם פְּחָדוּ פָּחַד

"...they felt fear" and committed to recite one hundred brachot a day in order to rectify their wrongdoing.

Thus the Jews saw all the troubles which

befell them as the part of a divine system of reward and punishment. In contrast, King David points out that the enemy did not even believe in Hashem or His involvement in human affairs. Surely now, after they had been comprehensively defeated in battle, the enemy should appreciate that

כִּי-אֱלֹקִים בְּדוֹר צְדִיק

that Hashem is to be found amongst that righteous generation of Jews who see Him as the source of everything that happens in this world.

It is precisely this attitude which sets us apart from other nations. We see every challenge, trial and success as a package sent straight to us from on high. Every problem we face is a message from Hashem that we need to act. Have we done something wrong to bring calamity upon ourselves? Maybe not. But if identifying and rectifying any problematic behaviours will serve to alleviate our problem then it makes sense to review our recent deeds and conversations and see if there are any stand-out errors. The Messilat Yesharim recommends a daily cheshbon hanefesh (journaling of good and bad deeds). If this sounds like an overly ambitious goal then perhaps a monthly accounting is the way to go. It may pay off dividends.

To be continued next week B'ezrat Hashem



HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Introduction to Pesukeh De'zimra

The Halacha below was generated based on classes given by Rabbi Eli Mansour in the Beki'im B'Halacha series. The classes were previously orated on the date(s) shown below. Click the date(s) below to hear the full length original audio file or watch the video by Rabbi Eli Mansour.

The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat (118) cites Rabbi Yossi's remark expressing his wish that he would have the same portion in the world to come as those who "complete the Hallel every day." While this at first glance appears to refer to the Hallel text that we recite on the holidays, the Gemara clarifies that this is not the case, for to the contrary, it is improper to recite Hallel every day. Rather, Rabbi Yossi refers here to what we call Pesukeh De'zimra - the final

chapters of Tehillim which we recite each day as an introduction to our prayers.

Rashi, in his commentary to the Gemara, explains that the Gemara speaks of specifically two chapters - chapter 148 of Tehillim ("Halelu Et Hashem Min Ha'shamayim") and the final chapter of Tehillim, chapter 150 ("Halelu Kel Be'kodsho"). Others, however, explain that the Gemara refers to the final six chapters, starting from chapter 145 (what we call "Ashreh"). It seems likely that Rashi agrees that all six chapters should be recited, but he sought to emphasize the unique importance of chapters 148 and 150. (Chapter 148 is special in that it describes the entire earth - the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the creatures in the world - giving praise to G-d. One Rabbi said that when we recite this chapter, we serve as

the conductor of the symphony, instructing everything in the universe to come together to sing the Almighty's praises.)

In light of Rashi's comments, the Poskim write that if a person is unable to recite all of Pesukeh De'zimra, he should at least endeavor to recite chapters 148 and 150, given their unique importance. Indeed, in some editions of the Siddur, these chapters are written in bold or a special font to emphasize their special significance. Several different reasons are given for the reason why we recite Pesukeh De'zimra before we come forward before G-d to pray for our needs.

Some explain based on the Gemara's teaching (Berachot 31a) that a person should be in the right mood when praying -

specifically, in a mood of "Simha Shel Misva," the joy of a Misva. One should not pray when he is angry, upset, agitated, or frivolous, but rather when he feels content and gratified as a result of a Misva. The Sages therefore instituted that we introduce our prayer with the recitation of chapters of Tehillim to put us in the right mood and the proper frame of mind for Tefila. Another explanation is that it is proper to first give praise to G-d before presenting our

requests. We learn this format from Moshe Rabbenu, who, before asking for permission to enter the Land of Israel, praised G-d for the great miracles He performed (Debarim 3:24). Therefore, before we approach G-d to ask for our needs, we first spend some time speaking His praises, just as Moshe did. The Rabbis of Kabbalah taught a different reason for reciting Pesukeh De'zimra. The verb "Z.M.R." can mean "sing," but also "prune," as in the Torah's command

"Ve'charmecha Lo Tizmor" (Vayikra 25:4), which forbids pruning during the Shemita year. As our prayers ascend to the heavens, they are exposed to the negative spiritual forces that seek to sabotage our Tefilot. We neutralize these forces through the recitation of the beautiful praises in these chapters of Tehillim, and thus this recitation is called "Pesukeh De'zimra" – the verses that "prune," or eliminate, the harmful spiritual forces that threaten our prayers.



WEEKLY PARSHA OVERVIEW

Parshat Vayeshev

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and

sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Torah portion's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will

found the Davidic line culminating in the Mashiach.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

Rabbi Sinclair,
Seasonsofthemoon.com

Q

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef..." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?

A

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.

