



Let's Talk

By Rabbi Yakov Grun

"I can't believe he posted that about you! Are you just going to let him get away with that?!"

"Definitely not."

"Are you going to post something nasty back?"

"Don't think so."

"You'll get him back in some other way?"

"Nope."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I think I'll approach him calmly, and discuss it."

"Oh. I didn't consider that."

Unfortunately, this isn't always our first reaction to conflict, but it's usually the most productive. We aren't in the position to, Chas VeShalom, judge Yosef's brothers, but in describing their disagreement, the Torah hints to us a strategy for conflict resolution. Rav Yonasan Eibuschitz notes that regarding the brothers' relationship with Yosef, the Torah says, "ולא יכלו דברו לשלום;" "And they were unable to speak to them in peace" (BeReishit 37:4). He explains that often, negative feelings that are harbored grow stronger with time. Often, the offender isn't even aware that he has hurt someone. On the other hand, when one approaches a friend to discuss the pain which he caused, the offender will often apologize, and commit to never repeat such behavior - thus putting an end to the negative feelings. The Torah indicates that had the brothers discussed with Yosef their reactions to his

behavior, his sale and the subsequent negative fallout could potentially have been avoided.

In fact, many מפרשים explain that when the פסוק tells us, "לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך," "Do not hate your brother in your heart, you shall surely rebuke your fellow" (VaYikra 19:17), the Torah is describing a strategy: if you want to avoid hating someone, tell them you are upset, because this will lead to reconciliation.

Hopefully, we should never experience negative interactions with others. But if we do, let us learn from the holy שבטים to apply this strategy promptly, allowing us to restore peace, and strengthen relationships.

Judean Crisis

By Gavi Kigner ('22)

The Torah refers to itself as a song. And as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks points out, the melody is important, especially in this week's Parashah, VaYeishev, where a Shalsholet is used. This is particularly noteworthy because this melody comes up only four times in the Torah, this week being the third.

The first time the melody shows up, Malachim are waking up Lot, telling him to take his family and flee Sodom: "*VaYa'itzu HaMalachim BeLot Leimor Kum Kach Et Ishtecha Ve'Et Shtei Benotecha HaNimtza'et Pen Tispeh BeAvon Ha'Ir*," "The Malachim urged Lot and said to get up and take his wife and his two daughters that are in the household, lest they be lost due to the sin of the city" (BeReishit 19:15). It's a time of identity crisis. Lot has to decide who he will listen to, and he hesitates: "*VaYitmamah* (read with a Shalsholet)," "and he hesitated" (BeReishit 19:16). He invested everything, left Avraham Avinu, just to prosper in this land. Does he really want to leave? But, on the other hand, he senses the Malachim are right. And he struggles. It's an identity crisis.

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The second time this rare note shows up is when Avraham sends Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak. Commentators suggest that Eliezer had a crisis of his own: would he try and find a wife for Yitzchak, or not, and potentially inherit all of Avraham's riches. He has two instincts: loyalty to Avraham and personal gain. What would he do? In the time of crisis he makes a decision: "*VaYomar* (read with a shalsholet) *HaShem Elokei Adoni Avraham HaKreh Na Lefanai HaYom Va'Aseih Chessed Im Adoni Avraham*," "and he said HaShem the Elokim of my master Avraham, do good for me on this day and do a Chessed for my master Avraham" (BeReishit 24:12). It is at this time when Eliezer decides who he is, when he decides that there is more to life than personal gain.

The fourth time this shows up is by Moshe Rabbeinu in Parashat Tzav, having to do with Shechitah. This is the instance upon which Rabbi Lord Jonathon Sacks primarily focuses in his article, and will not be addressed here¹. Instead, we will focus on this week's Parashah.

For Yosef, it is far from ideal. His boss' wife constantly attempts to seduce him, and he is at a breaking point. It is his desires, something that Mitzrayim was known for, against HaShem, Torah, Yaakov Avinu, and much more. It was his identity at stake, but he remembers who he is. It was not just if he was in the right, but if he is an *Ish Mitzri* or *Ish Ivri*. But Yosef steps up to the challenge: "*VaYima'en* (read with a Shalsholet)," "and he refused" (BeReishit 39:8) as well as in how Eishet Potifar characterizes him: an "*Ish Ivri*" (BeReishit 39:14). He maintains his true identity. It is this moment that the Midrash Rabbah pinpoints as to why Yosef was buried in Israel, while Moshe Rabbeinu was not - because Moshe was referred to as an "*Ish Mitzri*" (Shemot 2:19) by Yitro's daughters.

There are struggles like this throughout life, and, as Rabbi Sacks puts it, "It is a moment of existential truth". But this is the nature of a Jew. Even Avraham Ha'Ivri, who, many commentators say has "Ha'Ivri" appended to his name because he is Mei'Evar HaNahar, experienced such decisive moments. My Rebbe, Rav Daniel Fridman explains that this is true physically as well as intellectually. Avraham Avinu was

worlds apart from everyone else in terms of his thoughts and beliefs - and that is part of what it means to be a Jew. These moments are times to decide who one is. It is a time for one to uncover what really matters to him. Sometimes it requires going against certain impulses like Yosef, but the question is if we will be like Yonah, and, in the face of everything say "*Ivri Anochi Ve'Et HaShem Elokei HaShamayim Ani Yarei*," "I am a Jew and I fear Hashem" (Yonah 1:9).

Dream Big

By AJ Sepowitz ("22")

"All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them" - Walt Disney

In this week's Parashah, Parashat VaYeishev, Yosef has his famous dream which he repeats to his brothers. "שָׁמַעְנוּ בָּנָא הַקְלוּם הַנָּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלָמְתִי. וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי בָּנִי מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קִמָּה אֲלֵמִי וְגַם-נִצְבָּה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבְּינָה אֲלֵמִתִּיכֶם וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְאֲלֵמִתִּי" "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf" (BeReishit 37:6,7). As we know, Yosef is a principled man who has big dreams and aspirations. The brothers hate Yosef after hearing his significant dream. They feel that he is seeking power over them and is trying to put himself over them. However, we learn that Yosef does the right thing regardless of how he leaves his brothers. There's an amazing song, "Choleim Kimo Yosef," by the famous Israeli singer Chanan ben Ari. The song speaks about how Jewish people are supposed to dream big like Yosef.

On the other hand, the first Pasuk says "וַיָּשֶׁב וַיָּבִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מִגִּנְרֵי אֲבִיו" "Yaakov was settled in the land where his father had sojourned" (BeReishit 37:1). Rashi notes that Yaakov Avinu wanted to live the rest of his life in tranquility and peace. After running away from Esav, being tricked by Lavan, and losing his most beloved wife, Yaakov had had enough Tzarot. His final dream was to rest - VaYeishev. However, HaKadosh Baruch Hu had different plans. Yaakov faced another challenge when he lost his most beloved son Yosef. Hashem was trying to send him a message that nothing in life comes easy and the righteous can never rest. A

¹ See this link for his article:
<https://www.yeshiva.co/midrash/46831>

Tzaddik is one whose dreams contain hard work in order to attain greatness. For this reason, the Torah contrasts Yaakov's dream to rest with Yosef's dream to become a great leader. The Torah is teaching us that we are not only supposed to dream big, but we are also supposed to work hard to achieve those dreams.

Another important lesson is that hard work has its ups and downs. Yosef is the epitome of downfalls and comebacks. He was once the beloved son of the most righteous man in the world only to find himself sitting in a dungeon in a foreign land and hated by his dear brothers. It was only when he decided to share his lessons, the importance of dreaming big, and working to achieve those big dreams, that he once again rose to greatness. It is not only important to have big dreams and to work hard to attain them, but it is also important to share our aspirations with others.

May we take this lesson to heart and strive to lift up others as they achieve their dreams while we work hard to achieve our own.

"VeGam Ani Choleim Kemo Yosef," "I too dream like Yosef" - Chanan Ben Ari.

A Different Look at the Story of Yehuda and Tamar

By Eitan Nissel ('22)

The story of Tamar and Yehuda is a bit odd. Usually, we think of the VaYeishev-Mikeitz-VaYigash trilogy as focusing on Yosef against his brothers, so it's weird to see just a single brother on his own; not to mention how it doesn't connect to the story of Yosef at all. So what is this story doing here?

I think the first step is to dispel the notion that Yehuda isn't a character in his own right. While we usually think of Yosef's brothers as a single, antagonistic unit, Yehuda stands out as a unique character with a more concrete arc. Not only is he the one who actually sells Yosef (37:26-7), he is also the one to take responsibility for Binyamin (43:8-9) and, in the climax of the whole story (44:18-34), follows through on that promise. So it shouldn't surprise you that he has his own short story.

With this in mind we see how the story of Tamar helps Yehuda's arc take shape. First, he sells his brother out of jealousy, but later, he shows himself to

be responsible and respectful. We can really see this transformation through this seemingly irrelevant story.

Firstly, it re-emphasizes to us how Yehuda interacts with those in his family. Just as Yehuda didn't understand why exactly Yosef was favored, he didn't understand why his first two sons died. This made it all the easier to act selfishly in both cases, rejecting family for his own personal reasons.

Tamar, however, knows that she has been wronged and seeks to fix it by forcing Yehuda into recognizing her as part of his family. This is a microcosm of how Yosef, the other wronged party, uses his power to force Yehuda to take responsibility for Binyamin, with one crucial difference: In Tamar's case, Yehuda almost fails the test. He orders Tamar to be burned for her harlotry, and only at the last moment she calls him out with his pledges, the staff, cord, and seal. Finally, Yehuda recognizes not what seems to be the revelation, that he was the one who impregnated Tamar, but the actual cause of everything: "*Ki Al Kein Lo Netatiha LeShelah Beni*", "That this [my selfishness] is why I didn't give her to Shelah my son" (33:26). He realizes that his selfishness, and not his excuse about Shelah's youth, was the reason he rejected Tamar.

Furthermore, this moment directly calls back to Yehuda's original misdeed through specific word choice: Tamar says "*Haker Na LeMi... Eileh*," "Please recognize... whose are these" (33:25), which is almost the exact same wording that Yehuda uses to deceive Yaakov: "*Haker Na Haketonet Bincha Hi Im Lo*", "Please recognize if this is the coat of your son or not" (37:32). The Torah explicitly connects this to the misdeed that started the main narrative.

Now, it is clear how this is so important to this main narrative: It is only with this experience in mind can Yehuda recognize how he has wronged Yaakov Avinu. And, though he hesitates until their hunger is too great (43:1-2), Yehuda finally realizes his mistake and takes full responsibility for Binyamin in Yosef's stead.

The story of Yehuda's growth is one of the most compelling in all of BeReishit. Every story beat keeps on adding and adding to the tension, before it all gets released in one of the most climactic moments in Tanach. And part of it is all thanks to how even the side

stories serve to develop the characters of the main narrative.

Yochanan Gadol HaGadol in Al HaNissim?

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Matityahu Ben Yochanan Kohein Gadol

Al HaNissim identifies Matityahu as the son of Yochanan Kohein Gadol. We will review what we know about Yochanan Kohein Gadol and explore why it is worthwhile mentioning him in Al HaNissim. After all, we could have mentioned Matityahu without mentioning his father, like Eliyahu HaNavi.

We should clarify that there is considerable debate as to whether the Yochanan Kohein Gadol in Al HaNissim is the same as the Yochanan Kohein Gadol that appears in the Mishnah and Gemara. It is worthwhile addressing our issue since they may be the same person. In any event, the mention of Yochanan Kohein Gadol in Al HaNissim brings to mind the actions of the Yochanan Kohein Gadol mentioned in the Mishnah and Gemara. Rav Gil Student presents a concise summary of the debate concerning the identity of Yochanan Kohein Gadol of Al HaNissim, at <https://www.torahmusings.com/2006/01/yochanan-high-priest>.

Yochanan Kohein Gadol's Five Takanot

The last Mishna of Ma'aser Sheini (5:15) records Yochanan Kohein Gadol's five significant Takanot. Many of them are quite bold in that he made a significant break from earlier practice. These Takanot include the abrogation of a Mitzvah De'Oraita, the cancelation of the recital of a particular Mizmor of Tehillim in the Beit HaMikdash, a major change in standard practice regarding Shechitah the Bet HaMikdash, a major change regarding Hafrashat Terumat and Ma'aserot, and a significant change in an age-old practice in Yerushalayim!

Rabbi Chaim Rosenblatt of Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh explicates these Takanot as follows:

"Yochanan Kohein Gadol He'evir Hodayot HaMa'aser," "Yochanan the High Priest brought an end to the confession made over the tithe" (Ma'aser Sheini 5:15). Devarim 26:12-15 teaches that every three years a declaration needs to be made by a person that he gave away all the produce that he was obligated to give

away (Terumah, Ma'aser/Tithes, Bikkurim, etc.) to the appropriate people. This is known as Vidui Ma'aserot, the Confession of the Tithe. However, at the beginning of the Second Temple, when Ezra led a return of Jews to the Land of Israel, the Levi'im overall didn't join in, and as a result, Ezra imposed a Kenas/penalty, whereby they'd no longer receive Ma'aser. But this being the case, Yochanan Kohein Gadol nullified the Confession of Tithes, because included in that text is *"VeGam Natativ LaLevi,"* "And I even gave the Levi [his due]," but it was no longer relevant to say this, seeing as Ma'aser would no longer be given to the Levites (Devarim 26:13).

Next, the Mishnah says that "...he also discontinued 'the wakers...'" Initially, the Levi'im used to call out to Hashem in the Temple "Awaken! Why do you sleep O' God?!" Inasmuch as Hashem doesn't sleep, Yochanan Kohein Gadol deemed this text disrespectful, and nullified it.

Yochanan also abolished "...the knockers/hitters'..." It had been customary to scratch a calf-that-was-to-be-sacrificed between his horns, which would cause blood in his eyes, thereby preventing him from seeing, which would in turn make it easier to tie him up and slaughter him. But Yochanan Kohein Gadol nullified this practice, because it made it seem like the calf had a blemish, and that it was okay to sacrifice a blemished animal. He instead set up rings in which to place the calves, which would hold them in place when being slaughtered.

Then, the Mishnah states that "...Up until his days the hammer used to strike in Jerusalem..." Blacksmiths working with iron and copper originally worked on Chol HaMoed if it was a Davar HaAveid – a matter involving irreplaceable financial loss if they wouldn't do it, which is essentially allowed. But Yochanan Kohein Gadol felt that because blacksmiths use noisy hammers (Avsha Milta), there was a general degrading of the Festival, and he therefore disallowed this.

Finally, the Mishna says that "...and in his days there was no need to inquire about doubtfully-tithed produce." More ignorant Jews (Amei Ha'Aretz) are suspected of not separating Terumat Ma'aser, as well as the other Ma'asrot, so all produce bought from them is considered Demai - of dubious status. But rather than ask such Jews if they separated what they were

supposed to, Yochanan Kohein Gadol enacted that one should always separate Terumat Ma'aser and Ma'aser Sheini from all produce bought from an Am HaAretz in order to be sure that these were separated.

In light of the Takanot of Yochanan Kohein Gadol and the principle of "*Ma'aseh Avot Siman L'Vanim*" (parents' actions set a tone for the children's path), it is not surprising for the son of Yochanan Kohein Gadol to be the revolutionary Matityahu. Yochanan Kohein Gadol assumes a bold path to preserve Torah, and his son Matityahu follows in his footsteps and paves his own unique, bold paths to preserve the Torah's integrity in the face of the steep challenges he faced in his time.

Yochanan Kohein Gadol Becomes a Tzeduki!

Thus, the Yochanan Kohein Gadol described in Masechet Ma'aser Sheini fits with Matityahu and the themes of Chanukah. However, trouble begins when we note the Gemara (Berachot 29a), which tells the following horrifying story about Yochanan Kohein Gadol: after serving as Kohein Gadol for eighty years, he lost his faith and became a Tzeduki (a heretical denier of the authority of the Oral Law). The question then becomes, why do we mention the iniquitous Yochanan Kohein Gadol in our Tefillah and Birkat HaMazon on Chanukah?

Chanukah as a Festival of Torah SheBa'al Peh

The Chassidic Master, Rav Tzvi Elimelech Shapira of Dinov, presents a classic answer. He explains (Bnei Yissaschar, Ma'amarei Kisleiv-Teiveit 4:25-26) that even if the Yochanan Kohein Gadol referenced in Al HaNissim, is the one who abandoned his belief in Torah SheBa'al Peh, it would still make sense that he is mentioned, for this indicates that his son Matityahu, through the Chanukah-activity that he was involved in, brought about a Tikkun/spiritual-rectification of his father.

The Bnei Yissaschar notes that Yoma 29a teaches that Chanukah is a festival whose Neis should not be written down as part of Tanach. If so, Chanukah is perforce part and parcel of only the Oral Tradition. As such, it can be said that by bringing about a festival that is specifically part of the Oral Torah, Matityahu brought Tikkun to his father, who denied Torah SheBa'al Peh.

This approach fits well with the fact that little mention is made of Chanukah in the Mishnah (only six times in passing – in contrast to Purim, which has an entire Masechet devoted to it) and the Gemara (only a few Dafim in the second Perek of Masechet Shabbat).

Characterizing Chanukah as a festival highlighting the Oral Law is most compatible with the role of the Jewish people as the "companion volume" of the Torah. It also very much fits with the celebration of Chanukah – the victory of the Greeks and the continuity of Torah – meaning the continuity of Am Yisrael serving as Hashem's witnesses (Yishayahu 43:10), or what we may call "the companion volume" to the Torah.

We, the descendants of the people who experienced the Ten Makkot, Kiri'at Yam Suf, and Ma'amad Har Sinai, serve as witnesses for the integrity of the Torah. Our belief in these events does not stem solely from the Torah itself but also from the fact that we are the beneficiaries of a living tradition dating back to these momentous occasions. Thus, the Jewish People serve as a living and breathing complementary "Oral Law" for the Torah. The Syrian Greeks sought to extinguish this great light, and Chanukah celebrates this Torah SheBa'al Peh continuing to shine brightly.

Chanukah as a Paradigm for Continuous Growth

Based on the following two points, we suggest another angle to our mentioning Yochanan Kohein Gadol on Chanukah.

Legendary TABC Rebbe Rabbi Joel Grossman as a teenager, would help Rav Moshe Feinstein when he and his Rebbetzin came to visit their daughter (Rebbetzin Tandler) in Monsey. Rabbi Grossman saw Rav Moshe utilize every second to learn Torah, even to review Mishnayot between Aliyot! Rabbi Grossman said to Rav Moshe, why at his age (Rav Moshe was in his late eighties at the time) was he learning incessantly if he already mastered the Torah many times?! Rav Moshe offered a stunning response: "If Yochanan Kohein Gadol could become a Tzeduki after eighty years of serving as Kohein Gadol, Moshe Feinstein can also go off the Derech!"

The Gemara (Shabbat 21b) records the practice of Beit Hillel to kindle an additional light each night of Chanukah based on the concept of Ma'alim BeKodesh VeLo Mordim; we strive to ascend in holiness. The

Gemara terms this “Mosif VeHoleich,” which can be translated as continuous growth and improvement.

Rav Moshe Feinstein teaches that the shocking conclusion to Yochanan Kohein Gadol teaches us that we must be in a mindset of constant spiritual growth. He also teaches that the alternative is only a descent into the spiritual abyss. This message is highlighted by our adding a light each night of Chanukah. Interestingly, each night we begin by kindling that night’s additional light.

Based on this last approach, we may explain why we need eight days to thank Hashem for Chanukah, unlike Purim, where one day suffices. Although one day would suffice to thank Hashem for making the oil last for eight days and for the miraculous victory over the Syrian-Greeks, we need eight nights of Chanukah to reinforce the message of constant growth, everlasting vigor, and enthusiasm so that we have the spiritual wherewithal to overcome whatever challenges we may face. The path of Mosif VeHoleich is the only antidote to Yochanan Kohein Gadol’s spiritual downfall, and it serves as the backbone of our fierce resistance to any attempts to extinguish our individual and communal light of Torah.

Conclusion

Regardless as to whether the father of Matityahu is the Yochanan Kohein Gadol who lost his faith, the repeated mention of Yochanan Kohein Gadol on Chanukah serves to reinforce the vital messages and central themes of our Chanukah celebration. Yochanan Kohein Gadol serves as a potent reminder of our sublime role as the Torah’s companion volume and a sobering spur to never-ending spiritual growth.

Editors-In-Chief: Ezra Lebowitz and Aidan Samet
Publication Editors: Kivi Davis, Chanan Schreiber, Azarya Tiger, and Ariel Kyzman
Layout: Chanan Schreiber
Communications: Daria Kopel
Rabbinic Advisor: Rabbi Chaim Jachter
Questions, comments? Contact us at:
Phone: (201) 837-7696
webmasters@koltorah.org