



As the Light Begins to Fade

By Rabbi Ezra Stone ('11)

After the dramatic episode of Yosef revealing himself to his brothers, the Torah shifts its focus to Yaakov Avinu. As one could imagine, Yaakov was very excited that he would finally be reuniting with his son, but at the same time, he was nervous about going down to Egypt. Yaakov understood the challenges that awaited him and his family. Yet the Torah describes HaKadosh Baruch Hu's interaction with Yaakov in a unique way; something that we don't find with our previous forefathers. The Torah writes "*VaYomer Elokim LeYisrael BeMar'ot HaLaylah VaYomer Yaakov Yaakov VaYomer Hineini*," "And Hashem spoke to Yisrael in visions of night and He said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov,' and he replied, 'Here I am'" (BeReishit 46:2). The Torah uses interesting language describing when Hashem appeared to Yaakov. Hashem specifically appears to Yaakov in the "image/vision of night." The Meshech Chochmah explains beautifully that it is at this time of history that Yaakov Avinu plans on leaving Israel to settle outside of Israel for an extended amount of time. This is really the first time the Jews experience such a phenomenon. This is why Hashem specifically appears to Yaakov at night, contrary to Avraham and Yitzchak, to teach Yaakov that Hashem's presence can also be found outside of Eretz Yisrael. Even while we live in the darkness, Hashem is there with us.

The Meshech Chochmah continues to explain that this idea pertains only to when we adhere to our fathers' values. As long as we act in the ways of our fathers, Hashem's presence will be with us. This is such a powerful and relevant message on the heels of Chanukah.

As the Chanukah lights fade, we are tasked with internalizing the message of Chanukah. It is our responsibility to keep the light going.

I believe there is a practical suggestion as to how we can continue to incorporate the message of Chanukah. Many ask, why is there no Masechet Chanukah? We find with all other holidays a specific tractate that discusses the various laws, yet for the holiday of Chanukah, we only find a few Blat/pages in Masechet Shabbat. Many suggest the holiday of Chanukah represents the Torah SheBa'al Peh, the Oral Torah. Therefore, Chazal decided that since this holiday represents Torah SheBa'al Peh, it would be an oxymoron to write down this text. The message of the Oral Torah is that it is passed from generation to generation. It requires us to continue to do what the previous generation did. Perhaps our commitment to Torah SheBa'al Peh is the key for us as we head into the winter, which represents the darkness. Once we engage in Torah learning and connecting to our Mesorah, we will hopefully then be Zocheh to Hashem's presence in our midst.

Emunah: Finding Comfort in Darkness

By Emanuel Lubetski ('23)

Before Yaakov Avinu left Eretz Yisrael to go down to Egypt, Hashem comforted him by saying "*VeYosef Yashit Yado Al Einecha*," "And Yosef will place his hand on your eyes" (VaYigash 46:4). This promise is interpreted by the Ibn Ezra as meaning that Yaakov wouldn't see Yosef die in his lifetime. However, the Zohar explains these words as meaning *דא רזא דקריאת שמא*. How are we meant to understand this mysterious statement?

Yaakov Avinu knew already that the descent to Egypt indicated the beginning of a long and painful exile, and he feared for the future of his family and their descendants. Therefore, Hashem reassured him by saying "*Ki LeGoy Gadol Asimcha Sham*," "For there I will make you into a great nation" (46:3). Though Yaakov's worries weren't completely misguided, Egypt would still prove to be a *כור הברזל* - extracting all the refuse and purifying

Rabbi Jachter's new book, *Opportunity in Exile: An In-Depth Exploration of Sefer Daniel*, is out now! It can be purchased on Amazon.com, get yours today!

To sponsor an issue in memory of a loved one, in honor of a joyous occasion, or for a Refu'ah Sheleimah, please contact: business@koltorah.org

everything that was left. The imminent exile would appear to be detrimental and unfavorable to his descendants but would ultimately prove to be a blessing in disguise and create an even holier and nobler nation. No human being can foresee the future and understand Hashem's plan which is always for the benefit of Klal Yisrael, and the exile to Egypt was no exception. In the meantime, Yaakov would have to "close his eyes" and rely upon his spiritual faith until the truth would be revealed.

To reinforce this advice, Hashem referred Yaakov to the episode of his son Yosef. When he disappeared, Yaakov mourned the loss of his son for years. To Yaakov the loss of Yosef didn't just represent the human loss, but also the spiritual loss of his tradition to have twelve sons. However, Yaakov couldn't have been more wrong as Yosef was not only alive, but about to become a leading power in Egypt and in an ideal position to protect his family when they got there. Unknown to anyone, even Yaakov, Hashem's plan was taking shape but it took many years before Yaakov recognized his mistaken interpretation of events.

This seems to be the significance of "*VeYosef Yashit Yado Al Einecha*". Hashem wanted Yaakov to take a lesson from the episode of Yosef, because it would help "close his eyes" and not judge things near-sightedly. Just as Yosef's disappearance had turned out for the best, so too the outcome of the exile would also be a blessing for Bnei Yisrael. All that we need is faith and absolute trust in Hashem.

The mysterious words of the Zohar, *דא רזא דקריאת שמא* focus on the same idea. We refer to Hashem in Shema as "*Elokeinu*," a name associated with sternness and justice. However we also refer to him with the Sheim Havayah, which is associated with mercy. On the surface they are two contradictory attributes that coincide with each other. But we conclude Shema by saying "*Hashem Echad*," as they both stem from the same, single source of *ה*, of kindness. To us, Hashem's plan might seem harsh at times but in truth everything is for our good. That is why we are told to close our eyes during Shema, to warn us against viewing and judging things as we see them. Rather just we should leave it to Hashem to work things out in his own and merciful way. That was Hashem's message to Yaakov before he left to go down to Egypt and into exile, and that is the everlasting advice to every Jew for all time.

The Inyan of Yosef HaTzaddik

By Yakov Abrahams ('22)

In this week's Parashah, Yehudah makes a passionate speech describing the great tragedy that would befall Yaakov Avinu if Binyamin isn't brought home. Then

finally, in a dramatic moment, Yosef reveals himself to his brothers. The question is, why didn't Yosef's brothers recognize him earlier. Rashi says that it is because Yosef had grown a beard. However, Rav Moshe Weinberger explains that there is something much deeper going on here.

He explains that Yosef's brothers failed to recognize him because they had fundamentally misunderstood who he was as a person since his childhood. Rashi in Parashat VaYishlach describes Yosef as not only good looking, but as someone who cared about his appearance, and even combed his hair. Rav Weinberger explains that Yosef as a young man engaged in a constant struggle with his Yetzer HaRa for lust and immorality. He wasn't a troublemaker at the core, but rather, his Tafikid/challenge was to overcome this challenge, and once he was able to, he became Yosef HaTzaddik, the prime example of Tzaddik Yesod Olam. However since his brothers never faced the same battle in this regard, and were Tzaddikim from the start, they could not fathom his struggle, and therefore misunderstood him as no more than a troublemaker. Therefore, Yosef's brothers could not identify him as viceroy over Egypt. They viewed Yosef as a lowly boy and could not imagine such potential in him.

Rav Moshe Weinberger brings a proof from a Midrash. The Midrash says that when Yosef's brothers made their first trip to Egypt, the first place they searched for Yosef was in the Kubah Shel Zonot, a place of harlotry. He explains the brothers thought that's where he would be found because they perceived him as a troublemaker, a "playboy", a "bad kid". Rav Weinberger continues and explains that the sin of the brothers continues today, as parents and communities fail to see the struggle on a boy's face, and tend to cast a young man off as a "bad kid" when he has a funny haircut or acts out.

It is our job as the generation before Mashiach, to see through the surface and answer the call to all those Tzaddikim who are struggling as did Yosef HaTzaddik. In the merit that we see the beauty and potential in our own children, may we correct the sin of Yosef's brothers and merit the Binyan Beit HaMikdash with the coming of Mashiach Tzidkeinu BeMeheirah BeYameinu.

Guide to the Rabbis' Perplexing Silence

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Bar Kamtza (Gittin 56a) is incensed by the Rabbi's silence in the wake of his humiliating expulsion from the grand party. He interprets their silence as acquiescence to the host's very poor behavior. The Gemara does not explain this rabbinic inaction and we are left to speculate why this happened.

Fear of the Host?

A Shaarei Orah congregant suggested that the Rabbis feared confronting the party host. He appears to be quite wealthy and well-connected. I am not satisfied with this explanation since Bar Kamtza seems also to have been very wealthy and well connected, especially with the Roman Leadership.

Divine Manipulation

Carmi Mizrahi suggests that Hashem manipulated the Rabbis to remain silent. We do find the Gemara (in the next Ammud) suggesting that Hashem manipulated Rabi Yochanan Ben Zakai to err, to enable the Churban to occur ("Meshiv Chachamim Achor, V'Da'atam Yisacheil," "He turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish.")

However, the Gemara only a few lines later, criticizes rabbinic inaction when the Romans sought to offer a sacrifice with a subtle blemish. Perhaps here as well, the Rabbis are to blame for choosing silence.

Group Think

Binyamin Jachter thinks our situation is one of "groupthink" gone awry. Binyamin notes a similar instance in the planning of the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Kennedy cabinet members reflected afterwards that they each realized the plan was doomed to fail. However, they all feared voicing their concerns since they thought everyone else approved the idea. Each feared being the lone dissenting voice and each tragically remained silent.

Group think may also be to blame for the Rabbis' inaction when the Romans brought their blemished Korban. The Biryonim of the same Talmudic page also suffered from this malady. Their leader told his uncle Rabi Yochanan ben Zakai that he recognizes that their resistance to the Romans is futile and even suicidal but he feared voicing his disapproval to his followers lest they kill him. It is likely that the followers also realized their foolishness but feared retribution from their leader if they dissent.

It is for this reason that Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts judges "*Lo Taguru Mipnei Ish*," "do not fear others" (Devarim 1:17). Rashi (d"h *Lo Taguru*) adds that it teaches "*Lo Te'egor Devoracha*," "do not store your words (i.e., if you see something, say something)".

Rav Fohrman- Rabbis Innocent

Rav David Fohrman suggests that the Rabbis had no idea what happened. Bar Kamtza incorrectly assumed that the Rabbis ignored his plight. Rav Fohrman explains that this is a classic example of Sinat Chinam, unnecessary hatred. He notes that this fits the pattern of the party host unnecessarily suspecting Bar Kamtza of coming uninvited to disrupt his great event and the Romans misinterpreting our refusal to offer their slightly blemished sacrifice as a signal of disobedience and rebellion.

A problem with Rav Fohrman's approach is that the subsequent story regarding the Roman trying to bring a Korban decries the rabbinic inaction in that case. One might assume the rabbinic silence at the party in the prior story is also a case of misguided rabbinic inaction.

If You See Something, Say Something

In contrast to the lack of rabbinic response to evil action, we find Moshe Rabbeinu in Shemot Perek 2 reacting to poor behavior. He intervenes when an Egyptian oppresses a Jew, when two Jews are fighting, and when Yitro's daughter is being abused. Moshe Rabbeinu taking action against evil led to Ge'ulah. Rabbinic inaction in the Kamtza Bar Kamtza story led to destruction.

The Rabbis in attendance might have felt that their involvement would inflame and aggravate the situation. Perhaps they surmised that the host had good reason to hate Bar Kamtza.

However, the Rabbis could have and should have intervened and mediated a resolution to the terrible hatred between the host and Bar Kamtza. By contrast, Ta'anit 22a tells of Eliyahu HaNavi pointing to the gentlemen who merit Olam HaBa due to their efforts to mediate peace between warring parties. Conflict resolution is even described by Yishayahu HaNavi (Perek 2) as the primary activity of the Melech HaMashiach.

Rambam (Hilchot Sanhedrin 2:7) writes that Dayanim must follow Moshe Rabbeinu's example. I have done my best to honor this directive. At a Get procedure a number of years ago, the husband had the gall to openly demand concessions from his wife in exchange for the Get. I was keenly aware of our story and admonished the husband for his outrageous demand. When the husband responded that it was none of my business I responded that Rabbis are required to respond to injustice.

On another occasion, when adjudicating a monetary dispute, a litigant and his spokesman were not embarrassed to state that they shamed an opponent for advocating an opinion that ran contrary to theirs. I reminded my colleagues of the disaster wrought by rabbinic silence in Gittin 56a and our court decried the terrible behavior.

A Davav She'Eino Nishma

The Gemara (Yevamot 65b) urges refraining from saying something that will be ignored. The Rabbis at the party may have felt that their words would be ignored. The Gemara in the same context tells of the Biryonim who spurned Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai urging restraint in the face of the Roman onslaught. Perhaps this was symptomatic of the times.

Thus, the community may also share part of the blame for the Rabbis' silence. While the Rabbis are at fault for not responding, the community as a whole may

have been at fault for failing to create a climate of receptivity to rabbinic directives and direction.

Conclusion

It is remarkable and a sign of authenticity that the Gemara does not shy away from acknowledging mistakes of rabbinic leaders. No one is perfect and had the Talmud presented its protagonists as perfect, then its stories would be too good to be true. As in the Tanach, the Gemara (unique in the ancient world) acknowledges both the strengths and weaknesses of our rabbinic role models. In admitting their mistakes, the Rabbis also serve as a role model of appropriate and proper behavior.

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