Time Flies

“Yosef, at the age of seventeen ... but he was a youth.” (37:2)

Have you noticed that the older you get, the quicker everything seems to go? Birthdays seem about nine months apart. Pesach gets closer to Succos every year. It seems as though our perception of the passage of time is proportional to the span of our years.

When you’re young, a day seems forever, and a week is beyond measurement. It’s difficult to tell children to be patient because for them time has an entirely different reality. How many times do we buy the kids a present and say “Wait till we get home before you open it!” When we get home we find the wrapping is all over the back of the car.

Rashi comments on the above verse that being “a youth” means that Yosef would “fix his hair.” Can it be that Yosef the Tzadik was so vain? Or is Rashi hinting to something deeper?

A king is obliged to have a haircut every day, in keeping with the dignity of his station in life. Yosef knew through prophecy that he would one day be a king, and in the impatience of youth, he couldn’t wait for the prophecy to come true, so he “fixed his hair,” trying, as it were, to hurry that moment closer by going through the motions of kingship.

Ironically, when he eventually becomes a king in Egypt, it is not he who gives himself a haircut, but others.

As much as we may try to force events in our impetuosity, to everything there is a time and a place and a season under Heaven.

When Half Of Two Is Zero

Yosef said to the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers: “If only you would think of me... and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building.” (40:14)

Every Rosh Hashana, all those who have come to this world pass before the King of Kings like sheep. One at a time, we are judged. The entire following year is decided at that moment.

If everything is decided on Rosh Hashana and sealed on Yom Kippur, why should I bother to go out to work? If everything’s decided anyway, why don’t I just stay in bed and eat chocolates, and let my pay check arrive in the mail?

Even though all our needs are met miraculously, Hashem requires that we make an effort, that we do hishtadlus. The essential reason is so that we may cover up the miracle of G-d’s providing for us. By making an effort, we make it look like our livelihood is a result of natural forces.

We must never think that this effort has any connection with the results it seems to bring. If I get to work a little earlier and the sales figures show an increase, I shouldn’t let myself think that my early mornings were the cause. Rather, everything at every moment is sent to me from Heaven.

But how much effort is called hishtadlus and how much betrays a lack of faith?

Yosef asked the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers twice to intercede on his behalf to Pharaoh. By his lack of trust in Hashem by asking the Chamberlain twice, Yosef languished in jail for two further years.

Rabbi Chaim Brisker once asked Rabbi Shimon Shkop how long Yosef would have been kept in prison if he had only asked the Chamberlain once to help secure his release.

Rabbi Shimon replied that had Yosef only asked once, he would have only spent one year in prison.

Rabbi Chaim disagreed. “He wouldn’t have had to spend any more time in prison at all. To try to secure his release by asking once is considered to be hishtadlus — the human effort that Hashem expects of each of us. To ask twice showed a lack of trust in Hashem. So it would have been two years or nothing.”

Speaking Between the Lines

“...and Yosef would bring evil reports about them (his brothers) to their father.” (37:2)

Next to Everest, even K2 pales by comparison.

How could it be that Yosef... continued on page four
Yakov Avinu settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yakov makes for Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef excites 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. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Yishmaelim. When Reuven returns to find the pit empty, he rends his clothes in anguish. The brothers soak Yosef’s tunic in goat’s blood and show it to their father Yakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild animal. Yakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha’s sub-plot, Yehuda’s son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant because he feared that she would lose her beauty. Onan, Yehuda’s second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in circumstances similar to those of his brother. 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 of her, she slanders Yosef, falsely accusing him of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. While in jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh’s wine steward, who is re-instated; and the dream of Pharaoh’s baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef after he is released, and Yosef languishes in jail.

**Parsha Overview**

**Cosmic Consequences**

“Only you have I loved of all the families of the earth, therefore will I recall upon you all your iniquities.” (3:2)

Take two students. One talented and full of promise, the other slow-witted and delinquent. You catch them both cheating in exams. Which of the two is liable to get the greater punishment?

Even though other nations have certainly deserved punishment more, the Jewish people have suffered Hashem’s punishment more than any other people.

Privilege has no meaning without responsibility.

The Jewish People are supposed to be the “star pupil” in life’s classroom. For their sake, the world was created. They have been chosen to be a sign to all peoples. Israel is the heartbeat of the world, and therefore, necessarily, its responsibility is greater.

When the Jewish people sin, they blemish the whole creation, and therefore they are judged more exactly — because, even though their small infractions may seem insignificant, the consequences are cosmic.

**Love of the Land**

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

**First in Creation, First in Importance**

Eretz Yisrael was created first and afterwards as the passage states (Mashiach 8:26): “Before He made Eretz (land) and Chutzot (outlying areas).”

The term “Eretz” applies to Eretz Yisrael which was the main purpose of creation and therefore created first. All the other lands are considered secondary in importance as they were in the sequence of creation and are therefore referred to as “Chutzot.”

Even today we refer to the land we love simply as “Eretz” while the rest of the world is “Chutzot,” outlying areas of secondary importance.

**Haftorah: Amos 2:6-3:8**

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* Mayana shel Torah

This issue is dedicated in the memory of Rebbetzin Esther Golda Nusbaum O.B.M.
Parsha Q&A?

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?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn’t Hashem reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states “his father wept.” To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar’s father?

Bonus Question?

“I Didn’t Know That!”

“...They put him in jail, the place where the royal prisoners were imprisoned.” (39:20)

Yosef, a Hebrew slave on the lowest rung of Egyptian society, was accused of a capital crime. Why, then, was he given special privileges? Why was he put in the special jail with the royal prisoners?”

Parsha Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

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.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and Hashem, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitchzak, who wept because of Yaakov’s suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendant, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar’s wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned Hashem’s name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar’s wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king’s goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king’s bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler’s dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.
Candle, Candle, Burning Bright

The Mishna of “Bameh madlikin,” with its laws concerning the fuels and wicks which may be used for Shabbos lights, is familiar to anyone who prays in a synagogue (Nusach Ashkenaz) on Shabbos eve. But there is one detail in that Mishna which is less familiar as the center of the halachic dispute.

Beeswax, says the Mishna, cannot be used for fuel. The gemara stresses that this disqualification does not extend to the use of wax as a wick. Beeswax candles in which the wick is surrounded by wax, says Rashi, are acceptable for use and were commonly used in his time. Tosefos, however, cites the opinion of the Sages of Naravonne that such candles which is less familiar as the center of the halachic dispute.

Two statements may sometimes appear side by side in the Talmud even though the only thing connecting them is that they have the same author. This seems to be the case of one statement quoting Rabbi Tanchum regarding how high a Chanukah lamp may be placed above street level and another citing his interpretation of a passage in Chumash (Bereishis 37:24) about the pit into which Yosef’s brothers cast him.

A closer look at this second statement may, however, suggest a subtle link between the subjects of both statements. “The pit was empty, with no water in it,” says the Torah, and Rabbi Tanchum asks why it is necessary to repeat that there was no water in it if we have already been informed that it was empty. His conclusion is that the Torah wishes to stress that the pit was empty only of water but that it was inhabited by snakes and scorpions which miraculously did not harm the righteous Yosef.

“Were his brothers aware of the presence of these deadly creatures?” asks Rambam. If so, they certainly would have been so impressed with this Heavenly sign of Yosef’s righteousness that they would have ceased conspiring against him. His conclusion is that because the brothers were so high above the bottom of the pit where these creatures crept they did not notice them.

Now, suggests one of the commentators, we may see a link between Rabbi Tanchum’s two statements. The Chanukah lamp, which is supposed to publicize the Chanukah miracle, cannot be noticed by those walking below if it is more than 20 cubits high. Yosef’s brothers, on the other hand, could not notice the dangerous creatures at the bottom of the pit because it was too far below them.

Parsha Insights

HaTzadik — Yosef the Righteous — could have spoken evil about his brothers? When a father looks at his children, and notices that one is exemplary, necessarily this forces the other children to conform to that example. And, the others will be judged lacking to the degree that they fall short of their sibling.

“Why can’t you be like your brother — now that’s the way a person should behave!”

It wasn’t that Yosef actually spoke evil about his brothers, rather that his excellence was like a silent accusation against them. For however elevated the brothers may have been in ultimate terms, comparatively they were not on Yosef’s level.

And comparison always makes the lesser seem inadequate. Next to Everest even K2 pales. If this was the case, and Yosef didn’t actually accuse them, then why was he punished?

The more righteous a person is, the greater is his obligation to conceal his righteousness — even from his father.

Sources:

• Speaking Between The Lines - Admor R’ Menachem MiAmshinov in Iturei Torah

GET CONNECTED TO OHR SOMAYACH ON THE WEB

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OVER A BILLION BYTES OF TORAH LITERATURE AND INFORMATION
DE VINE REVELATION

Derek Koss
<dsports@westworld.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
When the flood was over, the first thing Noah did was get drunk. Why? And what was the lesson from that? Noah acted so strangely from his drinking that his behaviors became a moral question. What was G-d saying?

Ira <hisadis@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

How did Noah know how to make alcohol? How did he get drunk?

Dear Derek Koss and Ira,

As for Noah knowing how to make wine, there’s no reason to think that people didn’t know how to make wine before the flood. Noah was 600 years old at the time of the flood, so he had plenty of time to learn what everyone else knew. Besides, grape juice ferments by itself when left to react with the oxygen in the air and it naturally becomes wine.

The Midrash relates that Noah took vine branches into the ark with him. He decided to begin the process of rebuilding the world by planting them. This was his first mistake, for he should have begun planting something more vital for mankind’s existence — wheat, for example. One mistake leads to another: He made wine, had a drink, then another and another. Once drunk, he lost his dignity. The message is that the pleasures of the world are available for us, but we must exercise restraint and never lose sight of our role as a holy people.

Sources:
• Bereishis Rabba 36:4
• Midrash Aggada 9:21

SHEVITI

Howard D Feiner,
San Mateo, California
<hdfeiner@ix.netcom.com> wrote:

What is a “sheviti”? What do they say and are there any special things about them?

Dear Howard D Feiner,

A “sheviti” is a written page with the verse “I have placed G-d before me always” and sometimes also Psalm 67 written in the form of a menorah. The Hebrew word sheviti means “I have placed.” The purpose of the sheviti is to arouse a person’s awareness of the presence of God and to instill fear of heaven. Many synagogues have such posters on the wall, or in front of the cantor and some place small pages in their prayerbooks. Some authorities are against production of the small shevitis since it is very likely that they will be lost, or not treated with the proper respect due to something that contains the name of Hashem.

Sources:
• Tractate Berachos 18b

SANHEDRIN OF SEVENTY

Avraham Shimon Becher, age 11,
<becher@netmedia.net.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
The Anshei Knesset Hagedola had 120 judges. I think the Talmud says that you’re not meant to have an even numbered beit din (rabbinical court) so as to avoid a tied vote. So how could the Anshei Knesset Hagedola have 120 judges?

Dear Avraham Shimon Becher,

The Anshei Knesset Hagedola was not a beit din for the purpose of judging civil or criminal cases. The maximum beit din in that regard was 71 members, like the “Beit Din Hagadol” also known as the “Sanhedrin Gedola.” This number is derived from the verse in the Torah where G-d tells Moshe to gather 70 elders; including Moshe himself there were 71.

Rather, the Anshei Knesset Hagedola was a body that issued Rabbinic enactments, compiled parts of the Bible and instituted the blessings and prayers.

Sources:
• Bamidbar 11:16
• Sanhedrin 2a, 3a & 40a
• Megillah 2a
• Bava Basra 15b
• Berachos 33a

WHAT THE DEAD KNOW

Chava <gordon1@mskcc.org> wrote:
Dear Rabbi,

What do we believe about the knowledge people who have passed away have of events in this world? My father passed away almost two years ago. My sister just got engaged, baruch Hashem. Does my father have any knowledge of this? I thank you for your time.

Dear Chava,

Yes, the dead can sometimes have awareness of what goes on in this world. There’s actually a custom to try to get engaged and married soon after the passing of a parent in order to bring joy to the deceased parent. So, it’s possible that your father knows about your sister’s engagement and that it’s bringing him joy.

Sources:
• Bamidbar 11:16
• Sanhedrin 2a, 3a & 40a
• Megillah 2a
• Bava Basra 15b
• Berachos 33a

continued on page six
THAT’S WHAT WESTERN WALLS ARE MADE OF

Wendy Davis <ddprod@telalink.net> wrote:
What is the Western Wall made of? Were the stones quarried in Israel. Thank you,

Dear Wendy Davis,
The Western Wall is made of sandstone which is very common in the central Israel area. It was almost certainly quarried in Israel. First of all, the stone is very common here, and is still quarried and used in building today in Israel. Secondly, some of the stones are incredibly heavy, and would have been extremely difficult to transport. There is one stone that weighs approx. 250 tons!

Some possible answers to the Yiddle Riddle:
Moshe — his name spelled backwards is “Hashem.”
Leah — she cried to “HaKel” (Hashem) so that she wouldn’t have to marry Esav.

• Mamaleh@aol.com

Re: Minyan Motivation: Another version of the story is that there once was a town with 10 Jewish men, and they always had a minyan — however, when the 11th man moved into town, they could never get a minyan — each one thought he could stay home because there would be exactly 10 without him.

• Howard Kravitz, Chicago, IL <email@withheld>

One more suggestion for someone whose name spelled backwards describes them: This was told to me by Malka Mantin. “Moshe” which spelled backwards is “Hashem,” and Moshe is described as an “Eved Hashem” — “Servant of G-d.”

• Benyomin Wolf, Yeshiva U. <bwolf@ymail.yu.edu>

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• Benyomin Wolf, Yeshiva U. <bwolf@ymail.yu.edu>

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we wrote:
Baruch Sterman <baruch@netmedia.net.il> wrote us with the following riddle:
When one of the Chassidic Rebbes was eight years old he was asked a riddle: “What verse in the Torah has the first three words the same as the last three words?” He replied, “The verse where Moses did not say emet (the truth).” What did he mean?

Answer:
In the last verse in Parshat Shlach, Moses quotes G-d: “Ani Hashem Elokeichem … Ani Hashem Elokeichem” — “I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d, I am the L-rd your G-d.” After this verse during the recital of the Shema, we immediately add the word “emet” — “truth” — as though this word were part of the verse. This, however, is not the way the verse appears in the Torah. Therefore, this is the verse in which Moses did not say the word “emet,” although when we read the verse, we do say “emet.”

• Ramban

Recommended Reading List

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