

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Vayeshev

### Picking up the Tallit

*"For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews" (40:15)*

Rabbi Arthur Kohn ז"ל was the Rabbi of a synagogue in Finsbury Park in London. Finsbury Park Mosque was a well-known hotbed of radical Islamic Judeophobia. In 2004, its imam, the notorious Abu Hamza al-Masri, was arrested by British police after the United States requested his extradition to face trial. He was later charged by British authorities with sixteen offenses for inciting violence and racial hatred and, in 2006, a British court found him guilty of inciting violence and sentenced him to seven years' imprisonment. On October 5, 2012, after an eight-year legal battle, he was extradited from the UK to the United States to face terrorism charges and on April 14, 2014 his trial began in New York. On May 19, 2014 Hamza was found guilty of eleven terrorism charges by a jury in Manhattan and on January 9, 2015 he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

On the "baby slopes" of his terrorist career, Hamza and his cronies once vandalized Rabbi Kohn's synagogue. As Al Webb, United Press International reported at the time, "LONDON, April 30 2002 (UPI): "Windows have been smashed, a swastika daubed on a rabbi's lectern and holy books ripped apart at a London synagogue, triggering fears that a wave of anti-Semitic attacks on Jews and Jewish religious sites across continental Europe may have reached Britain. "This is the first incident in the country that resembles what's happening on the continent," a spokesman for British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks told journalists. "In terms of desecration, this is one of the most disturbing attacks we have seen." Police said the attack appeared to have been planned. Vandals smashed their way into the

building by breaking more than 20 windows, then used green paint to inscribe a huge, Nazi-style swastika on the lectern and splash across the Ark, where the synagogue's Torah – biblical scrolls – were kept. They stomped on Israel's Star of David flag, splattered more paint on it and ground it into the sand they dumped on the floor. Prayer books were torn to pieces, shawls and skullcaps slung into excrement that was mixed in with the sand and ceremonial wine was emptied into the mess."

Then Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, journeyed to Finsbury Park and asked, Rabbi Kohn, "What are you going to do?" Rabbi Kohn replied, "My father was a *rav* in Berlin. After Kristallnacht, they came and asked him, 'What are you going to do?' He picked up his charred tallis and said, 'Look, it's a little bit burned, so what, I'm going to continue.'" Picking up his paint-splattered tallit, Rabbi Kohn said to Rabbi Sacks, "Look at my tallis, there's a little bit of paint on it, I'm going to continue."

*"For indeed I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews"*

Despite its risks, Yosef identified himself with the Jewish People (see also 39:14). For this he earned the privilege of being buried in *Eretz Yisrael* – something that even Moshe did not merit. Whether we are in Berlin, in London, or in Jerusalem, the world at large would prefer us not to identify as Jews, but in every generation we will pick up our 'tallit' whether it is charred or stained and proclaim to the world, "*Am Yisrael Chai!*" "The people of Israel live!"

- Sources: *Devarim Rabbah* 2:5; story heard from Rabbi Moshe Cantor

## Miketz

### If Ya' Got It, Don't Flaunt It!

*"So, Yaakov said to his sons: 'Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?'" (42:1)*

For many years, Rabbi Arthur Kohn זת"ל was the Rabbi of Finsbury Park Synagogue in London. Once, at a wedding, delighted to see that Rabbi Kohn was in the crowd, one of the organizers rushed up to him and asked if he would accept the honor of saying one of the *sheva berachot* (seven wedding blessings) that are traditionally recited under the *chupa* (wedding canopy). Rabbi Kohn readily agreed, but when the organizer came to tell him that his *beracha* would be the next one, he firmly refused.

The *beracha* that he was to recite was: "Sos tosis..." "The barren one will surely exult and be glad in gathering her children to herself joyfully (in haste). Blessed are You, Hashem, The One who gladdens Tzion by way of her

children." "But Rabbi Kohn," said the organizer, "please accept the honor!" "You don't understand," said Rabbi Kohn, "we have no children. If I say this *beracha*, how will my wife feel?"

*"So, Yaakov said to his sons: 'Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?'"*

In the Gemara in Ta'anit (10b) Rashi explains that Yaakov was telling his sons to be sensitive to the plight of Yishmael and Esav, through whose lands they would have to travel on the way to Egypt. When everyone else is starving, be sensitive to others and don't flaunt your good fortune.

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## LOVE OF THE LAND

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### MODI'IN

Modi'in is the historical name of the mountain stronghold of the Maccabeans whose victory over the vastly superior forces of the Hellenist Greek oppressors is celebrated on Chanuka.

In his historical account of that epic struggle between pagan idolatry and Hebrew faith, Josephus describes how the wicked Antiochus ordered his officers to wipe out any trace of Judaism. They did indeed slay anyone who remained faithful to Torah observance, except for those who fled to the mountain area of Modi'in together with Matitياهو, the son of Yochanan.

It was from this Modi'in that Matitياهو and his five sons led their small band of faithful Jews in a seemingly hopeless war of "the mighty against the weak, the many against the few, the impure against the pure, the wicked against the righteous, the sinners against those who adhered to the Torah" – a war ending in a miraculous victory, climaxed by the miracle of the oil in the Menora which burned for eight days.

Since the Six-Day War, the Modi'in area has been intensely developed and is the home of the fast-growing city of Modi'in and the large Torah community of Kiryat Sefer.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Vayeshev and Miketz: Nidah 51-64

### Before and After

*"There are things that require a blessing beforehand but not afterwards."*

What are these “things” that are mentioned in our *mishna* as requiring a *beracha* before but not after? After suggesting vegetables and water – and rejecting these answers – the *gemara* states that the *mishna* refers to *tefillin*, meaning that a *beracha* is made before putting on *tefillin* but not after taking *tefillin* off. However, this answer is also countered by the fact that “the people in the Land of Israel would make a *beracha* after taking off their *tefillin*, saying, ‘*asher kideshanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu lishmor chukav* – Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to guard His statutes.”

This community in Eretz Yisrael said a *beracha* when taking off their *tefillin*, based on the verse, “And you will guard this statute at its appointed time, from *yamim* to *yamim*.” (Shemot 13:10) They interpreted this verse to be speaking about *tefillin* and teaching that the mitzvah of *tefillin* is only during the day – *yamim* – but not at night. Night is not a permitted time for *tefillin* according to Torah law, and this verse is teaching to guard the mitzvah of *tefillin* by taking them off prior to sunset.

Tosefot quotes Rabbeinu Tam as teaching that this *after-beracha* was said only when taking the *tefillin* off at

the very end of the day, since at that point of time there is an *obligation* to remove them. He adds that although this was the practice in Eretz Yisrael at the time of the *gemara*, it is not the halacha anywhere in the time of Tosefot (or nowadays) to make a *beracha* after the mitzvah of *tefillin*. This is because we say that the mitzvah of *tefillin* exists also at night according to Torah law, since we interpret the verse “and you will guard...” as speaking about the yearly Passover offering and not about *tefillin*. According to us, although *tefillin* are not prohibited at night by Torah law, there is a Rabbinical decree not to wear them at night lest a person fall asleep in them. Therefore, the mitzvah of *tefillin* is like other mitzvahs, with a *beracha* before but not after.

This is in accordance with the teaching that “a *beracha* for a mitzvah should be recited *before* doing the mitzvah.” The commentaries explain reasons for the *beracha* to precede the act of the mitzvah. One reason offered is that the *beracha* helps ensure that the mitzvah is fulfilled with pure and correct intent. This intent is called *kavana*, which comes from the Hebrew word for direction or alignment. Making a *beracha* is a method to help us align our own thoughts and desires with those of our Creator.

- Nidah 51b

### FUTURE MITZVAHS

*“It is permitted to make burial shrouds from kilayim (a wool and linen garment, aka shatnez, which is forbidden for a living person to wear).”*

This *beraita* on our *daf* is the source for a fascinating discussion in our *sugya* regarding whether there will be an obligation to fulfill the mitzvahs following the future resurrection of the dead.

Rav Yosef learns from this *beraita* that there will be no obligation in the future at the time of resurrection.

Tosefot explains that this can be seen in the *beraita*, since if mitzvahs will apply at the time resurrection, people will “arise” wearing what they were buried in. This would obviously pose a problem for anyone buried wearing *shatnez*.

Abayei, however, cites the opinion of Rabbi Yannai to show that, in fact, mitzvahs will exist following

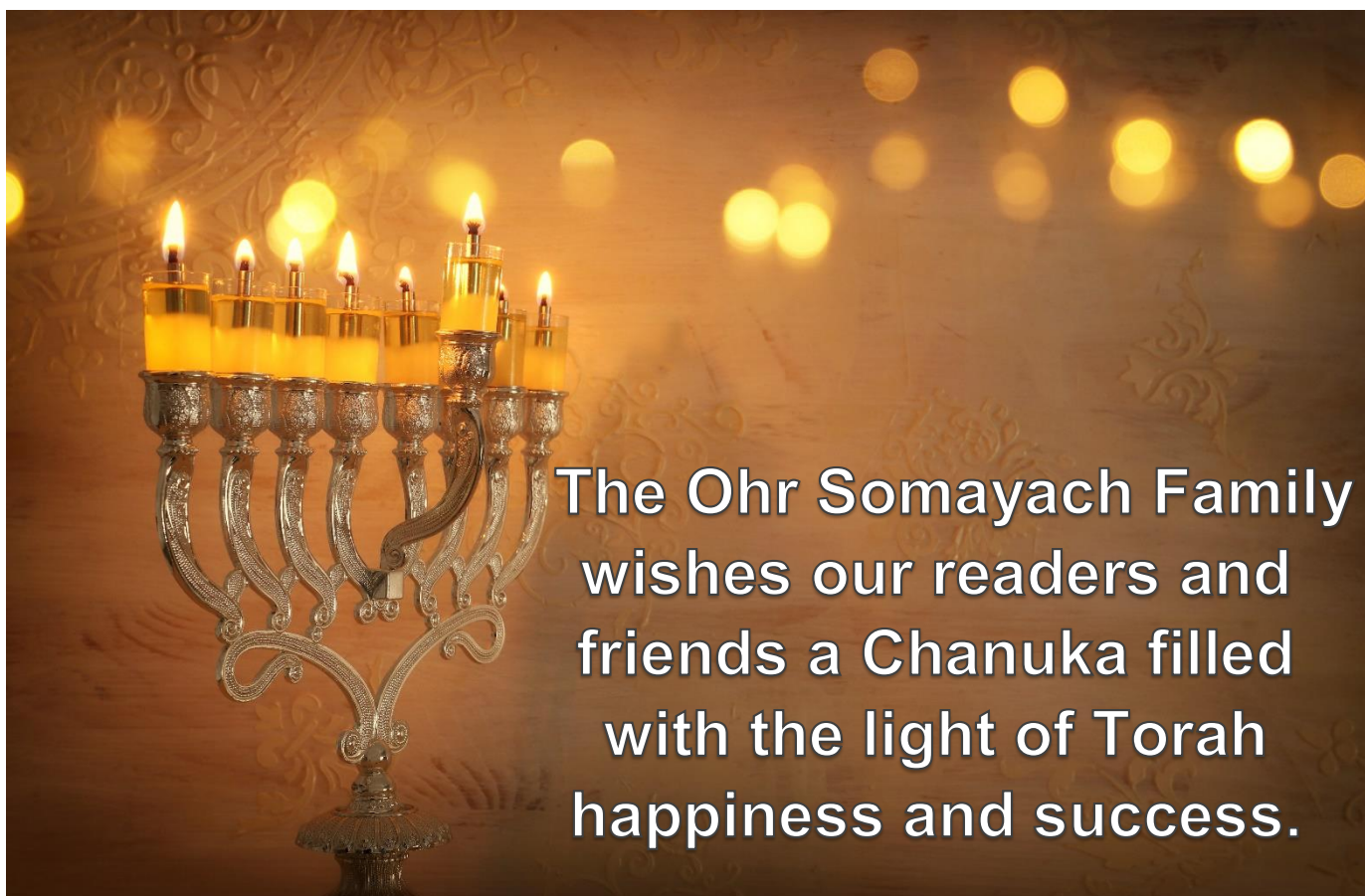
resurrection. Accordingly, these Sages understand the *beraita* to be speaking only about putting *shatnez* on the deceased for the eulogies, but not for the burial itself.

But, Rav Yosef stands his ground. He quotes the teaching of Rabbi Yochanan that *shatnez* is permitted even for the burial, clearly indicating that mitzvahs will not exist after resurrection. The *gemara* states that this is completely consistent with a different teaching by Rabbi Yochanan, “What is the meaning of the verse that states ‘among the dead, who are free?’ (Tehillim 88:6) This means that once a person passes from this world he is exempt from mitzvah observance – i.e. forever, even after resurrection.”

Although the *gemara* doesn't spell it out, it seems clear that Rabbi Yannai would understand the verse to refer to a person as free from mitzvahs only during the time period after one's life in this world and before his life after resurrection.

Regarding halacha, the Shulchan Aruch states that the deceased may be buried in shrouds containing *shatnez*, which follows the view of Rav Yosef and Rabbi Yochanan. (Yoreh Deah 301)

▪ *Nidah 61b*



## Chanuka

### Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanuka take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanuka.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "shamash"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanuka?
12. What three mitzvahs did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanuka?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanuka except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanuka indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanuka?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanuka?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanuka 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol*. (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanuka 1:1, and the "Al Hanissim" prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanuka 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanuka 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer "Al Hanissim" (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
10. No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
11. When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanuka. (Ibid. 684:3)
12. Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
13. They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanuka 1:1)
14. They were stronger and more numerous. ("Al Hanissim" Prayer)
15. It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
16. Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanuka. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
17. If we break up the word into two parts – *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25th day of the month.
18. Hallel (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
19. They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. ("Chanuka" means inauguration.)
20. Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

## Vayeshev

### Questions

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 G-d 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?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "*hand*" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

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.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, 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 descendent, 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 G-d'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.

## Miketz

### Questions

1. What did the fat cows being eaten symbolize?
2. How did Pharaoh's recollection of his dream differ from Nevuchadnetzar's recollection of his dream?
3. What was significant about the fact that Pharaoh dreamed repeatedly?
4. What does "*Tsafnat Panayach*" mean?
5. What happened to the Egyptians' grain that was stored in anticipation of the famine?
6. What did Yosef require the Egyptians to do before he would sell them grain?
7. Did Yaakov and his family still have food when he sent his sons to Egypt? If yes, why did he send them?
8. What prophetic significance lay in Yaakov's choice of the word "*redu*" – "descend" (and not "*lechu*" – "go")?
9. Why does the verse say "Yosef's brothers" went down to Egypt (and not "Yaakov's sons")?
10. When did Yosef know that his dreams were being fulfilled?
11. Under what pretext did Yosef accuse his brothers of being spies?
12. Why did the brothers enter the city through different gates?
13. Who was the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers?
14. Why did Yosef specifically choose Shimon to put in prison?
15. How does the verse indicate that Shimon was released from prison after his brothers left?
16. What was Yaakov implying when he said to his sons: "I am the one whom you bereaved"?
17. How did Reuven try to persuade Yaakov to send Binyamin to Egypt?
18. How long did it take for Yaakov and family to eat all the food that the brothers brought back from Egypt? Give the answer in terms of travel time.
19. How much more money did the brothers bring on their second journey than they brought on the first journey? Why?
20. How did the brothers defend themselves against the accusation of theft?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 41:4 - That all the joy of the plentiful years would be forgotten. (Not that the good years would provide food for the bad years.)
2. 41:8 - Pharaoh remembered the contents of his dream but didn't know its meaning. Nevuchadnetzar forgot even the contents of his dream.
3. 41:32 - It showed that the seven good years would start immediately.
4. 41:45 - He who explains things that are hidden and obscure.
5. 41:55 - It rotted.
6. 41:55 - Become circumcised.
7. 42:1 - Yes, but he sent them because he did not want to cause envy in the eyes of those who did not have food.
8. 42:2 - It hinted to the 210 years that the Jewish people would be in Egypt: The word "*redu*" has the numerical value of 210.
9. 42:3 - Because they regretted selling Yosef and planned to act as brothers by trying to find him and ransom him at any cost.
10. 42:9 - When his brothers bowed to him.
11. 42:12 - They entered the city through 10 gates rather than through one gate.
12. 42:13 - To search for Yosef throughout the city.
13. 42:23 - His son Menashe.
14. 42:24 - Because he was the one who cast Yosef into the pit and the one who said, "Here comes the dreamer." Alternatively, to separate him from Levi, as together they posed a danger to him.
15. 42:24 - The verse says Shimon was bound "in front of their eyes," implying that he was bound only while in their sight.
16. 42:36 - That he suspected them of having slain or sold Shimon, and that they may have done the same to Yosef.
17. 42:37 - He said, "Kill my two sons if I fail to bring back Binyamin."
18. 43:2, 10 - Twice the travel time to and from Egypt.
19. 43:12 - Three times as much, in order to repay the money they found in their sacks and to buy more even if the price had doubled.
20. 44:8 - They said, "We returned the money we found in our sacks; can it be that we would steal?"

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# SEASONS –THEN AND NOW

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## Chanuka: Lessons behind Halachot

by Rabbi Danesh Chaviv

It is a known idea that Jewish holidays are not just a commemoration of the past, but rather a reliving of the same spiritual energies that were available then. Based on this idea, the commentaries point out that on some level, everything that happened in the world during each holiday happens on a smaller scale every year to every individual. For example, on Pesach the Jewish people were freed from slavery. Similarly, every year on Pesach there is special help from Above for each individual to free himself from the clutches of his personal *yetzer hara*. Based on this idea, how should we understand the special energy of the holiday of Chanuka as it relates to the individual?

Let's begin by analyzing one of the many differences between the miracles of Chanuka and Purim. On Purim, the Jewish People responded to their decree of annihilation with fasting and *teshuva*. As a response to the Jewish People's sincere actions, Hashem miraculously saved them from the wicked Haman. However, in the story of Chanuka it was just the Chashmonaim who decided to rebel against the Greeks – many Jews had already assimilated into Greek culture, without any thoughts of *teshuva*. Nevertheless, even though many didn't deserve it, Hashem saved them from spiritual annihilation through the miracle of Chanuka. Based on this, the Bnei Yissaschar explains the symbolism behind the custom of playing with a *dreidel* on Chanuka and shaking the *gragger* on Purim. The *gragger* has its handle on the bottom representing the *teshuva* of the Jewish People from down here, which triggered the miracle. The *dreidel*, though, has its handle on top, representing the undeserved miracle that was triggered by Hashem's kindness from Above (Ta'amei Haminhagim, Chanuka 859). Evidently, on Chanuka there is an outpouring of kindness from Hashem, even to the less deserving.

We can see this idea hinted to on a personal level in the *halachot* of Chanuka. The Gemara says: *Wicks and oils that the Rabbis forbade to be used for lighting the Shabbat lamp may nevertheless be used to light the Chanuka lamp*. On a simple level, this is because on Shabbat we are afraid that someone may tilt a lamp whose wick is not burning well

to make it burn better, and thereby transgress Shabbat. Therefore, we only use oils and wicks that produce the best light. The Chanuka lights, on the other hand, are lit exclusively for the mitzvah – and once they are lit, the mitzvah is done, even on *erev* Shabbat, dismissing the fear that one will come to tilt the flame.

On a deeper level *Chazal* point out that the wick, oil and fire symbolize a person and the three levels of his soul, which are the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama* (Tikunei Zohar, tikun 21). As the verse says, *the lamp of Hashem is the soul of man* (Mishlei 20:27). A thorough explanation of this concept is beyond the scope of this work, but, put simply, just as the quality of the light produced from a wick and oil depends on the quality of the wick and oil themselves, the revelation of a person's higher level of soul, *neshama*, depends on the spiritual quality of his *nefesh* and *ruach*. The more a person refines his *nefesh* and *ruach* through performance of mitzvahs and Torah learning, the stronger his *neshama* can shine through. Based on this, we can decode the above-mentioned halacha as follows: *While on Shabbat only refined souls can be lit, on Chanuka all types of souls can be lit*. How is this so?

The Gemara says, "Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World to Come" (Berachot 57b). Just like a person who doesn't prepare food for Shabbat will have nothing to eat on Shabbat, one who doesn't do mitzvahs to prepare for the World to Come will have nothing to enjoy in the World to Come (see Gemara Avoda Zara 3a). But it is not only the *physical* preparation that is used symbolically for the World to Come; the commentaries tell us that one who has a spiritually inactive week will not have a spiritually uplifting Shabbat that week, regardless of any physical preparation. Shabbat, in this sense, is a taste of the World to Come that is destined, based on the spiritual work one did that week.

We see this dual preparation in the *halachot* of preparing for Shabbat as well. In fact, the physical preparations for Shabbat hint to spiritual preparations one needs to make before leaving this world. One of the preparations that a



person is required to make before Shabbat is to wash his body. Just like one cleans himself from physical dirt when washing oneself, *teshuva* spiritually cleans one's *neshama* from the impression left behind through sinning. Another way we prepare for Shabbat is by wearing special Shabbat clothing. On a spiritual level, clothing represent a person's mitzvahs that will clothe his soul in the World to Come, and before Shabbat one is expected to inspect his mitzvahs and see if they will be fitting to adorn him in the World to Come (see Shevet Mussar, chapter 35). Essentially, the only way one can truly feel the holiness of Shabbat, which is a semblance of the World to Come, is with proper preparation.

Chanuka, on the other hand, is a holiday that even the unrefined soul can connect with. At this time, Hashem comes down, so to speak, to even the less deserving souls, as He came down to save the less deserving Jews during the Chanuka story. Therefore, Chanuka has no specific rules regarding preparations before the holiday, unlike Shabbat. Thus, the simple *neshama* that did not merit

reaching the lofty heights demanded in order to fully appreciate Shabbat, can still taste some of the holiness of Chanuka.

One can still ask: Even if Hashem is more accessible at this time, how does a soul that is not connected to its source feel a special connection to Chanuka? Let's analyze the miracle of the Chanuka story. The Greeks came and defiled the oils in the Beit Hamikdash. However, they left one jar of oil untouched. They could not defile that. That jar represents the part inside every one of us that is too holy to ever be defiled – all it needs is just one spark to be ignited. Every year on Chanuka there is special help from Above to tap into this part of our soul and receive undeserving help from Above to grow and rise higher and higher, even in the parts of our service that we usually struggle with. May we merit making the most of this special time! (Based on M'Or Einyayim, Sefat Emet, Chidushei HaRim, B'nei Yissaschar, Netivot Shalom)

## ASK!

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### Chanuka Havdala

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

#### *Chanuka, O Chanuka...*

Just thinking about the holiday of Chanuka should be enough to warm the cockles of anyone's heart. With Menorah lighting, dreidel spinning, *latkes*, *sufganiyot*, family time and plenty of *l'hodos u'lehallel*, not to mention extra Torah learning, Chanuka gives us eight memorable days and nights. But even once you decide which opinions to follow regarding where and when to light the Menora, there still remains an annual halachic debate that has been simmering since the time of the *Rishonim*. I am referring to whether one should light the Menora or make Havdala first on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka.

\*Important note: This question is only relevant if one has already ended Shabbat by reciting either "Atah Chonantanu" in *Ma'ariv*, or "Hamaudil Bein Kodesh l'Chol." Otherwise one would not be allowed to light Chanuka candles while it is still Shabbat for him.

#### *Light the Menora*

Motzai Shabbat Chanuka is unique as it presents a situation of competing halachic principles. This has been the basis of the centuries-old debate regarding which mitzvah has priority and should therefore be performed first. The *Shulchan Aruch* rules that on Motzai Shabbat one should light the Chanuka Menora in *shul* before making Havdalah. The *Rema* adds that certainly at home one must do so as well, as lighting the Menorah precedes making Havdala. This is based on the *Terumas Hadeshen's* applying the Talmudic dictum of "Afukei Yoma M'achrinan," or delaying the leaving of Shabbat (see *Gemara Pesachim* 105b). Meaning, if one can delay ending Shabbat, he should do whatever is necessary to keep the holiness of Shabbat a bit longer.

Therefore, they rule that it would be preferable to light the Menora before making Havdala, especially as it will augment the “*Pirsumei Nissa*” by at least a few precious minutes.

### ***Taz: Tadir Tonight***

However, the *Taz* counters that the famous Talmudic adage of “*Tadir Kodem*” takes precedence. When one is faced with doing two different Mitzvahs and is in doubt which one to perform first, he should begin with the one that is performed more frequently. A prime biblical example is that even on Shabbat, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh, the *Korban Tamid*, the communal daily sacrifice, was offered before the *Korban Mussaf*, the special sacrifice exclusive for those particular days. [See *Bamidbar* Ch.28 and *Gemara Zevachim* 89a.]

The *Taz* applies this ‘*Tadir*’ principle to Motzai Shabbat Chanuka. He maintains that since Havdala is made every Saturday night, whereas Chanuka candles are only kindled eight nights a year, making Havdala take precedence. Additionally, he argues, once one lights Chanuka candles on Motzai Shabbat, he is showing that he intrinsically already ended Shabbat; if so, what further gain can there be by delaying Havdala further? He adds that the great *Maharal M’Prague* (this author’s namesake) also ruled to make Havdala before lighting the Menora.

### ***Taking Sides***

As mentioned previously, this halachic debate has been ongoing for centuries, with many *Poskim* taking opposing sides. Those who sided with the *Rema*, to light the Chanuka Menora first at home, include such luminaries as the *Levush*, *Magen Avraham*, *Vilna Gaon*, *Elya Rabba*, and *Chayei Adam*, while other renowned decisors, including the *Pri Chadash*, *Chida*, *Ben Ish Chai*, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, and *Aruch Hashulchan* conclude that the *Taz* was correct and one should make Havdala first.

Many decisors offer additional rationales and reasons to explain why they feel that the other opinion is incorrect. For example, the famed *Avnei Nezer* wrote a point-by-point refutation of the *Taz*’s proofs, while the *Chedvas Yaakov* later did the same to his arguments. And, interestingly, although Rav Yaakov Emden cites that his father, the renowned *Chacham Tzvi*, scorned those who would light Chanuka candles first, he nevertheless personally concluded that that is the correct course of action.

### ***Contemporary Kindling***

Contemporary authorities also have taken sides on this issue. The *Chazon Ish*, Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shmuel *Halevi* Wosner, and Rav Ovadia Yosef, all personally made Havdala first, while the Tukachinsky *Luach Eretz Yisrael*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv ruled that Chanuka lights should be kindled first.

In fact, Rav Shlomo Zalman and Rav Elyashiv were such ardent supporters of lighting the Menora immediately after Shabbat that they ruled that even those who normally wait 72 minutes for Shabbat to end (“*Zman Rabbeinu Tam*”) should not do so on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka. Rather, they should end Shabbat at an earlier time and immediately light Chanuka candles, followed by Havdala. This is also what the *Chazon Ish* and Steipler Gaon personally did on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka. (Although they personally made Havdala first, they still would perform both before “*Zman Rabbeinu Tam*” on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka.)

On the other hand, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, and Rav Ovadia Yosef do not agree, maintaining that those who normally wait 72 minutes should do so as well on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka, and only then light the Menorah.

However, a further qualification is made by Rav Moshe Sternbuch and the Karlsberger Rav, Rav Yechezkal Roth, that even according to those who hold to make Havdala first, nevertheless, if the setup and making Havdala would delay the Chanuka lighting more than a half hour after nightfall, then it would be preferable to light the Menora first, to ensure that one does not miss an opportunity for the optimal time of the Mitzvah of kindling the Menora.

## *Lighting It Up*

So, knowing that there is such a huge difference of opinion as to the proper halacha, what is one to do? The *Mishnah Berurah*, asking that very same question, famously concludes that in *shul* one should light Chanuka candles before making Havdala (if applicable; many, if not most, *shuls* nowadays do not make a communal Havdala), yet at home “*d’avid k’mar avid, d’avid k’mar avid*”, whichever opinion one decides to follow, he is acting correctly. Accordingly, even if you have a *minhag* to light the Menora first while your neighbor is busy making Havdala first, both of you should realize that both are equally halachically valid opinions.

It is told that Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld used to ask his wife to prepare his Menora for him on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka outside his house (observing *Minhag Yerushalayim*) while he was still in *shul*. This way, when he came home he would not have to enter into this halachic dispute and decide which opinion to follow, but rather immediately light the Menora (before Havdala) before actually entering his house, in order not to “pass over a Mitzvah”.

It is reported that Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer had an interesting custom as well. If Motzai Shabbat Chanuka fell out in the first half of Chanuka and he was therefore able to prepare the Menora on Erev Shabbat for Motzai Shabbat (meaning set up the full amount needed for both days in his one Menora), he would light the Menora first, as soon as he would arrive home from *shul*. However, if Motzai Shabbat Chanuka fell out in the second half of Chanuka, and he would need to set up the Menora on Motzai Shabbat itself, he would first make Havdala and only then prepare and light his Menora.

## *Don’t Mix and Match*

The noted *Melamed L’Hoyeel*, Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman (late 1800s), wrote an interesting responsum, relating a personal anecdote. Apparently, after following the *Taz*’s approach of making Havdala first for twenty-five years in his role as the Rav of Berlin, one Motzai Shabbat Chanuka he decided that he was going to follow the *Rema*’s opinion and light the Menora first, as it was getting late. As he was about to light, he suddenly remembered that he had uncharacteristically forgotten to say “*Atah Chonantanu*” in *Ma’ariv*, and technically had not yet ended Shabbat. He realized that according to the *Magen Avraham* he was now *required* to make Havdala before lighting the Menora. He understood that he was receiving a Heavenly sign from Above. Thus, he concluded, as should we all, that although both positions might be officially correct, with many great halachic authorities through the generations to rely upon for whichever opinion one chooses to follow, nonetheless, it is improper for one to change his longstanding *Minhag* without strong reason.

There is a related story told of Rav Avrohom Pam, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaas, who was well known for his sensitivity and concern for others. He originally followed the ruling of the *Rema*, and on Motzai Shabbat Chanuka would light the Menora before making Havdala. One year, one of his young children protested, claiming “I don’t care what you do – I’m not lighting my Menora before Havdala.” Rav Pam perceived right away what was troubling his son: How can one kindle a fire before properly reciting Havdala? Wasn’t it still Shabbat? Rav Pam realized that no matter how well he could justify his actions, explaining that one may engage in activities forbidden on Shabbat after reciting the formulaic insert “*Atah Chonantanu*” in *Ma’ariv* or “*Hamavdil Bein Kodosh l’Chol*,” he was still concerned that his son might come away with a lessened appreciation of the severity of Shabbat desecration. He therefore immediately agreed with his son, saying that “from now on we will do it your way,” and proceeded to recite Havdala before kindling the Menora.

Whether we are contemplating the lights of Chanuka or the Havdala candle, regardless which we ended up lighting first, let us internalize their message that Hashem’s *hashgacha* in this world, showing us the triumph of light over darkness, is eternal and everlasting.

**Postscript:** This final *psak* of “*d’avid k’mar avid, d’avid k’mar avid,*” regarding the kindling of Chanuka candles or the Havdala candle first, applies to Ashkenazic practice due to said dispute over the centuries. However, regarding Sefardic practice it seems to be that they must make Havdala before lighting the Menora at home (as opposed to in *shul*, which would be the opposite, as explained above, which was the *Shulchan Aruch’s* actual *psak*), as virtually all Sefardic *Poskim*, including the Pri Chadash, Chida, Ben Ish Chai, Kaf Hachaim, Rav Ovadiah Yosef, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, and the Yalkut Yosef, ruled this way.

*This article was written L’iluy Nishmas the Ohr Somayach Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R’ Yechezkel Shraga and Sima bas Boruch Peretz and l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad!*

For any questions, comments or for the full sources, please email the author: [yspitz@ohr.edu](mailto:yspitz@ohr.edu)

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## WHAT’S IN A WORD?

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*Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Vayeshev

### A Real Toss Up

In the lead-up to Yosef being sold by his older brothers, the Torah uses cognates of the word *hashlachah* (“throwing”) three times: First, when Yosef’s brothers wanted to kill him and “throw” his corpse into a pit (Gen. 37:20), then when Reuven convinced his brothers to “throw” him into a pit alive (Gen. 37:22), and finally when they actually “threw” Yosef into the pit (Gen. 37:24). In this essay we will examine the meaning, implications and root of the word *hashlachah* and explore how it differs from *zerikah*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that *hashlachah* is throwing an object in a way that it is not evident whether one is trying to hit something else or just get the object away from oneself. This form of throwing connotes a disrespectful attitude towards that which is thrown, as if one is simply trying to get rid of it. Because this word connotes a more casual or callous form of throwing, it usually refers to throwing something downwards, which is the easiest way to throw something. It might be more accurate to translate *hashlachah* as “dropping” or “throwing away.”

When there was no water left in her flask, Hagar “threw” (*vatashlech*) young Yishmael underneath a tree (Gen. 21:15). In that context, Nachmanides offers two ways of understanding the word *vatashlech*: First, he explains that it means that Hagar “abandoned” Yishmael, thus explaining

that *hashlachah* as a form of “forsaking.” Second, he proposes that Hagar “sent away” Yishmael, thus explaining that *hashlachah* means to “send away,” an assertion he proves from other Scriptural passages (Deut. 29:27, Ps. 51:13).

In this second explanation, Nachmanides essentially argues that *hashlachah’s* root SHIN-LAMMED-KAF can mean the same thing as its near-homonym SHIN-LAMMED-CHET. They are “near-homonyms” because in the traditional Ashkenazi mode of pronunciation the letters CHET and CHAF are pronounced in the same manner.

Rabbi Pappenheim notes that most cognates of *hashlachah* which appear in the Bible refer to throwing something away in a disparaging fashion – e.g., Hagar “throwing away” Yishmael (Gen. 21:15); Yosef’s brothers chucking him into a pit; Moshe “throwing” down the Tablets (Ex. 32:19); Pharaoh’s decree that Jewish baby boys be “thrown” into the river (Ex. 1:22); and the command that non-kosher meat be “thrown” to the dogs (Ex. 22:30).

Nonetheless, Rabbi Pappenheim admits that not all instances of *hashlachah* in the Bible refer to this type of casual “throwing away.” Some cases connote throwing something deliberately to bring about certain results. For example, Aharon “threw” his staff and it turned into a snake (Ex. 7:10) and “threw” the Jews’ gold into the fire to

make the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:24). The same could be said of the requirement to “throw” cedar wood, hyssop, and a red string into the fire while burning the Red Heifer (Num. 19:6).

In Modern Hebrew, *hashlachot* are “consequences” or “ramifications.” This extension of *hashlachot*’s usage is not attested to in the Bible or in Rabbinic Writings, but may refer to a “result” as a sort of “throw-off” from its cause.

Most grammarians, such as Menachem Ibn Saruk, Ibn Janach, and Radak, maintain that the root of *hashlachah* is the trilateral SHIN-LAMED-KAF. However, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *hashlachah* is actually a portmanteau of the two biliteral roots SHIN-LAMMED (“throwing out”) and LAMMED-KAF (“going/walking”).

Linguists propose a similar theory (cited by Ernest Klein and Avraham Even-Shoshan in their respective dictionaries) based on a rare verb conjugation called *shaphel*, in which the letter SHIN serves a grammatical function and is not part of the root. In such cases, the letter SHIN denotes an action which creates the situation of the verb whose root is used in a given word. To better illustrate this idea, we will show some examples:

- The root of *shiabud* is AYIN-BET-DALET (*eved*), which means “slave,” and the SHIN denotes the creation of servitude through “subjugation” or “obligation.”
- The root of *shichnur* is CHET-REISH-TAV (*cherut*), which means “freedom,” and the SHIN denotes the creation of freedom through formal “emancipation.”
- In Modern Hebrew, the root of *shichpul* is KAF-PEH-LAMMED (*kefel*) which means “double,” and the SHIN denotes the creation of twin items through “copying.”
- In Modern Hebrew, the root of *shichvtuv* is KAF-TAV-BET (*ktav*), which means “writing,” and the SHIN denotes the creation of a new draft or written adaptation through “rewriting.”

Thus, the theory goes that the word *hashlachah* is derived solely from the two-letter root LAMMED-CHET (“going”). According to this theory, the letter SHIN that appears in *hashlachah* (and cognates of this word) is not part of the words’ root, but creates a grammatical conjugate which denotes the creation of a situation in which something has “gone” – from one place to another – through “throwing.”

In a tangentially-related note, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935-2017) explains that the Hebrew/Aramaic word *shapir* (“good,” “make better,” “nice”) also uses the *shaphel* form. He explains that its root is the same as *tiferet/pe’er* (“glory” or “beauty”) – with the SHIN at the beginning serving a grammatical function that denotes an action which leads to the creation *pe’er*. Interestingly, a folk etymology connects the ancient Jewish surname Shapiro to the word *shapir*, although historians argue that it is more likely derived from the name of the German town Speyer.

Now let us examine the other word for throwing, *zerikah*. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *zerikah* is a portmanteau derived from the roots ZAYIN-REISH (“spreading, dispersal”) and REISH-KUF (“emptying”). He explains that *zerikah* connotes one purposefully causing something to land in a specific spot. *Zerikah* is related to “spreading” because it usually involves throwing something with multiple small parts (like sand, ashes, or any liquid) that spreads out as it falls. Hence, the ritual “sprinkling” of sacrificial blood is *zerikah*. (In Modern Hebrew, a *zerikah* is a “shot.”)

Nonetheless, explains Rabbi Pappenheim, the Rabbis use the term *zerikah* for any type of “throwing” (deliberate or not). For example, the Mishna (*Shabbat* 11:1) rules that if one “threw” (*zarak*) any object from a private domain to a public domain, or vice versa, he has violated the ban on carrying on Shabbat. Here *zerikah* is used when the item was deliberately thrown into a different domain. In another case, the Talmud (*Chagigah* 15a) relates that Rabbi Meir likened learning from his apostate teacher Acher (also known as Elisha ben Avuyah) to eating a pomegranate: Rabbi Meir “ate” the fruit and “threw away” (*zarak*) the peel – i.e. he picked out the good parts of Acher’s teachings and rejected the rest. In this case, *zerikah* is used when the destination of the cast away item is irrelevant.

G-d told Moshe to “throw” a handful of ashes (*zarko*) into the air to bring about the Plagues of Boils (Ex. 9:8). Rashi explains that G-d commanded Moshe to throw the ashes with one hand, since He wanted Moshe to throw them with full force and it is easier to throw forcefully with one hand. Maharal (1520-1609) explains that Rashi knew that Moshe was supposed to throw the ashes forcefully because the Torah uses the word *zerikah* and that term implies throwing with force, whereas *hashlachah* does not.

Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman suggests that this distinction is the basis for Rashbam’s comment concerning Moshe throwing down the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Torah reports that when Moshe saw the Jews partying with the Golden Calf, he became angry and threw down (*vayashlech*) the Tablets (Ex. 32:19). Rashbam explains that Moshe became so enraged when he saw the Jews’ perfidious idolatry that he could not gather the strength to “throw” the Tablets, so he just “dropped” them. Rabbi Hartman infers from this that like Maharal, Rashbam also understood *hashlachah* to mean “dropping” without putting in extra force (as opposed to *zerikah*, which means “throwing” with full-force).

There are two other Hebrew words for throwing: *hazayah* and *ramah*. Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *hazayah* connotes the same type of throwing as *zerikah*, just over a longer distance. Alternatively, the Malbim explains that *zerikah* connotes throwing/sprinkling with a vessel, while *hazayah* is done by hand.

In Hebrew, the REISH-MEM root refers to something “esteemed” or “high” and is also occasionally used in Biblical Hebrew to mean “throw” (see Ex. 15:1). Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the Hebrew term *ramah* refers to “throwing” or “shooting” something upwards in an arc trajectory so that it will land precisely upon its intended target. The Targumim translate Hebrew *zerikah*-cognates into Aramaic words that share the ZAYIN-REISH-KUF root. However, they translate cognates of *hashlachah* into Aramaic derivatives of the REISH-MEM root. Thus, it seems that in Aramaic REISH-MEM cognates mean the same thing as *hashlachah*. Perhaps they refer to lifting an object in order to throw it.

In conclusion, we have two basic words for throwing: *hashlachah* and *zerikah*. *Hashlachah* usually implies “throwing away” or “dropping” an item, so when the Torah uses *hashlachah* to describe Yosef being thrown into a pit, it means that his brothers haphazardly tossed him there. On the other hand, *zerikah* is a general term for “throwing” that sometimes connotes throwing purposefully and forcefully. *Hazayah* and *ramah* are fairly similar to *zerikah*, but with a twist: *Hazayah* connotes throwing long distance and/or by hand, while *ramah* emphasizes throwing the object upwards (so that it will land precisely on target).

## Miketz and Chanuka

### Holy Priests vs. Unholy Priests

**I**n the Story of Chanuka, the undisputed heroes are the family of devoted kohanim led by Matityahu the Hasmonean, who stood up to the pagan Hellenes and led the fight to purify the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This special holiday essay explains the etymology of the word *kohen* and how it differs from *komer*.

The word *kohen* is commonly translated as “priest.” In a halachic context it refers specifically to Aharon the High Priest’s male descendants, who are the only ones allowed to perform certain rites in the Tabernacle and Temple in the service of G-d.

The Bible also uses the word *kohen* in the context of idolatrous cultic activity. The Torah (Gen. 41:50) describes Joseph’s father-in-law Poti-phera as the *kohen* of On (Heliopolis), and Moses’ father-in-law Jethro as the *kohen* of Midian (Ex. 2:16; 3:1). Additionally, the Torah refers to the Egyptian priests who were exempted from the taxes that Joseph levied on the rest of Egypt as *kohanim* (Gen. 47:22). Similarly, the priest appointed to serve Micah’s idol was also called a *kohen* (Judges 18:4). In all of these cases it seems that the Bible uses the word *kohen* to refer to a religious functionary of an idolatrous cult.

However, close examination of the Targum and Rashi reveals a more nuanced meaning of the word *kohen*. When discussing Poti-phera and Jethro, Targum Onkelos translates the word *kohen* as *rabbah* (“master”), which implies a position of political leadership more than a position of ritual. But when it comes to the above-mentioned Egyptian priests and Micah’s idol’s priest, Targum Onkelos translates *kohen* as *komer* (“idolatrous priest”). Rashi also states that the Egyptian *kohanim* were *komrim*. He then explains that *kohen* refers to any religious functionary, except when it is attached to the name of a place (e.g. *kohen* Midian), in which case it refers to a leadership position in that place. In other words, sometimes *kohen* refers to some sort of priest

(whether of the legitimate worship of G-d or otherwise), and sometimes it refers to a political leader.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) traces *kohen*’s etymology to the biliteral root KAF-NUN, which he explains means “base” or “basis.” Other words derived from this root include *ken* (“so,” “yes”) and *nachon* (“correct”), which legitimize something by acknowledging its basis, as well as *tochnit* (“plan”) and *hachanah* (“preparation”), which are the bases for any serious enterprise. As a corollary to these meanings, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that a *kohen* is a person charged with making sure that all “preparations” for ritual worship at a temple (of any type) are in order. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) similarly connects *kohen* with *hachanah*, explaining that the *kohen* sets an example of how to worship G-d, and thus “prepares” others to be initiated into His service.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *kohen* also has secondary meanings. It can refer to somebody who wears any type of special clothes (e.g., a bridegroom, see Isa. 61:10), just like a priest has his own distinctive vestments; or to anybody who is priest-like because he functions in an official capacity (e.g., a prince, see II Sam. 8:18).

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) notes that the Arabic word *kahin* (“soothsayer,” “diviner”) is probably a cognate of the Hebrew *kohen*, leading him to suggest that the root of the word *Kohen* is *koh* (“thus/so”) — a word commonly employed by the prophets of the Bible when relaying the word of G-d (“So says G-d...”). In fact, *kohanim* were not only involved in the Temple’s rituals but were also instrumental in teaching Torah, so it makes sense that they would be associated with prophecy, which also relays G-d’s word (see Mal. 2:7).

From what we have seen so far, *kohen* can refer to any sort of priest (whether in service of the One G-d or not), while

*komer* refers specifically to idolatrous priests. (Interestingly, a letter from the Elephantine Papyri distinguishes between Jewish priests who are called *kohanim*, and Egyptian priests who are called *komrim*.)

Indeed, the word *komer* also appears in the Bible and suggests this very meaning: the Bible reports that when King Josiah cleaned up his predecessor's idolatry, he "fired" all the *komrim* from their idolatrous positions, helped them repent and decreed that all the *kohanim* (i.e. descendants of Aharon) who had been previously been *komrim* for idolatry were banned from serving in the Temple in Jerusalem (II Kgs. 23:5-9, with Radak).

Likewise, the prophet Zephaniah foretold that G-d will eliminate any remnant of Baal worship from Jerusalem, along with the *komrim* and the *kohanim* (Zeph. 1:4). In explaining that prophecy, Targum and Rashi seem to understand that *komrim* refers to anyone who worships idolatry, and *kohanim* refers to the idolatrous priests. This differs from what we have learned above because it assumes that the word *komer* does not mean "idolatrous priest" but rather refers to anyone who participates in idol worship.

On the other hand, Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi (1279-1345) explains that in Zephaniah's prophecy, *komrim* are the idolatrous Baal-priests, while *kohanim* refers to G-d's priests (some of whom had been acting corruptly).

In no less than three places, Radak (to Zeph. 1:4, II Kgs. 23:5, and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) explains that both *komrim* and *kohanim* in Zephaniah's vision refer to idolatrous priests. He adds that *komer* means "blackened" (see Ecc. 5:1), so a *komer* is a priest who wears "black" vestments, whereas a *kohen* does not. (In fact, the legitimate *kohanim* in the Holy Temple wore white vestments.) Ibn Kaspi and Radak support our previous understanding that *kohen* could

refer to a priest of any sort, while a *komer* was an idolatrous priest.

Dr. Chaim Tawil notes that *kumru* means "priest" in Akkadian and in other Western Semitic languages, so Zephaniah's use of the word *komrim* was likely an oblique reference to cultic functionaries from places where those languages were spoken. According to this, it could be that both *komrim* and *kohanim* refer to (idolatrous) priests, and that the words are perfect synonyms although coming from different languages.

In *Sefer HaTishbi*, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) offers another explanation of the word *komer*. He argues that *komer* literally means "closed, clustered, cloistered" (see Targum to Ps. 77:10). He sees evidence of this in the Talmudic term *komer shel anavim* (*Bechorot* 31a), which is "a mass of grapes" all clustered together. Thus, he explains that *komer* refers specifically to idolatrous priests who were secluded and clustered in a monasteries (i.e. monks), while *kohen* is a more general term for "priest."

Rabbi Hirsch ties the word *komer* to the emotional manipulation commonly employed by idolatrous priests. When Joseph's brothers brought Benjamin in front of him, the Torah reports that Joseph quickly left the room to cry elsewhere because "his mercy was aroused (*nichmaru*)," and he did not want his brothers to suspect that something was amiss (Gen. 43:30). Rabbi Hirsch explains that *nichmaru* ("arousing" mercy), *komer*, and *michmar* ("net" in Isa. 19:8, 51:20), are all related because the idolatrous priest trapped his followers in the net of his cult's influence by arousing their imagination and emotions. In contrast, the Torah appeals to man's intellect, not his feelings or imaginations. In Rabbi Hirsch's view, the idolatrous priest – the *komer* – feeds on his congregant's emotions, while the Jewish priest – the *kohen* – actually provides people with intellectual food in the form of Torah study.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rclein@ohr.edu](mailto:rclein@ohr.edu)

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## VAYESHEV

**Y**aakov 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.

## MIKETZ

**I**t is two years later. Pharaoh has a dream. He is unsatisfied with all attempts to interpret it. Pharaoh's wine chamberlain remembers that Yosef accurately interpreted his dream while in prison. Yosef is released from prison and brought before Pharaoh. He interprets that soon will begin seven years of abundance followed by seven years of severe famine. He tells Pharaoh to appoint a wise person to store grain in preparation for the famine. Pharaoh appoints him as viceroy to oversee the project. Pharaoh gives Yosef an Egyptian name, Tsafnat Panayach, and selects Osnat, Yosef's ex-master's daughter, as Yosef's wife. Egypt becomes the granary of the world. Yosef has two sons, Menashe and Ephraim.

Yaakov sends his sons to Egypt to buy food. The brothers come before Yosef and bow to him. Yosef recognizes them but they do not recognize him. Mindful of his dreams, Yosef plays the part of an

In the Parsha'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.

Egyptian overlord and acts harshly, accusing them of being spies. Yosef sells them food, but keeps Shimon hostage until they bring their brother Binyamin to him as proof of their honesty. Yosef commands his servants to replace the purchase-money in their sacks. On the return journey, they discover the money and their hearts sink. They return to Yaakov and retell everything. Yaakov refuses to let Binyamin go to Egypt, but when the famine grows unbearable, he accedes. Yehuda guarantees Binyamin's safety and the brothers go to Egypt. Yosef welcomes the brothers lavishly as honored guests. When he sees Binyamin he rushes from the room and weeps. Yosef instructs his servants to replace the money in the sacks, and to put his goblet inside Binyamin's sack. When the goblet is discovered, Yosef demands Binyamin become his slave as punishment. Yehuda interposes and offers himself instead, but Yosef refuses.



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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## VAYESHEV

### RESOLVE AND REMORSE

**R**euben's involvement in the events that lead to the sale of Yosef is obscure. His position is clearly not one of unity with the other brothers; it appears as if his presence during those moments before Yosef approached the brothers in Shechem was by chance. In fact, he disappears during the decisive moments of the incident, and it is not clear if, or how, Reuven ever learns of the sale of Yosef.

One thing is clear: Reuven tried to save Yosef. Another thing is also clear: He fell short. When he heard his brothers plotting to kill the approaching 'master of dreams,' he jumps to Yosef's aid. The Torah records: *Reuven heard and rescued him from their hands. He said: We shall not kill him.* But then Reuven suggests throwing him into pit, in what appears to be a bid to *passively* kill him instead of *actively* kill him. But the Torah reveals Reuven's true motive: he did this *in order to rescue him from their hands and to bring him back to his father.*

We are left to wonder why Reuven could not do what he intended. The next we see of Reuven is his "returning" – from where, we do not know – after the brothers lifted Yosef from the pit and sold him as a slave to a caravan of Ishmaelites. Rashi cites the Midrash, explaining that the word "returning" tells us not only *that* he returned, but also what he was doing during his absence. He was "returning" – repenting for his earlier sin of meddling in the placement of his father's bed. A decade earlier, after the death of Rachel, Reuven, motivated by his mother's honor, moved Yaakov's bed from Bilha's tent to his mother Leah's tent. This is the stain on Reuven's past that haunts him throughout his life.

Reuven's expression upon discovering Yosef's absence is striking: *The child [Yosef] is not there, and I – where can I come to?* This could easily be mistranslated as "where can I go?" meaning "where can I flee with my grief?" But this is not what Reuven says. He says there is no place he can *come to* – no place he can *be*. This expresses a deep feeling of shame and remorse, the anticipation of reprimand, whether deserved or undeserved. Reuven says, *there is no place where I could be at rest, where I could hold up my head. Everyone will shun me.*

Rav Hirsch suggests that this may be both his response to the shame of his lack of resolve in saving Yosef and also the reason for the lack of resolve in the first place. Perhaps he could not summon the necessary strength to act because he was troubled by the awareness of his own sin – the awareness of his own weakness robbed him of the strength to take more decisive action. This may be why his immediate reaction to his valiant but insufficient attempt was to repent for his past misdeeds.

Indeed, Reuven teaches a most powerful lesson in human psychology. The burdens of shame and worthlessness are fierce inhibitors. Removing those burdens can give life to new resolve.

- *Source: Based on Commentary, Genesis 37:21-22, 30*

# MIKETZ

## COMPASSION, NOT PITY

One of the three hallmark characteristics of the Jew is compassion, *rachamim*. (Yevamot 79a) The term first appears in the Torah in this week's Torah portion, when Yaakov sends his sons back into the hands of the ominous Egyptian viceroy (whom he does not know is Yosef). When he could no longer delay, he agreed that the brothers must return to Egypt with his precious son Binyamin, to purchase food, come what may. His farewell blessing to them: May G-d grant you *rachamim* before the man.

*Rachamim* denotes the attribute of G-d's love for His creatures, which can never be lost. This attribute is also the guiding principle in human relationship, the glue of deep connection. The term derives from the root *rechem*, which means a mother's womb. *Rachamim*, then, is the love of family, the love of parents for their children, the love of children for one another because of the one *rechem* from which they came forth. Compassion is the expression of our essential connection – of G-d's connection to us as fragments of His being, and of our connection to each other as brothers, sharing a single Source of existence.

*Rachamim* is often confused with the popular expression *rachmanut*, which is taken to mean pity. Pity, however, is a much lower expression of feeling for another. Pity is easy to muster – for any stranger, stray animal, and can even appear without much effort for an enemy. Sharing in another's pain is almost natural to the human condition. True compassion – which extends to sharing of joy – is far more rare and noble. Not all those who today share in a poor man's pain will rejoice to the same degree if overnight he becomes rich.

The *rechem*, womb, is defined by a self-sacrificing investment of energy for the completion of another. True *rachamim* reflects this devotion to our fellow – not only does it suffer when the other suffers, but it knows no rest until it sees him happy.

How appropriate then was this request for *rachamim*! As if to say, *may this man act on the compassion deriving from his incognito brotherhood*, and spare nothing to see you return complete – with Shimon, Binyamin and provisions for your families.

- Source: Commentary, Genesis 43:14

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