

With no divine intervention, Joseph knew the interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams.

How?



# JewishTimes

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## Weekly Parsha

# Meketz

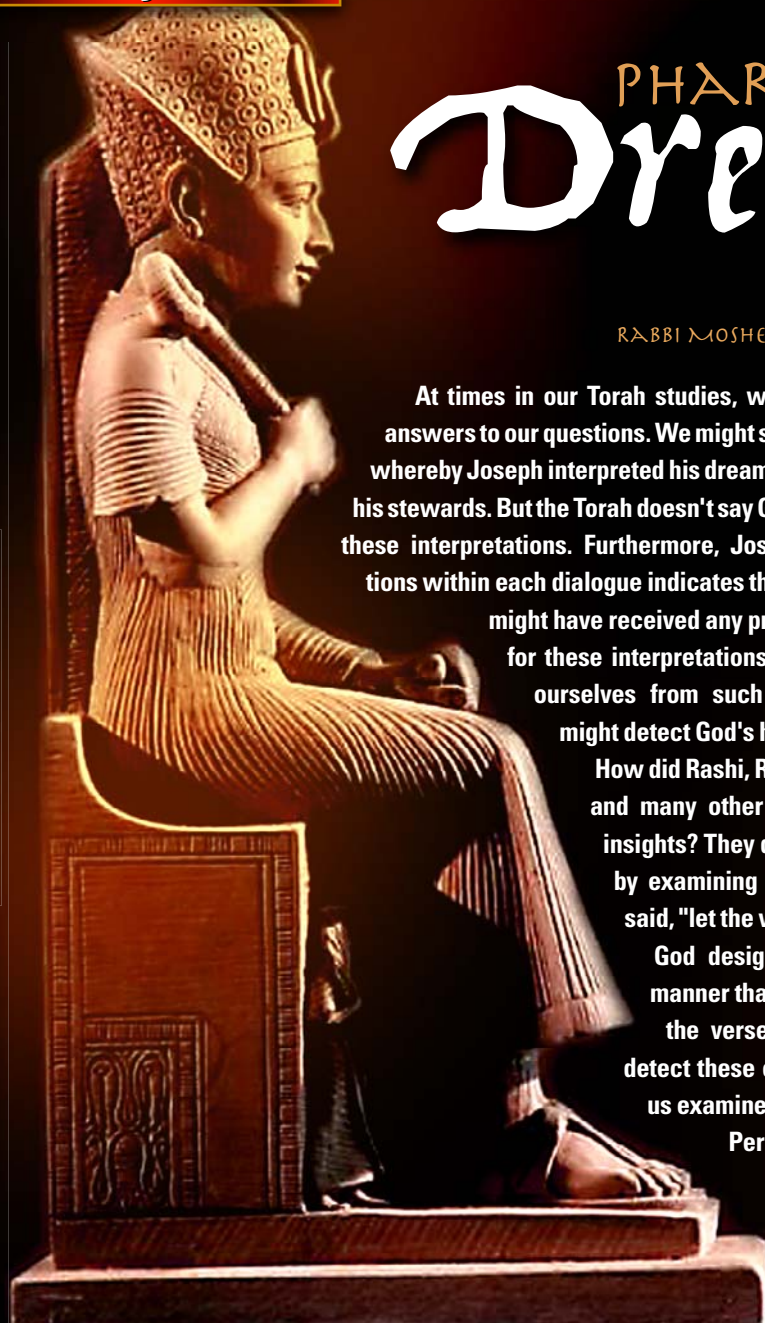
RABBI BERNIE FOX

## The Delay of Yosef's Liberation

*At the end of two years Paroh had a dream: He was standing by the river. (Beresheit 41:1)*

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## Weekly Parsha



# PHARAOH'S Dreams

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

At times in our Torah studies, we often give quick but baseless answers to our questions. We might say it was through some prophecy whereby Joseph interpreted his dreams, Pharaoh's dreams and those of his stewards. But the Torah doesn't say God gave Joseph any prophecy for these interpretations. Furthermore, Joseph's instantaneous interpretations within each dialogue indicates there was no gap of time where he might have received any prophecy. Suggesting divine origin for these interpretations, without any basis, we prevent ourselves from such precious moments where we might detect God's hints in the verses.

How did Rashi, Rambam, Ramban, Sforno Ibn Ezra and many other great minds derive new Torah insights? They did so through traditions, but also by examining the verses. A great Rabbi once said, "let the verses talk to you".

God designed our great Torah in such a manner that He offers us clues embedded in the verses. The sensitivity necessary to detect these clues takes years of training. Let us examine the verses in this weeks Parsha.

Perhaps we can uncover these clues...

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## Weekly Parsha

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This pasuk introduces Paroh's fateful dream, which was to serve as the vehicle for Yosef's rescue from prison and his subsequent rise to power in Egypt. It occurred exactly two years after Yosef's inspired interpretation of the dreams of Paroh's butler and chief baker.

Rashi tells us that Hashem had provided Yosef with an opportunity to be redeemed through the dreams of these two servants of Paroh. However, Yosef acted improperly in his reaction to this opportunity, and Hashem delayed his rescue for an additional two years. What exactly was Yosef's impropriety? Rashi explains that by pleading with the butler to mention his plight to Paroh, Yosef was essentially entrusting him with his fate, and he was punished for this misplaced trust.

On the surface, Rashi's comments are difficult to understand. Yosef was provided with an opportunity to save himself through the assistance of Paroh's butler. Through providing the butler with a proper interpretation of his dream, Yosef hoped to win the friendship of Paroh's servant, and he expected this grateful butler to plead his case before the king. This seems like a completely rational plan. Certainly, Hashem expects each of us to strive to secure our own well being. We are not permitted to simply rely upon Hashem for miraculous salvation. Where is Yosef's iniquity in attempting to help himself?



While we are required to do everything in our power to help ourselves, we must concurrently recognize that our efforts alone are not sufficient to secure happiness and success. Only if our actions are accompanied by the favor and grace of Hashem, will we secure positive results. Apparently, Yosef believed that through his wisdom alone he would be redeemed. He felt he had devised a brilliant plan through which his individual efforts would secure his freedom. He envisioned the grateful butler returning to Paroh and pleading his case. Paroh would investigate the charges against Yosef and recognize his innocence. He would then intervene to correct the injustice that Yosef had experienced. The process would take time, but it would inevitably culminate in Yosef's freedom.

His error was in failing to recognize that, despite the brilliance of his plan, success could not be achieved without the assistance and benevolence of Hashem. No individual controls his environment. We are affected by a multitude of factors, few of which are under our control.

Hashem taught Yosef that he had erred. He showed Yosef that despite the brilliance of his elaborate plan, salvation was not inevitable. Years passed. During this time, Yosef painfully learned that he could not alone control his fate. Only after Yosef banished this false confidence from his outlook could salvation be attained.

After Yosef repented, his salvation occurred immediately. Paroh became aware of Yosef's talents. There was no gradual process of redemption. Yosef was immediately brought from jail, presented to Paroh, and achieved a position of prominence in Egypt. Our Sages teach that this near-instantaneous transformation, from abject privation to freedom and power, is a hallmark of Divine intervention.

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam offers a different explanation for the two-year hiatus between Yosef's interpretation of the butler's dream and his liberation. He argues that Yosef's redemption and appointment to a high position was made possible as a result of this delay.

If the butler had immediately approached Paroh and pleaded Yosef's innocence, what would have been the outcome? At best, the butler would have convinced Paroh that Yosef had been unjustly imprisoned. This may have resulted in the restoration of Yosef's freedom. However, Yosef would have lost the opportunity to meet Paroh and make a personal impression. Instead, the butler completely forgot Yosef. On the occasion of Paroh's dream, the butler suddenly remembered Yosef and his unpaid debt to this Hebrew. He encouraged Paroh to seek Yosef's help. Yosef met with Paroh personally and impressed the ruler. As a result, Yosef became the virtual king of Egypt. From this perspective the two-year delay was not a punishment. It was a blessing.

### The Selection of Asenat as Yosef's Wife

*And Paroh named Yosef Tz'apenat Pa'neach, and he gave him Asenat, the daughter of Poti-Pheer, the governor of On, for a wife, and Yosef went forth over the land of Egypt. (Beresheet 41:45)*

Yosef interprets Paroh's dreams. The dreams foretell that Egypt will experience seven years of bountiful harvests. These will be followed by seven years of scarcity. The dreams imply a response to the approaching challenge. Paroh should collect the excess harvest from the first seven years and create a ready store for use during the years of scarcity. Paroh is impressed with Yosef's interpretation of his

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dreams. He appoints Yosef as his minister. He places him in charge of the preparations suggested by the dreams. He changes Yosef's name and he gives Yosef a wife.

Our pasuk describes this wife as Asenat, the daughter of Poti-Phera. Our Sages comment that Poti-Phera was, in fact, Potiphar.[1] Potiphar was Yosef's former master. He purchased Yosef from the traders who brought him to Egypt.

It seems strange that Paroh suggested Yosef marry the daughter of Potiphar. In order to understand the odd nature of this choice, we must review a previous incident. Yosef was Potiphar's servant. Potiphar placed Yosef in charge of his entire estate. Yosef served Potiphar loyally. Potiphar's wife was infatuated with Yosef and repeatedly attempted to seduce him. Yosef resisted these advances. Eventually, Potiphar's wife entrapped Yosef in a compromising situation. She maneuvered Yosef into a situation in which they were alone. Again, she attempted to seduce Yosef. He rebuffed her advances. However, she grabbed Yosef's cloak. Yosef freed himself and fled. He left his garment in the hands of Potiphar's wife. She used this cloak to support her claim that Yosef had attempted to seduce her. Potiphar reacted by removing Yosef from his household and placing him in prison.[2]

It is odd that Paroh would choose, as Yosef's wife, Potiphar's daughter. This was the one family in Egypt that most resented Yosef.

In order to understand Paroh's decision, we must answer another question. Yosef was accused of attempting to seduce or rape Potiphar's wife. It is odd that Potiphar placed Yosef in prison. Yosef was a servant. His master had treated him benevolently. An attempt by Yosef to seduce or rape Potiphar's wife represented an unimaginable sin against his master. We would expect Potiphar to demand Yosef's execution. Why did he merely remand Yosef to prison?

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that Potiphar trusted Yosef. He did not believe that Yosef had attempted to seduce or rape his wife. Instead, Potiphar suspected his wife of fabricating Yosef's crime. However, he was confronted with a dilemma. He could not disregard his wife's public accusations. This would discredit her and shame her and his family. He could not execute Yosef. This would be an inexcusable injustice. Therefore, he spared Yosef's life and instead placed him in prison.[3]

Now, we can understand Paroh's decision. Paroh wished to appoint Yosef as his minister. However, he faced a problem. How could he appoint a

convicted criminal to a high ministerial position? He needed to clear Yosef's name. Paroh knew that Potiphar himself doubted Yosef's guilt. This provided Paroh with the opportunity to clear Yosef's name. He arranged for the marriage of Potiphar's daughter to Yosef. This marriage communicated the message that even Potiphar himself acknowledged Yosef's innocence. The proof was his willingness to allow his daughter to marry Yosef. With this marriage, Yosef was vindicated and fit to serve as Paroh's minister.

### Yaakov's Reason for Directing His Sons to Travel to Egypt

*Yaakov saw that there were provisions in Egypt, and Yaakov said to his sons: why do you show yourselves? (Beresheit 42:1)*

A famine developed, spreading throughout Egypt and the neighboring lands. In Canaan, food was in short supply. Yaakov realized that provisions could be secured in Egypt. He chided his children with the words, "Why do you show yourselves?" According to Rashi, Yaakov chastised his children for disguising their plight. The pride of the brothers prevented them from admitting their desperation. Instead, when in the presence of others, they behaved as if they were exempt from the scourges of the famine.

Gershonides explains Yaakov's rebuke differently. Yaakov's sons were traveling through Canaan and negotiating for provisions with the local traders. He warned his sons that their behavior was dangerous. They would be better advised to travel to Egypt in order to secure provisions. What was this danger that Yaakov feared?

In Parshat VaYishlach, the Torah tells us how Prince Shechem abducted Dinah. Against Yaakov's wishes, Shimon and his brother, Leyve, murdered the citizens of Shechem's city and rescued their sister. At that time, Yaakov rebuked his sons for their violent behavior. He protested that their actions alienated them from the inhabitants of Canaan. Yaakov and his children would be regarded as criminals. They would have few allies; their neighbors would try to destroy them.

Yaakov now saw that his fears had been realized. As the famine progressed, Yaakov and his family became ever more dependent on the goodwill of the traders and inhabitants of Canaan. The purchase of provisions from these traders required them to travel throughout the land. But Yaakov's sons could not expect this cooperation or to safely travel through the land. Instead, vengeance was likely. He

told his sons that the risks inherent in searching for traders in Canaan were not justified. Instead, the sons should travel to Egypt and purchase provisions directly.

The comments of Gershonides suggest that the abduction of Dinah and the response of Shimon and Leyve had a deep significance. The all-knowing Creator designed the famine as a means by which the brothers would be placed into the hands of Yosef. This plan required forcing the brothers to travel to Egypt. Dinah's abduction served as a potential device which would force the brothers out of Canaan and into Egypt. The decisions and actions that they took of their own volition determined their fate. Their violence created the animosity that forced them to place their lives in Yosef's control.

### Tragedies in Yosef's Life Lead to His Redemption

*"You shall be [appointed] over my household, and through your command all my people shall be nourished. Only [with] the throne will I be greater than you." And Paroh said to Yosef, "Look, I have appointed you over the entire land of Egypt." And Paroh removed his ring from his hand and placed it on Yosef's hand, and he attired him [with] raiment of fine linen, and he placed the golden chain around his neck. And he had him ride in his chariot of second rank, and they called out before him, "[This is] the king's patron," appointing him over the entire land of Egypt. And Paroh said to Yosef, "I am Paroh, and besides you, no one may lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt." And Paroh named Yosef Tz'apenat Pa'neach, and he gave him Asenat the daughter of Poti-Phera, the governor of On, for a wife, and Yosef went forth over the land of Egypt. (Beresheit 41:40-45)*

These passages describe the final step in Yosef's ascension to power in Egypt. The Torah's narrative of Yosef's story begins in Parshat VaYeshev. The Torah tells us that Yosef was favored by his father but hated by his brothers. He dreamed that some day he would be the leader of his brothers and that even his father would acknowledge his position within the family. His brothers plotted to put an end to Yosef's visions of glory and sold him into slavery in Egypt. The Torah describes in some detail the vicissitudes of Yosef's fate in Egypt. He rises from a lowly slave to become the household manager of a powerful and influential officer. He was then thrown into jail. But even in jail he prospers and is appointed to a position of responsibility. But the parasha ends with Yosef's hopes of redemption dashed. Now suddenly, Yosef again

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(Meketz cont. from previous page)

## Weekly Parsha

experiences a complete reversal of fate and is appointed to a position of power second only to Paroh.

Our parasha opens with this final chapter of Yosef's ascension. Paroh has two disturbing dreams. His advisors cannot provide him with an acceptable interpretation. Paroh's butler had been imprisoned with Yosef. In prison, Yosef provided the butler with an accurate interpretation of a dream. Yosef told the butler that his dream foretold his release from prison and his reappointment to Paroh's court. This interpretation was correct in every detail. The butler relates the incident to Paroh who, in turn, summons Yosef to interpret his dreams.

Yosef tells Paroh that his dreams foretell seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of incomparable famine. The dreams are intended as a forewarning. Paroh is to use the years of plenty to plan and prepare for the years of famine. Through these preparations Paroh can save his land from destruction. Paroh is impressed with Yosef's ability and wisdom. He appoints Yosef as his prime minister and places the future of Egypt in his hands. Yosef is to supervise the preparation for the famine. During the famine he is responsible for the distribution of food.

Surely, the story of Yosef is a wonderful and exciting adventure. But we must wonder why the Torah provides so much detail. Would it not have been sufficient for the Torah to tell us that Yosef was sold into slavery and to continue with a description of the circumstances of his rescue and appointment as steward of Egypt? Instead, the Torah provides a remarkably detailed account of the vicissitudes of his fate. These details seem superfluous.

In order to understand the purpose and message of this detailed account, some of the elements must be explored and analyzed. As mentioned earlier, Yosef was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. However, he did not long toil as a lowly slave. He was purchased by Potifar – an influential member of Paroh's household or government. Potifar's exact position is the subject of debate. According to Rashi, Potifar was in charge of butchering and providing meat to Paroh's household.[4] Unkelus disagrees. He suggests that he was Paroh's executioner. Nachmanides prefers Unkelus' position.[5] However, he does not provide an explanation for this preference.

Yosef rose to a position of prominence in the household of Potifar. Potifar placed Yosef in charge of the affairs of the household and gave him complete responsibility and authority over these affairs. Potifar's wife was attracted to Yosef. She attempted to seduce him. Yosef rejected her advances. Eventually, she attempted to force

herself upon him. Yosef fled from her. She accused Yosef of attempting to seduce her. Her husband placed Yosef in jail.

It is notable that Potifar placed Yosef in jail. This was a rather tempered response. Yosef was accused of seducing Potifar's wife. Yosef was Potifar's servant. It seems that he was remarkably lenient in his response. Nachmanides offers a number of possible explanations for this response. He suggests that Potifar's great love and admiration for Yosef may have influenced his decision to spare him. He also suggests that Potifar may have suspected that his wife was not completely truthful in her characterization of her encounter with Yosef. As result of either or both of these considerations, he decided to spare Yosef and imprison him rather than seek his death.[6]

The Torah tells us that he placed Yosef in the "beit ha'sohar – the place in which the prisoners of the king were imprisoned." Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra is concerned with the term *beit ha'sohar*. The term is unusual and does not have an obvious meaning. He explains that the term is actually derived from the Egyptian language. Therefore, the Torah explains the meaning of the term. The Torah tells us that it is the prison in which the prisoners of the king are placed.[7]

Nachmanides disagrees. He explains that *beit ha'sohar* is a Hebrew term and he explains its origins. It means prison. However, the Torah adds that Potifar did not place Yosef in the prison provided for typical crimes. Instead, he was placed in a special prison reserved for prisoners of the king.[8] According to this interpretation of the passage, the Torah is telling us that although Yosef was placed in prison, he was not treated as a common criminal; he was not placed among the general body of prisoners. Instead, he was placed in a special institution reserved for the prisoners of the king. As we shall see, this apparent nuance of fate had important ramifications.

We can now understand Nachmanides' preference for Unkelus' interpretation of Potifar's position. According to this interpretation, Potifar was Paroh's executioner. In this position, he was in charge of Paroh's personal prison. When faced with the decision of how to punish Yosef, he used his authority to place Yosef in the special prison under his command. In other words, were Potifar not Paroh's executioner, he would have handed Yosef over to the civil authorities who would have placed Yosef in a common prison. But because of his position, Potifar had the option of placing Yosef in this special prison reserved for the prisoners of

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the king. Potifar took advantage of this option and placed Yosef in the prison under his control.

There is a deeper message in Nachmanides' position. He seems to maintain that every trial and travail Yosef experienced was actually the seed, or antecedent, to his eventual ascension and redemption. Yosef was sold into slavery in Egypt. He was ripped away from his home and his father. But this tragedy was also the precursor to his eventual emergence as one of the most powerful political leaders of his era.

Yosef was condemned to prison for an alleged crime he had not committed. This was another tragedy. But again, this tragedy was an antecedent to his eventual rise to power. Potifar respected Yosef. He had the authority to place Yosef in the king's prison. He exercised this authority. As a result, Yosef came into contact with the individual who would eventually recommend him to Paroh and propel him into prominence.

Nachmanides provides another example of an apparent tragedy serving as an antecedent to Yosef's ascension. In prison, Yosef came into contact with Paroh's butler. He interpreted the butler's dream and foretold his release and reappointment to Paroh's household. He asked the butler to remember him and, upon his release, to use his influence to rescue him. What measures did Yosef hope would be taken by the butler? Nachmanides offers a number of possibilities. Perhaps Yosef hoped the butler would recommend him to Paroh as a servant. Perhaps, the butler would ask Paroh to allow him to take Yosef as his own servant.[9] Yosef did not have lofty aspirations. He only hoped to be freed from prison and restored to servitude. But the butler forgot about Yosef and did not make any effort to free him. Again, Yosef experienced a tragedy.

But this tragedy led directly to Yosef's ascension. Our parasha opens with Paroh dreaming two disturbing dreams. He does not receive an acceptable interpretation of these dreams. Now, the butler remembers Yosef and his uncanny skill in interpreting dreams. He recommends him to Paroh at this crucial moment. Yosef's interpretation of these dreams leads to his appointment as Paroh's minister.

In summary, according to Nachmanides, each tragedy experienced by Yosef set the stage for his eventual redemption. These tragedies did not represent Hashem's abandonment of Yosef. Instead, each was a step in a complicated series of events that would lead to Yosef's ascension. The apparent significance of each of these tragedies is misleading. Superficially, they were expressions of Hashem's abandonment. But within the overall

design of Hashem's providence, each served a role in bringing about Yosef's emergence as a powerful leader and savior of Bnai Yisrael. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 41:45.

[2] Sefer Beresheit 39:1-20.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 39:19.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 37:36.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit,

37:36.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 39:19.

[7] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 39:20.

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 39:20.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 40:14.

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*a Lesson in  
Subordination to God*

# MENORA

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah portion “Truma” outlines the Temple and the various vessels housed therein. Of considerable detail is the Menora, the structure of which includes mandatory decorations of cups, knobs and flowers, unlike the other vessels: the Ark, the Table or the Altars. It possesses seven branches, six of which emanate from the center stem with identical design requirements; three branches on each side of the center stem. The seventh, center stem contains more designs than the others, and the entire Menora was required to be hammered from a single block of gold: it could not be made piecemeal and assembled.

Not too much information or explanation is readily available about these designs, but as we research the Menora, we start to learn of a few references to Menora in the Torah. I wish to cite these references, and try to understand their uniting theme.

The Menora is one of three institutions over which Moses was perplexed. The Talmud states that a fiery Menora descended from heaven to convey its form to Moses. (Menachos 29a) What is the meaning of this statement?

Perhaps the most popular source of the Menora is the holiday of Channukah. After the Jews won the war, they returned to resume Temple service by lighting the Menora. Finding insufficient, pure oil to last eight days until they could press new oil, God created the famous miracle where one day’s supply of oil lasted those eight days. Unable to light each day was not the Jews’ fault, so we wonder the need for such a miracle, as the Jews were already victorious. It is not a miracle that saved the Jews, nor was it needed. Why then did God perform this miracle?

Parshas Beha-alosecha commences with the command of Aaron lighting the Menora. This follows the inauguration of the Tabernacle (Temple) as the first service. Why is Menora the first service?

On Shabbos Channukah we read the Haftorah of Parshas Beha-alosecha found in Zechariah. It describes God’s promise to enable the reconstruction of the second Temple through Darius, Queen Esther’s son. In this portion of the Prophets, Zechariah sees a vision, part of which reveals a golden Menora. Zechariah also sees olives which on their own, are miraculously pressed and provide golden oil for the Menora. The lesson according to Rashi is that just as this vision of the olives required no man to press oil from them, so too, no man will be required to create the situation where the Temple will be rebuilt, as the verse states, “not by an army and not by strength, but by My spirit, says God of hosts.” Meaning, this part of the vision is an analogy to future events: just as man is unnecessary to create oil and light the Menora, man is equally unnecessary to enable the situation to rebuild the Temple; God alone will accomplish this. The question is what does the Menora have to do with God’s message to Zechariah? The Menora’s presence seems arbitrary. Any item could be used to convey God’s message... why a Menora?

However, we notice in all three of these sections, a Menora is found, and the section is dealing with either resuming temple service (Channukah), initiating Temple service (Beha-alosecha) or the rebuilding of the Temple (Zechariah).

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(Menora cont. from previous page)

## Channukah

What is this central role of the Menora, when the Ark is truly the focus of the Temple, as it houses the Torah? Additionally, while donning Tefillin each morning, we recite these words: "and the good oil pour out on the seven branches of the Menora, to spread forth Your goodness to Your creations." What is this statement's meaning? What does the Menora have to do with God pouring out His "good oil" (goodness) to His creations?

One more matter is essential to our discussion: Sforno's explanation for the very need for Temple. Of course, Temple is not "for" God, as God needs nothing. Temple is for man. But as Sforno taught, Temple was a response to the Golden Calf. The Jews expressed an idolatrous need, as Moses presumably was dead, and the nation could not bear existing with no physical figurehead. Thus, the Jews said, "...Moses the man who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has happened to him." Why did they mention Moses "the man"? It was due to their over attachment to man, instead of God. Sforno explains that the Jews then created the Golden Calf to replace Moses. They did not truly assume the Calf was God, but that this Calf would be the means through which they could relate to God. Nonetheless, this was a grave sin. However, this sin displayed the level of the Jews, that they required a tangible method of approaching God. Temple was God's response: it would act as a controlled outlet of sorts. God would allow their tangible approach to Him, never once allowing the Jew to view God as tangible, but merely offering them a means, on their level, to worship God. If we understand God's message to the Jews here, we can now answer our main question regarding the role of the Menora.

With Temple, God teaches mankind that our own means of approaching Him – the Golden Calf – must fail in truly relating to God. Human ideas by definition are qualitatively and quantitatively less than God's perfect knowledge. But not only are our ideas flawed, the central point I wish to make is this: man cannot initiate a relationship with God, unless God makes this relationship a reality, and does so first. For the Jews to presume that creating a golden animal will realistically relate them to God, is a crime, which earned them death. Our understanding of the true means by which we relate to God is so essential, that without it, our lives are worthless. We may now understand why Menora is so essential to Temple.

Temple, as we said, is God's allowance for mankind to relate to Him in an Earthly and tangible fashion. But since the Jews sinned, assuming they might initiate a relationship with God on their own, and with their own fabricated devices and acts, God corrects us. And not only did those Jews possess the emotion responsible for the Golden Calf's creation, we are all still the same "human" design, sharing the seeds of that sin, and in need of keeping a "lid" on those idolatrous emotions. The Talmud teaches that the Yetzer Hara – the evil instinct – emerged from the Temple's "Holy of Holies" in the form of a fiery lion. This parable means that it is in the religious sphere (Temple) that man's idolatrous emotions are most powerful. And therefore, in this religious sphere (Temple worship) we find the most exacting of laws to restrain this emotion. We find today all too often, many Jews wishing to express greater "religiosity" than others. Man's ego teams with his religious emotion, and seeks grandeur in

(continued on next page)



(Menora cont. from previous page)

## Channukah

the eyes of his fellow, instead of in God's eyes. God, having created our religious emotions, warns us not to add to the Torah, for this very reason. Radak's last "Yaish Omrim" in Zafania 1:8 explains how God punished Jews who dressed differently than the other Jews, just to present themselves as more religious. We have digressed, but for good reason. Let us return to the Menora.

Now, as Sforno taught, man sinned by assuming he knew how to relate to God: he thought his arbitrary actions of creating a Golden Calf might have some real meaning before God. However, this is pure idolatry and imagination. How does God correct us? We require this vital lesson that we cannot initiate a relationship with God, but it is God who does so, and it is God's prescribed actions and laws, which are truly recognized by Him. We are taught of the Menora's essential role in our aforementioned three cases.

When reestablishing Temple service during Channukah, God made certain that the very initiation – Menora lighting – was not by natural means, but through that miracle. When God gave Zechariah his vision, again, God informed him that the Temple would be rebuilt through God: "not by an army and not by strength, but by My spirit, says God of hosts." (Zech. 4:6) Meaning, man's relationship to God (Temple service) in these two cases, required a reminder that this relationship exists...only due to God's will, and man cannot effectuate a relationship arbitrarily, without God's will. We learn that man must subordinate his religious desires, to God's exact prescriptions of service. The honest person will ask, "How can man relate to the Creator of the universe?" And a great, honest man did already express this: "What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you remember him? (King David, Psalms, 8:5) Humility demands this response of King David. However, God does create a relationship, for which we must be thankful. So our two cases teach that God intervened, not allowing man to assume he might relate to God, without God's will or methods. Perhaps this also explains the Talmudic portion citing the "fiery Menora" that taught Moses of its perplexing design. The concept of a "perplexing design" suggests this idea again: that we must subordinate our knowledge, to God's knowledge. Even the most perfect and intelligent man relied on God's instruction.

But now you will ask, "Where was there any act of God in the inaugural service in Beha-alosecha?" To this, I ask you, "Why did God select the Menora, and not another item, to function as His lesson in Zechariah and during Channukah?"

Again: Temple (man's service to God) demands that man recognize God's methods, and that God initiates any relationship with man. I cannot

explain the Menora's knobs, cups and flowers, but I wish to suggest why it is designed with six branches emanating from a seventh. I believe this refers to Creation, from which six days emanated, and rest was established for the seventh. The very concept of creation is the most primary example of God's relationship with everything: His creation of matter's very existence is the most primary expression of His relationship with matter, with the entire universe. Perhaps for this reason, God uses the Menora to demonstrate this lesson, that He creates this "relationship" with man, just as he forged the basis of all relationships, by granting everything existence. The act of creation is the expression of God's relationship to matter, per excellence. He therefore structured the Menora to embody an expression of "Creation" so that Temple will have an item displaying the foundation of our relationship with the Creator: an object which resembles creation, an emanating six days, paralleled by an emanating six branches. Perhaps for this reason we recite, "and the good oil pour out on the seven branches of the Menora, to spread forth Your goodness to Your creations" as we wind the Tefillin "seven times" on our arms. Again here, when in service to God wearing His Tefillin, we remind ourselves that without His Mitzvos or His desire, we have no means to relate to Him.

Menora resembles creation, and by contemplating creation, we realize the idea of God relating to creation. And as this Menora sits in the Temple, the place where we desire to approach God, we are made aware of this truth, that only through God's methods, will we have any relationship with Him.

We are thereby averted from subjective, idolatrous, religious expressions as displayed by the Jews who created the Golden Calf. Menora reminds us to rely on God's means to approach Him, so that we truly approach Him, and not imagine we do. God creates the truth that we can relate to Him, and thus, He created miracles when the temple was reestablished and rebuilt. Temple service devoid of a clear teaching that God enables such service is false. God desires we live by truth, so God teaches us with lessons as these.

This is a primary lesson for us all. We must recognize by Torah study what is true and what is false concerning our notions of God. We must then adhere meticulously to His commands, as He alone knows the only means for our relationship with Him.

Studying God's Torah is the greatest command, and where we find our true expression as intelligent beings. But although as we said, the Ark which houses the Torah is the true focus of the Temple and our lives, the Menora teaches a vital lesson as well, regarding our relationship with God. Temple addresses the entire human being, and part of our Earthly existence encompasses not only Torah study (Ark), but also our approach to God in a relationship. Menora is the vehicle that educates man on this relationship, restraining our religious expression to only what God deems proper, and teaching that our relationship follows His methods, not our own.

To partake of reality, man must subjugate his feelings, to God's true knowledge. This, I feel, is a goal of the Menora. ■

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In Genesis, 41:1, we read of the dreams of Pharaoh. He saw seven lean cows swallow seven fat cows, and no enlargement could be seen in those lean cows. After waking and falling asleep a second time, Pharaoh dreams again of seven full ears of grain being swallowed by seven thin ears, and again there was no telling that the thin ears swallowed the fat ones. Pharaoh awoke and called all his interpreters, but none could offer a pleasing interpretation until Joseph was summoned.

Joseph told Pharaoh the following (Gen, 45:25): "25: The dream of Pharaoh is one, that which God plans to do has He shown to Pharaoh. 26: The seven good cows represent seven years, and the seven good ears represent seven years, it is one dream. 27: And the seven lean, bad cows that came up after them are seven years and the seven withered ears blown by the wind are seven years of famine. 28: This is the matter which I had told to Pharaoh, what God plans to do He has shown to Pharaoh."

Joseph continues to tell Pharaoh that first, there will be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of great famine, and the famine will be so severe as to wipe away the memory of the plenty. Joseph explains why the dream was repeated, as God was to enact the plenty and the famine immediately. He then advises Pharaoh to store the plenty in preparation, thereby placing Pharaoh in control of all produce.

The questions which arise are as follows:

1) What did Pharaoh see in Joseph's interpretation, which satisfied him, as opposed to the Egyptian interpreters? The interpreters said that Pharaoh would have seven daughters and bury seven daughters. Joseph said the seven represented years of plenty and famine. What was more satisfying in Joseph's interpretation?

2) In his interpretation, Joseph does not keep to the order of events. His first interpretation is in passage 27, where he commences with mentioning the famine. But the famine takes place 'after' the plenty. Joseph should have commenced with explaining that the fat cows and fat ears represented plenty. (These came first in Pharaoh's dreams.) But he didn't. Why?

3) Very significant is Joseph's statement in passage 28, "This is the matter which I had told to Pharaoh, what God plans to do He has shown to Pharaoh." As if to say, "you see Pharaoh, I have now proved what I was saying, that this is from God". It seems from this passage that Joseph contented himself that he had successfully proved to Pharaoh — at this point — that it is God's plan. This would mean that in these words alone Joseph



feels he has already convinced Pharaoh that the dreams are from God. What in his words convinced Joseph that he made his point clear? A closer look at Joseph's words gives us the answer...

Notice that Joseph repeats one element, "it is one dream". This repetition is what Joseph is trying to drive home in Pharaoh's mind, and Pharaoh's astrologers do not mention this element of repetition. Joseph differed from the astrologers, not so much in the dream's content, but in his explanation of the 'style' of the dreams. Joseph showed Pharaoh that his dreams were exact duplicates: a phenomenon which does not have its source in human dream dynamics, but rather, something only possible when emanating from a Divine Source — God. Pharaoh was wise enough to see this as true. The proof of this explanation is not only Joseph's repetition, but in the fact that Joseph concluded to

Pharaoh midstream in his explanation, that this is already proof enough that your dreams are Divine. Joseph said, "This is the matter which I had told to Pharaoh". Saying in other words, "you see, it is true." Joseph went on with the rest of the interpretation, but not as a proof of Divine origin. Joseph was convinced that this element of exact repetition proves that the dreams were from God. He therefore interrupted his interpretation to impress this upon Pharaoh.

While discussing this explanation with a friend, he quoted verse 41:32 where Joseph said that the doubling of the dreams is to teach Pharaoh that the matter is imminent, and not as I suggested, that it is to teach a divine pattern normally not seen in dreams. I then came across an Ibn Ezra and a Ramban which says the doubling of the dreams teaching imminence, is derived not from the dreams' duplication per se, but from the doubling of dreams in "one night". According to Ibn Ezra, had the dreams been identical, but took place on separate nights, we would not learn of the imminence factor. This taught imminence of the years of plenty and the ensuing famine. Identical dreams are from God. The other idea of the "imminence" is learned from both dreams occurring in a single night. Ibn Ezra and Ramban's explanation support our original explanation. Joseph was in fact stating that the identical nature of the dreams — not their single night's occurrence — taught divine origin. The duplication in one night taught imminence.

We learned earlier that Joseph dreamt of the sheaves and stars bowing to him. The wine steward and baker had similar dreams too, and Pharaoh also had two similar dreams. This consistent pattern of duplicating dreams reveals to us that such dreams are divine, and something, which Joseph detected in each case, arriving at his determinations in all three instances, each dream was divine.

The reason why Joseph commenced with interpreting the famine aspect first, was that Joseph desired to be freed from prison and avert this catastrophe. His calculation, which proved intelligent, was to hit Pharaoh with bad news before the good news, even though this distorted the order. Joseph is known as the chief psychologist in Jewish history, and he understood that people attach themselves to the first element of news, even if followed by good tidings. By presenting Pharaoh with the stark reality of a devastating and imminent famine, Joseph intended to render Pharaoh helpless, and in need of one who could save him — in need of a Joseph. ■

# Happy Chanukah

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# Saving our Children of Chernobyl



**Laura Koster**

Today we are living in challenging times, experiencing acts of terror, economic crisis and great uncertainty about our future. Darkness appears to cover the existing light underneath the evil tragedies occurring throughout the world. Tragic events have occurred throughout the world in recent history: 9/11, Tsunami, New Orleans flood, and California brush fires and now the great loss of Rabbi Gavriel and Rivkah Holtzberg, along with others in Mumbai, India. We need to continue reaching out to help others rebuild homes, find jobs, donate charity to the poor and orphans, assist with finding marriage partners, and provide medical assistance during times of economic hardship. The Jewish people are a light upon other nations and we need to unite together in order to maintain love, peace and harmony throughout the world. According to the Torah and rabbinic leaders, when we follow Jewish tradition, marry within our faith, keep the Sabbath, the holidays, kosher laws and learn Judaism, G-d's protection dwells amongst us and showers us with overflowing blessings.

The holiday of Chanukah commemorates a small group of Jews defeating the Greek army which was on a quest to annihilate our people and Jewish traditions. The Greeks prohibited the study of Torah, circumcision as well as observing Jewish traditions. We witnessed the miraculous occurrence of finding a small flask of oil which lasted for eight entire days. Children celebrate with spinning colorful dreidles, eating home-made potato latkaks and singing "Chanukah, oh Chanukah, come light the menorah. Let's have a party and all dance the hora." Young boys and girls play joyfully with dreidels which are inscribed with the Hebrew letters nun, gimel, heh, and peh, the letters combined spell out: nes gadol hayah poh "a great miracle occurred here." We need to continue teaching and instilling Torah to our children and pray they will continue to pass down our traditions and values to the future generations.

A few weeks ago, I was invited for Shabbat. When I arrived at the home of my friend Miriam and her husband Rabbi K, I walked into the kitchen, smelling the aroma of Challah baking and the children helping prepare for Shabbat. The children entered the kitchen wearing pretty Shabbat dresses and hair neatly brushed. As the sun was quickly setting, I lit the candles in the beautiful brass settings. One of the younger girls watched and smiled as I covered my eyes and recited the blessing. I stood quietly thanking Hashem for my loving family,

friends, teachers, and all the wonderful people in my life. I felt the loss of Rabbi Gavriel and Rivkah deeply and I prayed that their souls would rest in peace and the impact of this tragedy would help unify our Jewish people as one.

Following my 10-minute prayer, I entered the living room. The girls were reading books on the couches while the youngest boy was playing miniature bowling on the floor. He had done many mitzvahs during the week, which his sisters recorded on a chart, and his parents rewarded him with this game. Ariella, the eldest picked up her head from *The Jewish Week*, "So I heard you telling my mom that you attended the Children of Chernobyl dinner. How was it?"

I perked up, "It was absolutely beautiful! When I arrived, photographers were shooting photos and interviewing one of the celebrities. I squeezed my way to the front of the red rope and noticed my friend Jon Voight, dressed in a dashing black tux and white scarf, speaking to a reporter."

Ariella replied, "Wow, you know a famous actor?"

All the children listened with great interest.

"Yeah, before Jon entered the hall, I called out and waved, 'Hey Jon!'"

"Jon greeted me with a big hello and smile while the camera lights flashed as we entered Chelsea Piers. He introduced me to the director of Children of Chernobyl."

Ariella exclaimed, "That's so exciting!"

"Oh yes, wait until you hear this." I hopped out of my chair. "While Jon and I strolled down the hallway, suddenly a tall green tree jumped out and waved her branches towards us." I held my arms up in the air and swayed them from side to side as if they were branches gently blowing.

The girls giggled and Ariella looked at me in disbelief. "What do you mean 'a tree jumped out of nowhere'?"

I whispered, "It was really a tall woman dressed up as a green tree with leaves, and children around her were handing us gift bags."

The younger sister Shoshanna asked, "What was in the bag?"

"Well, Jon opened his bag with a book of prizes and pulled out a colorful flower necklace that sparkled in red, blue, green and yellow."

When Rabbi K called everyone to the table to make Kiddush (prayer over the grape juice) before dinner, we approached the beautifully set table with fresh baked Challah as centerpiece. Our Shabbat dinner was spent eating, singing songs and hearing the Rabbi share Torah stories.

The next day after lunch, a friend of the girls walked up to me. "I heard you went to the dinner this week. How were you invited?"

"My aunt and uncle happen to be good friends of Jon Voight and gave my family tickets."

Sarah responded enthusiastically, "Wow, my cousin attended the dinner and I volunteered to wrap candy packages

for the tables!"

I was amazed. "Really, that was very kind of you. I remember the variety of candy corns, colored jellybeans, and I loved the chocolate balls. The flower arrangements and lit candles were really pretty."

Sarah smiled, "Thank you, I can't believe you were there. That's so cool!"

I added, "They had huge movie screens showing films of the Children of Chernobyl." However on Shabbat, I refrained from sharing how the films sadly exhibited children suffering from the effect of nuclear weapons, contaminated water, air pollution and poor nutrition. Mothers have been having miscarriages and lack proper medical care. One segment of a film showed Jon Voight visiting families with Rabbi Yossi (who recently passed away) in Israel for its 60th birthday. He flew over to celebrate Israel's existence and spoke about the importance of the Jewish people keeping our land. Jon and Rabbi Yossi joined arms and danced together with several men and boys with tremendous joy and simcha. Imagine a righteous gentile flying to the Holy land to help the Jewish people with love and devotion!

Simultaneously, the Jewish community, rabbis, actors and philanthropists, Jon Voight, Ivanka Trump (Donald Trump's daughter), Jody Durst (President of Environmental Co.) attended the fundraiser in order to save thousands of Jewish children afflicted with cancer and life threatening illnesses. "On April 26, 1986, Chernobyl nuclear reactor four exploded. By 1990, the earth, air and water cycled radioactivity through every part of the Chernobyl ecosystem, which continues to be radioactive vehicles forcing its way into the bodies of innocent children. Based on Belarus national cancer statistics, Greenpeace predicted that up to 270,000 cancers and 93,000 fatal cancer cases have been caused by Chernobyl."

The Children of Chernobyl event was celebrated by Jews of different backgrounds and non-Jews from New York, California, Israel and others to help these innocent Jewish children. This was a true example of bringing love, harmony and unity among Jews and gentiles. We light the menorah with gratitude for Hashem's gift of life and freedom to celebrate Chanukah with love and simcha. With faith in G-d, the Jewish people will persevere and emanate light from the glowing candles in our windows into the world. May we all unite together and pray that G-d will bless us with the ability to save the children of our future and witness amazing miracles!

Please feel free to participate in a worthy mitzvah to help the Children of Chernobyl by giving charity and enabling the children to heal. For additional information, contact:

Children of Chernobyl 675 Third Avenue, Suite 3210 New York, NY 10017 Website: <http://www.ccoc.net/> Email: [ccoc@ccoc.net](mailto:ccoc@ccoc.net)

I was born with mild cerebral palsy caused by lack of oxygen from umbilical cord strangulation during my birth (malpractice). As a child, I walked with braces, crutches and helmet to protect me from falls. Today, I have a Master's in Counseling, ability to walk without devices, dance, drive and live a fulfilling life. I am eternally grateful to Hashem. I am a motivational speaker, life coach and writer. I am devoted to spreading the message of G-d and inspiring people to achieve their life goals and dreams.

Wishing you and your family a Happy Chanukah filled with health, prosperity, happiness and world peace!

**Laura Koster (Rafaela Chana Leah)**

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## Letters



## Letters

from our

## READERS



## Grave-site Prayers

**Reader:** Wishing you and Klal Yisroel a wonderful year, filled with Ha'Shems blessings.

Having the opportunity to download your weekly edition for the past few years I have come to the realization that many of the "customs" I grew up may in fact be UNTRUE Torah lessons.

My need at this point in my life is for clarification so that I can teach my children and grandchildren the truth before my clock runs out of time.

You have taught that the dead do not hear and can't speak. If one fails to grasp this idea and practices this custom they are practicing idol worship.

Please explain the "custom" of visiting the cemetery prior to the High Holydays as well as visiting the "Ohel" of departed Chasidic Rabbis before one of Life's great Jewish moments, i.e., engagements, weddings, job interviews etc.

I was brought up in an orthodox home, am yeshiva educated as are my children and grandchildren and yet because of my families "Chasidic" (not Chabad) roots I was taught to visit

the cemetery and not only say tehillim but also to SPEAK to the deceased. Examples such as inviting my departed relatives to attend my Bar Mitzvah, etc. My family was not alone in practicing such minhaging. The beliefs of wearing red bendles and attaching a red ribbon to a babies clothing or to a bat Mitzvah girl or beautiful woman's underwear is still practiced among some of my ultra orthodox friends and family. G-d forbid a yurzzeit candle went out before ALL the wax was burnt or at least 25 hours meant dire consequences.

Please explain to all of us, your weekly readers, how and why these customs became prevalent among our educated parents and grandparents going back hundreds of years. What is the TRUE purpose of visiting the cemetery during Elul and what should one do at the grave site of a dearly beloved relative or a true Tzadik.

*Thank you.*

*Your Talmid, Aron Yitzchok*

**Mesora:** Aron, thank you for your wishes.

First and foremost, we must appreciate why Maimonides taught that any instance of "angel" met with in the Torah, must indicate a vision. (Guide, book II, chap. xlii) Why does Maimonides say this?

The answer is that on Earth, there is nothing other than man that possesses intelligence, which might control any phenomena. Man alone possesses intelligence, and man alone intentionally manipulates worldly events. When the Torah depicts angels talking to prophets, this is all in a vision, and not on Earth. With this knowledge, we dismiss red bendles, omens (quick-burning yahrtzeit candles), spirits, ghosts, or inviting the dead to Earthly events. For this reason, in the Torah (Deuteronomy 18:11) consulting the dead is grouped together with other idolatrous practices. We violate Torah and truth by acting as if there are other forces on Earth. Assuming this, we cannot view God as the "only" force in the universe. This is why such practices are considered idolatrous.

The Torah, Talmud and halacha teach us that it is prohibited to talk to the dead. When discussing the custom to visit graves on Rosh Hashannah, Mishneh Brurah clearly writes, "But one must NOT direct his thoughts towards the dead: rather, he must seek God – may He be blessed – that God should show him mercy in light of the merit of the righteous." (Orach Chaim 581:4, Misneh Brurah 27 "Hakvaros", Beer Haytave "Hakvaros" 581:17)

What is meant by "God should show him mercy in light of the merit of the righteous"? This means that by our identification with the righteous who have passed on, we thereby perform an act of Teshuva. For through this, God recognizes our

inner desire to emulate those Tzaddikim. This is a praiseworthy custom. But we must not cross the line and talk to them. This is prohibited, and a Rabbi in the Talmud goes so far as to say that the dead do not know what we say, and it is akin to talking to a stone. (Brachos 19a)

In the Talmud we find that Calev visited the graves of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Maaras Hamachpelah). Talmud Sotah (34b) cites this verse: "They ascended in the south and he came to Hebron". (Num. 13:22) The Talmud says: "It should have said 'they' came to Hebron, and not 'he' came. Rava said this teaches that Calev separated himself from the counsel of the spies, and he traveled [alone to Hebron] and stretched himself out on the graves of the forefathers. He said to them, 'My fathers, seek out mercy for me that I am saved from the counsel of the spies'."

We find that God praises Calev for having followed "his other spirit"...meaning, his intelligence. He did not succumb to the counsel of the spies. The fact that Calev alone traveled to Hebron is a "derivation", as Rava learns this out from an apparently incorrect pronoun: "he" came to Hebron, and not "they" came. Rava did not have any historical transmission about Calev's travels and activities. If he did, no derivation would be necessary. So no one transmitted to Rava what Calev did...it is all Rava's own derivation from a single word. How then can Rava say exactly what Calev was doing at the patriarch's graves?

This is explained as a "drash", a homiletic lesson NOT to be taken literally. Rava was stating that Calev must have traveled to Hebron, and no other place, for good cause. And he knew it was Calev who went there, since the other spies were of evil intent. Rava knew the patriarchs and matriarchs are buried there. His question was why Calev went there at this time. Rava realized Calev's predicament: he sought defense from the powerfully persuasive counsel of the spies. Out of their own fears, the spies sought a pretense not to wage war in the land, as they should have according to God's promise of their foretold victory. Calev knew God's promise to the patriarchs that Israel was to be theirs, and he was confident in God's ability to win the war. However, Calev was honest with himself and wished to bolster his emotions to shield him from succumbing to the spies. By visiting the patriarch's graves, his emotions would become more attached to what his mind already told him was true.

Rava wasn't there, but homiletically phrased "as a prayer" what Calev was only thinking. Rava wouldn't dare ascribe praying to the dead to a man like Calev, who God loved. So in fact, Calev did not pray to the dead patriarchs, as this is a corrupt activity: all prayers must be to God alone. Calev never really said "My fathers, seek out mercy for me...". Rava merely spoke in homily, as he

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(Letters cont. from previous page)

## Letters

believed would be understood as homily. Rava's meaning was that it is "as if" Calev prayed to the patriarchs. Calev sought emotional strength to defend God's promise of the land. He therefore traveled to their graves to solidify this conviction. In truth, Calev found the mercy of his fathers, but only through pondering God's promise at their graves. He did not pray to them.

Rava and all Talmudic sages would always seek to prod our thought, by only hinting to a matter or suggesting impossibilities. Such an approach disguises truths from those not intellectually prepared, and sharpens the minds of those who are prepared. Homilies and metaphors also preserve truths for succeeding generations, as startling stories capture the imagination and are easily retained in memory. And the very fact that this Talmudic portion does not mention the prohibition to consult the dead in connection with Calev, is support for the fact that Rava's homily is in fact not literal.

Tosfos is of the opinion that Calev did in fact pray, but he prayed "to God", and God related his prayer to the dead patriarchs. But no opinion suggests that Calev prayed to the dead: an outright Torah prohibition.

Additionally, Talmud Sotah 14a says that G-d hid the burial place of Moses to prevent the Jews from relating to him, in place of God. God does not wish man to pray to the dead, to speak to them, or to seek the dead as intermediaries to God. Sefer Otzar Tefilos says this as well.

In the end, we find that Torah sources demand us to pray to God alone "for He alone performs wonders", recited each morning. Praying to the dead, placing notes in their graves, and all similar acts, violate what we have cited. This is a recurring problem, and even the ancient Jews created the Golden Calf due to their inability to live without the "man Moses", after they thought Moses died. They created a physical relationship to God, for which they were severely punished.

I continually stress this point: we must follow the Torah—not what is popular...even what is popular among religious Jews. ■

## Kabbala & Polytheism

Dear JewishTimes,

Although I am not a proponent of kabbalah, I feel compelled to write. The Me'ili writes, "They have said that one should pray in the day to one created divinity and at night to another divinity...and on Holy Days to yet another. During the Ten Days of Repentance they have increased

perplexity and backsliding by praying to another created divinity, and to other created divinities below the former during the rest of the year. They have made many distinctions in prayer."

I have not attempted to learn about kabbalah in at least ten years. However, I do recall the idea of "sefirot" which is described as "emanations," and I recall for example, some were "netzach" (eternity), "hod" (glory), and one was "melech" (king). (Actually, I just looked it up and it is called "keter"/crown).

It is my opinion that these can be related to in a similar manner to the way we describe Hashem "having" attributes. If Hashem is One, then He has no attributes. And yet He is described as "rachum" (merciful), "erech apayim" (slow-to-anger), "keyl"?-? (power), "shakai" (sufficient). These refer to how humans experience the actions of Hashem. When Hashem punishes, we call it "anger" or "din"/judgement. When Hashem gives more time, we call it "mercy." However, Hashem is One and is not sometimes angry and sometimes merciful. His actions appear this way to us, and this is how we describe it, even though ideally all Jews should be aware that these are anthropomorphic descriptions and not our actual conception of Hashem's nature.

I trust the Me'ili if he says that the kabbalists of his day were praying to the emanations, which would be similar to the mistake made in Dor Enosh (as described in Rambam, Hil. Avoda Zara chapter 1), when the people ultimately began to worship something other than Hashem.

However, I do not think that today's Jews worship the sefirot. It is my understanding that they regard Hashem as "ein-sof" (infinite and unknowable), and that the sefirot can be understood similar to the attributes. Yes, there are distortions about yichud Hashem, the Unity of God. There is confusion and people may think that eternity and glory and kingship are "aspects" of Hashem. However, these same distortions occur in all of mainstream Orthodox Judaism.

The Sforno (Bamidbar 13:47) says about the Jewish people: "the existence of the Creator and His Oneness is known by a small amount and accepted by the entire nation."

The Jewish people recite daily, "Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad." Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. It is true that not all Jews understand the ramifications of Hashem's Oneness, and we must do our best to educate.

However, I do not think that today's kabbalists (or at least, I can only speak for the people I have met and spoken to who study kabbala) make the mistake of worshipping (i.e. praying to) created divinities. ■

Jessie Fischbein

## Chabad & Messianism

**Reader:** Dear Mesora, Rabbi Elchanan ben Eliezer and Rabbi Saul Zucker,

I would like to thank you for your brave pieces on Chabad and Rabbi Cunin in your magazine. It was a great inspiration to see that more people dare to speak up when seeing such wrongdoings against Judaism.

My name is Michael Kohn and I am 23 years old, studying in Manchester. I was born and raised in Oslo, Norway.

I have a special interest in Chabad and messianism after seeing Chabad's behavior impact Scandinavia. I wish to take an active stand against some of their theology and many of Chabad's activities. After a few years of learning about the subject, I would like to take an initiative to improve the knowledge of Chabad within Scandinavian Jewry.

Scandinavian Jews have no interest in spending time to find sources and this will be an easy way to acquire and disseminate knowledge. Some of the information will also be in Norwegian, which I think will appeal to Scandinavians. Our youth will be especially intrigued that I am behind the website since many of the youngsters in Scandinavia know me.

In order to make it easier for people (especially Scandinavians) to find sources and information, I have created a website where I will gather articles, movies, sound clips, book reviews, etc. I do not want to write my own opinions on matters, because I do not feel competent enough, but I will direct people to sources so they might find honest information.

I would like to ask your permission to reprint your articles on my website in order to show an important publication's plea to Chabad, and important information about the problems with Messianism and deism.

Thank you.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. The address to the website is: [www.infochabad.com](http://www.infochabad.com)

Best regards,  
Michael Kohn

**Mesora:** Michael, we applaud your efforts to reach more Jews with true Torah ideals, and to educate others on the heresy promoted within Chabad. This is the gravest of all sins. Feel free to use our materials.

To date, we have not received any retraction or contact from Rabbi Shlomo Cunin. We are thereby led to the conclusion that his beliefs

(continued on next page)



(Letters cont. from previous page)

## Letters

stated in that video that the "Rebbe runs the world" and is Moshiach, are representative of at least his Chabad organization, and perhaps others. To the credit of two other Chabad Rabbis, they did denounce Rabbi Cunin's statements as false. However, in our conversations with Chabad members since that article, certain Chabad Rabbis continued to defend the Rebbe as Moshiach, supporting this belief with an incorrect reading of a Talmudic source.

I must mention that the method of Torah study is not to first accept a belief (the Rebbe is Moshiach) and then to seek support. Torah demands objectivity, where we leave behind previously accepted beliefs, and follow Torah truths. We are to live by those truths, even if that means abandoning cherished beliefs, and opposing others. With no Torah source, one must not imagine that the dead are candidates for the role of Moshiach. And one cannot excuse Rabbi Cunin for saying the "Rebbe runs the world until he comes to take us out of exile". Perhaps the reason no Chabad Rabbis and very few others have openly rejected Rabbi Cunin's words, is their fear of being ostracized. But one errs greatly when allowing his fear of man, to surpass his fear of God.

The command of Torah study is the greatest of all commands, and interestingly, is formulated as a command to "teach". From the fact that we must teach, we derive the command to first learn. Therefore, the 'objective' of Torah study is not for individuals, but for the nation. Therefore, we must teach others, and correct others, as our primary command in life. We must not allow our social fears to prevent us from following God's words. It is therefore praiseworthy that you have taken on this mission, and we will assist you in any manner possible.

We again appeal to all Chabad Rabbis: Teach truths, and reject heretical and false beliefs so together, we can eradicate dangerous notions from Jews. Chabad, you have much reach, and you must use this reach to spread truth, and counter heretical beliefs within your organization. We are willing to work with you to reach this objective, to unify Jews of all customs so we may all follow one Torah. Just as inactivity against intermarriage can destroy our nation, so does the passivity in speaking out against dangerous ideas. We will reprint your letters to foster Torah education, and hope we can work together continuously on this path. ■

## Moshiach: Not from the Dead

The burden of proof is not on those who say that moshiach won't come from the dead — the burden of proof is on those who say he can come from the dead. The reason for that is twofold — moshiach, certainly according to the Rambam, whom Chabad accepts as to the halakhos of moshiach, says that the person will reach a level of nevuah and kingship naturally, then will be revealed to be moshiach. "Naturally" means just that — not from among the dead. Now if one wants to claim that "naturally" includes from the among the dead, the burden of proof is on him. Further, if moshiach can come from among the dead, why would it not be the greatest king we ever had or could have — Moshe Rabbeinu — especially because we know for sure that Moshe will be resurrected, as the gemara states " 'Az yavdil Moshe...' mi-kan letechiyas hameisim min haTorah.", "From here we learn Resurrection is in the Torah". ■

*Rabbi Saul Zucker*

## Jewish Neshamas Stick Together

**Reader:** "Tears of Joy: Tears of sadness are Bitter, while tears of joy are Sweet!" [Me Am Lo'ez, page 458, Rabbi Yaakov Culi.]

Vayigash 1 GENESIS 45:14: Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept. Benjamin also wept on Joseph's neck.

Vayigash 1 GENESIS 45:15: Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept on their necks.

Every year, when I reach this portion of our Holy Torah, I can not escape the choked-up feelings of happiness and joy for Joseph and his brothers. Yes, as tough and hardened and thick skinned I imagine to be, this visualization of Joseph revealing to his brothers who he really is, somehow, cuts right to my heart, and triggers... tears of joy.

Is it possible that this tear-jerking account has far more significance than it appears? I think so! I don't think that Hashem included the story of Joseph because it would make a great screenplay. Then why did he give it to us? Maybe He gave it to us to use as a tool!

When we encounter neophytes, who want "truths" of Torah, we have this account of Joseph and his brothers to use as an excellent

example of being in touch with our Jewish Souls. "How do I know I have a Jewish Soul?" they often ask. Let them read this story, and when they come to sentence 45:14, and 45:15, ask them to describe their immediate feelings, their immediate emotions. Now ask them if they ever got the same reaction seeing strangers being reunited at the airport? That's right! They didn't feel the same way. Why not? Because their eyes didn't connect their Jewish Neshumas to these strangers. So far, I haven't encountered anyone who hasn't gotten choked-up, or hasn't shed a few tears for Joseph's happiness. Jewish Neshumas stick together!

We feel this way because G-d included this happy ending for our benefit, to put us in touch with our Jewish Souls, to show us that he made us to have feelings and compassion for our brother Jews.

*The Monsey Maggid*

**Mesora:** Yes, there is certainly a greater connection with our Jewish brothers and sisters, than with others: those equally entrusted with Torah. This is based on our identification with other Jews as fellow Torah followers. Pirkei Avos also states that greater was the love of David and Jonathan, than that of Amnon for Tamar. The latter felt tremendous love for his half sister Tamar, but this was conditional, romantic love. The greater love is between two like David and Jonathan who shared a love of Torah. This unconditional love of Torah was expressed towards each other, for they equally valued God's word. When we perceive in others an attachment to truth, nothing else can bond us with greater strength. For we understand that this attachment to truth in others is generated from that which differentiates man from all creations: our intellects. Make no mistake: this does not mean the Jews have a soul superior than any other human being. We all descend from Adam, so we all possess identical souls and identical potential, gentile and Jew alike. (In fact, David was the descendant of Ruth the convert.) And if we meet gentiles who share our love of Torah as I have, then we share this same bond as Joseph had for his brothers. And as Rashi points out, Benjamin and Joseph wept over the future Temple's destruction. This homily means to say that their love was based not on a simplistic brotherly love, but for their shared attachment to Torah values. ■

# Ramban

## Iggeres HaRamban - The Ramban's Letter

*(Written to his elder son, Nachman, with the instruction to read it weekly.)*

Hear, my son, the instruction of your father and don't forsake the teaching of your mother (Mishlei 1:8). Get into the habit of always speaking calmly to everyone. This will prevent you from anger, a serious character flaw which causes people to sin. As our Rabbis said (Nedarim 22a): Whoever flares up in anger is subject to the discipline of Gehinnom as it is says in (Koheles 12:10), "Cast out anger from your heart, and [by doing this] remove evil from your flesh." "Evil" here means Gehinnom, as we read (Mishlei 16:4): "...and the wicked are destined for the day of evil." Once you have distanced yourself from anger, the quality of humility will enter your heart. This radiant quality is the finest of all admirable traits (see Avodah Zarah 20b), because (Mishlei 22:4), "Following humility comes the fear of Hashem."

Through humility you will also come to fear Hashem. It will cause you to always think about (see Avos 3:1) where you came from and where you are going, and that while alive you are only like a maggot and a worm, and the same after death. It will also remind you before Whom you will be judged, the King of Glory, as it is stated (I Melachim 8:27; Mishlei 15:11), "Even the heaven and the heavens of heaven can't contain You" -- "How much less the hearts of people!" It is also written (Yirmeyahu 23:24), "Do I not fill heaven and earth? says Hashem."

When you think about all these things, you will come to fear Hashem who created you, and you will protect yourself from sinning and therefore be happy with whatever happens to you. Also, when you act humbly and modestly before everyone, and are afraid of Hashem and of sin, the radiance of His glory and the spirit of the Shechina will rest upon you, and you will live the life of the World-to-Come!

And now, my son, understand and observe that whoever feels that he is greater than others is rebelling against the Kingship of Hashem, because he is adorning himself with His garments, as it is written (Tehillim 93:1), "Hashem reigns, He wears clothes of pride." Why should one feel proud? Is it because of wealth? Hashem makes one poor or rich (I Shmuel 2:7). Is it because of honor? It belongs to Hashem, as we read (I Divrei Hayamim 29:12), "Wealth

and honor come from You." So how could one adorn himself with Hashem's honor? And one who is proud of his wisdom surely knows that Hashem "takes away the speech of assured men and reasoning from the sages" (Iyov 12:20)!? So we see that everyone is the same before Hashem, since with His anger He lowers the proud and when He wishes He raises the low. So lower yourself and Hashem will lift you up!

Therefore, I will now explain to you how to always behave humbly. Speak gently at all times, with your head bowed, your eyes looking down to the ground and your heart focusing on Hashem. Don't look at the face of the person to whom you are speaking. Consider everyone as greater than yourself. If he is wise or rich, you should give him respect. If he is poor and you are richer -- or wiser -- than he, consider yourself to be more guilty than he, and that he is more worthy than you, since when he sins it is through error, while yours is deliberate and you should know better!

In all your actions, words and thoughts, always regard yourself as standing before Hashem, with His Shechinah above you, for His glory fills the whole world. Speak with fear and awe, as a slave standing before his master. Act with restraint in front of everyone. When someone calls you, don't answer loudly, but gently and softly, as one who stands before his master.

Torah should always be learned diligently, so you will be able to fulfill it's commands. When you arise from your learning reflect carefully on what you have studied, in order to see what in it that you can be put into practice. Examine your actions every morning and evening, and in this way every one of your days will be spent in teshuvah (repentance).

Concentrate on your prayers by removing all worldly concerns from your heart. Prepare your heart before Hashem, purify your thoughts and think about what you are going to say. If you follow this in all your daily actions, you will not come to sin. This way everything you do will be proper, and your prayer will be pure, clear, clean, devout and acceptable to Hashem, as it is written (Tehillim 10:17), "When their heart is directed to You, listen to them."

Read this letter at least once a week and neglect none of it. Fulfill it, and in so doing, walk with it forever in the ways of Hashem, may he be blessed, so that you will succeed in all your ways. Thus you will succeed and merit the World to Come which lies hidden away for the righteous. Every day that you shall read this letter, heaven shall answer your heart's desires. Amen, Sela! ■





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