



HAPPY CHANUKAH

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Mikeitz: When Personal Initiative Belies Cosmic Intervention

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1. Yosef was imprisoned by Potiphar for 10 years.
2. In year 10, 2 ministers of the king were also incarcerated.
3. Yosef was appointed to attend to their needs.
4. One was the wine steward, the other, the baker.
5. They both dreamed the same perturbing dream one night. Yosef offered interpretation.
6. The wine steward would be reinstated in three days and the baker would be hanged.
7. Yosef requested the wine steward remember him, mention his innocence, & how he was sold into slavery.
8. Midrash: because of this request, Yosef spent two more years in prison for a lack of faith. Why?
9. When one sees that it is G-d catapulting him to the top, taking initiative is a lack of faith.
10. When Yosef was sold as a slave to Potiphar, his level of success was extraordinary.
11. When incarcerated, he rose to unofficial warden.
12. As it was clear beyond doubt that G-d was directing Yosef's life, his initiative was considered a lack of faith.

Mikeitz: Processing Life Through One's Own Prism

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1. Pharaoh dreamt two dreams that were not interpreted to his satisfaction.
2. The wine steward informs Pharaoh there is someone in prison with him who has the ability to interpret dreams.
3. When he describes Yosef to Pharaoh, he depicts him in the most denigrating context to indicate that he has no qualifications other than interpreting dreams.
4. Each depiction was intended to disqualify him from rising to power.
5. Midrash: we are able to draw from the wine steward's depiction that when evil people do a good deed they cannot do it appropriately.
6. Yosef asked the wine steward to mention him to Pharaoh when reinstated hoping to be released.
7. The wine steward failed Yosef thus causing him to remain in prison an additional two years.
8. The wine steward believed if Yosef rose to power, he would put him to death as an act of revenge.
9. He therefore depicted him as an unqualified person not fit for royalty or any position of leadership for self preservation.
10. Yosef, as a Tzadik, understood his extended incarceration was only due to his own failings.
11. A Tzadik doesn't look for scapegoats to blame because of his belief and faith.
12. An evil person who doesn't have belief, attributes everything to cause and effect to oneself & others.
13. The wine steward being evil processed Yosef's predicament within his own purview thus concluding what he would do under the same circumstances.

Chanukah: Debunking The Myth Of Chanukah

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1. Chanukah: The 8 day holiday commemorates the victory over the Greek armies & burning of oil with the seal of the High Priest.
2. The vial was sufficient to burn 1 night & burned 8 nights.
3. The last of the revealed miracles of 2nd Temple Period done for the Jewish People was the miracle of the oil.
4. If oil burned another 7 days, the Holiday should be a 7 day commemoration.
5. Meiri: The 1st of the 8 days commemorates the victory & the others are for the miracle of the oil.
6. Al HaNissim is inserted in the Amida to thank G-d for the miracle of Chanukah.
7. There is no mention of the miracle of the lights of the Menorah in Al Hanissim.
8. Maharal: The primary miracle of Chanukah is the victory the Greeks as described in Al HaNissim.
9. The miracle of the oil was a revealed miracle not to be understood out of the context of miracle.
10. The victory of the Chashmonaim could be attributed to their physical prowess and strategy in battle.
11. The miracle of the oil was only present to reveal that just as the burning of the oil is the hand of G-d, so is the victory over the Greeks.

Chanukah: The Machiavellian Approach to Acculturation

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1. Al HaNissim: "They attempted to cause the Torah to be forgotten & remove them from your statutes of will."
2. The Greeks forbade Torah study, circumcision, and sanctification of the new moon.
3. 1st paragraph of Shema: the mitzvah of loving G-d.
4. Juxtaposed to loving G-d the Torah states you must engage in Torah study wherever you may be.
5. Chazal: How does that bring one to love G-d?
6. A statute is a law that cannot be understood on a rational basis.
7. Laws, i.e stealing, damages, and injury, can be processed within a rational context but are statutes.
8. The Torah doesn't offer a rationale for its dictates.
9. Seforno: When one observes a statute it is a display of love for G-d.
10. One doesn't understand its value & adheres to it due to love of G-d.
11. The Greeks intended the Torah to be forgotten thus causing the Jews' love for G-d to wane.
12. Consequently they will be removed from the statutes.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Mikeitz



G-d's Kindness to Yosef

Torah: "And to Yosef were born two sons...Yosef called the name of the firstborn *Manasheh* for, 'G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household.'" Yosef was thanking G-d for causing him to forget the hardships and anguish that he endured through his brothers.

Why was Yosef so thankful to G-d for causing him to forget? Was it merely because he felt relieved that he no longer experienced the trauma and pain of the past? If this would have been the cause of his rejoicing, the name that he chose to call his first-born should have denoted his thankfulness, such as the name *Yehudah*. When *Leah* had given birth to a fourth child she gave thanks to G-d and called him *Yehudah*.

Yosef's brothers had initially hated and despised him. Ultimately, they considered killing him. However, because there was a caravan of Ishmaelites that was

passing, *Yehudah* suggested that they not should not leave Yosef in the pit to die, but rather sell him into slavery.

After being sold as a slave, Yosef experienced various levels of suffering. His greatest pain came from the fact that he was denied a relationship with his father *Yaakov*. *Yaakov*'s love for Yosef was unlimited because he saw him as his spiritual heir regarding guaranteeing the spirituality of his family and the Jewish people. The teachings and spiritual growth that Yosef was denied because of his separation from his father was incalculable.

Yosef was groomed by his father to address all of the spiritual issues of the Jewish people in exile. He understood that his mission as the son of *Yaakov*, was to prepare for the Jewish exile and to create an insular environment to guarantee the spiritual and material survival of his family in Egypt. Had it not been for Yosef's selfless dedication and sacrifice for his family,

the Jewish people would have assimilated. This would have not allowed the evolvement of the people who would stand at *Sinai* and declare, “*Naaseh v’nishma* (we will do and we will listen).” It was only Yosef who was uniquely qualified to contend with all of the issues of exile, as his father had done in the home of Lavan. All of the *Torah* that Yaakov had studied in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem* and *Eiver*, which was the *Torah* specific to the spiritual challenges that existed outside of the Land of Israel, was transmitted to Yosef.

Despite the depravity of Egypt and its pagan culture, Yosef remained unaffected as “*Yosef ha’tzaddik* (Yosef the devoutly righteous).” In order for Yosef to assume his role, as the sustainer and provider for his family, he could not have any sense of negativity towards them. The hardships and suffering that he had endured due to his brothers’ initiative would have hindered him. The degree of dedication that was necessary for Yosef to succeed was overwhelming.

Since Yosef’s positive mindset was an imperative for the future of the Jewish people/ objective of existence, G-d caused him to forget all that he had suffered at the hands of his brothers because it would have not allowed his mission to succeed. Yosef acknowledged and declared his thankfulness to G-d for bringing about something that under normal circumstances would have not been possible. Forgetting the trauma and pain that his brothers had brought upon him was the equivalent of a miracle. By naming his firstborn *Manasheh*, it is a testament to Yosef’s thankfulness to G-d.

The Process of Creation Being Repeated

Torah: After Pharaoh was informed that Yosef had the ability to interpret dreams, he sent for him to be taken out of the dungeon.

Torah: “So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon.”

Midrash: “*Reb Yehoshua ben Levy* says, ‘From the midst of suffering there is broadness. From the midst of darkness there is light.’” Prior to Pharaoh summoning him, Yosef was in a dark and hopeless predicament where he suffered for an extended period of time. From the moment that Yosef was summoned, his entire situation changed direction to one of ascent and great renown.

Midrash: “Through the abuse of the *tzaddik* (righteous), he is exalted. Where do we find this?

“Proverbs: ‘If you became denigrated you will be uplifted.’ As a result of *Chananya*, *Meshael*, and *Azaria* being thrown into the fiery kiln (for not bowing to the idol) they were uplifted. As a consequence of being thrown into the lion’s den, *Daniel* became elevated. Regarding *Mordechai*, it is written, ‘He wore sackcloth and ash, and he was uplifted.’ Ultimately, he rose to an exalted status, as it states, ‘He had gone out before the king in regal garments.’ Yosef was afflicted with iron shackles on his legs and he was uplifted. As it states, ‘And Yosef became the ruler over the land (of Egypt)...’” Why is it necessary for the *tzaddik* to endure suffering before ascending to success?

Midrash: “Only G-d has the ability to extract light from darkness. Where do we see this? *Avraham* came from *Terach*.” Despite the fact that *Terach* was devoid of any level of spirituality, *Avraham* was born to him. *Avraham* introduced G-d into existence and selflessly dedicated his life to the espousal of monotheism. He was the antithesis of his father *Terach*, just as light is the antithesis of dark.

Maharal of Prague, in *Gevuras Hashem*: The reason G-d chose Egypt as the location of bondage for the Jewish people is because it was the location that was the most devoid of spirituality.

Yechezkel the Prophet refers to the Egyptian people as “donkeys (*chamorim*).” As he states “The flesh of donkeys is their (the Egyptian) flesh.

Maharal of Prague: The word “*chamor* (donkey)” is derived from the word “*chomer* (material).” Meaning that of all the seventy root nations of the world, the Egyptian people had the least degree of spirituality. In order to bring about the greatest level of spiritual growth and advancement it must be in a setting that is the most devoid of spiritual. Egypt was known for its depravity and its expertise in witchcraft, which emanates from the most extreme level of spiritual impurity.

Just as G-d brings forth light from darkness, so too He extracted the Jewish people, who had become idolaters as a result of their bondage, from Egypt to become His Holy Nation at *Sinai*. They had gone from the forty-ninth level of spiritual contamination to the

forty-ninth level of spiritual purity. Thus, in order for the Jewish people to meet their potential as a spiritual people it was necessary that they be enslaved in Egypt for 210 years.

G-d created existence ex nihilo. There was nothing that pre-existed existence. In order to create a context of spirituality in the ultimate sense, it must evolve from a vacuum that is devoid of spirituality. This is the pattern and process of creation. Regardless of his unique abilities, Yosef could not ascend to be the viceroy of Egypt, which was the equivalent of total dominance over the world, until he was placed in a setting of hopelessness and darkness. He had to be contained in a state that was the equivalent of nonexistence in order to advance. Similarly, *Chananya*, *Meshael*, and *Azaria* needed to be thrown into the fiery kiln, which is a state of non-existence, before their ascent.

Daniel was put into a lion's den, which is a location that is impossible to survive, before he became elevated. The Jewish people at the time of *Haman*, were condemned by royal edict to be annihilated. *Mordechai* chose to go into a state of negation by grieving for the Jewish people. As a result of their semi-nonexistent state, the Jewish people ascended spiritually to rededicate themselves to *Torah* out of love. *Mordechai* ascended to be the viceroy of the Persian Empire.

Gemara in Tractate Taanis: "...Blessing only comes upon something that is concealed from the eye." Why is this so? Anything that can be weighed, measured, and quantified is not subject to blessing. If something is quantified it is limited by that quantification. Blessing, is a spiritual concept that is unlimited. Thus, if something is quantified in its physical context it no longer has relevance to the infinite.

When something is concealed or unnoticed it is not hindered as a result of quantification or limitation. Creation emanated from nonexistence. *Avraham* coming from *Terach* is the equivalent of light from darkness. In order for Yosef to rise to become the sustainer of all existence and the Jewish people, he first needed to be confined to a state of nonexistence/worthlessness so that he could actualize his unlimited potential.

Yosef Determining the Roles of Ephraim and Menasha

Torah: "Now to Yosef were born two sons...Yosef called the name of the firstborn *Menasha* for, 'G-d made me forget all my hardships and all my father's household.' And the name of the second son he called *Ephraim* for, 'G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'" Yosef had been appointed to be the viceroy of Egypt, which was the most advanced civilization in the world. He was entrusted by Pharaoh to oversee and address all the material needs of the country.

During the years of famine, Yosef oversaw the sale of all grain to the Egyptian people and all the countries in that region. Yosef's level of power and influence over the material was profound. When Yosef had said that he had become fruitful in the land of his suffering, was he referring to his political and material success as the Viceroy of Egypt?

It is interesting to note that each of Yosef's sons evolved and developed into different roles based on their innate abilities. *Menasha* became his father's confidant and a statesman along side his father. *Ephraim* on the other hand, was fully occupied in spiritual pursuits and thus dedicated himself only to the study of *Torah*. When *Yaakov*, their came to Egypt, *Ephraim* studied with him for the remainder of *Yaakov*'s life. *Yehoshua Bin Nun* who was the spiritual heir and successor of *Moshe* was from the tribe of *Ephraim* and not *Menasha*, who was the more spiritual of the sons of Yosef.

Yosef understood from his prophetic dreams and the mentoring of his father through the teachings that he had learned in the *Yeshiva* of *Shem* and *Aiver*, that he was the one to assume the responsibility to establish a spiritual refuge for the Jewish people during their exile in Egypt. Despite all of the impurity and depravity of Egypt the Jewish people were sufficiently insulated to be able to endure the exile because of what Yosef had created for them. Yosef had suffered greatly at the hands of his brothers. They hated and despised him. Although they initially wanted to kill him, they decided to sell him into slavery.

Because of the natural feelings pain and anguish that Yosef had as a result of their abuse, how was he able to establish such an insular environment for his family? G-d had performed a miracle and allowed him to forget the pain and travails of the past regarding his brothers.

Had it not been for G-d's intervention to allow these negative feelings to dissipate, Yosef could have not been effective in his role as the provider and sustainer of the Jewish people.

After Yosef had realized that the negativity of the past no longer existed, he understood that he would be able to fulfill his potential as the one who is responsible for guaranteeing the eternity of the Jewish people. Yosef thus called his firstborn son *Menasha* in order to acknowledge the miracle that G-d had provided for him. After Yosef had risen to a position of power and was able to actualize his influence, he expressed his thankfulness to G-d for allowing him to succeed in his mission. He thus named his second son *Ephraim* to reveal his gratitude to G-d.

Yosef experienced two levels of thankfulness. The first level of thankfulness addressed the removal of the impediment regarding his role as provider and caretaker. This was revealed through naming his firstborn *Menasha*. When his second son was born, his expression of thankfulness was at a more advanced level because he was stating that he had actualized his potential to be the provider. The second stage of gratitude, because it was a more advanced level of acknowledgement of G-d's beneficence to him, allow Yosef to merit *Ephraim*, who was the more spiritual of the two sons.

We find something similar regarding *Leah's* naming of her sons. In terms of the dimension of greatness of the tribes, *Yehudah* the fourth son of *Leah*, merited kingship because he possessed the qualities of leadership that were needed to succeed in this role as king. When *Leah* had initially named her sons, each name connoted her own self-interest in securing her relationship with *Yaakov* as his wife. For example, The *Torah* states, "*Leah* conceived and bore a son, and declared his name *Reuvain*, as she had declared, Because *Hashem* has discerned my affliction..."

Torah: Leah conceived and bore another son, "Because *Hashem* has heard that I am unloved." She called her second son *Shimon*. After *Shimon*, *Leah* again conceived and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons; therefore He called his name *Levy*."

It was not until *Leah* conceived and gave birth to a fourth son, did she give thanks to G-d for giving her a fourth child. As it states, "This time let me gratefully

praise *Hashem*; therefore she called his name *Yehudah*..." It was only regarding the naming of the fourth son did *Leah's* acknowledgement go beyond her own self-interest in being loved by *Yaakov*. Thus, she merited to have a son who was not inwardly focused, but rather he was qualified and capable to assume the responsibility for the Jewish people as king because of his selfless dedication.

The Eternal Message that is Communicated through the Kindling of the Menorah

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos* presenting the argument between the house of *Hillel* and the house of *Shamai* regarding how one kindles the menorah: *Hillel* is of the opinion that on the first night of *Chanukah* one should kindle one light and add another for each subsequent night until the eighth night of the holiday.

Ultimately one will have on the eighth night, eight lights burning. This manner of lighting is to commemorate the miracle that occurred during the rededication of the Second Temple. After the Greeks had been vanquished and driven out of the Land of Israel, the Priests of the Temple found only one vial of olive oil with the seal of the High Priest. This indicated that it was not contaminated by the Greeks. It was sufficient to burn for only one night. In order to produce new olive oil, it would have taken minimally another seven days. However, G-d performed a miracle and the lights of the menorah remained kindled for eight days.

The house of *Shamai* argues and is of the opinion that on the first night one commences the kindling with eight lights and diminishes one light for each subsequent night until the eighth night when only one light will remain. What is the basis for the argument between the house of *Shamai* and the house of *Hillel*?

Gemara: The house of *Hillel* is of the opinion that one must kindle the lights based on the days that are to come. The house of *Shamai* is of the opinion that one kindles the lights based on the days that have passed. According to the house of *Shamai* one commences the holiday with a full appreciation of the miracle that had occurred on *Chanukah*, thus one begins the kindling of all eight lights. In contrast, the house of *Hillel* is of the opinion that one should kindle the lights

as the miracle had presented itself. Just as the Jewish people did not know the full extent of the miracle of the oil until the eighth night, so too do we increase the number of lights each night until the eighth night.

Gemara citing another interpretation of the positions of the house of *Hillel* and house of *Shamai*: The house of *Shamai* explains that during the festival of *Sukkos* there were seventy oxen brought throughout the festival. Each of the seventy oxen represented one of the seventy root nations of the world. The seventy oxen were brought over the seven-day period of the holiday. There was a gradual diminishment of the number of oxen brought each day until it concluded on the seventh day with the last oxen.

Gemara: Sacrificing the oxen in diminishing direction is an indication that all the nations of the world will be destroyed and the one ox that is brought on the festival of *Shemini Atzeres*, which represents the Jewish people will remain intact. The house of *Hillel* argues, stating, "Regarding all issues of sanctity (*kiddushah*), we always advance *kiddushah* and we do not diminish it." Meaning, although he is in full agreement with *Shamai* regarding the oxen that were brought on *Sukkos*, representing the demise of the nations of the world, regarding the kindling of the lights, one must follow the overriding principle that *kiddushah* must be advanced and not diminished. Therefore, on *Chanukah* one kindles one light on the first night and increases the number of lights for each subsequent night.

On *Sukkos*, G-d determines the amount of water that will come upon the world. Thus, each nation is represented through the sacrifice of the oxen in order to be worthy of existence. However, ultimately they will be diminished and the Jewish people will prevail. In contrast, the kindling of the menorah on *Chanukah* is a commemoration of the miracle of the oil that was found during the rededication of the Temple. Despite the fact that the Greeks attempted to destroy the spirituality of the Jewish people, they were defeated and vanquished. The Divine Presence rested with the Jewish people. What relevance do the oxen that were sacrificed on the festival of *Sukkos* have with *Chanukah*?

The miracle of *Chanukah* took place during the Second Temple period. At this time, the Jewish people did not have the same degree of relationship with G-d as they had during the First Temple period. After the

destruction of the First Temple, G-d said that He would go into concealment "*hester panim* – concealed face". Meaning, one would only experience G-d through His concealment in nature. During this period, there was no longer revealed miracles such as prophecy, which is a direct communication between G-d and man.

During the occupation of the Greeks the Jewish people were becoming acculturated with the Greeks (Hellenized). As a result of the initiative of the *Chashmonaim* to expunge this impurity from their midst, the Greek armies were driven from the Land. Although the number of *Chashmonaim* was small compared to the mighty Greek army, G-d performed a miracle and brought victory to the *Chashmonaim*. Subsequently, the Temple was purified and rededicated.

During the Second Temple period, there was no revealed miracles. The only revealed miracle that had taken place since the destruction of the First Temple was the miracle of the oil. The menorah burning in the Temple was an indication that the Divine Presence dwelt among the Jewish people.

Despite the fact that the Jewish people of the Second Temple period were not at the same spiritual level of the First Temple, G-d wanted to reveal to them that He was still in their midst. The message that was communicated through the miracle of the oil of the menorah was that although the Jewish people from a spiritual standpoint may not be as advanced as previous generations; nevertheless, because G-d is in their midst they will live on for eternity.

However, this is not the case regarding the nations of the world. This was communicated through the diminishment of the oxen that were brought as sacrifices on the festival of *Sukkos*. The house of *Shamai* is of the opinion that the miracle of *Chanukah* was to demonstrate to the Jewish people that they are eternal, unlike the nations of the world. Therefore, in order to present this message in a clear manner we begin with the kindling of eight lights and remove one for each following night.

The house of *Hillel* is in full agreement with the house of *Shamai* regarding the philosophical message; however, because the lighting of the menorah is a *mitzvah*, it is a representation of sanctity of holiness there is an overriding factor that supersedes the

message. One must advance sanctity and one does not diminish it. Therefore, one must add a light for every night until all eight lights are kindled. Regarding one's level of spirituality, one is never permitted to regress or plateau. One must continue to advance in his spirituality.

Yosef, the Source of Blessing

(From *Vayeishev*)

Torah: After Yosef had been sold into slavery by his brothers, he was purchased by *Potiphar*, one of the ministers of Pharaoh.

Torah: "His master perceived that *Hashem* was with him, and whatever he did *Hashem* made succeed through him. Yosef found favor in his eyes... and whatever he had he placed in his hand."

Baal HaTurim: "The ending letters of the words in the verse 'whatever he had he placed in his hand' spell the word '*lashono* (his language).'" To what is this referring? G-d had sent the archangel *Gabriel* to teach Yosef seventy languages. Since Yosef was already fluent in Hebrew, he thus had a proficiency in seventy-one languages. What relevance does Yosef's fluency in seventy-one languages have to his success in the house of *Potiphar*?

Pharaoh as the king of Egypt was proficient in seventy languages. After Yosef ascended to the position of viceroy, Pharaoh became aware that he was proficient in seventy-one languages (He was fluent in all of the languages that Pharaoh was in addition to Hebrew). Because he realized that Yosef had a greater proficiency than he, he made him swear that he would never reveal this fact. If this information were to become known, it would have caused Pharaoh to be dethroned. Why would Yosef's knowing one more language than Pharaoh be the cause of Pharaoh's dethronement?

Maharal of Prague: The number seven and multiples thereof such as seventy connote the natural order, as the *Torah* tells us that the creation of existence came about in seven days. Anything that is beyond the number seven(ty) indicates that it exists outside of the realm of nature. The foundation of pagan belief was that nothing exists outside of the natural order.

Yosef, as one individual who was able to encompass seventy-one languages, indicated that it was possible to supersede nature. It was a refutation of idolatry, which was the basis of Egyptian civilization. They believed that although G-d may have created the world, He transferred His control to the deities represented in nature to maintain existence. Therefore, Pharaoh insisted that Yosef take an oath to never reveal the fact that he knew seventy-one languages

Through Yosef's degree of unlimited success, "whatever he did *Hashem* made succeed through him" was an indication that he was rooted in the power that brought about existence. Thus, he was able to succeed regardless of the situation. *Maharal of Prague* writes that all life and blessing emanate from G-d Himself. Therefore, the one who is attached to G-d will generate that kind of blessing.

Despite the fact that *Potiphar* was a pagan he understood that if Yosef had the capacity to speak seventy-one languages, it was a confirmation that he was rooted in the Omnipotent Power, G-d Himself. Therefore, he was able to generate unending blessing.



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