

uncomfortable washing, since I was about to eat unkosher food,” the sinner replied. “I do not understand,” the Rav asked. “Out of all the restaurants in the city, why did you select an unkosher restaurant?” “I had no alternative,” the man replied. “It was *Shabbos*, and all of the kosher establishments were closed.”

Yet, this man came to perform *teshuvah* for not washing *mayim achronim*. Is it different than the wicked person who claims that he did not learn Torah because he was entangled with his *yetzer hora*? It is like trading one *aveirah* for another, which, quite possibly, is worse than the first. Imagine a person saying, “I could not learn Torah, because I was busy committing various sins.”

Rav Blazer explains that the sin of *bitul* Torah, wasting time from learning Torah, is worse. “Entangled with my *yetzer hora*” is a sin, but it does not come close in gravity to the sin of not learning Torah. The wicked person is willing to accept the punishment for the sin of deferring to his evil inclination – as long he does not have to answer for wasting time from learning Torah.

The *Ben Ish Chai* underscores the *aveirah* of *bitul* Torah with the following observations. Whenever we have reason to identify a person by name, it always includes his father’s name. Hence, Yosef *ben* Shimon. This occurs when we call someone up to the Torah, an inscription on a tombstone, and signing one’s name as a witness. When we pray for someone who is ill, we always use his mother’s name. Why is this?

The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that the father also might carry the weight of the sin of *bitul* Torah. Therefore, when a person is ill and one wants to circumvent the possibility of a negative merit, he does not use the father’s name. A woman does not have the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*. Thus, she does not transgress the sin of *bitul* Torah.

What about neglecting Torah study is so condemning? *Chazal* say in *Kiddushin* 30b, *Barasi yetzer hora barasi Torah tavlin*, “I created the evil inclination; I created the Torah as a cure/antidote (to save one from the effects of the *yetzer hora*).” In other words, when the *rasha* asserts that he could not learn, because he was entangled with deferring to his passions, we say to him, “Had you studied Torah, it would have refined you, so that the *yetzer hora* would have no effect on you.”

When one learns Torah, he establishes a relationship with its Divine Author, Hashem. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 8a) teach that, since the *Bais HaMikdash* has been destroyed, Hashem has only one place in the world where His Presence is to be found – the four *amos shel halachah* – in the *bais hamedrash* where people are learning. Each of our *batei medrash* is a mini *Bais Hamikdash*, as Hashem is to be found therein. Thus, when a person learns Torah, he is establishing a relationship with the Almighty. The *yetzer hora* cannot influence an individual who is in direct contact with Hashem.

## Va’ani Tefillah

וּחַנּוּנוּ מֵאַתָּךְ דְּעָה בִּינָה הַשֶּׁכֶל  
***V’chaneinu meitcha de’ah, binah v’haskel. Grant us from You de’ah, binah and haskel.***

**Horav Shimon Schwab, zl**, interprets these three qualities which comprise wisdom. *De’ah*, knowledge, is the knowledge about Hashem which is derived from the Torah; *binah*, understanding, *meivin davar mitoch davar*, understanding one thing from another, the understanding of the Torah that results from *daas* Hashem. As a result of the recognition of Hashem (*de’ah*), one proceeds to study His Torah. *Haskel, seichel*, is applied/practical wisdom. Theoretic wisdom is the wisdom which one has in theory, but does not apply it to his practical life, behavior and character; this wisdom is not called *haskeil*. One who knows *halachah*, but does not apply it in practice, of what value is his knowledge? He is not possessed of *haskeil*. In this prayer, we entreat Hashem to grant us not only *de’ah* and *binah*, but also *haskeil*, the intelligence to apply these levels of wisdom to our everyday lives successfully. Furthermore, we ask for the ability to apply the age-old *halachah* to the new problems which emerge with each ensuing generation. The *halachic* arbiters of each ensuing generation must access all of the *halachos* that were given thousands of years ago, and apply them to life today. This is done by employing our G-d-given talents of *binah* and *de’ah*. This is what is meant by *haskeil*, applied wisdom.

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Parashas Vayeishev

תשע"ז

פרשת וישב

## TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

ישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו... ויראו אחיו כי אהו אהב אביהם  
 מכל אחיו וישנאו אותו... ויקנאו בו אחיו

**Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all of his sons...His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers so they hated him...So his brothers were jealous of him. (37:3,4,11)**

Clearly the story of Yosef and his brothers is one of the most difficult passages in the Torah to understand. One must view everything which occurs in the Torah and the Torah’s description of these events through a spiritual lens, understanding full well that the actions of our ancestors are beyond our understanding, and completely inexplicable from a simplistic, secular perspective. Do we even have an idea concerning the spiritual persona of Yosef *HaTzaddik* – or his brothers, the *Shivtei Kah*? In a passage of the *Midrash* (*Midrash Eileh Ezkerah*), *Chazal* say the following: “Rabbi Yishmael said, ‘When I returned (from Heaven – when the Roman beast sought to condemn the Ten Martyred *Tannaim* for the sale of Yosef, the *Tannaim* asked Rabbi Yishmael to ascend to Heaven and inquire if this decree is for real: Was it specifically decreed by Heaven, or just another act of anti-Semitism?) and relayed that the decree was, indeed, from Heaven, all of my colleagues celebrated.’ Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel simultaneously mourned and celebrated. On the one hand, they mourned because they would have to die in a most cruel and brutal manner. On the other hand, they celebrated, since Hashem had intimated to Rabbi Yishmael that the *Tannaim* were compared to the sons of Yaakov (whose place they were taking, because the evil Roman King felt that they should be executed for their ancestor’s sale of Yosef). The *Tannaim* were far from simple Jews. Each and every one of them was capable of resurrecting the dead. Yet, when they heard that in Heaven they were being compared to the *Shivtei Kah*, they rejoiced.” We now have some faint idea of the spiritual plateau achieved by the *Shevatim*.

The image of Yosef *HaTzaddik* (either as an ox or *keruv*/young child, which is debated in the *Talmud*) is engraved on the *Kisei HaKavod*, Holy Throne. We are acutely aware that Yosef and his brothers who “play” the role of adversaries were holy beyond description. Thus, we realize that what is written in

the Torah concerning this tragedy is all relative. This means that, according to their lofty plateau, their actions hinted at jealousy and hatred. Yosef’s speaking *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, against his brothers is to be understood in a similar vein. Everything that Yosef did was *al pi halachah*, according to the strictest concerns of Jewish law. For Yosef to relate to his father what he felt were his brothers’ spiritual shortcomings was no different than putting on *Tefillin*. He saw it as a *mitzvah*. He was not doing anything wrong. It certainly was not personal.

What about Yosef’s combing his hair while in the home of Potifar? This was surely not the behavior that would be expected of a *tzaddik*. **Horav Shmuel Truvitz, zl**, comments that Yosef attempted to conceal his spiritual persona, the fact that he was a *ben Chakim*, wise son. Thus, he behaved like any teenager obsessed with the physical would act: eating, drinking, addressing his physical appearance. This is why his brothers thought little of him. When he came to Egypt, he continued playing with his long, beautiful hair. **Horav Yosef Salant, zl**, cites the *Talmud Shabbos* 139a that says Yosef was a *nazir* who was not permitted to cut his hair. He figured that as long as he took care of his locks and maintained a respectful appearance, Potifar would not compel him to take a haircut.

**Horav Reuven Karlinstein, Shlita**, sums it up in the following way: Regardless of the various interpretations and explanations rendered in order to make sense of the actions of our ancestors, we must remember that, after all is said and done, we have no clue as to the spiritual eminence of the *Shevatim*. He says (and I paraphrase), “The spiritual plateau achieved by an observant Jew, a *ben Torah* during *Neilah* (closing prayer of *Yom Kippur*, which is the spiritual apex of the entire year, and the supreme level that a Jew reaches), when he cries out, ‘*Shema Yisrael*,’ followed by, ‘*Hashem Hu Ha’Elokim*,’ seven times, becomes higher and higher each time until he reaches the climax of the holiest day of the year. At this moment (his most elevated), he has not achieved even one millionth of the holiness and purity which Yosef *HaTzaddik* was imbued with when he combed his hair!”

The *Maggid* concludes with an incident that occurred concerning **Horav Chaim Soloveitchik/Brisker, zl**. He once paused during his *shiur* to scan a *sefer*. While he was peering

into the *sefer*, two students who were at the *shiur* began to whisper to one another, unaware that *Rav* Chaim could hear their conversation. “What would happen if David *Hamelech* would suddenly appear in our *bais hamedrash*? What would be the reaction?” one student asked his study partner. *Rav* Chaim lifted up his eyes from the *sefer* and said, “What are you asking, ‘What would be if David *Hamelech* visited our *bais hamedrash*?’ Let me tell you what would take place. *Mir valten ale farbrent givaren fun zein kedushah!* We would all be burnt up from his holiness!”

Do we have any idea of the caliber of sanctity evinced by those who have preceded us? We maintain a cavalier attitude regarding them, as if they were one of us – or, rather, we were one of them. We cannot even begin to imagine the spiritual plane upon which they stood – let alone speak about them as equals. It is this aura of awe and respect that we must transmit to students and children. First and foremost is that we learn to accept and demonstrate this level of respect ourselves.

**כי ראתה כי נודל שלה והיא לא נחמה לו לאשה**

**For she saw that Sheilah had grown, and she had not been given to him as a wife. (38:14)**

Tamar waited – and waited. Tamar was determined to have children from Yehudah. When she noticed that Sheilah had not been given to her, she decided to take undignified steps to realize her dream. If her children could not emanate from Yehudah’s sons, they would emanate from Yehudah himself. She was going to be the progenitress of the Davidic /Messianic dynasty. The **Baal HaTurim** adds to the above (*Rashi’s*) *p’shat*, explanation. When Tamar saw that she was not being given to Sheilah, she became anxious, filled with pain at the thought that she would not play a role in carrying the seed of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. This troubled her greatly. In the merit of her angst over not being able to marry into Yehudah’s family, she warranted that *Malchus Bais David*, the Davidic monarchy, would descend from her.

**Horav Shraga Grossbard, zl**, suggests that the *Baal HaTurim* is teaching us a profound *chiddush*, original thought. We are accustomed to think that the reason Tamar was selected to be the mother of Davidic Royalty was her *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, in being prepared to die rather than humiliate Yehudah by telling the people that he was the father of her unborn twins. Her willingness to die a fiery death – in order not to embarrass Yehudah – earned her this special accolade.

From *Baal HaTurim* (and *Rashi*), we derive that the reason for Tamar’s worthiness was the pain she experienced from the knowledge that she would not bear a child from the *Shevet*, tribe, of Yehudah. This was the most eminent tribe from which would descend David *Hamelech* and eventually *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. When she saw that it was not going to happen, she was miserable. This misery was her merit.

The *Mashgiach* suggests that in these words lie the secret to raising children successfully. When a parent or a *rebbe/morah* experiences pain because his/her student/child is not succeeding, is floundering and possibly swaying towards leaving the path of observance, this parent or mentor manifests the correct and, quite possibly, most important ingredient in child

rearing. *Rav* Grossbard adds that this does not refer to pain of embarrassment: i.e. “My child swings left, so I am ashamed. I am perceived as a failure.” It is embarrassing to have a child who has left the *derech*, path of observance. This is not the pain that makes the difference. This is personal pain, egotistical pain: “What are the neighbors going to say? How can I walk into *shul*? How can I hold my head up in public?” While it is not to be ignored, this pain does not engender merit.

We are talking about pain that one sustains over the loss of a child from Judaism; the pain that one experiences when a boy or girl goes off the *derech*, when he/she could have been saved, but no one seemed to care: maybe there was not enough money to save him; there was no “honor” in working in the trenches; it is not as if I am saying a *shiur*, teaching Torah on a high level. People toil when they get attention, receive accolades. Sadly, in this field, all one receives is an occasional “thank you,” often accompanied by abuse.

*Rebbezin* Karelitz, wife of **Horav Nissim Karelitz, Shlita**, was the granddaughter of *Rav* Hirsch Kupshitz, an individual who exemplified greatness in Torah, as well as *chesed* and *yiraas Shomayim*. He merited that all of his sons became respected *Roshei Yeshivos* or *dayanim*. *Rebbezin* Karelitz was often asked what special ingredient in their home catalyzed such an incredible *nachas*, Torah satisfaction, from their children? She attributed it to her father’s attitude when one of her brothers, for whatever reason, missed a day of *cheder*/school. He fasted the entire day! Imagine, fasting because your son missed school! This indicates the pain he experienced when his son did not learn Torah. How many can say that?

Furthermore, love of Torah resonated in their home; the unique feeling of *ahavas*, love, of *Torah*, was palpable, evident throughout the household. Following their marriage, the Karelitzes lived in Bnei Brak. One of the *Rebbezin’s* relatives passed away, and her mother (*Rebbezin* Karelitz’s mother) was sitting *shivah*. *Rav* Nissim remained home to supervise the young children while the *Rebbezin* traveled to Yerushalayim to comfort her mother.

When the *Rebbezin* arrived at her parent’s home, her father asked her where her husband was. She replied that he was taking care of the children. Her father’s response characterized his approach to, and love for, Torah: “Your husband is a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, to whom every minute of Torah study is valuable. He should be in the *bais hamedrash* learning – not babysitting. Do not do this again. Your husband’s learning takes priority!” When a child grows up in such a home that grants Torah the primacy that it deserves, it is no wonder that he ultimately will carry those values through his educational process and achieve remarkable success in Torah.

**לאיש אשר אלה לו אנכי הרה ותאמר הכר נא למי החתמת  
הפתילים והמטה האלה.**

**“By the man to whom these belong I am with child.”  
And she said, “Identify, if you please, whose are this  
signet, this wrap and this staff.” (38:25)**

What is the definition of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven? A G-d-fearing Jew is one who is acutely aware of Hashem’s Presence, who understands that he stands before G-d

at all times and that all of his actions and designs are under Heavenly scrutiny. A G-d-fearing person never loses his perspective of Hashem. This may sound like a given, almost a simple understatement, but, if one thinks about it, most of us act as if we do not think Hashem is “looking.” If one were to ask the average person how to develop recognition, a profound realization of Hashem, the response would probably be, “By studying such scholarly works of Jewish philosophy as *Moreh Nevuchim*, *Sefer Halkarim*, *Kuzari*, etc.” One would never suggest that, by making the appropriate decision when confronted with a *nisayon*, a challenging test, he would indicate that he realizes and recognizes that there is a G-d Who is in control. When we do the right thing and overcome a personal proclivity to follow the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, when we are confronted with the choice of doing right or wrong – and we act correctly – we have just demonstrated our recognition and fear of Hashem. One cannot claim to be G-d-fearing unless he shows that he is aware of Hashem’s Presence – at all times.

**Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl**, derives this idea from *Rashi’s* commentary to the words *haker na*, “Recognize, if you please.” *Rashi* writes: “The word *na*, in this context, expresses nothing but request. Tamar implied, ‘Please, recognize your Creator and do not destroy three souls.’” The *Mashgiach* explains that Tamar was intimating to Yehudah: “If you have the courage to stand up in public and take responsibility for your actions, by confessing to your paternity, thus not allowing the destruction of three lives, then you have demonstrated that you recognize the Creator.”

*Rav* Wolbe explains that *hakoras haBorei* is determined by one’s ability to withstand a *nisayon*, a challenge. If he is able to break his *middos*, character traits, in order to act truthfully, then he has shown that he is aware of Hashem’s presence in his life. *Vayaker* Yehudah – Yehudah overcame his *middos* (Confession would quite possibly incur embarrassment. Many a person would lie his way out of the predicament, but not Yehudah, who was aware that Hashem was “watching” the events unfold.) and deferred to the *emes*, truth, thus demonstrating that he recognized Hashem.

While it is true that *yiraas Shomayim* is a quality that one develops over time, it is certainly important that a feeling for *yiraas Shomayim*, an understanding of its overriding significance, and comprehending its meaning, are all imbued in a child as he/she develops. From the earliest age, a child must be taught that Hashem is everywhere, He is all-knowing and all-seeing. This sets the stage for understanding the meaning of fear. One learns to internalize the fact that Hashem’s Presence is with him at all times.

A father once brought his young son to the **Brisker Rav, zl**, with a request that the *Rav* bless him that he grow to be a true *talmid chacham* and *yarei Shomayim*. The *Rav* responded with sound advice: “If you learn with your son, he will become a true *talmid chacham*, and if your wife *davens* and implores Hashem that her son grow up to be a *yarei Shomayim*, he will become a *yarei Shomayim*.” The *Brisker Rav* was of the opinion that the *tefillos* of a mother for the future of her young child are of utmost importance. Furthermore, he considered a mother’s *tefillos* to carry greater weight than that of the father. A mother is closer to a young child than the father. Therefore, her *tefillos* are

expressed with greater keenness and maximum sincerity. Also, women are more emotional and closer to tears than men. As a result, a mother’s *tefillos* have a greater likelihood of being expressed with accompanying emotion, with a *lev nishbar*, broken heart, which are the most beloved of all *tefillos*.

**ולא שמע אליה לשכב אצלה להיות עמה**

**If he would not listen to her to lie beside her, to be with her. (39:10)**

Yosef *HaTzaddik* suffered greatly from the attempt of Potifar’s wife to seduce him. *Chazal* (*Yuma* 35b) describe her machinations in order to take Yosef down: “Every day, she would attempt to seduce him with words. The clothes she wore for him in the morning, she would not wear for him in the evening. The clothes she wore for him in the evening, she would not wear for him in the morning. After varying her wardrobe in order to arouse him, she said, ‘Surrender yourself to me.’ He responded, ‘No!’ She threatened to have him put in jail. He responded, ‘Hashem frees the imprisoned.’ ‘I shall bend your proud stature.’ ‘Hashem straightens those who are bent.’ She threatened to blind him. This, too, did not move him. She offered him a large sum of money - to no avail. Last, she asked him to lay beside her. He refused everything.”

As a result of this incredible willpower, *Chazal* teach that Yosef *mechayev es ha’rashaim*, “Yosef obligates the wicked.” For if we ask a wicked man, “Why did you not engage in Torah study?” and if he responds, “I was handsome and entangled with my evil inclination,” we ask him, “are you any more handsome than Yosef?” In other words, Yosef had every reason to defer to his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. He did not, because he had tremendous willpower and self-control. **Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl**, notes that the wicked man’s excuse, “I was entangled with my evil inclination,” is a weak response. In fact, it is utterly foolish. Imagine if the *Mashgiach*, ethical supervisor of a *yeshivah*, were to approach a student and question his whereabouts the day before. “Why did you not attend *seder*, study period?” “*Rebbe*,” the student would reply, “I would have come, but I was very busy,” “What were you doing that had greater importance than attending the study period?” “I was spending time at the local bar with a group of hooligans.” The excuse (where he was) is certainly much worse than not attending *seder* – or is it?

In order to underscore the foolishness of the excuse, *Rav* Blazer cites another analogy from the **Ben Ish Chai**. One *erev Yom Kippur*, a man came before the *Rav* of the city with a request for assistance in performing *teshuvah*, repenting for a sin that he had recently committed. “What *aveirah*, sin, did you commit?” the *Rav* asked. “I did not wash *mayim achronim*,” wash hands after a meal prior to *bentching*.

“Why did you not wash *mayim achronim*?” True, it is not right, but it is not the worst of sins. “I did not wash *mayim achronim*, because I did not wash *mayim rishonim*.” (In other words, he did not wash prior to eating.) He figured that if he did not wash before the meal, why should he bother washing after the meal?

The truth was slowly emerging. “Why did you not wash before the meal?” the *Rav* asked. “The truth is that I felt