

# Peninim On The Torah

*Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum*

## *Parashat Vayeshev*

*Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings. (37:1)*

It is related that the saintly Gaon, zl, M'Vilna would lecture every Shabbos on the parsha of the week. When it came to Parashas Vayeishev he said, "I find it very hard to speak this Shabbos, in contrast to the previous Shabbosos. This is because I cannot employ the usual syntax I use for my drashah, lecture, this week. Every week I focus on the righteous hero of the parsha, and I elevate him, while I denigrate the rasha, evil individual, in the parsha. I was able to do this with Kayin and Hevel, Noach and the people of his generation, Avraham and Lot, Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Eisav, Yaakov and Lavan, and - once again - Yaakov and Eisav. This week, however, the parsha revolves around Yosef and his brothers. I have nothing to say, for they were all tzadikim, kedoshim and tehorim - righteous, holy and pure!" This attitude should prevail whenever we approach the parshios from Parashas Vayeishev until the end of Sefer Bereishis. We do not understand what really occurred and what really was happening behind the scenes. We do know one thing, however, they were all - Yosef and his brothers - holy and righteous individuals. There is no "bad guy" in this parsha - just two distinct perspectives which are far beyond our ability to grasp; it is certainly above our capability to distinguish between them.

*Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all of his sons, since he was a child of his old age. (37:3)*

Targum Onkelos defines ben zekunim as bar chakim, a wise child. Yaakov Avinu's affection for Yosef was based upon the reality that he was a bright child with incredible potential. This is a nice pshat, explanation, but what is the connection between Yosef's acumen and his status as the ben zekunim, child of Yaakov's old age? Obviously, as is explained by many a commentator, the ben zekunim is showered with an extra dose of love, precisely because he is the youngest. A child who receives love will produce. Love begets wisdom. When we smile to a child; when we demonstrate to him that we love him; when he feels loved and cared for, he responds accordingly. He becomes a better student. His wisdom increases in accordance with the love he receives.

On the other hand, a child who is the subject of scorn, screaming and constant rebuke and negativity will not produce effectively. Hitting a child will not make him learn. It will only guarantee

that he will distance himself from the parent and his values. It might have worked years ago, which is something I hear, but do not believe. Rabbeinu Gershom writes in Bava Basra 21A, "Do not hit a child more than necessary, for as a result of too much physical discipline, he will not become smarter."

The Chazon Ish, zl, was wont to relate stories about tzadikim, righteous Jews, to young children, claiming that these vignettes would instill yiras Shomayim, fear of Heaven, in the child. He was especially fond of using the sefer, "Chut Ha'Meshulash," stories about Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the Chasam Sofer and Kesav Sofer as a favorite sourcebook. He related that when the Chasam Sofer, zl, was but a lad of four years old, he once came home from cheder appearing very depressed. His father immediately asked him what was wrong. After all, this was a child who loved to study Torah, who ran to cheder, who imbibed every word of Torah with an unquenchable thirst. He explained to his father that his rebbe had beat him for asking a question. His father was shocked to hear this, and he asked his son to explain.

"We learned the pasuk in Bereishis which describes Hashem fashioning Adam HaRishon, 'And Hashem G-d formed the man of dust from the ground' (Bereishis 2,7) The rebbe explained this as, 'He (Hashem) took dust/earth from ground/earth.' I immediately asked, 'From where else does one take earth, if not from the earth?' What is so novel about this pasuk?"

"The rebbe became angry with me for asking this question. He did not respond to me. When I repeated my question, he came over to me and hit me a number of times."

When the Chasam Sofer's father heard this, he became incensed. After all, this was a perceptive question, one that even Rashi addresses. How could the rebbe hit a young child for asking this question? Moreover, he was concerned for his young son. How could he study Torah from someone who not only is unable to explain the material properly, but is also impatient and subject to an uncontrolled temper. He went to the rav of Frankfurt, Horav Nossan Adler, zl, who, after hearing an account of the incident, instructed him to cease working in his business and spend all of his time with his brilliant son and personally teach him Torah. The Chasam Sofer's father did not have to be convinced of his parental responsibility. He dropped everything to devote himself to his son's educational development. The Torah world is forever indebted to him.

It is not the act of disciplining that is the problem, as much as the attitude that accompanies it. When one strikes a student out of anger, it fosters negativity and hatred. When one must discipline for a valid reason, it should be with dignity and love. Horav Yaakov Kaminetsky, zl, a Rosh Hayeshivah and mechanech, educator par excellence, was an individual who was famous not only for his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah, but also for his middos, character traits. He once remarked that he never held a grudge against anyone - except for one of his earliest melamdin, elementary school teachers. He related an incident from his early childhood that had never left him. It was a gentile holiday, and the town was celebrating in the usual way with a festive parade. The children in the cheder were admonished by their rebbe that it was absolutely forbidden to attend the parade. Everyone was expected to be in class on time.

The next morning, as the young (Rav) Yaakov was walking to cheder, he noticed an elderly woman carrying a number of heavy shopping bags. He approached her and offered his assistance in carrying the bags. After helping her home with her bags, he went immediately to cheder, but arrived slightly late. The rebbe asked him, "Why did you go to the parade? Did I not tell everyone yesterday that it is absolutely forbidden to attend their parade?" The young boy immediately replied, "But I did not go to the parade. I am late because I was helping an elderly lady with her packages." "Not only did you disobey me by going to the parade, you also have the nerve to lie!" declared the rebbe. This angry

retort was accompanied by two slaps to complete the humiliation.

Rav Yaakov concluded, "He is the only person I have not been able to bring myself to forgive, because, to the best of my knowledge, I have never lied in my life."

The Tolner Rebbe, Shlita, once met a man who boasted that he had no problem disciplining his children in the "ancient" practice of spanking or slapping. After all, if it was good enough for his father and grandfather, why should it be different with him? The Rebbe replied, "Your grandfather kept his meat cold in an icebox, not a refrigerator. He also did not have the benefit of a microwave. Perhaps you should place the fish your wife prepares for Shabbos in an icebox and share with me if you care for the taste. Things have changed. Life has changed. We no longer discipline with negativity and corporeal punishment. Today, we discipline with love."

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, Rosh HaYeshivah of Bais Medrash L'Torah in Skokie, Illinois, was a distinguished Lithuanian Torah scholar and mussar personality who, following World War II, moved to Chicago. During his tenure as Rosh HaYeshivah, he reached out to many talmidim, students, imbuing them with a love of Torah. What his talmidim recall about him most was the love and respect that he demonstrated towards them. He was warm and caring, making every student feel comfortable in his presence. Rav Rogov never turned his back on a talmid. After speaking with a student, whether it was in the bais ha'medrash or in a classroom, he would always back away when he had finished. He did not turn around and leave with his back to the student. This taught the talmidim to respect and show reverence to those who study Torah.

He once announced to his class that since a student was expected to inform his rebbe if he could not attend class, it was only right that the rebbe should notify his talmid if he was going to miss shiur, class. Since his grandson was becoming Bar Mitzvah that Shabbos in Detroit, he would like to attend - providing that his talmid did not mind. If anyone had objected, he would not have attended his grandson's Bar Mitzvah!

His son once came home to discover Rav Rogov upset. Indeed, his eyes even seemed damp. Concerned, he asked his father if he felt well. His father explained that a talmid had approached him that day and cried bitterly that he had been unable to achieve success in learning. "Please, rebbe, give me a brachah!" the boy asked. He attempted to encourage the student, but, unfortunately, learning was only one of his problems. He had other troubles as well. Rav Rogov was distressed by his talmid's pain and, even now, many hours later, was still concerned about his student's condition.

*A man discovered him, and behold! He was blundering in the field. (37:15)*

A chasid once came to the Sanzer Rav, zl, lamenting the fact that his eldest daughter had reached marriageable age, but he did not have the wherewithal with which to marry her off. The Rebbe quickly prepared a letter of approbation for the chasid to deliver to one of his wealthy chassidim who lived in another town, appealing to him to help this individual raise the necessary funds to marry off his daughter. When the poor chasid approached the wealthy man for assistance, the man curtly replied, "Talmud Torah k'neged kulam, 'The study of Torah supersedes everything' I must learn Torah. I do not have the time to run around the city raising funds."

A number of months went by, and the wealthy chasid had occasion to be in Sanz. When he greeted the Rebbe, the Rebbe ignored him. He figured that the Rebbe must be deeply engrossed in

thought. When he was about to leave, he came to say "goodbye" to the Rebbe, and, once again, he rebuffed him. This was not typical of the Sanzer Rav. He decided to gather his courage to ask the Rebbe what was wrong. The Sanzer Rav replied with the following Torah thought. "In the Torah in Bereishis 32:25, when Yaakov Avinu encountered Eisav's guardian angel, the Torah writes, 'And a man wrestled with him.' This went on all night until Yaakov prevailed over the angel, after which Yaakov asked for his blessing. It was daybreak, and the angel asked Yaakov, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.' (ibid.27) Rashi explains that the angel asked to be released because it was his turn to sing praise to Hashem. We also find that when Yosef was wandering in the field, a man showed him the way. Rashi comments that the man was actually the angel Gavriel. Now, let me ask you, why, in the debate between Yaakov and the man, does Rashi say it was Eisav's angel, and, in the incident of Yosef, he says that the angel was Gavriel? It says the man in both cases! What is there about each episode that alludes to the true identity of this man?

"The answer is," the Sanzer explained, "that when Yosef was lost and a man came forward to help him find the way, it must be the angel Gavriel. When Yaakov found himself alone in the middle of the night, however, and asked the "man" to bless him, and he responded, "I am in a rush to praise Hashem," this must have been the response of Eisav's angel. Only Eisav's angel would use such an excuse not to help a Jew. The mitzvah to act kindly to help another Jew is all-encompassing and takes precedence over everything. Obviously, it must have been Eisav's angel."

The Sanzer Rav got his message across to the chasid. There is a time and place for everything. When a Jew is in need, one makes the time to help him. Regrettably, there are many who do not take this idea to heart. They are kind and benevolent, and always there to help, but it is always on their terms. A person in need determines the terms according to his needs. If he is in need now, then the act of chesed demands that he be assisted now - not when it is convenient for the benefactor. Veritably, we do not realize the extent to which a simple act of kindness can go and the difference it can make in someone's life. The following episode illustrates just one instance among myriads of episodes in which a small act of kindness has gone a long way towards saving a soul.

A young bachur, yeshivah student, who was studying in a new yeshivah felt very lonely: he was homesick; the yeshivah was a bit overwhelming; he had a difficult time making friends. He felt out of place and wanted to leave. No one seemed to take a real interest in him, so he decided this was not going to work. He was leaving the yeshivah.

He remained in the yeshivah for one last Shabbos, packed his bags and prepared to leave. On motzei Shabbos, out of the blue, a young kollel fellow struck up a conversation with him. A friendship developed between the two, and they even began to learn b'chavrusa, became study partners. The young bachur forgot about leaving and began to study Torah diligently. He soon became a budding talmid chacham, Torah scholar.

A number of years went by, and he became engaged to a very fine girl from a distinguished family. He decided to look up the kollel fellow who had taken the time to converse with him that motzei Shabbos. He located him and sent him a wedding invitation. At first, the kollel fellow had to think twice before he remembered the name. It was not as if they had had that much time together. However, he did attend the wedding. It was an emotional scene when the kollel fellow entered the room where the chassan was seated surrounded by family and friends. The chassan stood up and ran over to the kollel fellow, and they embraced. Amid tears, he declared, "You are the most important guest at this wedding! If not for you, I would not be here tonight. You went out of your way to befriend a young bachur in the yeshivah. If not for your friendship, I would have left the yeshivah and probably would

never have matured into a ben Torah. Thank you!"

It does not take much, but it does take some effort. Everyone has the desire to help. We somehow never find the time. By making the time, we could be saving someone's life, or even more - his neshamah.

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

The Baal HaTurim takes note of the Mesorah, Masoretic tradition, of the words, "For she saw that Shelah had grown" and cites three other instances in total in which a similar phrase is used. The first is, previously, in Bereishis 26:13, "The man (Yitzchak) became great and kept becoming greater until he was very great." The second is this pasuk, which relates Tamar's reaction to Shelah's maturing and the fact that he had still not been given to her as a husband. The third citation is a pasuk in Sefer Iyov, "Because the pain is very great." He explains that there is a distinct relationship between these pesukim. They explain why Tamar merited to be the matriarch of Malchus Bais David, the Davidic Monarchy, from whom Moshiach Tzidkeinu descends. When she saw that Shelah had matured and she had yet not been given to him as a wife, she was filled with great pain, which is a reference to the pasuk in Iyov. Since she was so distressed over not being designated as the progenitor of Moshiach, she merited to become the matriarch of the Davidic Dynasty, which would grow greater and greater until the advent of Moshiach, which is an allusion to the pasuk concerning Yitzchak Avinu's material growth.

This Mesorah is teaching us that Tamar merited this distinction because she felt so much pain, to the point of distress. When someone cares enough about an ideal, and they are worthy of reward, Hashem will grant them what they value the most. Hashem looks at one's priorities and rewards accordingly.

My mechutan, Horav Shmuel Gluck, Shlita, RAM in Telshe Chicago, shared with me an insight regarding this idea. We find that when Aharon HaKohen was designated by Hashem to be Kohen Gadol, he had to be encouraged by Moshe Rabbeinu to approach the Altar. He was filled with fear, trepidation and awe, and he felt ashamed to approach the Altar because of his role in the sin of the Golden Calf. He felt guilty and, thus, unworthy of the High Priesthood. Moshe encouraged him saying, "Why are you ashamed? It is for this that you have been chosen." The commentators add that Moshe was intimating that it was specifically because of his awe and shame, because of his outstanding humility, that he had been chosen. He demonstrated what was important to him. His overwhelming reverence for the Altar and what it represented made him feel unworthy of serving there on behalf of Klal Yisrael. He indicated what his priorities were, and, thus, merited to become one of Hashem's priorities.

*Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings. (37:1)*

Rashi comments that the Torah records the offspring of Eisav in a perfunctory manner, because Hashem did not hold them in high esteem. It would, therefore, be unnecessary to detail how they settled or to give accounts of their battles. The offspring of Yaakov Avinu are a different story. They are important enough for Hashem to dwell at length about their settlements. Alternatively, Va'yeishav Yaakov,

Yaakov settled, can be explained by the following parable. A certain flax merchant entered a town with his camels heavily laden with flax. The blacksmith who observed this entrance wondered, "Where can all this flax be stored?" A clever fellow noticed his consternation and replied, "One spark can go forth from your bellows which will burn it all up." Likewise, Yaakov saw all the chiefs of Eisav, whose names are mentioned at the end of the last Parsha. He voiced concern, "Who could conquer all of them?" The response comes in the way of the following pasuk (37:2), "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef." This pasuk implies that Yosef provides the solution to the threat of Eisav's numbers. As it is written (Ovadia 1:18), "The house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for straw," a spark shall go forth from Yosef which will annihilate and burn all of them.

The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, have a profound understanding of the above analogy. They view it as a fundamental lesson concerning the Jewish People in their age-old battle against the forces of Eisav, manifest in the various external forces which are dedicated to seeing us become an extinct nation. Eisav and his cohorts are represented by straw. The value of straw can be measured in one way: quantity. The more straw one possesses, the greater its value. Small quantities of straw are basically without value. Only in numbers does it achieve significance. Its mass determines its value. This is the salient characteristic of Eisav and his minions. These nations value the material and negate the spiritual. Thus, he who has more has greater significance. He who has less has diminished worth. When Eisav met Yaakov, he ignored Yaakov's gift, declaring, *Yeish li rav*, "I have much." His value system was based upon mass and volume. Eisav was materially wealthy. There was nothing Yaakov could give to the man who had everything. Indeed, the nations who live by the barometer of material wealth would deluge our People, if they could. They would establish a system whereby he who has - is, and he who does not have - is not. It would be a world unencumbered by moral and spiritual values, by ethics and humanness. It would be a world of who has and who has not. They would use their mass to overwhelm Yaakov. This is what the blacksmith saw. How could the village survive with all of this straw?

Yaakov had the answer illustrated by the way of life he had chosen for himself and his offspring. When he met Eisav, he said, *Yeish li kol*, "I have everything." He lived on a spiritual moral plateau in which values are not measured by size, bulk or mass. Quantity has no relevance. Quality determines value and significance. Yaakov had everything. He achieved *shleimus*, completeness/perfection, an impossible accomplishment in the realm of the physical, since, regardless of what one possesses, he wants and can obtain more. Harmony, peace, completion and wholesomeness are words which define measurement in the spiritual realm.

Let us compare Eisav's bulk of straw to Yaakov's spark. This little spark is a complete unit of energy, regardless of its size. One tiny spark has the power to inflame and incinerate all of Eisav's straw. In the battle of physical might against genuine spirit, the authentic quality will prevail over the quantitative substance, which is nothing more than an external covering, a *fa?ade*. One tiny spark of true Judaism can enlighten a world of darkness, a world built upon the foundations of shallow superficiality.

The spark, however, has power only as long as the tiniest flame burns with it. Once the fire is gone, the spark is extinguished and worthless. Indeed, an extinguished spark is worth less than a bulk of straw. What a powerful lesson for us to absorb and integrate into our lives. As long as the flame burns within the Jew, in his heart and mind, Eisav can have no mastery over him. He has nothing to fear. If the ember cools, if the fire dies out, he falls prey to Eisav's blandishments of materialism, superficiality and one-dimensional perspective. How fortunate are we that the spark of the Jew, his *neshamah*, soul, is of a Divine origin - one that burns eternally.

*But he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah. (37:2)*

Sforno posits that due to his immaturity, Yosef sinned by telling tales about his brothers. He was inexperienced and, thus, could not foresee the consequences of his actions. This does not negate the fact that he was very intelligent and was later able to counsel the Egyptian hierarchy. Intelligence and wisdom are independent of maturity. Yosef had the ability to offer sound advice based upon his brilliance. Yet, his puerile attitude precluded his ability to envision the sequel to the stories he was telling his father about his brothers. It would seem from Sforno's explanation that Yosef's age played a negative role in his debacle. I think that we might be able to view his attitude in a positive light. After all, we find that Yehoshua, successor to Moshe Rabbeinu as Klal Yisrael's leader, was referred to as a naar.

All too often a leader is confronted with a dilemma: an infraction occurs to which he must respond. Yet, he procrastinates, because he feels that he must study all of the political ramifications. Usually, he ends up either responding poorly or not responding at all. Why? Because he fears the consequences. This is where naar, the ability to maintain a certain level of immaturity, to see an infraction and respond immediately - regardless of the backlash - plays a pivotal role. Otherwise, while he dabbles around looking for excuses to either act or not act, Hashem's Name is being publicly profaned. At times, a leader must step forward and take action, blind to the potential consequences.

*Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings. (37:1)*

Chazal teach us that Yaakov Avinu wished to settle down in tranquility, but the anguish of Yosef's kidnapping came to haunt him. Although the righteous seek tranquility, Hashem says, "Are the righteous not satisfied with what is in store for them in the World to Come, such that they expect to live at ease in This World also?" Understandably, the commentators offer various approaches to explain Yaakov's desire to live in tranquility. The question that confronts us, however, is whether we can understand the nature of a request for tranquility from an individual who is used to such a life. Yaakov's life actually had been filled with anguish from the beginning. From birth, he had to contend with Eisav, followed by Lavan and the incident of Dinah; he was always running from Eisav. In reality, the episode with Yosef was typical of Yaakov's previous life experiences. Regrettably, it fit perfectly into the scheme of the tzaros, miseries, he had sustained throughout his life. What was there about the anguish concerning Yosef that consumed Yaakov?

The Brisker Rav, zl, explains that the tzaros that Yaakov Avinu experienced became the foundation for building Klal Yisrael. Whatever Yaakov sustained comprised the building blocks for the future nation that would descend from him. Yaakov's dispute with Eisav concerning the rights of the first-born was a portent of Klal Yisrael's sojourn in Egypt. Hashem refers to His People as Beni b'chori Yisrael, "My son, My first-born, Yisrael." The misery and trials that he experienced in Lavan's home, Rachel and Leah's travail, and Yaakov's ultimate descent to the land of Egypt, all were pieces of Hashem's Divine Plan for His nation. Thus, Yaakov accepted these tzaros as aspects of a collective harbinger of what was in store for his offspring. He withstood the trials and acquiesced to the pain. They served a purpose.

The torment concerning Yosef, however, was completely different. It was personal. Everybody else knew that Yosef was alive. Yosef's status had been concealed from only one individual: Yaakov. This vexed Yaakov to no end. He was acutely aware that every consequence has an origin, every result has its source, every torment has its precursor in sin. When Yaakov noted that he was being visited with personal trauma, he realized that he must have sinned. He sought to understand the reason for his personal anguish. Yaakov signifies the individual, while Yisrael represents the collective nation. Yaakov, the man, sought to pinpoint the sin that was disrupting his personal "tranquility." What did he do to deserve this retribution?

Furthermore, with regard to the actual request to settle in tranquility, is it improper for the righteous to request the opportunity to serve Hashem in a calm, undistracted venue? After all, it is not as if they are asking for a vacation. They simply want to serve Hashem without the constraints of anguish. Is that so inappropriate? The Brisker Rav teaches us a powerful lesson: One is not to entreat Hashem to alter his circumstances, so that he can serve Him better. On the contrary, one is to rise above the challenges presented by his current situation to serve Hashem, regardless of the impediments.

He would often cite the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, whose practice it was to daven in a small room on the side of the shul, while his chassidim davened in the bais hamedrash. One Rosh Hashanah, the Kotzker opened his door and said, "I know for what you are praying, and I also know Hashem's reply." The Rebbe immediately closed his door and continued praying in private. One of his close chassidim knocked on the door and asked, "Rebbe, what is it that we are requesting?"

The Rebbe replied, "You are requesting less difficulty in earning a livelihood, so that you will have more time to study Torah. And Hashem's reply is, 'This is what I want, and this is how it should be.'" In summation, we are to serve Hashem in our current situation without excuses.

*He saw them and behold! They were aggrieved. And he asked Pharaoh's courtiers who were with him in the ward... "Why do you appear downcast today?" (40:6,7)*

This is how it all started. Yosef took notice of his cellmates' sad appearance. He inquired as to the reason for their downcast demeanor. The rest is history. Yosef was ultimately freed and elevated from lowly prisoner to viceroy of all Egypt, a position which led to Yaakov Avinu's finding refuge in Egypt during the terrible famine. Yosef was in jail, in a dungeon where no one cares about anybody other than himself. Indeed, it is a place where everybody feels sorry for themselves. The last thing a person would do is to notice his cellmate's downcast countenance, let alone ask him what is wrong. Not so, Yosef Hatzaddik. He saw a change in a person's appearance and immediately inquired about the source of his sadness.

The other day, one of the mispalelim, worshippers, in shul, had occasion to be the shliach tzibbur, lead the service. When he recited the brachah of refaeinu, the blessing dealing with health, it seemed that he placed greater emphasis on this brachah. While I may not be the individual's greatest confidante, I nonetheless approached him after davening and asked if everything was all right. He said no. He did not want to talk about it - but appreciated the fact that someone cared.

This is what being a human being is all about. I recently read an inspiring thesis that viewed this trait as the characteristic which distinguished Yosef. As a young seventeen-year old, he noticed that the children of the maidservants were not being treated well by his brothers. He immediately responded to this problem. Yosef had the qualities essential in a leader: he saw; he cared; he acted. He did not

distinguish between another person's feelings and his own feelings. He did not sit around with his hands folded. When he saw a miscarriage of justice, he acted. His concern for the welfare of others changed the course of history.

The first step is to look. Next, one should take note. Third, he should act. If one is obsessed with himself, however, he does not have the ability to see others. The Noda BeYehudah was once walking down the streets of Prague, and he noticed a ten-year old gentile boy sitting on the street crying. Many people would ignore a young gentile child crying in the street. The Noda BeYehudah was not "many people." He bent down and asked the boy what was wrong. The boy replied that his father was a baker. Every day the boy would sell rolls and give the proceeds to his stepmother. Today, he had been mugged and his rolls were stolen. Now, his family would have nothing to eat. He cried, because he was afraid to face his stepmother and relay the truth.

The Noda BeYehudah did not skip a beat as he reached into his pocket and gave the boy the amount of money he would have earned. The boy just stood there in a state of wonderment. Such things did not just happen.

Eight years passed. The Noda BeYehudah was sitting in his home late at night studying Torah, when he heard a loud knock at his door. He rose to see who could be coming by at such a late hour.

A tall young man stood at the door. He said, "I know that your Passover holiday ends on Monday. The non-Jewish bakers in Prague have all banded together to avenge their god who was killed by the Jews. They have decided to poison the bread. Rabbi, I have come to warn you. Tell your people not to purchase the bread. Please do not tell anyone why, or I will be killed."

The rav looked at the young man in a state of shock. "Why? Why are you telling me this?" he asked.

"Rabbi, do you remember, eight years ago you found a little boy crying on the street? Do you remember how you helped him? That little boy was me, and I never forgot that favor. You Jews are a compassionate people. You do not deserve any harm. This is my way of repaying the favor. Thank you."

The Noda BeYehudah issued a decree the next day that, due to an error in the calendar, Pesach must be observed for one more day and no one should eat any bread. The Prague bakers lost money, because they could not sell their poisoned bread to anyone else. After complaining to the local authorities that the rav had undermined their business and caused them a financial loss, an investigation was initiated and the poisoned bread was discovered. The Jewish community was spared a tragedy, because eight years earlier someone had taken notice of the tears of a little non-Jewish boy.

Yosef is referred to as Yosef Hatzaddik. According to the above, he exemplified the middah, attribute, of chesed, kindness, as well. Noach was also referred to as a tzaddik. In addition, he spent an entire year immersed in the middah of chesed as he saw to the needs of the many creatures on the Ark. Apparently, these two virtues go in tandem with one another. The tzaddik is righteous in his relationships both with Hashem and with his fellow man. Chesed is the power of acknowledging and recognizing the people around us - and responding to their needs. The true baal-chesed does not need to be asked to help; he notices the need on his own. The next chance we get, we should look around, take note, and do something about it. Who knows? While we might not alter the course of history, we will certainly affect the status quo.

*If only you would think of me with yourself... and you will do me a kindness, if you please, and mention me to Pharaoh. (40:14)*

Chazal tell us that because Yosef placed his trust in the sar ha'mashkim, Chamberlain of Cupbearers, instead of Hashem Himself, he was punished with a two-year extension of his sentence. What did Yosef really do wrong? There is such a thing as hishtadlus, endeavoring. Part of hishtadlus is to ask the chamberlain to intercede on his behalf. This does not diminish his trust in Hashem. The commentators, each in his own way, offer explanations for Yosef's actions and, thereby, teach us lessons in the meaning of faith and trust in Hashem. Horav Nossen Wachtfogel, zl, the venerable Mashgiach of Beth Medrash Govohah, underscores this question by citing the fact that in preparing for his confrontation with Eisav, Yaakov Avinu employed three forms of hishtadlus: doron, he sent a gift; tefillah, he prayed to Hashem; milchamah, he prepared for war. Why then are Yosef's actions discountenanced?

The Mashgiach cites Horav Chaim Vital, zl, who distinguishes between Yaakov's hishtadlus that was carried out together with tefillah and Yosef's hishtadlus that was exclusive of tefillah. While Yosef certainly prayed to Hashem, it was not together with the hishtadlus. Every act of hishtadlus must be accompanied by prayer, supplicating Hashem that this act of hishtadlus be successful. Likewise, when one goes to the doctor, he should entreat Hashem with a kapital, chapter, of Tehillim, that this visit should be therapeutic. Thus, one realizes that the physician is only a shliach, Hashem's agent. It is Hashem who dispenses the cure. He chooses to deliver it through His various emissaries.

*Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings. (37:1)*

Regarding the above pasuk, the Baal HaTurim writes, "This can be compared to one who, upon seeing a band of dogs begin to chase him, intent on attacking him, sits himself down among them; so, too, Yaakov settled among Eisav's descendants." The Gerrer Rebbe, zl, the Imrei Emes, derives from here a significant lesson regarding life and how it should be lived. At times, we are confronted with various trials and tribulations, anxieties and misfortunes. Our first reaction is to run from them and, consequently, allow our mitzvah observance and relationship with the Almighty to wane. This was not Yaakov Avinu's response. He confronted his challenges head-on, not allowing them to affect his spiritual well-being.

Yosef HaTzaddik followed in his father's footsteps. While incarcerated in the miserable Egyptian prison, he did not let depression rule his life. His smile and kind words were a staple for many prisoners. He never forgot Hashem. During his most trying moments he attempted to live his life in an orderly manner, never deviating from his spiritual status-quo.

This is the meaning of the Baal HaTurim's analogy: If a person is confronted by a band of dogs bent on harming him, running away from them will only encourage them to chase after him. The best plan is to remain stationary in order to confront the challenge with determination and fortitude.

Horav Yerucham Levovitz, zl, takes a similar approach towards understanding Yaakov's decision to settle in Eisav's backyard. He uses the following analogy to make his point. Once, an elderly woman was sipping her coffee in the restaurant of a theatre long after the curtain had gone up,

signaling the beginning of the first act. The waiter inquired curiously why she had not taken a seat in the theatre. She replied, "I would never go in now. It is much too crowded. I will go in once they all come out. Then I can have as many seats as I want to myself."

This is the folly of life for many of us. We wait for those tranquil moments, those endless summer days: days when the sky is blue and cloudless, the sun is warm and shining, and everything seems to be perfect. When the rain falls - a temporary situation which we all must endure - we perceive it to be a hardship which we must "weather." We consider it just a painful interlude, assuming that when it is over we will resume with "real" life.

This perspective on life is false. Many fail to realize that life is all about the rain, the storms of thunder and lightning. A part of life is the sickness and anxiety, pain and fear - and our constant striving to overcome these challenges. Only through these tribulations, and our triumph over them, are we able to enhance our spirituality in order to fulfill our purpose on this world. The sunny days are for gathering our strength and conjuring up our courage to be able to derive the most from life's challenges.

True, Yaakov sought tranquility; he desired serenity. He did not seek it, however, for the purpose of leisure to idle away his time. No, Yaakov sought peace of mind so that he could better devote himself to his spiritual pursuits. Nonetheless, Hashem told him that this is not the way for the righteous. They will receive their rest in the World to Come. This world is for action, for challenge. Those who focus on the intermission will quite often miss the show.

*Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. (37:1)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov sought to live in serenity, but the anguish of Yosef sprang upon him. Righteous people want to live in serenity in this world, but Hashem says to them, "Is it not enough that you will enjoy serenity in the World to Come, that you want it in this world as well?" We are confronted with a simple - but penetrating - question: Would Hashem begrudge a tzaddik a life of serenity? In a homily for Parshas Vayeshev given at the beginning of World War II in December, 1939, the Piazesner Rebbe, zl, cites Rav Baruch m'Medzbusz. He explains the verse in the zemer, Shabbos song, of Kol mekadash, which we sing on Friday night, Azor la shovsim bashvii bacharish u'vakatzir "Help those who sanctify the Seventh Day by desisting from plow and harvest." The Hebrew word, charish, plow, may also be translated as "silence." The verse would then read, "Help those who sanctify the Seventh Day with silence." They sanctify the Seventh Day because they do not speak.

In the simplest interpretation of this teaching, it might be a reference to the idea that on Shabbos one should sanctify his speech. He should refrain from idle and unnecessary talk, focusing on speaking devarim shebikedushah, holy speech. The Piazesner interprets the verse quite differently. He feels it could be a reference to those righteous people who achieve such rapture on Shabbos that they are unwilling to describe what they are experiencing with mere words. In this interpretation, the actual experience demands silence, a silence for which one is rewarded. How are we to understand this?

The Rebbe explains that there are two types of silence: a silence of spiritual ecstasy, which eludes verbal description; and a mute silence of crushing defeat and despair. Two words in the Hebrew language refer to silence: charishah, silence; and ilmut, muteness. The word charishah is used primarily to describe a situation or an individual that has the potential for engaging freely in speech, but, nevertheless, does not speak. Ilmut is a term used to describe one who is so broken and crushed that he has nothing to say. He does not feel; he has no head or heart with which to perceive or feel. He is mute.

For him, silence is not a choice; he is incapable of speech.

At certain times, however, a Jew realizes that a time of despair is about to occur, when survival means being reduced to petty, small-minded and spiritually diminished behavior. He then takes hold of himself, adjusting to the forthcoming tribulation. He says to himself, "At the present time, I am indeed ileim, mute, but even a mute has the ability to communicate by gesturing in a manner appropriate to his condition. I, too, will speak a little in this way, communicating through my muteness."

At times, the troubles may increase and intensify, to the point that each individual feels that he has reached a condition in which the state of muteness has become still more powerful and encompassing. This may be understood from the dialogue between Yosef and his brothers concerning his dream.

Describing his first dream, Yosef says, "Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field. Then my sheaf stood up erect, and your sheaves surrounded it and bowed down to my sheaf" (37:7). The Hebrew words used for "binding sheaves" is me'almim alumim, which is identical to the Hebrew word for "mute." This is as if Yosef were to say to them, "We were struck dumb/mute in the field."

The word "field" in Yosef's dream is a reference to the Kabbalistic concept of the "holy field" in which all Jews toil. Yosef was saying to his brothers, "We were harvesting the field. When the bitter galus, exile, reached the point of mealim alumim, total muteness, we became bereft of the ability to communicate - even in our Torah and avodah, worship of Hashem. Then suddenly, almosai, my muteness, stood up erect. At first, I attempted to accept my muteness, to bend to the crushing situation, to live with the muteness, to communicate somewhat, to gesture, to do something. When I saw how overpowering the muteness had become, however, I could no longer bear it. I conjured up the courage to cry out to Hashem even louder, to the point that even your sheaves, muteness, surrounded mine and took strength from me."

This is the meaning of the original quote from Rashi: Righteous people seek serenity. They want to adapt, to adjust to the exile and its tribulations. Hashem says to them, "It is not enough that they will have a future that will be good. They must toil to arouse Heavenly mercy in this world, so that Hashem will spare Klal Yisrael -immediately. There is no coming to terms with the troubles that confront us. Muteness is not an alternative.

In a sense, the Piazesner Rebbe was referring to himself as he rallied others on. He had just sustained overwhelming personal losses, to the point that for two months he had found it impossible to teach and lecture. Now, as the homily seems to imply, he was making a conscious decision to reject spiritual passivity and mute acceptance of suffering. He would forge ahead with Torah study and prayer, encouraging those who had thus far survived with him to do likewise. They would not be mute!

*Come let us sell him to the Yishmaelim, but let our hand not be upon him. (37:26)*

In his blessing to Yehudah shortly before his death, Yaakov Avinu said, "A lion cub is Yehudah; from prey, my son, you ascended" (Breishis 49:9). Rashi comments that it was Yehudah's advice to sell Yosef that earned him this blessing. We must endeavor to understand this. Slavery is a form of death. Furthermore, being sold to an immoral master, which was what could be expected in those days, meant resigning oneself to the state of slave/victim, to a spiritual demise worse than death. Why, then, is

Yehudah lauded for his "superb" advice? Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl, derives a compelling lesson from here. When a person is faced with an overwhelming situation, he must make an irrevocable decision; Once he executes the decision, he cannot go back. In such an instance, it is far better to remove oneself and "allow" Hashem to do what He wants. The brothers had decided to do away with Yosef. This was a decision from where there was no return. Yosef could not be brought back to life. Yehudah encouraged his brothers to desist and let Hashem's will be done.

This idea applies to each and everyone of us during various instances in our lives, when we are confronted with a situation where the decision is difficult to render and no room for error exists. We should remove ourselves and trust in Hashem. He is never wrong.

*She was being taken out, and she sent (word) to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong I am pregnant," and she said, "Recognize, if you please, whose are this signet, this wrap, and this staff." (38:25)*

Rashi comments that Tamar did not wish to embarrass Yehudah by saying, "I am pregnant by you." She figured if Yehudah were to decide on his own to confess, then let him admit it. If not, she was prepared to be burned, rather than humiliate him. Chazal derive from here that "it is preferable for a person to throw themselves into a fiery furnace rather than shame their friend in public." Chazal's statement is ambiguous. If they are deriving a halachah, law, it should be an absolute statement to the fact that one must throw himself into a furnace, rather, than saying, "it is preferable to do so."

Horav Leib Chasman, zl, gleans from Chazal's wording that, indeed, it is not a halachah, but only an eitzah tovah, good piece of advice. Chazal are teaching us that one should reflect and sensitize himself to the point that he feels the act of murder inherent in humiliating another person. This may be compared to two hot, burning stoves: one large and one small. Certainly, if he is compelled, he will choose to pass through the smaller stove. Likewise, one should view embarrassing someone as being the larger, much hotter stove. Chazal have taught us the sensitivity we must have towards our friend's feelings. It is worse than a fiery stove! Indeed, it constitutes an act of murder.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, supplements this by retelling an incredible incident that occurred with Horav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, zl. As he advanced in age, Rav Yehoshua Leib had a sugar problem. Thus, he was forced to consume much more sugar than usual. Due to his illness, his attendant would bring him a cup of tea with extra sugar, even during his lecture. It once came to the attention of the students that the rebbetzin was disconcerted. When they asked her for the source of her distress, she explained that she recently noticed that the salt had mistakenly been placed in the sugar container. Apparently, the attendant who was serving Rav Yehoshua Leib his tea was scooping tablespoons of salt into the tea instead of sugar! Imagine, Rav Yehoshua Leib was swallowing salt, which was noxious and life-threatening for him, rather than embarrassing the attendant for making an error.

When Rav Yehoshua Leib was asked why he risked his health by taking the salt, he responded, "It is preferable to throw oneself into a fiery furnace rather than shame someone in public." This is the meaning of sensitivity for another person.

Horav Schwadron observes that it is not sufficient to simply be aware of the gravity of humiliating another person; one must internalize this knowledge into his psyche to the point that he feels it. When Rav Yehoshua Leib drank the salt, he tasted sugar, because to indicate a bitter taste would be to hurt someone's feelings. This could not be allowed.

Thus, if an individual were to observe a person humiliating another person in public, it would be tantamount to witnessing an act of murder. He has just seen his friend being flung into a fiery furnace! How could he calmly sit by and watch?

Horav Yisrael Chaim Kaplan, zl, was once seen sitting in the bais hamedrsh, weeping uncontrollably. A student went over and asked, "Rebbe, is something wrong? Why is the rebbe crying?" Rav Yisrael Chaim did not respond; instead, he continued crying. The student waited a few moments, and once again he asked, "Why is the rebbe crying?" Finally, Rav Yisrael Chaim turned to him and said, "Chazal compare humiliating a fellow Jew to murder. Let me ask you; If you were to witness someone in the bais hamedrash going over to another student and stabbing him with a knife, would you not cry? You would be hysterical, would you not? I have just witnessed a similar act of murder. I noticed how one student embarrassed another student. How can I not cry? I witnessed an act of murder!"

This is how our Torah leaders understood the meaning of sensitivity to another person's feelings.

*Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning ...These are the offspring of Yaakov, Yosef...  
(37:12)*

Rashi cites a parable to explain why the Torah mentions that Yaakov Avinu settled - immediately after mentioning Eisav's chiefs. He compares this to a certain flax merchant whose camels entered a town laden with flax. The blacksmith wondered, "Where can all this flax be stored?" A clever man who was standing nearby, answered him, "One spark can go forth from your bellows which will burn it all up." Similarly, when Yaakov saw all the powerful chiefs of Eisav whose names are written above, he wondered, "Who would conquer all of them?" The Torah responds, "These are the offspring of Yaakov, Yosef," implying that Yosef is the solution to the problem. Yosef is considered Eisav's nemesis, as it says in Ovadiah, 1:18, "The House of Yaakov will be a fire, and the House of Yosef a flame, and the House of Eisav for straw." Fire without a flame does not have an effect over a long distance. Once Yosef-who is compared to a flame-was born, Yaakov trusted in Hashem to protect him from Eisav. What is the meaning of comparing Yosef to a flame? How does this analogy enhance our understanding of Eisav's challenge to Yaakov?

In their ethical discourses, Yeshivas Bais Shalom Mordechai explains that Eisav symbolizes the yetzer hora, evil inclination, who makes use of every form of guile and deception in order to lead people to sin. In order to triumph over the yetzer hora, one must be able to see and understand the yetzer hora's malicious intentions prior to his encounter. Once he has "locked horns" with the evil inclination, since he has already permitted him to come close, he has already been ensnared in his net. It has become much more difficult to break loose. Yosef, the flame, had the capacity to peer into the future in order to perceive his enemy. He understood fully well who Eisav was, what he represented and what his malevolent intentions were. Eisav lived by subterfuge. He dressed and acted outwardly like a saint, but, in truth, he was evil incarnate. He asked intricate halachic questions; he married a woman at the age of forty, because that is what his father did. He is compared to the pig that spreads out its split hooves, proudly displaying one kosher sign, concealing the fact that it does not have the inner sign, the chewing of cud. The pig is not kosher; neither was Eisav. When one outwardly acts as a

saint, however, only a wise and perceptive individual can perceive the hidden intentions, to recognize the future risks that are involved.

Yaakov feared Eisav's duplicity. He feared his descendants would fall prey to him. When Yosef was born, however, he was calmed; he recognized that Eisav's nemesis, the one who could see beyond the individual, who could look right through Eisav's deception, had been born. During the encounter between Eisav and Yaakov, Bilhah and Zilpah and their children were the first ones to meet Eisav. They were followed by Leah and her children. Last, Yosef and Rachel came forward. Rashi notes that the first three wives went before their children. Yosef, however, preceded his mother. He said, "My mother is very beautiful. Perhaps Eisav will take notice of her appearance and want her. I will, therefore, stand in front of her and block his vision." Yosef was able to anticipate what was going on in Eisav's mind based upon their initial encounter. He knew with whom he was dealing, and he was prepared. His brothers did not take notice of what he had immediately observed. Is it any wonder that he was Eisav's nemesis?

The ability to comprehend the consequences of one's actions, the outcome which presently may be viewed as innocuous, but could later result in disaster, is especially significant for parents and educators. All too often, we tend to disregard the improper behavior of our children and students, calling it mischief and capricious, when in truth it represents a malignant evil that, if left unchecked, will devastate us later on.

Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, mi'Bagdad, relates an incredible story whose moral lesson conveys this truth. There was once a thief who was finally caught. According to Arab law, he was condemned to be executed. The condemned man asked to be allowed to speak to his mother once before he was to be executed. It seems that he had an important message to communicate to her.

Permission was granted, and the criminal was taken from his cell to meet his mother. As to be expected, his mother was grief-stricken, bewailing the terrible fate that awaited her son. He went over to her and bent down close to her as if he was about to whisper something in her ear. He did not, however, say a word to her. Instead, he did a most atrocious and fiendish act: he viciously bit off her ear! Everyone was stunned. Imagine, in the last act of his mortal life, he compounded his treachery by mutilating his broken-hearted mother. The criminal, fully aware of everyone's disgust with him, turned to the people and said, "You should know that she is responsible for my iniquitous behavior. When I was a child, she never rebuked me when I would take things from others. As I grew up and my taking became stealing, she once again looked away, saying I was going through a phase; I had too much energy, everything - but the truth. Had she been stern with me, I would never have ended up facing the gallows."

What a terrible criticism with which to charge a parent. When we stop to think about it, could it be true? We have only to open up a daily newspaper to read of the "mischief" young people are committing today. From stealing to mass murder, how long are we going to bury our heads in the ground and attribute the cruelty and treachery to childishness and mischief? Someone has to be the "flame," to have the capacity to see the results of these actions and have the courage to do something about it.

Chazal tell us that Rabbi Yehoshua's mother placed his crib in the bais ha'medrash from the day he was born, so that his ears would become acutely attuned to the sounds of Torah study. True, what can an infant hear or understand? Who knows, however, what impression it left for the future? Rabbi Yehoshua attributed his success in life to the fact that he was raised in the bais ha'medrash. Obviously, it left some kind of impression on him. His mother represented the "flame" that a parent should exhibit

in raising her children. It is so much easier to prevent a tragedy from occurring than to deal with its aftermath. Regrettably, there are still some whose myopic vision and lack of courage dictate that their level of perception be relegated to hindsight.

*The boy is gone! And I - where can I go? (37:30)*

Reuven returned to the pit only to find that Yosef was no longer there. He expressed his sorrow at his father's grief, lamenting, "Where can I flee from father's grief?" When he would come across this pasuk, Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, would sigh heavily and cry out, "Hayedel einenu," the boy is gone - my youth has gone by - how will I face my Father in Heaven?" He was bemoaning the fact that he had let his youth slip by "unaccomplished," and now in his advanced years, when the time to meet his Maker was drawing near, he sensed that he was unprepared. If a great saint and tzaddik such as Rav Elya Lopian feels that he could have accomplished much more during his formative years, what should we say?

The experiences of one's youth will invariably leave a lasting impression on one's inner personality. Rebbetzin Shoshana Zilberstein, a"h, daughter of Horav Y.S. Eliashov, Shlita, related how she and her siblings were "taught" about the insignificance of this temporal world. She was one of twelve children. Understandably, living in a small apartment with a large family necessitated much sacrifice. On the other hand, the children were being taught that olam hazeh, this world, with its material values does not necessarily coincide with the Torah's barometer of importance. There were regrettably not enough beds for every one of the children. This reality mandated that some of the girls were subjected to sharing a bed. She related that every day at three o'clock in the morning, when her father arose, he would take one of the girls and carry her into his bed. He would then proceed to the table and begin to study Torah. It was this scene that remained engraved on the minds of his children. The sweet song of Torah that emanated from that room; the image of their father bent over his seforim, books, in the middle of the night, was eternally etched in their psyche. While they might not have enjoyed the physical comfort of a large mattress, how many of us can say we fell asleep listening to the pleasant sounds of the Torah study of a gadol hador, leader of the generation?

*Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. (39:6)*

Yosef's physical appearance was certainly to the yetzer hora's, evil inclination's, advantage. Undoubtedly, one who is blessed with the gift of extremely "good looks" is left wide open to contend with the pitfalls which the yetzer hora is so skilled at placing before him. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites a story that occurred concerning Horav Yitzchak Bender, zl, when he was Rosh Hayeshivah in Makov. It was the summer of 1913, when a young student by the name of Yitzchak Krakowsky from the city of Lodz, Poland, registered in the yeshivah. He was known as "Reb Yitzchakel Otvozker," because of the time he had spent in the city of Otvozk due to a lung condition from which he suffered. He was only sixteen years old, but his youth extended only to his chronological age. As a scholar, he was well beyond in years, soon becoming one of the foremost scholars in the yeshiva. His sagacity was captivating, his profundity in Torah knowledge was exemplary.

The Rosh HaYeshivah's shiurim, lectures, were well known for their depth and brilliance. Yet, when the Rosh HaYeshivah would begin to say the shiur, Reb Yitzchakel would soon complete his ideas. It got to the point that the Rosh HaYeshivah felt there was nothing more he could teach this young prodigy.

Reb Yitzchakel was blessed with a physical appearance that was remarkable. His face shone, his high forehead seemed to glow. Indeed, his total physical image was captivating. Here was a human specimen who was outstanding in his physical and intellectual capacities. The Rosh HaYeshivah once related how it came to pass that this exceptional young man was blessed with such an enchanting physical appearance.

It happened that Reb Yitzchakel's parents came to the yeshiva to take their son home. The winds of World War I were beginning to gust. While it would not be safe anywhere in Europe, they wanted their child at home with them. When the parents arrived, the Rosh HaYeshivah was shocked at the physical appearance of Reb Yitzchakel's father. He was the extreme opposite of his son. While the son was tall, erect and handsome, with radiant skin that seemed to glow, the father was dwarflike, with skin like leather that was dark like a blacksmith's skin. It was difficult to imagine that there was any physical relationship between these two people. The Rosh HaYeshivah turned to Reb Yitzchakel's father in bewilderment and asked him point blank to explain the "discrepancy" in the physical appearance between father and son. The father turned to the Rosh HaYeshivah and said, "Let me tell you the following story which will shed light on the inconsistency in our appearances.

"The story goes back ten generations to the time of Rav Mordechai Yoffe, the author of the Levushim, an epithet given to him because of his brilliant, scholarly works, each entitled Levush, i.e. Levush Techeilas, Levush Malchus, etc. As his family name was Yoffe, which was derived from the Hebrew word yafeh, beautiful, so was Rav Mordechai a man of captivating physical appearance. His visage was something to behold. It is quite possible that his last name was directly associated with his appearance.

"One day Rav Mordechai's good looks almost became the source of his downfall. Similar to what occurred to Yosef Hatzaddik, our grandfather was confronted with an overwhelming challenge. A beautiful gentile woman was so enchanted with his appearance that she did everything possible to encourage him to sin. When Rav Mordechai realized what was occurring, he was determined to ward off her blandishments—even at the expense of his own life.

"Outside of the house was a canal filled with sewage. He immediately jumped into the foul-smelling water. The stench on his clothes was so overpowering that the woman was "turned off," so that one left Rav Mordechai alone. The sewage seeped through all of Rav Mordechai's ten garments that he was wearing at the time. Indeed, the garments that clothed him were filthy and foul-smelling, but his neshamah, soul, and moral character remained as pure as before. "In the merit of his self-sacrifice to triumph over the yetzer hora, Hashem gave him the ability to author ten volumes of halachic treatise which he named Levushim, garments, corresponding to the ten garments that had become soiled. The ten garments which saved him would yield ten seforim, that would inspire a world of Torah students. At that moment, Rav Mordechai turned his eyes Heavenward and in emotional prayer beseeched Hashem, 'The next ten generations that will descend from me should be repulsive in appearance, so that they should not encounter the challenges associated with physical beauty.'

"The ten generations, ten generations of descendants whose physical appearance was far from appealing," continued Reb Yitzchakel's father, "ended with my son. He is the eleventh generation, with him the beauty begins anew. The external beauty and inner spiritual, moral beauty that reigned

coincidentally in my sainted grandfather has returned to my son."

This incredible story gives us but a glimpse of the greatness of our Torah luminaries.

*These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef. (37:2)*

The introductory sentence of "These are the offspring of Yaakov," suggests that the Torah is about to enumerate a long list of children. The Torah, however, proceeds to mention only one son - Yosef. The commentators offer a number of reasons for this. Rashi posits a reason that is somewhat questionable. He asserts that whatever happened to Yaakov, happened to Yosef. One example that he gives is that both were hated by their brothers - Yaakov by Eisav and Yosef by his brothers. The question that immediately confronts us is: How can we compare the two "hatreds"? Eisav's hatred toward Yaakov was driven by his evil streak, by his innate hatred of everything pure and holy. The tribes were tzaddikim whose "hatred" -- for want of a better term -- was motivated by idealism and grounded in halachah. While his brothers were ostensibly wrong in their assessment of Yosef, this is still no reason to compare their feelings toward Yosef to those of Eisav for Yaakov.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, explains that Rashi is not comparing the actual hatreds, but rather the side effects and ultimate consequences of both hatreds. As a result of their brothers' animosity, both Yaakov and Yosef were forced to fend for themselves in such a manner that helped them to develop the strength to attain unimaginable heights. Yaakov was an "ish tam," a wholesome man, "yoshev ohalim," abiding in tents: this means that sitting in the bais ha'medrash, studying Torah, was his way of life. He knew nothing else. Eisav's hatred had forced him out of the study hall to spend twenty-two years with Lavan in an environment clearly antithetical to that of the yeshivah. While Yaakov may truly have possessed the potential to triumph in this challenging situation, only after he was compelled to accept the challenge did this potential achieve fruition. Yaakov was forced to leave home and access those hidden qualities of which he, under normal circumstances, would not have been aware. These qualities became active components in his personality and, subsequently, they appeared in his descendants.

Likewise, Yosef's brothers' hatred towards him effected an incredible change in his personality. He transformed from a sweet, complacent young man to a world leader. He was obliged to develop his hidden strengths and abilities to survive both physically and spiritually, climaxing in his ascension of the throne of Egypt as viceroy to Pharaoh. This ability to lead will be imparted to his descendant, our future leader, Moshiach ben Yosef.

*They took Yosef's tunic, slaughtered a goatling, and dipped the tunic in the blood. (37:31)*

The brothers' act of dipping the tunic in the blood holds great significance for us. The Ben Ish Chai says that we dip twice during the Pesach Seder is in commemoration of the "two dippings" associated with the galus, exile. The exile began as a result of sinaas chinam, unwarranted hatred, between Yosef and his brothers. Thus, the dipping of Yosef's tunic in blood marked the first step of the exile. The redemption began when Klal Yisrael was commanded to dip a bundle of hyssop in the blood of the Korban Pesach and touch the lintel and two door posts with it. This dipping in blood, as the Jews were about to leave Egypt, initiated yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt. Horav Chaim Vitzal, zl, explains that the actual decree that Klal Yisrael would be enslaved for four hundred years originated at

the Bris bein Ha'besarim, Covenant between the Parts. The fact that Egypt was to be the land of their exile and the extent of the affliction to which they were subjected however, was determined when the hatred of brother to brother caused them to dip the tunic in the blood. When Klal Yisrael together took a bundle of hyssop, symbolizing unity, and dipped it into the blood of the Korban Pesach, they understood that the key to redemption was - togetherness and unity. Unwarranted hatred led to the exile; unwarranted love will end it.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, cites the Meshech Chochmah in his commentary to Parashas Acharei Mos. He explains why when we recite Shemoneh Esrai on Yom Kippur, we close with the brachah, "Ki atah salchan l'Yisrael u'machalan l'shivtei Ye'shurun", "For You are the forgiver of Yisrael and the pardoner of the tribes of Yeshurun." We do not find an allusion to the shevatim, tribes, in any of our other prayers. Why is this connection specified in regard to the tefillah, prayer, of Yom Kippur? He explains that while the sin of the Golden-Calf is the source of Klal Yisrael's transgressions throughout the generations, this only applies to those sins that are "bein adam la'Makom," between man and G-d. Those sins that are "bein adam la'chaveiro," between man and his fellow man, have a different source - mechiras Yosef, the brothers' sale of Yosef. In accordance with the lofty spiritual level of the shevatim, the sale of Yosef indicated a deficiency that reflected itself in sinaas chinam among Jews throughout the generations. He proves that wherever Jews are failing in their brotherly love, Hashem exacts retribution from Klal Yisrael for their ancestors' "sin." Thus, when we supplicate Hashem on Yom Kippur, we ask that He forgive us for two sins - the Golden-Calf and the sale of Yosef. As long as there is unwarranted hatred among Jews, we must answer for the sin of mechiras Yosef. In addressing our persecution visa-vis the various blood libels that were leveled at us throughout history, Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, suggests that in every bit of sheker, untruth, there is a bit of truth to maintain its credibility. What aspect of the blood libel could possibly be true? Rav Elchanan explains that the dipping of Yosef's tunic in blood is that bit of emes, truth, that has been sufficient to give credence to the blood libels throughout the generations. How incredible it is that after all these generations we still suffer as a result of that lack of brotherly love which destroyed the harmony of Yaakov Avinu's home! What we should ask ourselves is: Have things really changed since that tragic incident? Have we learned our lesson, or do we just pay lip service to the concept of achdus, unity? This may be one question which we just do not want to answer.

*And everything that was done there, he would accomplish. (39:22)*

Simply, Yosef succeeded in every endeavor that he undertook. The Veitzener Rav, Horav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, zl, offers a homiletic rendering of this pasuk based upon an idea expressed by the Ba'al Shem Tov. The Ba'al Shem Tov once saw a Jew desecrating Shabbos. He immediately inspected his own actions to examine whether he himself might have participated in a tinge of chillul, desecration, of Shabbos. He explained that when one sees another Jew submitting to his evil-inclination and transgressing, Hashem is conveying a message to him: The individual himself had also been "nichsol," stumbled/fell, in a way similar to this sin. He is being availed the opportunity to see what he did wrong so that he will repent. In other words, what we witness reflects what we do. When one notes another's inappropriate behavior, it is not by chance; it is by design to encourage us to wake up and look at ourselves. The Ba'al Shem Tov reminded himself that he once had heard someone speaking degradingly about a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, and he did not protest. The Zohar Ha'Kadosh says that a talmid chacham is considered on a level with Shabbos. Thus, one who is not concerned with the proper respect

that should be accorded a talmid chacham is in effect analogous to one who desecrates Shabbos. The Ba'al Shem Tov understood that he was being given a message from Heaven. He immediately acted in response to it.

Horav Meisels cites Horav Shmuel Chaim Sofer, zl, who applies this concept to "exonerate" Yosef from the criticism leveled against him for speaking "lashon hora," slander, against his brothers. Yosef was actually chastising himself when he told his father that he saw his brothers committing certain sins. He felt that he observed his brothers' actions because he was deficient in these areas. Rather than seeking to cast aspersion upon his brothers, Yosef was reprimanding himself.

There is, however, a distinction between the incident involving the Ba'al Shem Tov and Yosef's situation. The Ba'al Shem Tov was privy to an unfamiliar individual's desecration of Shabbos. In contrast, Yosef was remanded to prison for an extended period of time during which he was exposed to every form of evil, to every type of miscreant. Surely, in such a situation one would not have to attribute all the "sins" with which he comes in contact as reference to his own deficiencies. Yet, says Horav Meisels, Yosef did not look for a way out. He did not make any attempt to rationalize the aveiros that he confronted as irrelevant, just because he was in jail. No, Yosef blamed himself "and everything that was done there." He could have easily invalidated as coincidence - all the sins and sinners with which he came in contact. No! Not Yosef - "he would accomplish", - he took the blame as if Hashem was telling him directly that what he had observed was an area of his own behavior that must be rectified.

Pharaoh became angry with his two officers...And they dreamed a dream, both of them...And Yosef said unto them, "Do not interpretations belong to G-d? Tell it to me, I pray you." (40:2,5,8)

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer and chief baker were both punished and incarcerated in the jail at the same time as Yosef. We are not told, however, what their sin was: What did they do that warranted this punishment? Chazal tell us that a fly was found in the goblet of wine that the cup-bearer offered to Pharaoh, and a stone was found in the bread prepared by the chief baker. Yosef interpreted their dreams to mean that the baker would die and the cup-bearer would be reinstated to his previous position. Undoubtedly, Yosef interpreted their dreams through prophetic perception: Yet, there must have been some indication from their dreams that would have implied a positive direction for rendering an explanation for the cup-bearer's dream and a negative perception for the baker's dream. On the contrary, the cup-bearer's sin was greater than that of the baker. The cup-bearer should have noticed the fly floating on the surface of the wine. The baker could at least have attempted to excuse himself by saying that he could not have seen what was inside the bread.

Horav Yosef Tzvi Dunner, Shlita, comments that when one reads through the text of their dreams, it becomes apparent that Pharaoh's two chamberlains had disparate attitudes towards their positions. Their relative levels of devotion towards their ruler was, likewise, significantly different. People are inclined to dream at night what they think about during the day. When we peruse the cup-bearer's description of his daily endeavor, "And I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I placed the cup in Pharaoh's palm," we note his total commitment to serving Pharaoh with reverence. His allegiance to Pharaoh was apparent from the way he depicted his work. His job was to bring wine to Pharaoh. Yet, we see the care he applies to its preparation from its very beginning on the vine! That is loyalty; that is devotion. So, he made an error - once; a grave error, but it was a single in the concept of tenure of faithfulness and loyalty. Such a person deserved another chance.

The baker's words also indicate his attitude - one very dissimilar from his counterpart, the cup-bearer. In the baker's dream, he saw "three wicker baskets were on my head." He did not dream about

working in the fields, gathering the wheat, preparing the flour, and baking the bread. He saw everything prepared, ready to be served. He saw what he wanted to see. He did not care about the preparation of the bread. He simply wanted to serve the bread and be finished. Is it any wonder that a stone was found in the bread? Moreover, we see that the baskets were on his head - he did not care enough to hold them in his hands. Also, why would someone who is really concerned offer Pharaoh his bread in a wicker basket? Is not a king served on gold and silver? The dreams were the barometer by which Yosef determined each chamberlain's dedication to his position and his loyalty to the king. Only one who literally throws himself into his work, not anticipating special reward -- just simply out of a sense of commitment and work ethic -- will succeed.

Parashas Vayeshev is always read either on Shabbos Chanukah or the week before. There is a relationship between Chanukah and Parashas Vayeshev. We are confronted with the question: How did a small band of Jews triumph over the overwhelming odds that they faced? How did the "me'atim," few, overcome the "rabim," many, who were armed with all types of weaponry? Yet, they lost. How did this happen? Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, applies the above exposition to give greater meaning to the concept of "rabim b'yad me'atim." In the Talmud Chullin 92 Chazal assert that the dream of the vine is an analogy to Am Yisrael; the word "gefen," vine, represents Torah. Its clusters of grapes symbolize the tzaddikim, righteous Jews, of every generation.

The secret of Klal Yisrael's success and survival throughout the millennia has been our mesiras nefesh, total devotion to the point of self-sacrifice, for Torah and mitzvos. We were moser nefesh not to work on Shabbos, to keep kosher; to maintain family purity; and to see to it that our children were accorded a Jewish education. One who has such convictions will triumph over adversity and challenge, because Hashem will support him regardless of who or how powerful his enemy is. Our success is not dependent upon the size or strength of our army; it is consistent with our commitment and loyalty to Hashem. When we realize that our very lives are contingent upon our ability to carry out the ratzon, will, of Hashem, then we will do whatever is necessary to facilitate this success. Thus, the cup-bearer's dream has a far-reaching message.

*And Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings. (37:1)*

The Rokeach makes an incredible statement which begs elucidation. He says that every pasuk in Parashas Vayeshev, with the exception of eight pesukim, begins with the letter "vav." The eight exceptions correspond to the mitzvah of Bris Milah which is performed on the eighth day of the boy's life. Horav Zeev Weinberger, Shlita, gives the following explanation: If one were to follow the narrative throughout Parashas Vayeshev, it would seem to be one long story in which everything fits into place naturally. This is implied by the "vav" which is the connecting letter meaning "and." This is the picture perceived by the average person, who sees things from a purely superficial perspective. One who looks at an incident with both of his eyes, with depth and understanding, clearly sees that nothing just occurs as a natural course of events. This is especially true concerning the events surrounding Yosef's life, from his sale as a slave to his eventual liberation and ascent to leadership over Egypt. Every incident was pure miracle!

Indeed, this idea applies particularly to Klal Yisrael, whose very existence is beyond the scope of the natural. Klal Yisrael's survival throughout history, marked by challenge, tribulation and suffering, is truly miraculous. Bris Milah, performed on the eighth day, is linked to the eight pesukim which do not begin with the "vav". The number eight symbolizes the spiritual, since the highest number in

creation is seven. The number eight transcends creation and, therefore, implies miracle. It behooves the nation, whose standard for existence is supernatural, to view life's occurrences with more depth than the human eye can perceive.

*These are the chronicles of Yaakov; Yosef. (37:2)*

The word "toldos" is commonly translated as "offspring". In this case, however, the Torah only mentions Yosef. Thus, it seems that the Torah is referring to Yaakov Avinu's personal history. The Midrash suggests that since Yosef and Yaakov had so much in common, the concept of toldos, offspring, applies most to Yosef. Yaakov slaved in Lavan's home in order to earn Rachel, Yosef's mother, for a wife. Yosef's physical visage was similar to that of Yaakov. Yosef experienced some of the same life events as Yaakov did. Each one had brothers - or a brother- that hated him and sought to kill him. Horav Elyakim Schlesinger, Shlita, renders a novel interpretation of this Midrash. Everyone wants to be remembered, to know that when he is gone his memory does not disappear together with his mortal remains. Some people will build a city or community or will dedicate a building to serve as a remembrance for the future. Others will commission a painting or a statue of themselves. There are also those who will either write or collaborate on their biography. This is their way of eternalizing themselves.

Yaakov Avinu left his imprimatur on Yosef. He was his hope for the future. They shared a great deal together. Yaakov taught Yosef Torah. They looked alike, and their life story was similar. This teaches us that one should do everything in his power to assure that his children follow in his path. What greater remembrance is there of a person than that his children continue along the path which he has forged for them.

*And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons since he was a child of his old age. (37:3)*

Yosef was a ben zekunim, born to Yaakov Avinu when the latter had advanced in age. Is this a reason for Yaakov to love Yosef more than Binyamin, who was the "baby" of the family? The Chizkuni responds that since Rachel died during Binyamin's birth, Yaakov Avinu did not love him as much. While we can understand that Binyamin brought back memories of the tragic death of his beloved Rachel, one would think that the Patriarch was beyond such emotions. Indeed, one would think that the memory of the mother of his orphaned son would enhance his love towards his son. Moreover, Binyamin was the last fruit of Rachel's life. Is there a greater reason to love Binyamin?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, explains that a child is the product of the harmony that exists between a man and wife. Marriage is a partnership in which two people are unified; a child is the fruit of this relationship. Thus, the epitome of love for a child is attained only when both parents are sharing together in raising this child. Binyamin's birth, which was the fruit of Yaakov's partnership with Rachel, was regrettably the precursor of Rachel's death and the consequent demise of their partnership. Hence, the happiness and love Yaakov developed with his youngest child was stunted. It could never reach its full expression without his life-long partner, the child's mother. At Yosef's birth, on the other hand, both parents were together, sharing in the joy, jointly experiencing the fruit of their relationship. Although Rachel passed away later on, Yaakov retained the level of love that he had attained in Yosef.

*Yehudah said to his brothers, "What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?" (37:26)*

Simply, Yehudah interceded on Yosef's behalf, asserting that the brothers would not benefit from killing him. Pituchei Chosam cites the pasuk in Yeshaya 1:15 wherein the Navi laments, "Even when you pray very much I (Hashem) do not listen to you because your hands are full of blood." We infer from here that the tefillos, prayers, of one who "spills blood," i.e., a murderer, are of no value. Ostensibly, the Shevatim, tribes, brothers, prayed three times each day since the tefillos had been introduced by the Patriarchs. The word "betza", bais, tzaddik, ayin, is an acronym for the three tefillos of the day: boker, Shacharis; tzaharayim, Minchah; erev, Arvis. Yehudah was implying something else to his brothers. "Ma betza? What do we gain from davening three times a day, if we kill Yosef?" Hashem does not listen to one who spills blood!

There is a story told about Horav Yechiel Meir Lipshutz, zl, who was a student of the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, who once rebuked a wealthy Jew in his town who was notorious for lending money for interest. This usurer would "suck the blood" out of the poor people whose misfortune it was to borrow money from him. This same person never missed a tefillah b'tzibur, coming to shul three times a day to daven. He told him, "What betza do you gain by going to shul three times a day if you spill the blood of poor people?"

While this is undoubtedly a good "vort", it should bear greater significance for us. All too often we attempt to absolve our lack of mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro, relationship between our fellow man, by expanding or emphasizing our mitzvos bein adam l'Makom, relationship with the Almighty. This is not effective. One cannot take advantage of his fellow man, regardless of the method or reason, and expect Hashem to look upon his avodah, service to Him, favorably. This is the epitome of a double-standard. Regrettably, many of us still view this as only a good vort, while we have a difficult time practicing the concept in our everyday lives.

*Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man. (39:2)*

Horav Bunim M'Peshischa notes the Torah's emphasis on Yosef's "remembering" the source of his success. He realized that the success he had achieved was only because "Hashem was with Yosef." All too often we pray to Hashem for various favors. Shortly after Hashem grants us His good will, we seem to forget the source of our beneficence.

Along these same lines, the Chofetz Chaim explains that in the tefillah that we say on the Shabbos prior to Rosh Chodesh, we implore Hashem to grant us a life replete with yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, and yiraas cheit, fear of sin. Once again, at the end of the tefillah, we ask for ahavas Torah u'yiraas Shomayim, love of Torah and fear of Heaven. Why do we ask Hashem to grant us yiraas Shomayim twice?

The Chofetz Chaim relates that after our first request for yiraas Shomayim, we ask for a life of osher v'kavod, wealth and honor. Once a person has "tasted" a life of wealth and honor, he seldom retains the yiraas Shomayim he once had developed. Consequently, it is necessary to request yiraas Shomayim a second time.

*There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife, how then can I perpetrate this great evil? (39:9)*

The yetzer hora, evil inclination dressed in the guise of Potifar's wife, sought every avenue to ensnare Yosef Ha'Tzaddik in its trap. Chazal characterize Yosef's battle with Potifar's wife as more difficult than fighting with a large bear. Every day she attempted to coerce him through her blandishments. She tried to arouse him by changing clothes twice a day, beautifying herself constantly. She hoped that at one point his guard would be down and he would capitulate. When she saw that her cajoling did not work, she began to threaten Yosef, all to no avail. How did Yosef do it? How was he able to overcome the various challenges that the yetzer hora presented him with?

Horav Mordechai Kukis, Shlita, attributes Yosef's success to two things: First, Yosef's yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, reigned paramount in his life. The boundaries of right and wrong were clearly defined by his fear and awe of Heaven. The image of his father confirmed and encouraged his yiraas Shomayim. To paraphrase Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, "The best and most effective agent for overcoming the challenges of the yetzer hora is to envision in one's mind that the entire world is enveloped with Hashem's Glory. He sees and takes note of every movement that he makes; and He hears every sound. Nothing one does goes unnoticed." This should serve as a successful deterrent to sin.

This, however, does not always work. Indeed, when one is embroiled in the passion of sin, he "seems" to forget Hashem's Presence. What else protects him? What was the second factor which guaranteed Yosef's success in battling the yetzer hara? Yosef told Potifar's wife, "Look - with me, my master concerns himself about nothing in his house, and whatever he has he placed in my custody. There is no one greater in this house than I- How can I perpetrate this great evil?" This thinking reflects one specific virtue - hakoras ha'tov, appreciation. Yosef was literally given the keys to the entire household. His master had placed his utmost trust in him. How could he pay him back by performing such a terrible act? The only "possession" that was off limits was his master's wife. How could he manifest such a lack of appreciation? How could he stoop so low as to take his wife from him? Yiraas Shomayim, coupled with hakoras ha'tov, were the contributing factors that saved Yosef from spiritual doom.

Another instance of hakoras ha'tov in this parsha demonstrates how far one should go in order to repay his debt of appreciation to someone from whom he benefitted, even indirectly. Reuven was an equal participant in the Bais Din that convened to decide Yosef's fate. Yet, when it came to final deliberation, he took a stand on Yosef's behalf and protested against killing him. He suggested they throw him into a pit, thinking to himself that he would return later and rescue him. What motivated this change of heart? Why did Reuven stand up against his brothers to save Yosef? Chazal tell us that when Reuven heard Yosef saying that in his dream eleven stars bowed down to him, together with the sun and the moon, he said, "I thought that because of my actions regarding Bilhah's bed, I would be censured from the family. Now that I hear that Yosef includes me among the tribes, how could I not save him?" In other words, Reuven was driven to save Yosef as the result of a sense of appreciation for including him in the "family." Reuven's remarkable act of valor is commensurate with his incredible virtue in recognizing the benefits one receives from others and reciprocating in turn. Recognizing the good that one does for us is equally as important as the original action that stimulates this recognition. It seems, however, to be more difficult for some.

*In three days Pharaoh will lift your head from you and hang you on a tree; birds will eat your flesh from you. (40:19)*

Why did Yosef interpret the bakers' dream in this manner? What clue did he have that the baker would die? Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, responded by citing a story. Once, at an art festival, the organizers hung up a picture that was drawn by a world-famous artist. It was a picture of a man holding a basket of fruit in his hands. The illustration was so realistic that birds would fly over the picture and attempt to eat the fruit! This picture amazed everyone, to the point that a prize was offered to anyone who could find an error in this picture. A wise man came along and said, "Although the fruits truly appear to be realistic, the man does not. If the man really appeared to be alive, the birds would be afraid to go near him. The birds' bold approach indicates that they know the person is not real." The man received the prize.

Similarly, when the baker said that in his dream the birds ate from the basket that was on his head, Yosef knew that he was a dead man. Otherwise, why would the birds not be afraid to approach him?

And Yaakov settled in the land of his fathers' sojourning. (37:1) The words "vayeshev," settled, and "megurei," sojourning, contrast with one another. One implies permanence, while the latter alludes to a temporary state. Indeed, this formulation catalyzes Chazal to suggest that after a long exile and numerous struggles, Yaakov finally wished to settle down, to live peacefully. Hashem sent the anguish of Yosef to disturb his efforts. Hashem told him, "Are the righteous not satisfied with what awaits them in Olam Habah that they expect to live at ease in Olam Hazehe?" In other words, the righteous have no right to demand tranquillity in this world.

We must attempt to reconcile ourselves with Chazal's statement. Yaakov literally went through a life of misery. He did not have a "good day." From the enmity of his brother, Eisav; to the deception of his father-in-law, Lavan; to losing his beloved Rachel; to the tragedy of his daughter, Dinah; to the near loss of his sons Yosef, Shimon, and Binyamin, Yaakov clearly suffered throughout his life. Was he not entitled to a little *menuchas ha'nefesh*, tranquillity and rest? Avraham had Olam Hazehe; he was wealthy, respected, and admired by all. Yitzchak also achieved prominence and material success. Why did Hashem criticize Yaakov for wanting to enjoy life? Is a positive experience in Olam Hazehe forbidden?

There is ostensibly no prohibition against enjoying the fruits of this world. Commerce is commendable as long as it is performed in accordance with Torah dictate. We are permitted any material benefits that we reap through methods that are above reproach. We are expected to utilize opportunities to enjoy a lifestyle of Torah and *avodas Hashem*, helping those institutions and individuals who are in need. Indeed, shortly before his death, the Gaon M'Vilna lamented that he was leaving a world where, for just a few coins, one can purchase a pair of *tzitzis*, for which he would merit Olam Habah. Therefore, what was inappropriate about Yaakov Avinu's request?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, observes that there is "sufficient" Olam Hazehe for everyone to enjoy. It is not as if we fear that a *tzaddik* might receive too much of This World. We may foster divergent attitudes, however, towards material possessions in This World. Avraham and Yitzchak were completely satisfied with their lots in Olam Habah. They viewed their portions in Olam Hazehe as

nothing more than a medium for attaining eternity--no more, no less. Everything on this world, all the pleasures, benefits, and moments of joy and tranquillity had no value in their own right--only as a vehicle for Olam Habah. All their days they wandered from place to place, spreading the word of G-d. Even when Avraham remained in a place for an extended period of time, such as Chevron and Plishtim, the Torah views it only as a "sojourn." Yitzchak, who lived in Eretz Yisrael the entire time, is also described as a "ger b'aretz," a sojourner in the land. Their Olam Hazeh was intrinsically meaningless to them. Everything was oriented towards Olam Habah.

When Yaakov sought to settle in the land of his fathers' sojourning, Chazal sense that he was attempting to transform his perspective from the attitude that his ancestors had embraced. He wanted to settle in the land, to benefit from Olam Hazeh, to relax in peaceful solitude--as an end in itself. He valued Olam Hazeh in its own right.

As a result of Yaakov's attitude towards Olam Hazeh, he was plagued with the anguish of Yosef. He distinguished Yosef from the rest of his sons by giving him a multi-colored garment, reflecting a tendency towards valuing the material. This catalyzed envy and enmity among the brothers. When one views material goods as nothing more than a medium for attaining spiritual rewards, there is no room for jealousy. Yaakov's act of attributing value to Olam Hazeh caused his later anguish.

*Behold, a caravan of Yishmaelim was coming from Gilead, their camels bearing spices, balsam, and lotus...(37:25)*

What does the composition of the Yishmaelim's cargo mean to us? Rashi claims that Hashem intervened on Yosef's behalf. Yishmaelim usually carry foul-smelling cargo. In order to spare Yosef from being subjected to the harsh odor, Hashem "arranged" that this caravan carry only sweet-smelling spices. This is enigmatic! Imagine being sold as a slave -- with no hope for redemption. Yosef's life was literally falling apart in front of his eyes. Should he be concerned about the odor of the cargo that was to accompany him?

Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl, compares this to a sick man who has undergone a very serious and dangerous surgery. Everyone stands around his bed as he lies unconscious from the effects of the surgery. Suddenly, he opens his eyes; all assembled break into extreme joy, knowing that phase one of his recovery has been successfully achieved. His open eyes are far from proof that the surgery was successful, but the initial alertness is a hopeful sign that the patient is on the road to recovery.

The same idea may be applied to Yosef. Amidst his terrible predicament, Yosef noted a slight change, a behavior pattern which is atypical. Thus, he was encouraged and hopeful. Everyday the Arab merchants carried foul-smelling cargo. If --specifically today the caravan to which he was sold was carrying sweet-smelling spices, it was a message from Hashem that the future would not be so bad. There was hope. There is no greater assurance than the knowledge that Hashem is with us--all the way. Perhaps if we look a little closer, we might also see the silver lining shining through the clouds.

*And Reuven returned to the pit, and behold Yosef was not in the pit! So he rent his garments. (37:29)*

The Midrash questions from where did Reuven return? They respond that he was sitting in

sackcloth and fasting, remorseful over his impetuous reaction to Yaakov moving his bed into Bilhah's tent. Although Reuven did nothing more than tamper with his father's bed, the Torah viewed his action as being a transgression. He now repented for his sin. The Midrash continues that Hashem told Reuven that previously no one had ever sinned and repented. Since he initiated teshuvah, he was to merit that his descendant, Hoshea, would petition Klal Yisrael to perform teshuvah with the clarion call of "Shuvah Yisrael." Two questions confront us upon learning this Midrash. First, why does the Torah allude to Reuven's teshuvah specifically now during mechiras Yosef, the sale of Yosef? Second, was Reuven truly the one to originate teshuvah? Are we to ignore Adam and Kayin, who repented long before Reuven?

Horav M.D. Soloveitchik, Shlita, cites an interesting answer to these questions. When the brothers sold Yosef, they ostensibly knew that their actions would cause great pain to their father. Yet, they proceeded with their plans. To a certain degree, they had lost respect for their father. They sold his beloved Yosef despite their father's obvious feelings. Reuven blamed himself for this lack of respect. Had he not slighted his father, perhaps the brothers would have retained their esteem for Yaakov. Inadvertently, Reuven felt he had caused mechiras Yosef. He humiliated his father to the point that the brothers were no longer sensitive to his feelings, thereby leaving them no regrets over the sale of their brother.

A single sin on the part of one individual can catalyze a number of sins for a group. Reuven feared the worst. He feared that his error, the result of a moment of impetuous zeal, caused the sale of Yosef, an error of such grave proportion that we still feel its punitive effect today. Reuven's teshuvah was unique. He repented not only for his own sin, but also for the sins that were caused by it. His teshuvah is consistent with the parsha of mechiras Yosef, because he earned the onus of guilt over mechiras Yosef.

Reuven's concept of teshuvah was novel. One repents for the sins of his own commission. One feels remorse for his own actions. When do we find an individual accepting the blame for the consequences of his actions? Where do we find someone repenting for a sin that he did not himself commit, --but inadvertently caused? Do we ever take into account the effect of our sins? How many people permit themselves to relax their levels of observance as the result of an inappropriate action they saw another individual perform? Reuven's teshuvah was different. Such repentance had never before been reported. He repented not only for his wrongdoing, but also for its repercussions.

*There is no one greater in the house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife; how can I have perpetrated this evil? (39:9)*

Sforno interprets the idea of "this evil," to mean the performance of bad in return for good. Yosef's prime concern was the gratitude he owed his master. He could not respond to the advances of his master's wife because of his hakoras hatov, the appreciation he felt to Potiphar. We may infer from here a lesson regarding the significance of hakoras hatov, and how far one must go to fulfill his obligation to acknowledge gratitude. Yosef was subject to the blandishments of Potiphar's wife on an almost constant basis. She tried to entice him in every way possible. She would speak to him affectionately; she varied her mode of dress; she threatened him with prison and humiliation; she threatened to blind him; she even resorted to offering him a bribe. He ignored her threats and rejected her offers due to hakoras hatov. He acknowledged the good that Potiphar had done for him. Thus, he adhered to his obligation to be makir tov. He was willing to suffer pain and humiliation, all for hakoras

hatov. Why? What did he really owe Potiphar? He had a job. Potiphar needed a manager and Yosef was available. Does Yosef owe Potiphar that much gratitude? One would think that the opposite makes more sense; Potiphar owed Yosef! Indeed, Chazal tell us that originally Potiphar made Yosef work very hard. Only after he noticed that everything Yosef touched became blessed, did Potiphar relent and grant Yosef a prominent position.

Horav A. Hensch Leibovitz, Shlita, remarks that regardless of the motivation of the benefactor, the obligation to recognize and appreciate the good one receives demands reciprocity. Yosef owed Potiphar hakoras hatov even though Potiphar was not worthy of it. Potiphar's worthiness, however, is not an appropriate standard. We always look for reasons to justify our lack of appreciation to others. If we would realize that our attitude towards others defines our own *menchlichkeit*, human decency, we might be able to train ourselves to have greater respect for others.

*And he asked Pharaoh's courtiers who were with him in the prison.... "Why do you appear downcast today?" (40:7)*

Four words! Yosef turned to the dejected, deposed courtiers of Pharaoh, noticing their downcast appearance, he asked them, "Why are you so downcast? What is the cause of your depression?" Yosef's sensitivity catalyzed circumstances that changed his entire life and the history of Klal Yisrael. Our course of history was altered because Yosef asked a simple question. He noticed--he cared--he took action. First and foremost, however, he noticed. This caring for another human being ultimately led to Yosef's salvation from imprisonment and elevation to the position of viceroy. Thus, his father, Yaakov, was able to come down to Egypt as royalty -- all as the result of a few words.

Horav Ze'ev Weinberger, Shlita, cites Targum Onkelos' interpretation of the pasuk describing Yosef as foreman in the prison, "And everything that was done there, he would accomplish." (39:22) Everyone -- prisoners and warden alike -- admired Yosef. He succeeded in everything that he undertook. He was, therefore, given dominion over the entire prison. In translating the above pasuk Onkelos says, "And everything that was done was according to his command." This does not seem consistent with the pasuk which implies that Yosef did more than command--he worked! Horav Weinberger says that Yosef's tendency to work with the other prisoners achieved for him the respect and admiration necessary for his directives to be executed. When the other prisoners saw that Yosef cared for them and that he also worked with them, they were happy to carry out his orders. All of this happened as a result of Yosef's sensitivity to them, his caring.