

Candle Lighting

5:11

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:37

Sunset

5:30

Motzei  
Shabbat

6:08



Parshat HaShavuah

וישב

VAYEISHEV

כ"א כסלו תשע"ה

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Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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## THE CARE OF A LEADER

RABBI DR. DAVID SHABTAI

When Yosef's brothers are considering killing him, Reuven hears of their plans and "saves him [Yosef] from their hands. And he [Reuven] said, let us not kill him" (37:21). Instead, Reuven suggests that the brothers toss Yosef into a pit and not take any physical action against him.

The Torah testifies that Reuven's true intention was "so that he [Reuven] could save him [Yosef] from their [the other 9 brothers] hands and return him [Yosef] to his father" (37:22). While the brothers indeed follow Reuven's advice, the outcome is not quite as Reuven anticipated. After this episode, Reuven leaves the scene [Rashi explains that he went home to help out with Yaakov] and by the time he comes back to the pit, the other brothers have already sold Yosef to a caravan of traders. Realizing that Yosef is no longer in the pit, Reuven is completely distraught and can't imagine facing his father's grief (see Rashi 37:30).

A little later, we get filled in on some additional details that were seemingly left out. A few years later, the brothers find themselves face to face with Yosef in Egypt. They have come to buy food because of a famine in Canaan and do not recognize Yosef, who is the leader of the land. After accusing them of being spies, Yosef (still in disguise) demands that they leave one brother with him in Egypt, return to their father, and bring Binyamin along with them the next time that they come down.

Dealing with this setback, the brothers talk amongst themselves, "And each man said to his brother, but we are guilty for our brother, since we saw the anguish of his soul when he begged us and we did not listen. And this is why this trouble is now befalling us" (42:21). Reuven immediately responds, "Did I not speak to you [then] saying, 'Do not sin against the child!' and you did not listen; and now his blood is being avenged."

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## DON'T GIVE UP

JOLIE DAVIES ('16)  
MONTHLY WRITER

Parshat Vayeishev tells the story of Yosef's life, complete with all of his trials and tribulations. His very own brothers hate him and sell him into slavery. He is accused of raping Potiphar's wife. Even after he sticks to his morals and rejects her, Yosef is still thrown into jail and forgotten for twelve years. However, despite all of Yosef's struggles and hardships, he never feels sorry for himself; in fact, he is always empathetic to others around him. Specifically, in this week's parsha, we see Yosef's compassion towards the baker and the butler in jail.

The Talmud (Brachot 10a) explains, "Even with a sharp sword at your neck, don't give up on mercy." In other words, even when there is an obstacle in one's way and the world seems like a very dark place, one can never give up on hoping for Hashem's mercy, because the light can always come and help him/her.

Rabbi Saul Rosenblatt tells a story that a survivor from Auschwitz once told him. This woman had treasured the Talmud's phrase during the duration of her time in the camp; however, instead of "don't give up on mercy," she understood it as "don't give up on being merciful." She refused to be too self-involved and to forget about others around her.

When someone is surrounded by hardships, it's easy to think he or she is the only person with difficulties. But having that mindset can only lead a person to becoming self-absorbed and uncaring. We all have problems, but our personal problems can never be an excuse to lose our compassion. Circumstances can rob you of many things, but when you stop caring about others, you voluntarily relinquish your humanity. Yosef, even in jail, was empathetic towards others, just like the survivor of Auschwitz mentioned above. Both in Auschwitz and in the depths of Pharaoh's dungeons, the sharp sword was at their necks but they did not lose their mercifulness.

In our lives, we might feel we have "a sword at our necks," yet we still cannot give up our care and compassion. Since our compassion for other humans is what makes us who we are, we must remember that no one can take that away from us.

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## DREAMS OF POTENTIAL

CHAYA COHEN ('16)  
MONTHLY WRITER

Yosef, known as "The Dreamer" to his family, has a life that is seemingly tied to his ability to interpret dreams. He inflames the envy of his brothers when he shares his dreams of the stalks of wheat and the stars bowing to him. Later on in life, having correctly interpreted Pharaoh's officers' dreams, and then those of Pharaoh himself, he rises to glory and power. These sets of dreams seem to profoundly impact the life of Yosef. Their significance in the events of Yosef's life and his family's lives compel us to analyze them carefully and derive an important message from their meaning.

Yosef's first dream is of 11 sheaves of wheat all bowing to a center sheaf. The brothers interpret this to mean that Yosef, the brother with the colored coat, believes that his 11 brothers will bow down to him. In the second dream about the sun, moon, and stars, the brothers repeatedly think that Yosef is trying to assert his greatness, which in turn arouses their envy. But, the Torah relates that Yaakov "שמר את הדבר" - "guarded the matter" (37:11) of Yosef's dreams and anxiously waited for them to come to fruition. This raises the question, what did Yaakov see in Yosef's dreams that the brothers seemingly miss?

Rashi recounts the similarities between Yosef and Yaakov. While analyzing their lives, one might note that both of them dreamt dreams in their lifetimes. Not only that, but both dreams included the same two elements – *gashmiyut* and *ruchniyut* – earthly and heavenly matters. Yaakov dreamt of a ladder standing on earth but reaching towards the heavens. He dreamt of ascending from the earthly matters and climbing the ladder to dwell in the presence of Hashem. His dream was centered around Hashem and the angels. In contrast, Yosef's dreams seem to be about his brothers paying

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homage to him. It seems that the brothers are correct in their envy and anger towards Yosef's aura of self-importance. So again, why did Yaakov guard Yosef's dream and expect a positive outcome?

Yaakov understands Yosef's dream on a deeper level. He understands that Yosef is not dreaming of himself, but of Man reaching his highest potential. He dreams of Man being limitless in his capability. Yosef is not being egotistical; he dreams of a world where Man can fulfill his responsibility to serve Hashem in the ultimate way. Yaakov's dreams were about heavenly angels, while Yosef's dreams are about heavenly humans. Yosef fulfills his dreams when, over the course of 22 years, he overcomes each trial and tribulation before him and still emerges with complete faith in Hashem; Yosef exceeds Yaakov's confidence in him and rightfully earns the name as Yosef HaTzadik.

## THE SCENT OF ORDER

YONI MEYER ('18)

This week's parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, deals with the story of Yosef and his siblings. The pasuk says: "And behold, a caravan of Yishmaelites was coming from Gilad and their camels were carrying spices, balm, and ladanum down to Mitzrayim" (37:25). From here, a question emerges. Why was it necessary for the Torah to give details about the goods on the caravan that would ultimately bring Yosef to Mitzrayim?

Rashi explains that these caravans would usually carry foul smelling loads. However, Hashem made sure that this caravan would only be carrying fragrant spices, since they would be transporting a tzadik.

The Zichron Meir explains that this is a foundation for how Hashem runs the world. Every person has a specific amount of pain and suffering he can endure and, once that measure is filled, Hashem won't increase it. People are usually so overwhelmed with their big problems, that they tend to overlook their smaller hardships. But Hashem doesn't. Hashem knows that Yosef would have to endure the humiliation of slavery, but he did not have to endure a bad smell on his way to Mitzrayim. Therefore, Hashem summoned a special caravan that did not smell terrible, so that Yosef wouldn't have to suffer any more than he could handle.

This is an amazing concept and a beautiful understanding of how Hashem runs the world. We might feel like He is making us suffer and feel pain, but He always has a reason for it. He will not make us endure more suffering than required and understands our pain limit. Hashem pays close attention to our lives -- nothing gets overlooked.

## TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE

ALYSON WINDERBAUM ('18)

This week's parsha, Parshat Vayeishev, includes the sale of Yosef by his brothers. However, before they decided to sell him, Yosef's brothers actually had the plan to kill him! Besides for the fact that it is mind-boggling how the very founders of our nation could even think about murder, let alone the murder of their own brother, another aspect of this parsha is equally puzzling. Out of the ten brothers who were present during the scheme, only one brother stood up for Yosef: Reuven! This is surprising because Yaakov's favoritism of Yosef most likely hit Reuven the hardest.

Reuven was the *bechor* and the leader of his brothers before Yosef came along and displaced him. However, rather than channeling his jealousy and helping with the plot or even just remaining passive, he channeled his "pro-activeness" and stood up for his brother. Even though he lost his status to Yosef, Reuven was not a bystander and he at least tried to be *active* in saving him.

Take this lesson and apply it to your life. The next time you see a fellow classmate in need, whether they dropped all their books or are not being treated nicely, go help! Channel your "inner Reuven" and take an active role.



This entire dialogue is missing from the initial story. And even some of the parts that overlap aren't entirely consistent. In this retelling of the story, Reuven mentions that he tried to completely stop his brothers from doing anything bad; however, in the original telling of the story, we only hear of Reuven suggesting an alternative means to dispose of Yosef.

It's the Torah's narrative in the original story that tells us that Reuven's motivation was in fact to save Yosef's life. Ramban (37:22) in fact suggests that when Reuven was arguing with his brothers, he initially told them not to harm Yosef at all (as Reuven states in 42:22), but they did not listen to him. Reuven then resorts to a different tactic that he intended as a means to buy some time.

R. Elchanan Samet suggests that even in the original telling of the story, we can find a hint to this idea in that the Torah introduces Reuven's speech twice. First in (37:21) we read, "And he [Reuven] said, let us not kill him." Immediately thereafter, instead of just continuing his sentence, the Torah (37:22) reintroduces Reuven, "And Reuven said to them," suggesting that they throw Yosef into the pit.

It seems that after his first suggestion, Reuven got no response, merely blank stares. He was waiting for somebody to step up and agree with him. When that didn't happen, he needed to change tactics and that is why the Torah states again, "And Reuven said," to suggest that this is not a direct continuation of Reuven's initial message.

In the retelling of the story, when the brothers are reacting to Yosef's demand of imprisoning one of them, we see two different responses to crisis. The brothers offer a religious and positive response – taking responsibility for what they did and engaging in serious soul searching, recognizing the Divine hand in history.

Reuven, on the other hand, accuses his brothers of the crime and tries to completely absolve himself from any responsibility. Whether or not he was correct is not the issue. Even if he fought valiantly against his brothers to save Yosef (he didn't), Reuven could still have been more supportive when his brothers are expressing remorse.

In most families described in the Torah, the firstborn is supposed to be the leader, the one who carries the torch of the tradition forward. Not so with Yaakov; Reuven is passed over and out of the running for consideration. *Chazal* give several reasons for what particular reason was Reuven not worthy. This instance, even if not a reason in itself, is likely just a symptom of some larger character trait.

A leader must be somebody who not only takes responsibility for his or her own errors, but even when the leader was in the right, helps and supports others who are experiencing remorse and regret. A leader needs to lead not only by standing out in front as an example, but also by making sure that all of his followers know that he has their back.

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