

A PARASHA THOUGHT

True Motivations

The story of *mechiras Yosef* (the sale of Joseph), beginning in last week's *parasha*, is amongst the most puzzling in the entire Torah. A simple reading would seem that Yosef's brothers were jealous of the favoritism Yaakov showed him. Therefore, they contemplated killing Yosef before finally settling on selling him into slavery. It goes without saying that it is incomprehensible to understand this at face value. Behavior of this kind would be shocking by anyone, let alone by the *Shevatim*, the core of the Jewish people, whom the Talmud describe (*Shabbos* 146a) as being without imperfection. Clearly, something more than the simple understanding is at play here.

The Seforno (37:18) sheds light by explaining that the brothers were under the impression that Yosef was attempting to kill them, as evidenced by his constantly bringing bad reports about them to Yaakov. As such, they were allowed – even obligated – to do whatever was necessary to prevent themselves from being harmed. Seforno reinforces this idea with the fact that in this week's *parasha*, we only find (41:21,22) the brothers expressing regret for the lack of compassion they expressed by ignoring Yosef's cries for help. That is, they regretted **how** they sold him, but not the actual sale – for that they felt justified.

However, we still must understand why the Torah attributes the brothers selling Yosef as being due to their jealousy. According to the Seforno, they truly felt that selling him was the right thing to do. A beautiful explanation, attributed to an unnamed *chacham* (sage), is found in the *sefer Even Shleima* (4:17, fn.14).

This *chacham* explains that whenever we find

the Torah attributing a sin to a great person, G-d forbid to think that that person realized they were doing something wrong but still did so. Rather, they definitely felt they were doing the right thing – but deep, deep down what led them to that mistaken conclusion was a *middah* (character trait) which hadn't been perfected, which subconsciously led them to rationalize a certain behavior. Therefore, the Torah attributes the brothers selling Yosef as being because of their jealousy – not that they were aware of it, but deep down, a tiny bit of jealousy led them to the conclusion that they were right about selling Yosef.

In short, subconscious emotions can lead people to rationalize all kinds of behavior, without realizing what is truly motivating them.

There is a strong connection to Chanukah here. The Greek culture which the Jews found themselves surrounded by was amongst the most advanced on earth. Greek minds developed the basis of much of modern science and mathematics. Aristotle, writes the Rambam (letter to R' Shmuel ibn Tibn), achieved the highest level attainable by the human intellect before reaching prophecy. Despite their genius, the Greeks never reached a belief in one G-d creating the world, a belief incumbent on every Jew, even the simplest. How do we understand this, asks Rabbi Elchanon Wasserman. The awesome design that exists on every level of this world screams that Someone designed it. How did the Greeks not realize that? The answer, writes Reb Elchanon, is simple. The Greeks wanted to be free to pursue their desires. Belief in a G-d involved in this

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RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

WITH
RABBI CHAIM HEINEMAN

Our *Balei Mussar* teach that the crux of the fight between the Jews and the *Yavanim* (Greeks) was their opposing approach and view of life. The Hellenists promoted a secular lifestyle which revolved around tangibles and materialism. They focused on beauty, intellect, sports, and personal gratification. Their motto and attitude towards spirituality was that if it cannot be seen it does not exist. The Jews, on the other hand, valued spirituality, Torah study, *mitzvos*, self-control, and the constant ability of a human to grow and get closer to Hashem.

Similarly, the Alter of Novardok infers from Eisav's request in *parshas Toldos* that Eisav and his descendants also were focused on physicality and impulsiveness. We find Eisav returns home from the field and requests "some of that red stuff since I am tired." Why does he not call the lentils by name? Furthermore, even if the type of food eluded Eisav at that moment, is that a reason that, as the *possuk* says, he should acquire the name "Edom" forever? The Alter explains that Esav was superficial and would be dazzled by shiny and bright colors. Not caring whether there is substance or whether he is giving up the first-born rights for fleeting pleasures, he instinctively and impulsively would get consumed with whatever allured him at the moment, ignoring the consequences of his actions. That is why the name "Edom" stuck, because this represented what he stood for and his outlook on life.

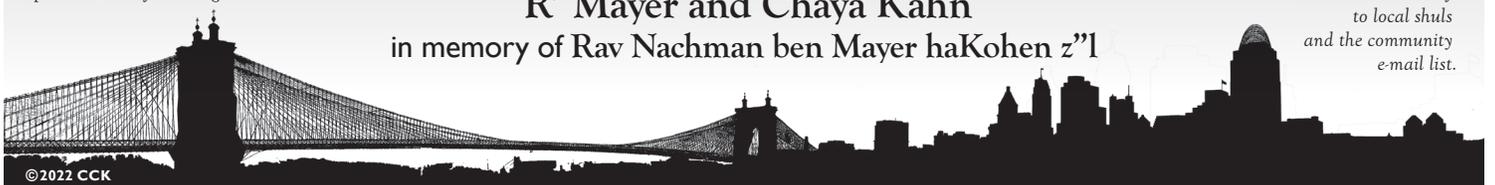
A few Sundays ago, the Kollel had their annual campaign at the revolving top floor of the beautiful Radisson hotel. The hotel is situated downtown

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

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adjacent to the Paul Brown Stadium, the home of the Cincinnati Bengals, who were playing at the same time. In fact, during one of the breakout classes on the 16th floor, I caught some people distractedly staring out of the window trying to catch a glimpse of the game. After both events ended, the hotel lobby and elevators filled up with non-local fans who had traveled in for the game and were staying overnight. While returning upstairs to clean up, I found myself in the elevator with a father and five sons who had the Bengals name and logo on every article of clothing they were wearing and even painted on their skin. During the short ride up to the 18th floor of the tower, I was surprised to learn that they reside in Syracuse, NY, and make an effort to attend as many Bengals games as possible. Considering that I do not find many people doing the same to learn Torah in our Kollel, I asked him what inspired or prompted him to become such a serious Bengals fan. I was expecting one of a few answers: 1) I grew up in Ohio, 2) my grandmother used to live here and she instructed me to stick with the family tradition, 3) my favorite player was a Bengal and I therefore started rooting for the entire team, 4) at some point while I was growing up, the Bengals were the best team (which never was the case!) and I jumped on the bandwagon ever since, or 5) some other compelling or non-compelling reason....

Instead this fellow looks at me and says, "while growing up as a teenager in NY, I just loved the orange and black

A PARASHA THOUGHT

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world would restrict that freedom. Therefore, subconsciously, the Greeks could not come to terms with belief in one G-d creating the world and had to develop an alternate philosophy which wouldn't restrict their pleasure seeking. In other words, the Greeks' notorious hedonism was not an outgrowth of their beliefs. Rather, their beliefs were produced by their hedonism.

May we all be fortunate enough to realize what is truly motivating us and use that self-knowledge to further our growth.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Shabbos and a wonderful Chanukah! 🕍



colors of the Bengals helmets and I and my sons have been hooked since then." I turned to him in disbelief hoping he would end off with "and the tickets are affordable," but he didn't. Rather, his son, whose hands and legs were decorated in orange, chimed in while exiting the elevator "yes, my dad loves the Bengals' colors, which is why my kids will likely be Bengals fans also!" I stopped and thought to myself. Though the Alter was referring to Esav many years ago, this superficiality holds true with some of his descendants some four thousand years later! 🕍

HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

We know that the Haftorah of the week is generally connected to the Parsha; however, during a holiday, it is connected to the holiday, so this week our Haftorah is connected to Chanukah. The Haftorah is from a prophecy of Zechariah. Zechariah is among the group of the last prophets, along with Chagi and Malachi. Rashi, in the opening of Zechariah, writes, "The prophecy of Zechariah is very closed, since there are visions like a dream that need explanation."

In chapter 7 verse 3, Hashem tells Yehoshua *Kohen Hagadol* (not to be confused with Yehoshua, the student of Moshe) if you give rebuke to your children who have sinned, I will give you "walkers among the standers." Rav Dessler explained that angels, as great as they are, do not have the ability to grow; they are what they are and, for that reason, they are referred to as "Standers." However, a person has the ability to grow from level to level and is called a "walker." Rav Dessler adds that this applies even after a person's death, as he has the ability to climb in heaven to greater heights. How does one grow spiritually after death when we know that in *Olam Haba* (the world to come) a person can no longer do *mitzvos*?

Chazal (the sages) call a son the *kara d'avhua* (leg of the father). It is said in the name of Rav Hutner that this is because the son gives the father the ability to walk even after he leaves this world. When the son does *mitzvos* the father continues to walk. 🕍

TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI YEHUDAH LEVI

As many have just experienced, there is a strong emphasis on eating oily foods on Chanukah. The rationale for oil consumption is that it highlights the miracle of the oil remaining lit for eight days. The source for this custom is an interesting one, and can be found in a 1944 collection of ancient manuscripts, entitled *Srid U'palit*. The book records a manuscript from a Rabbi Dovid Hasabouni of Sale, Morocco, that was in the possession of Rabbi Yehudah ben R' Meir Toledano, an 18th century Moroccan scholar. In the document, Rabbi Hasabouni cites and translates a text written in Arabic by Rabbi Maimon Ben Yosef, father of the Rambam, highlighting the importance of observing Jewish customs. As an example, Rabbi Maimon describes a long-time practice of eating donuts fried in oil in honor of Chanukah. Apparently, already in the 12th century indulging in oily delights was an old tradition. Other elements of the foods we eat such as potato and jelly, appear to be a product of culture. 🕍

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