

## A PARASHA THOUGHT

### The Silver Lining

RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER  
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz raises an interesting question. Yosef was sold to an Arab caravan traveling to Egypt. The Torah points out that this caravan was carrying fragrant "spices, balsam, and lotus." Rashi, quoting Midrash, explains that this was a highly unusual occurrence. The Arabs usually carry foul smelling substances, but Hashem arranged that Yosef shouldn't have to undergo that unpleasant experience.

This is unbelievable! Put yourself in Yosef's shoes for a minute. Here he went from learning Torah with and basking in the presence of his holy father, Yaakov, to suddenly being dragged away to be sold as a lowly slave in Egypt – the ultimate place of impurity and depravity. Egypt was famed for being a place where no servant escaped; it seemed like he would be there forever! Can you begin to imagine the pain and distress he must have been experiencing at the time?! Do you think that in such a state he would even care if the caravan was carrying fragrant or foul-smelling spices?

Rav Shmulevitz answers with a penetrating thought. Yosef was in a very low place at the time. Precisely then, when he might be prone

to just giving up, Hashem sends him a small, sweet-smelling message that he is neither lost nor by himself. Hashem is with him, "holding his hand" on his difficult, but necessary journey. This was his silver lining, the beacon of light giving him strength by knowing that Hashem loves him and is with him.

The purpose of the fragrant spices wasn't just to prevent Yosef from undergoing an uncomfortable experience, but to strengthen him with the knowledge that he wasn't alone. Even through difficult times, Hashem knows exactly what he's going through (see *Sichos Mussar*: 16).

Mishchas Shemen quotes commentaries who use this idea to answer the famous question of the Beis Yosef who asks why we celebrate and say *Hallel* on the first day of Chanuka. There was enough oil in the flask to burn for one night, hence the miracle was only the additional seven days the Menorah burned!

Meiri (1249-1316) explains that the miracle of the first day was the finding of the flask itself! The Jews were living through a very dark, oppressive period, and Hashem's clear orchestration that one small flask was spared was that ray of light, showing them that He is always with them, even in the darkest of times.

Rav Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev (1740-1809) notes that most Jewish holidays, such as Pesach, Sukkos, and Purim, take place in the middle of the lunar month when the moon is full. Chanuka is the exception, beginning at the end of the month (on the 25th) when the moon wanes. This symbolizes that the Jews, compared to the moon, sometimes are on the decline, living through spiritual and physical hardships; yet they still have the special Divine Providence of Hashem, and will once again grow and shine brightly. 🌙

*Mazal Tov to*

Rabbi & Mrs. Kanowitz on the  
birth of a baby boy 🌙

## THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH  
RABBI YITZCHAK PREIS

**Q:** If I'm reading the text correctly, Reuvein was not present when Yosef was sold into slavery. And I'm under the impression that Binyomin was also not involved. In this case, there were nine guilty brothers. Yet, on Yom Kippur we describe ten martyred sages (*asara harugei malchus*) whose deaths somehow atone for ten brothers of Yosef. Why ten!?

**A:** Rabbeinu Bechaye addresses this question. He suggests that although Reuvein was not in fact guilty for the sale of Yosef, he had a different need for atonement due to the sin of his tampering with his father's bed in last week's *parasha*.

He offers another fascinating suggestion: The tenth brother needing atonement was not Reuvein, but Yosef! Since the sale was the result of the sentiments triggered by Yosef's statements, Yosef shared some of the culpability.

**Q:** When Yosef is sent to his brothers, he encounters a man with whom he shares that he is looking for his brothers and requests, "Please tell me where they are..." Shouldn't Yosef first ask the man if he has seen them before assuming that he knows their location?

**A:** Your question is actually seen by some as answering another question: Rashi tells us that the "man" was not a typical man, but rather a *malach* (angel). How does Rashi know this? Seeing the confidence that Yosef has in this "man" being able

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**Kollel Chanuka Event**  
Monday, December 19th  
THE SECOND NIGHT OF CHANUKA  
At CHDS | For men

**FAST & FURIOUS  
EIGHT  
DIVREI  
TORAH**  
in Five  
Minutes  
or less!

**PROGRAM**  
8:30pm HOT BUFFET  
8:45pm FAST & FURIOUS DIVREI TORAH  
~10:00pm MAASIV

**SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER**  
R' Zvi Ryzman

**R' Zalman Frager**

**R' Yosef Alden**

**R' Doron Lazarus**

**R' Shmuel Botnick MC**

**R' Aryeh Pridonoff**

**R' Yechiel Fishman**

**R' Eric Littman**

**R' Yosef Kirschner**

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## THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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to reveal the brothers' destination indicates that Yosef perceived the "man" to have supernatural tracking tools as could be expected of a *malach*. 🕯️

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing [parasha@cincynkollel.org](mailto:parasha@cincynkollel.org). Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

### A Night Out for the Whole Family!

Join the Cincinnati  
Community Kollel for a  
Chanukah Family  
Drive-In Event

6:30PM | Wednesday,  
December 21st  
Fourth night of Chanukah  
Amberley Green

Stories, trivia, raffles,  
prizes, special refreshments  
delivered to your car, and more!



## HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

Our Haftorah is taken from the *sefer Amos*. The *sefer* begins by giving context of when Amos said his prophecy, two years before the "anger." Most of the *Rishonim* (early commentators) understand that this "anger" is referring to when Uziyahu, who was the King of Yehuda, went into the *Beis Hamikdash* (Temple) to bring the *ketores* (incense).

The book of *Amos* is full of *mussar* (rebuke) to the Jewish people. Our Haftorah opens in chapter 2 verse 6, saying that Hashem will forgive three sins of the Jewish people, but the fourth He will not forgive. The verse continues in delineating what the fourth sin is: "For their having sold a righteous man for silver and a destitute one for the sake of a pair of shoes." Radak explained that the three sins refer to the three cardinal sins (murder, idol worship, and immorality), which God can forgive, but bending justice by taking and giving bribes, that Hashem will not forgive.

The Midrash *Tanchuma* (*Vayeshev* 2), based on this verse in *Amos*, records that after the brothers sold Yosef for twenty *selaim* of silver, they then took the money and used it to buy shoes. In light of this, we have a new understanding of this *posuk*. Hashem has patience for our sins. However, when Jews hate each other – for that Hashem does not have patience. The Gemara in *Yoma* writes that the first *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins, but that exile was only 70 years. However, the second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of baseless hatred – and we still are suffering from that exile. This idea is also a connection between our *parasha* and Haftorah.

In *sefer Masas Kapi* (vol. 5, p. 172), Rav Dovid Cohen raises the following question: Why did the brothers specifically purchase shoes with money they made in the sale of Yosef? He suggests a fascinating approach: There is a deep reason why we wear shoes. We can understand this based on the *Derech Hashem* (Vol. 2, ch. 4:2), which says that when Adam was created, he was on a much higher level than the level a person is on now. When he sinned, the entirety of Adam's level took a huge plunge to a very low level. Adam was kicked out of the Garden of Eden and Hashem cursed the land (*Bereishis* 3:17) that it will no longer give food without the work of man. For this reason, we wear shoes to provide a separation between us and the cursed earth. Additionally, when Cain killed Abel the world was cursed again (Rashi), based on the verse (4:11) that when the earth accepted the blood of Abel the earth sustained an additional curse. However, writes the *Derech Hashem*, God gave the opportunity for subsequent generations to retake the level of Adam. The brothers had climbed the ladder to retake that level and therefore did not need the protection of shoes. When the brothers sold Yosef and dipped his coat in blood, it was on some level as if they killed Yosef, and by doing so they slipped back to the level of Adam after the sin. Therefore, they needed shoes to protect them from the curse of the land. Based on this approach they needed shoes without realizing that it was punishment for their actions. 🕯️

## TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

If you ask people which words they associate with Chanukah, "dreidel" will definitely be towards the top of the list. Let's examine the background of this practice.

The reason most commonly given for playing dreidel is that after the Greeks forbade the Jews from studying Torah, the dreidel served as a simple way to conceal the true reason why Jews were gathering.

If we are to work with this understanding, the reason for playing dreidel has roots as ancient as Chanukah itself, that being the second century. However, the first source to suggest this idea is the *sefer Otzar Minhagei Yeshurun*, written by Rabbi Avraham Eliezer Hershowitz and published in 1917, who attributes it to Rabbi Eliezer Zelig Karlstein, who lived in the late 1800s. This is highly surprising if dreidel has such ancient origins. The dreidel does share a striking resemblance with the *teetotum*, a four sided top inscribed with various letters, which was popular in many European countries as part of a gambling game from around the sixteenth century. This thought is reinforced by reading the accounts of many Sefardic Jews, who write that they saw their first dreidel when they met European Jews.

However dreidel started, it definitely has become a Jewish custom, and was practiced by such greats as the Chassam Sofer (*Minhagei Chassam Sofer*, ch. 11, note 13) and many Chassidic Rebbes.

[This is as opposed to playing cards over Chanukah, which appears to have been a common practice and was vigorously opposed by many Rabbinic authorities. See, for example *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Orach Chaim* 670,9).]

The reason commonly given for the four letters on the dreidel, "gimel," "nun," "hei," and "shin," is that they stand for "neis gadol heia shum" – a great miracle happened there, there referring to Israel.

Therefore, many dreidels produced in Israel replace the letter "shin" with the letter "pei," which stands for the word "poh," which means "here" in Hebrew, as in "a great miracle happened here."

However, various other explanations behind the dreidel's letters are offered by the Chassidic masters, most notably the Bnei Yissachar, which provide much deeper levels of understanding behind these letters. As such, there are some who prefer for the dreidel to retain its original form even in Israel (*Pardes Eliezer*, chapter 12). 🕯️