

CHEVRAH TORAH...LT, 5780

Discovering the Other—Understanding Ourselves

Being a student of Elie Wiesel means being yourself and cultivating your humanity, your sensitivity to others...It means knowing you do not have to choose between your particular identity and your concern for all people...that the particular and the universal can be mutually reinforcing." [Witness Ariel Burger, pgs. 253-254]

Miketz Genesis 41:33-52

Key KOSHI:

HOW is Joseph a model of understanding the other as a path to self-discovery/survival?

WHAT does he teach us about the message/meaning of Hanukah 4-us today?

P'SHAT...The Story that Unearths THE Question: WHAT Are We to Become

41:33] "Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34] And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize^a the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. 35] Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered, and let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority as food to be stored in the cities. 36] Let the food be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will come upon the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine."

37] The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his courtiers. 38] And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" 39] So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. 40] You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed,^b only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." 41] Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." 42] And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. 43] He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, "Abrek!"^c Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.

44] Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45] Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah;^d and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt.—46] Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.—Leaving Pharaoh's presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.

47] During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance. 48] And he gathered all the grain of ^ethe seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, ^eand stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it. 49] So

33 וְעַתָּה יִרְאֵה פַרְעֹה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכֵם וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶהוּ
עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם : 34 יַעֲשֶׂה פַרְעֹה וַיִּפְקֹד
פְּקָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְחָמַשׁ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בְּשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע : 35 וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־אֹכֶל
הַשָּׁנִים הַטּוֹבוֹת הַבָּאֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּצְבְּרוּ־בָר
תַּחַת יַד־פַּרְעֹה אֹכֶל בְּעָרִים וְשָׁמְרוּ : 36 וְהָיָה
הָאֹכֶל לְפָקֶדוֹן לְאֶרֶץ לְשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר
תֵּהְיֶינָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְלֹא־תִפְרֹת הָאֶרֶץ
בְּרָעָב : 37 וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי
כָּל־עַבְדָּיו : 38 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־עַבְדָּיו הֲנִמְצָא
כֵּזֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ : [שְׁלִישִׁין]
39 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ
אֱלֹהִים אוֹתָךְ אֶת־כָּל־זֹאת אִירָנְבוֹן וְחָכֵם
כְּמוֹד : 40 אֵתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל־בֵּיתִי וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשָּׁק
כָּל־עַמִּי רַק הַכִּסֵּא אֲגַדֵּל מִמֶּךָ : 41 וַיֹּאמֶר
פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נִתַּתִּי אֶתְךָ עַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם : 42 וְנֹסֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ
וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל־יַד יוֹסֵף וַיִּלְבַּשׁ אֹתוֹ בְּגָדֵי־שֵׁשׁ
וַיִּשֶׂם רֶבֶד הַזָּהָב עַל־צוּאָרוֹ : 43 וַיִּרְכַּב אוֹתוֹ
בְּמַרְכָּבַת הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיִּקְרָאוּ לְפָנָיו
אַבְרָהָ וַנִּתֵּן אוֹתוֹ עַל־כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם :
44 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבִלְעָדֶיךָ
לֹא־יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְאֶת־רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם : 45 וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם־יוֹסֵף צְפֹנָת
פַּעֲנִחַ וַיִּתְּנוּ־לוֹ אֶת־צְפֹנָת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פְרַע כַּהֵן
אֵן לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּצְא יוֹסֵף עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם :
46 וַיּוֹסֶף בְּרִשְׁלָשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּעַמְדוֹ לְפָנֵי פַרְעֹה
מִלֶּךְ־מִצְרַיִם וַיִּצְא יוֹסֵף מִלְּפָנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיַּעֲבֹר
בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם : 47 וַתַּעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ בְּשֶׁבַע שָׁנֵי
הַשָּׁבַע לְקִמְצִים : 48 וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־אֹכֶל
שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּתְּנוּ
אֹכֶל בְּעָרִים אֹכֶל שְׂדֵה־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר סָבִיב־תִּיהֶ
נָתַן בְּתוֹכָהּ : 49 וַיִּצְבְּרָה יוֹסֵף בָּר כָּחֹל הַיָּם
הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד עַד כִּי־חָדַל לְסַפֵּר כִּי־אֵין מִסְפָּר :

Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

50] Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera, priest of On, bore to him. 61] Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, “God has made me forget^f completely my hardship and my parental home.” 52] And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, “God has made me fertile^g in the land of my affliction.”

50 וַיִּלְיוֹסֶף יָלֵד שְׁנֵי בָנִים בְּטָרִם תְּבוֹא שָׁנַת
הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר יִלְדָהּ לוֹ אֲסֵנַת בַּת־פְּוֹטִי פְּרַעֲ
כֵהֵן אִוֶּן: 51 וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־שֵׁם הַבְּכוֹר
מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי־נִשְׁנִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי וְאֶת־כָּל־
בֵּית אָבִי: 52 וְאֶת־שֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי קָרָא אֶפְרַיִם כִּי־
הִפְרִנִי אֱלֹהִים בְּאֶרֶץ עֲנִי: [רביעי]

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...An Interchange of Truths: The More Jewish—The More Human

v.38 Then Pharaoh said to his courtiers: *Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?*

RADAK... Where could we find another like him, for Joseph's wisdom clearly exceeds any of our magicians!

ALTER... "*the Spirit of God*" Pharaoh produces just the response Joseph hoped for. The flexibility of "*Elohim*" serves the dialogue well. The Egyptian monarch has not been turned into a monotheist, but he has gone along with Joseph's idea that human wisdom is a gift from God, or the gods, and the expression he uses could have the general force of "*divine spirit*."

TALMUD... When Pharaoh proposed elevating Joseph to his high position, the royal astrologers exclaimed:

"Will you set over us a slave whom his master bought for twenty pieces of silver?"

v.39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph: *Since God has made all this known to you, there can be no one as wise & discerning as you!*

MUNK... In order to confer quasi-royal powers on Joseph, Pharaoh had to ensure he had the approval of his servants. For in the eyes of the Egyptians, a Hebrew was an impure being, relegated to the status of outcast. So, he asked: *Can we find one as wise?* They agreed to his superior mind, but pointed out that he was a slave... Pharaoh replied: But I see in him signs of royalty; he is the son of a noble family. To which his servants replied: Well, then, he should know the seventy languages. So Pharaoh decided to test him the next day. That night, the angel Gabriel came to teach Joseph all the languages of man, but he could not learn them. Then, a letter from God was added to his name, as it is written in the Psalms, "He put a sign of testimony on Joseph..." [the letter HEH] Thus did Joseph merit the miracle that occurred that night, for when he presented himself before Pharaoh the next morning, he was able to answer him in all 70 languages. In the end, Joseph addressed Pharaoh in Hebrew, but the King of Egypt did not understand. So he swore Joseph never to reveal his weakness. Pharaoh,

well-aware of this miraculous intervention, exclaimed, "...*there could be no one as wise & discerning as you!*" [TALMUD, Sotah 36a]

v.40 *You shall be in charge of all my household; by your command shall all my people be guided; only with respect to the throne shall I be your superior.*

RASHBAM... "*al pi-cha yi-shak kol ami—by your command will my people be sustained*" Yi-Shak like Ne-Shek, that is,

'You shall supervise the arming of my people against any enemy.' [cf I Kings 10:2]

RADAK... Yi-Shak, similar to N'ShiKa—kiss... Like two kissing, all the house of Egypt will cling to every word from Joseph's mouth.

v.41-43 Pharaoh further said to Joseph: *See—I put you in charge of all the Land of Egypt. Removing his signet ring, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he dressed him in robes of fine linen, put a gold chain on his neck. He had Joseph ride in his chariot, and they cried before him "AV-rech" Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.*

MIDRASHEI TORAH... Hearing this, he could hardly believe it. Joseph was abashed at such a lofty appointment and not sure Pharaoh meant it. That is why Pharaoh reiterates: "*Re'eh—See, I have truly set you in charge!...*"

RAMBAN... The giving of the king's ring is a sign that the person is second in command... The king gave Joseph his seal so he should be leader of Egypt, commander of the government, sealing whatever decrees he sees fit.

HaKTAV v'HaKaBALLAH... The ring, the uniform, the gold chain—all symbols of high office, for up till now, Joseph had been a slave in jail. The people would not easily accept this sudden elevation, thus Pharaoh gave his decision great publicity, parading Joseph throughout the capital to make it clear...

RASHBAM... "*AvRech!*" In the words of the *aggadah* [SIFRE] R' Yehudah expounded: *Av-Rech*, This refers to Joseph, for he is "*Av*"

a father to Pharaoh in wisdom, yet "*Rach*"—tender in years. R' Yossi replied: How long will you distort the text!? *Av'rech* is related solely

to *berech*, knee, for everyone must bend the knee by his authority.

MENACHEM ZION... Rav Yehudah interprets *Avrech* as a tribute to Joseph's wisdom, so impressed were the Egyptians with his brilliance... R'Yossi retorts that this is a distortion because history demonstrates, again and again, that gentiles do not respect Jewish wisdom unless it is backed by power. Egyptian regard for Joseph was based on a simple fact: they were forced by royal edict to bow low!

v.45 Pharaoh called Joseph: *Zaphenat Pane'ach, and he gave him Osenat, daughter of Potiphera for a wife. Thus Joseph emerged over all of Egypt.*

MUNK... In accord with the Egyptian custom, Joseph is granted a new name on his nomination to a state position.

The change of name is important because it will contribute to masking Joseph's identity when his family comes to Egypt.

According to ONKELOS, the name means "explainer of the hidden..."

AKEDAT YITSCHAK... As part of the effort to enhance Joseph's prestige, Pharaoh arranges an aristocratic marriage.

Pharaoh took all these steps in order to accelerate and foster Joseph's cultural acceptance among the Egyptians.

v.51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn Menasseh—for God has made me forget my hardship and my father's household, and the name of the second Ephraim...

HIRSCH... To be the only Jew in Egypt, to marry a daughter of the priest, and yet to bring up children of such virtue that parents to this very day bless their children to be "*like Ephraim & Menasseh*," that is indeed great merit!

ZORNBERG... Nowhere does Joseph reveal his identity as nakedly in these names his own feelings about the strange vicissitudes of life. Both names are fraught with paradox... *Menasseh*—the danger of obsession with his past has the power to cripple him in the task he's undertaken... But by naming his son for that oblivion, he expresses his ambivalence... In naming *Ephraim*, Joseph meditates on the real problems of life-giving. He has been fruitful, but his fierce longing is to have heirs... As sustainer life for many nations, Joseph understands—how to stop things from rotting is more vital than fertility itself.

DRASH...A Dialogue of Celebrating Difference: Listening for the Light

Prof. HARVEY COX....The story of Chanukah is a perfect example of the joke about a generic Jewish holiday... “They tried to kill us. We won. Let’s eat!” ...Chanukah actually commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple and the victory of the Maccabees that made it possible. Chanukah’s most familiar symbol is the menorah, with one additional candle lit each night. But even before any candles are kindled, the prayers thank God “who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days, at this season.” I had already become accustomed to Jews thanking God for commandments, something Christians almost never do. But I was surprised by how much emphasis is placed on the miraculous nature of God’s help...For a people who have indeed experienced some victories but even more than their share of defeats through the centuries, maybe this should not be surprising...

What I noticed, however, is that Chanukah is somewhat controversial among Jews. A distinctly minor holiday on the Jewish calendar, it has recently been promoted far beyond its traditional importance, mainly because it can easily be mingled along with Christmas into a generic “holiday season.” Like many other serious Jews and Christians, I am troubled by this soggy blending of two very distinct holidays. I am also bothered by the blurring of discrete aspects of Christianity and Judaism which do have many common features, though this is not one of them

And just this is the whole point of Chanukah. Its underlying significance is that Judaism is a particular tradition and does not mingle well with a majority cultural religion. The events of Chanukah remind Jews every year that some of their ancestors fought to the death rather than meld their spiritual practices into the prevailing Hellenistic culture of Palestine in the second century BCE. It is ironical in the extreme that precisely this holiday—the one that hails Jewish resistance to assimilation—is the one that faces the biggest risk of being lost through cultural amalgamation.

Paradoxically, the other troubling aspect of Chanukah arises precisely out of what it does memorialize. The real story is a little different from the storybook version...Some second century Jews, especially from the upper class, greeted the Hellenist wave with enthusiasm. Some of them even changed their names to ones sounding more Greek, and a few underwent an operation to reverse their circumcision. Their attitude is not difficult to understand. Hellenism represented the “modern” enlightened world culture...Furthermore, Greek religion was anything but inflexible. It is doubtful that the Greeks ever wanted the Jews to abandon their religion, only to add the gods of the Olympic pantheon. But many other Jews would have none of it. They insisted they should worship only their God...and no other gods.

A bloody war broke out in which the Maccabee family led the resisting Jews to what proved to be a short-term victory. They did indeed capture Jerusalem and reconsecrate the Temple. But within a remarkably short time, they became just as Hellenized and just as cosmopolitan as the people they had fought. This is what really happened, and it is a chronicle with many lessons to teach us, among other things, about the ambiguity of power. But this is not how the story is generally told today...Jews who are aware of their history know about this ambiguous but valuable chapter...I once heard a rabbi tell a largely Reform and liberal group... “Since we are now the ones making so many accommodations to American culture, we would have been the “bad guys” in this historic battle...”

Some years ago in early December, I confessed my discomfort to my friend Rabbi Marshall Meyer. Marshall told me he also had reservations about the holiday’s telling, but he found it a useful time to reflect on just how much any religion can accommodate to a prevailing culture.

His remark rescued Chanukah for me...No religion ever exists in a vacuum. All of them are surrounded by pressures from majority culture to incorporate, accommodate, assimilate... Religions that make no adjustments disappear, or they hang on at the margins like the Hasids or the Amish...But religions that make too many accommodations end up disappearing into the woodwork. There is no definitive answer, and religions must ask the question again and again in every generation...All religions are caught today in the swirling currents of mass media and consumer culture. I have come to savor the flickering menorah lights. They seem so tiny. They remind me of what a miracle it is that any religious tradition survives when we are all endangered species—all threatened not only from without, but more subtly, by erosion from within.

[Common Prayers—A Christian's Journey Through the Jewish Year, H.Cox, pgs 82-88]

SOD...Courage & Vulnerability: The Open Questioning that Leads to Love

Prof ALAN DERSHOWITZ... The good news is that American Jews—as individuals—have never been more secure, more accepted, more affluent, and less victimized by discrimination or anti-Semitism. The bad news is that American Jews—as a people—have never been in greater danger of disappearing through assimilation, intermarriage, and low birthrates. The even worse news is that our very success as individuals contributes to our vulnerability as a people. The even better news is that we can overcome this new threat to the continuity of American Jewish life and emerge with a more positive Judaism for the twenty-first century.

American Jewish life is in danger of disappearing, just as most American Jews have achieved everything we ever wanted: acceptance, influence, affluence, equality...Projections suggest that early in the next century, American Jewish life as we know it will be a shadow of its current, vibrant self—consisting primarily of isolated pockets of ultra-Orthodox Hasidim.

Our long history of victimization has prepared us to defend against those who would destroy us out of hatred; indeed, our history has forged a Jewish identity far too dependent on persecution and victimization by our enemies. But today's most serious threats come not from those who would persecute us, but from those who would, without malice, kill us with kindness—by assimilating us, marrying us, and merging with us out of respect, admiration, and even love...This book is a call to action for all who refuse to accept our demographic demise as inevitable. It is a demand for a new Jewish state of mind capable of challenging the conventional wisdom that Judaism is more adaptive to persecution and discrimination than it is to an open, free, and welcoming society.

...In 1812, when Napoleon was battling the czar for control of the Pale of Settlement, where millions of Jews were forced to live in crowded poverty and under persecution and discrimination as second-class subjects. A victory for Napoleon held the promise of prosperity. A victory for the czar would keep the Jews impoverished and miserable. The great Hasidic Rabbi Shneur-Zalman—the founder of the Lubavitch dynasty—stood up in his synagogue on the first day of Rosh Hashanah to offer a prayer to God asking help for the leader whose victory would be good for the Jews. Everyone expected him to pray for Napoleon. But he prayed for the czar to defeat Napoleon. In explaining his counterintuitive choice, he said: “Should Bonaparte win, the wealth of the Jews will be increased and their [civic] position will be raised. At the same time, their hearts will be estranged from our Heavenly Father. Should however our Czar Alexander win, the Jewish hearts will draw nearer to our Heavenly Father, though the poverty of Israel may become greater and his position lower.”

If Jews are given freedom, opportunity, and choice, they will choose to assimilate and disappear...I call the approach taken by these rabbis *The Tsuris Theory of Jewish Survival*. Under this theory, the Jews need external troubles to stay Jewish. Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism and a secular Jew, believed that “our enemies have made us one...It is only pressure that forces us back to the parent stem.”

But there is more—much more—to Jewish identity than collective self-defense...After two millennia of persecution and victimization, we may well be moving into a new era of Jewish life. If Jewish life cannot thrive in an open environment of opportunity, choice, free thinking, affluence, success and first-class status—if we really do need tsuris, czars, pogroms, poverty, insularity, closed minds, and anti-Semitism to keep us Jewish—then Jewish life as we know it will not, and should not, survive the first half of the twenty-first century.

The ultimate good news may be that the denouement of negative Judaism—Jewish identification based largely on circling the wagons to fend off our enemies—compels us to refocus on a more positive and enduring Jewish identification. We can thrive best in an open society where we freely choose to be Jews because of the positive virtues of our 3,500 year-old civilization. . . . For thousands of years, Jews have been embattled. Surrounded by enemies seeking to convert us, remove us, even exterminate us, we have developed collective defense mechanisms highly adaptive to combating persecution by anti-Semites. But we have not developed effective means of defending the Jewish future against our own actions and inactions. This is our urgent new challenge—to defend the Jewish future against voluntary self-destruction.

Our children, who have no actual memory of embattled Judaism fighting for the life, liberty and equality of endangered Jews, are now the crossroads generation that will be in the coming century.

Bill Clinton's presidency marked the end of discrimination against Jews in the upper echelons of government. For the first time in American history, the fact that an aspirant for high appointive office was a Jew became irrelevant in his or her selection.

The coming generation of Jewish adults will not remain Jews because of our enemies or because of our perceived status as victims. They crave a more positive, affirmative, contemporary, and relevant Jewish identity. Being Jewish is easy, at least in relation to external burdens. Jews today assimilate not because Christianity or Islam is "better" or "easier" but because Jewish life does not have a strong enough positive appeal to offset the inertial drift toward the common denominator.

Most Jews who assimilate do not feel that they are giving up anything by abandoning a Jewishness they know little about. They associate the Judaism they are abandoning with inconvenient rituals and rules that have no meaning. . . . We must recognize that many of the factors which have fueled current assimilation are positive developments for individual Jews: acceptance, wealth, opportunity. Most Jews do not want to impede these developments. Indeed, they want to encourage them. For that reason, we must accept the reality that many Jews will continue to marry non-Jews, but we should not regard it as inevitable that these marriages will necessarily lead to total assimilation. We can take positive steps to stem that tide—but it will take a change in attitude toward mixed marriages, and indeed toward the tribalism that has understandably characterized Jewish attitudes toward outsiders for so much of our history.

. . . I have no personal stake in any particular solution to the problem of Jewish survival. I just want American Jewish life to move from strength to strength. I love my Judaism and I feel passionately about its survival, but I do not believe in survival merely for survival's sake.

Our goal should be a self-sustaining Judaism that can thrive in the kind of open society in which most Jews want to spend their lives. . . . It would be a tragedy if the only forms of Judaism that made it past the twenty-first century were insular, ultra-Orthodox Judaism and Israeli Zionism. I hope that they, too, will continue to prosper, but I believe that a more diverse Jewish life has even more to contribute. If I have a bias, it is in favor of an eclectic, tolerant, many-branched menorah that is inclusive of all who wish to safeguard and share the future of the Jewish people.

[from *The Vanishing American Jew*, A. Dershowitz, 1997]