

In 2011, the Harvard Business Review found that over the previous three years, nearly 2/3rds of US Companies reported having their employees work longer hours than they had previously. As we look back on the 2010s, the changes in work culture as affected by globalization and smartphones, among other factors, I think, are going to be some of the most interesting developments to reflect on. And when you're working long hours, here's the question you have to always ask yourself: is this necessary, or am I running away from something?

Is there something at home that I am avoiding?

On Hanukkah, we cannot avoid our homes. The core mitzvah is **נר איש וביתו**, a candle for a person and their home. A candle per home, at home. We light candles in shul and we might go to some of the popular public candle lightings-- but neither of these fulfill the mitzvah of Hanukkah-- you must also light at home. And our Halachic sources are clear about the most ideal time for that home candle lighting: towards the end of sunset, when people, in the eyes of Halachic literature, must be just about home from work. These days that's somewhere around 4:45pm. Home from work at 4:45pm. That's quite a proposition. In high school, I wasn't even home from school by then. (Don't worry, if you aren't home quite that early-- you can light when you get home.)

And then we have to ask, what makes a place home anyways? Is it having your own bed? Pictures on the walls? A well-stocked kitchen? Knowing your way around the local grocery store? You would be surprised by how diverse and personal the answers to this question can be.

The Talmud in Eruvin 72b asks: **מאי מקום דירה?** What is considered a person's place of residence? And the Talmud records a debate: **רב אמר מקום פיתא ושמואל אמר מקום לינה**. Rav said: the place where he eats his bread, and Shmuel said: the place where he sleeps. Later Halachic literature considers these options, and also weighs a different element: are you eating and sleeping there temporarily, or is that your permanent situation? These questions play out in many areas of halacha-- not just in terms of Hanukkah candles, but also certain eruv questions, shabbat candles, mezuzah, the list continues. Ultimately, what we can say for sure is this: the homiest place, halachically speaking, is one where you eat and sleep with permanence.

Food and sleep and permanence is a wonderful combination to consider. If we translate permanence as "safety" then these three concepts make up the base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Home, then, is where our most basic human needs are met. But in truth, our homes are and can be so much more than that.

In our Parsha the word **בית**, home, appears over and over again, once the brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin (43:16-18).

**וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם אֶת־בְּנֵי־מִיֶּזֶן וַיֹּאמֶר לְאִשְׁרָי עַל־בֵּיתוֹ הֲבֵא אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים הַבְּיָתָה**

When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his **house** steward,

**וּטְבַח טֹבַח וְהָלוֹךְ כִּי אֲתִי יֹאכְלוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּצַהֲרָיִם:**

"Take the men into the **house**; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon."

**וַיַּעַשׂ הָאִישׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיֵּבֶא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּיָתֵהּ יוֹסֵף:**

The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph's **house**.

**וַיִּירָאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי הוּבְאוּ בְּיַת יוֹסֵף**

But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's **house**.

And it keeps going from there- בית בית בית. Joseph has established himself, he has a בית, a house-- where he, unlike his father and brothers who are starving in Canaan, actually has food. The abundant and seemingly unnecessary repetition of the word בית comes to emphasize, in my opinion, Joseph's remarkable security.

(Now, admittedly, Joseph's feeling of home and security in Egypt is certainly misplaced, since as we all know this country will eventually enslave his family, but we'll save that sermon for a few weeks from now.)

The Joseph story in our Parsha also adds a new dimension into our understanding of home: agency. In Joseph's home, he decides who enters. The brothers were frightened, explains Rashi, because no one else who came to Egypt for food was ever invited in. Joseph makes the seating arrangements, mysteriously putting his brothers in age order. He chooses how much food everyone gets, giving Benjamin the largest portion. He goes and comes as he pleases, walking out when he feels overcome with emotion. He can even play tricks, having his goblet placed in Benjamin's bag. No longer in his father's home, nor Potiphar's home, nor prison-- Joseph is now in his own home, and he is in charge.

Now that we've explored some elements of what might make a place a home: food, sleep, security and agency-- it's time for us to ask the harder question. Do your current living arrangements feel like home? Or do you stay long hours at work because home isn't doing it for you? And when you bring work home with you-- are you working at home because you want to be home, or because you don't want to be home and working provides you with mental escape?

It could totally be that you have struck a perfectly healthy balance. You love home, you love work, you balance them as best you can and both nourish you in perfectly appropriate ways.

And it could be that you usually find a healthy balance, but right now there's something out of whack, or for the last couple of months there's been something wrong. Hanukkah, with its demands of home, is the perfect opportunity to recalibrate. And that recalibration can be simple. Or it can be really hard work, because it forces you to ask yourself, "what's wrong?" and confront and navigate an honest answer to that question.

Take heart in that challenge from the Maccabees. In the Hanukkah story, under Greek rule, their agency was threatened-- they lost their ability to choose how they worshiped and how they lived. Agency, as we've seen in the Joseph story, is a key element of home. According to the book of Maccabees, the Maccabees left their homes and lived in caves - in order to fight for their agency, in order to fight for their homes. Your recalibration, I hope, will not require even a fraction of their sacrifice, but they fought for their homes and so can we.

Because it's worth it, not just for you and your roommates or family, but for our broader community or even possibly the world. When we light Hanukkah candles in the window, lighting up the street, we make a statement that our homes have the potential to radiate outwards. It's really an amazing thing, almost a paradox, that we go home, not to the public square, but home-- in order to publicize the miracle.

Home is where it all begins, but from there, through open windows and welcoming tables and warm beds and rituals, we can share comfort and agency with others as it stems from our own. From Joseph's home, the first

home he ever had, he brought in his brothers and father, made sure they had food to eat, and also organized food for an entire, starving region of the planet. Our homes are incredibly powerful, and their maintenance requires attention. So, this Shabbat Hanukkah, I leave you with a challenge: make your home radiant.