Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Miketz/ 6th Day of Chanukah
December 24, 2022 *** 30 Kislev, 5783

Miketz in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3213/jewish/Miketz-in-a-Nutshell.htm

Joseph's imprisonment finally ends when Pharaoh dreams of seven fat cows that are swallowed up by seven lean cows, and of seven fat ears of grain swallowed by seven lean ears. Joseph interprets the dreams to mean that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of hunger, and advises Pharaoh to store grain during the plentiful years. Pharaoh appoints Joseph governor of Egypt. Joseph marries Asenath, daughter of Potiphar, and they have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Famine spreads throughout the region, and food can be obtained only in Egypt. Ten of Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to purchase grain; the youngest, Benjamin, stays home, for Jacob fears for his safety. Joseph recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him; he accuses them of being spies, insists that they bring Benjamin to prove that they are who they say they are, and imprisons Simeon as a hostage. Later, they discover that the money they paid for their provisions has been mysteriously returned to them.

Jacob agrees to send Benjamin only after Judah assumes personal and eternal responsibility for him. This time Joseph receives them kindly, releases Simeon, and invites them to an eventful dinner at his home. But then he plants his silver goblet, purportedly imbued with magic powers, in Benjamin's sack. When the brothers set out for home the next morning, they are pursued, searched, and arrested when the goblet is discovered. Joseph offers to set them free and retain only Benjamin as his slave.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Zechariah 2:14-4:7

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/598085/jewish/Shabbat-Chanukah-Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This haftorah is read on Shabbat Chanukah as it contains a vision of the golden Temple Menorah.

This prophecy was communicated by Zechariah shortly before the building of the Second Temple. The haftorah opens with a vivid depiction of the joy that will prevail when G-d will return to Jerusalem: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, behold! I will come and dwell in your midst, says the L-rd."

The prophet then describes a scene in the Heavenly Court: Satan was seeking to incriminate Joshua, the first High Priest to serve in the Second Temple, because of the "soiled garments" (i.e. sins) he was wearing. G-d himself defends the High Priest: "And the Lord said to Satan: The Lord shall rebuke you, O Satan; the Lord

who chose Jerusalem shall rebuke you. Is [Joshua] not a brand plucked from fire?" I.e., how dare Satan prosecute an individual who endured the hardships of exile? "And He raised His voice and said to those standing before him, saying, 'Take the filthy garments off him.' And He said to him, 'See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I have clad you with clean garments.'"
G-d then proceeds to outline the rewards awaiting Joshua if he and his descendents follow G-d's ways. The ultimate reward is, "Behold! I will bring My servant, the Shoot, " an allsion to Moshiach, the Shoot of David.
Zechariah then describes a vision of a golden seven-branched Menorah. An angel interprets the meaning of this vision: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel [descendent of King David, one of the protagonists in the building of the Second Temple], 'Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts." Meaning that Zerubbabel's descendent, Moshiach, will have no difficulty in his task, it will be as simple as lighting a menorah.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

To Wait Without Despair: Mikketz by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/mikketz/to-wait-without-despair/

Something extraordinary happens between the previous parsha and this one. It is almost as if the pause of a week between them were itself part of the story.
Recall last week's parsha about the childhood of Joseph, focusing not on what happened but on who made it happen. Throughout the entire rollercoaster ride of Joseph's early life he is described as passive, not active; the done-to, not the doer; the object, not the subject, of verbs.
It was his father who loved him and gave him the richly embroidered cloak. It was his brothers who envied and hated him. He had dreams, but we do not dream because we want to but because, in some mysterious way still not yet fully understood, they come unbidden into our sleeping mind.
His brothers, tending their flocks far from home, plotted to kill him. They threw him into a pit. He was sold as a slave. In Potiphar's house he rose to a position of seniority, but the text goes out of its way to say that this was not because of Joseph himself, but because of God:

> God was with Joseph, and he became a successful man. He lived in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that God was with him, and that God granted him success in all that he did. Gen. 39:2–3

Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, and failed, but here too, Joseph was passive, not active. He did not seek her, she sought him. Eventually, "she caught him by his cloak, saying, 'Lie with me'! But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside" (Gen. 39:12). Using the garment as evidence, she had him imprisoned on

a totally false charge. There was nothing Joseph could do to establish his innocence.

In prison, again he became a leader, a manager, but again the Torah goes out of its way to attribute this not to Joseph but to Divine intervention:

God was with Joseph and showed him kindness, granting him favour in the sight of the prison warden… Whatever was done there, God was the one who did it. The prison warden paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because God was with him; and whatever he did, God made it prosper. Gen. 39:21–23

Then Joseph met Pharaoh's chief butler and baker. They had dreams, and Joseph interpreted them, but insisted that it is not he but God who was doing so:

"Joseph said to them, 'Interpretations belong to God. Tell me your dreams.'" Gen. 40:8

There is nothing like this anywhere else in Tanach. Whatever happened to Joseph was the result of someone else's deed: those of his father, his brothers, his master's wife, the prison warden, or God Himself. Joseph was the ball thrown by hands other than his own.

Then, for essentially the first time in the whole story, Joseph decided to take fate into his own hands. Knowing that the chief butler was about to be restored to his position, he asked him to bring his case to the attention of Pharaoh:

"Remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place. For indeed I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into prison." Gen. 39:14–15

A double injustice had been done, and Joseph saw this as his one chance of regaining his freedom. But the end of the parsha delivers a devastating blow:

The chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, and forgot him. Gen. 39:23

The anticlimax is intense, emphasised by the double verb, "did not remember" and "forgot." We sense Joseph waiting day after day for news. None comes. His last, best hope has gone. He will never go free. Or so it seems.

To understand the power of this anticlimax, we must remember that only since the invention of printing and the availability of books have we been able to tell what happens next merely by turning a page. For many centuries, there were no printed books. People knew the biblical story primarily by listening to it week by week. Those who were hearing the story for the first time had to wait a week to discover what Joseph's fate would be.

The parsha break is thus a kind of real-life equivalent to the delay Joseph experienced in prison, which, as this parsha begins by telling us, took "two whole years." It was then that Pharaoh had two dreams that no one in the court could interpret, prompting the chief butler to remember the man he had met in prison. Joseph was brought to Pharaoh, and within hours was transformed from zero to

hero: from prisoner-without-hope to viceroy of the greatest empire of the ancient world.

Why this extraordinary chain of events? It is telling us something important, but what? Surely this: God answers our prayers, but often not when we thought or how we thought. Joseph sought to get out of prison, and he did get out of prison. But not immediately, and not because the butler kept his promise.

The story is telling us something fundamental about the relationship between our dreams and our achievements. Joseph was the great dreamer of the Torah, and his dreams for the most part came true. But not in a way he or anyone else could have anticipated. At the end of the previous parsha – with Joseph still in prison – it seemed as if those dreams had ended in ignominious failure. We have to wait for a week, as he had to wait for two years, before discovering that it was not so.

There is no achievement without effort. That is the first principle. God saved Noah from the Flood, but first Noah had to build the Ark. God promised Abraham the land, but first he had to buy the Cave of Machpelah in which to bury Sarah. God promised the Israelites the land, but they had to fight the battles. Joseph became a leader, as he dreamed he would. But first he had to hone his practical and administrative skills, first in Potiphar's house, then in prison. Even when God assures us that something will happen, it will not happen without our effort. A Divine promise is not a substitute for human responsibility. To the contrary, it is a call to responsibility.

But effort alone is not enough. We need siyata diShemaya, "the help of Heaven." We need the humility to acknowledge that we are dependent on forces not under our control. No one in Genesis invoked God more often than Joseph. As Rashi says, "God's Name was constantly in his mouth."[1] He credited God for each of his successes. He recognised that without God he could not have done what he did. Out of that humility came patience.

Those who have achieved great things have often had this unusual combination of characteristics. On the one hand they work hard. They labour, they practise, they strive. On the other, they know that it will not be their hand alone that writes the script. It is not our efforts alone that decide the outcome. So we pray, and God answers our prayers – but not always when or how we expected. (And of course, sometimes the answer is 'No'.)

The Talmud (Niddah 70b) says it simply. It asks: What should you do to become rich? It answers: Work hard and behave honestly. But, says the Talmud, many have tried this and did not become rich. Back comes the answer: You must pray to God from whom all wealth comes. In which case, asks the Talmud, why work hard? Because, answers the Talmud: The one without the other is insufficient. We need both: human effort and Divine favour. We have to be, in a certain sense, patient and impatient – impatient with ourselves but patient in waiting for God to bless our endeavours.

The week-long delay between Joseph's failed attempt to get out of prison and his eventual success is there to teach us this delicate balance. If we work hard enough, God grants us success – not when we want but, rather, when the time is right. [1] See Rashi's commentary on Genesis 39:3

Joseph, Hanukkah, and the Dilemmas of Assimilation by Arnold M. Eisen
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/joseph-hanukkah-and-the-dilemmas-of-assimilation-2/

Ruminations about assimilation come naturally to Jews in North America during the winter holiday season. How much should a parent insist that Hanukkah is part of public school celebrations that give students a heavy dose of Christmas? How often should one remind store clerks who innocently ask Jewish children which gifts they hope to receive from Santa this year that there are other faiths observed in our communities, and other holidays? Intermarried couples are familiar with conversations about having a Christmas tree at home, or going to midnight mass, or allowing their kids to open gifts Christmas morning under the tree at their cousins' home. The Hanukkah story is the perfect stimulus for such reflections, especially when read, as some historians do, not as a conflict between Jews and a tyrannical government, but as a dispute among Jews themselves over which Greek customs are acceptable and which cross the line to assimilation or apostasy.

How much distinctiveness should Jews maintain in a society and culture like ours that offers unprecedented opportunity and freedom? How much distinctiveness can we maintain without putting our acceptance in jeopardy? And—perhaps the most difficult question on the communal agenda these days—how much distinctiveness can Jews afford to sacrifice without losing Jewish children and grandchildren to the ways and identity of the majority?

Joseph—the most important figure among the first generation of the children of Israel—struggles with a version of these same dilemmas as he rises from one prison-pit after another to the height of power at the court of Pharaoh. Of all the dramatic moments in the gripping story of his reconciliation with the brothers who once betrayed him, none is more poignant, I think, than when Pharaoh tells Joseph that he will have absolute power limited only by the Pharaoh himself. The astute ruler had taken the measure of Joseph and realized immediately that this "shrewd and perceptive" Israelite was perfectly suited to the nasty work of gathering up all the grain of Egypt during the seven years of plenty, and selling it back to them during the seven years of famine. (Gen. 41:38-44) He immediately gives Joseph two gifts that can be read as heart-wrenching examples of the price he will pay for that power. Joseph will have an Egyptian name, Tsafenat Pane'ah—"the sustainer of life"—and an Egyptian wife, Asenat, the daughter of a priest, Poti Fera. (41:45). The story that follows reads differently because of those moves by the king to forcibly integrate Joseph into Egyptian society and culture. Joseph himself testifies

to the pain of his situation as the highest outsider in the land. When (vv. 50-52) "two sons were born to [him] by Asenat the daughter of Poti Fera, the priest of On, Joseph called the first-born Menasheh, because 'God has made me forget completely my hardship and the house of my father.' And Joseph called the second son Ephraim, because 'God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction.'" We will soon learn that he has not forgotten the pain suffered in his father's house. When the brothers arrive to purchase grain, he at once recognizes them and—seeing them bow before him—remembers the dream in which they symbolically had done exactly that. (42:6-9) He has not forgotten his father either: when the brothers return home empty-handed, having left Simeon behind as a hostage, they tell Jacob (43:7) that the man in charge of distributing grain had asked them if their father was still alive—and, in next week's portion Vayigash, when Joseph finally breaks down in tears and reveals himself to his brothers (45:3), the very first question out of his mouth will be, "Is my father still alive?"

Consider the irony: the survival of the children of Israel is secured by this child of Israel who, married to the daughter of a gentile priest, brings his family down to Egypt, where he and they loyally serve the Pharaoh. The survival of the Children of Israel in a later generation will be secured by another Israelite, that one from the tribe of Levi, also married to the daughter of a gentile priest, who will lead a rebellion that liberates his people from Pharaoh's service/slavery. (The Hebrew word for "slavery" and "service" is the same.) Had Joseph and Moses not been at home at Pharaoh's court, wise in the ways of ministers and kings, skillful at magic arts beyond the capacity of Pharaoh's magicians (dream interpretation and the working of miracles), and gifted with the right word at the right time and inside knowledge of Egyptian society and culture; and had they not, despite all this, retained a strong sense of divine mission and purpose—they would not have been able to perform the redemptive tasks assigned them.

We might say, in contemporary terms, that a certain measure of assimilation was required for their success, as was a measure of resistance to assimilation. Contemporary Jews know from experience that the balance is difficult to calibrate correctly. That has been all the more true of the Jews who have served gentile kings and courts over the centuries—and by so doing, served their people and their God. From the poet and general Shmuel Hanagid at the Spanish court to Henry Kissinger at the Nixon White House to the many humble tax collectors in Polish domains populated by Ukrainian peasants, the Joseph story has time after time repeated itself.

Gerson Cohen, chancellor of JTS from 1972 to 1986 and a magisterial historian of Jewish societies and cultures in many eras on many continents, probed these dilemmas 50 years ago in a brilliant essay entitled "The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History." Cohen took issue with the well-known midrash that attributes Jewish survival to the fact that our ancestors did not change their names, abandon

their ancestral language, or stop wearing distinctive clothing. He notes that this generalization did not hold for Jacob's grandchildren in Egypt (who according to the Torah took Egyptian names such as Aaron and Moses), or for the later generations who adopted Greek names like those of the ambassadors whom Judah Maccabee sent to Rome, Jason and Eupolemos. Nor did Jews refrain from writing and giving sermons in other languages than Hebrew, or (when permitted to do so) from dressing like their gentile neighbors. (The author of this Torah commentary, written in English, of course bears the name Arnold, and happens to be wearing slacks and a V-neck sweater.) Cohen forcefully disputed the claim that Jews survived only by remaining utterly distinct from the cultures that surrounded them. Rather, "a frank appraisal of the periods in which Judaism flourished will indicate that not only did a certain amount of assimilation and acculturation not impede Jewish continuity, but that in a profound sense, this assimilation and acculturation was a stimulus to original thinking and expression, a source or renewed vitality." (Jewish History and Jewish Destiny, 151)

The lesson of Hannukkah, then, or of the Joseph story, or of countless episodes in the long history of Jewish encounter with gentile ways, is that if Jews assimilate completely to those ways, we lose our own way, and Jewish continuity is lost with it, but if we don't wish to "ghettoize" ourselves, or allow Judaism to become "fossilized," we will need "to assimilate—at least to some extent." (ibid.,152) That has meant learning to speak new languages, and to have Torah speak in those languages. We have adapted customs and laws to new circumstances and found latent meanings in classical texts that previous generations had not seen there. We continue to draw lines that are at times squiggly or blurred, and at other times razor-sharp—and to argue with one another about which kind of boundary is required, and how to maintain it. And thanks to the cycle of weekly Torah readings, Joseph is here with us each year to guide us through the complexities of this holiday season. *(Arnold Eisen is the Chancellor Emeritus: Professor of Jewish Thought at JTS)*

The Power of Dreams and Our Power to Create Prophecy by Rabbi Becky Jaye

https://truah.org/resources/parshat-miketz-becky-jaye-moraltorah/

We do not often align ourselves with the pharaohs of the Bible, yet I find the pharaoh of the Joseph narrative a stunning model of proactivity and prevention in the context of communal activism.

At the beginning of Parshat Miketz, we read of the well-known dreams that wake Pharaoh in a blanket of sweat and confusion. First, he dreams he is standing at the Nile, privy to the sight of seven fat and handsome cows grazing on the luscious green beside the moving waters. However, shortly thereafter, the pleasing image of these cows grazing in a land of plenty becomes juxtaposed with the swift appearance of their mirrored opposites: seven other cows, "gaunt and repulsive."

And in what many assume to be a jarring and shocking vision, those seven emaciated cows quickly consume their fuller counterparts, succumbing to the starvation that ravages their bodies.

Presumably startled by such a sight, Pharaoh quickly awakes, as one often does when the quietude of sleep is punctured by an unfamiliar and frightening dream. Yet despite having soothed his mind back to a peaceful slumber, he dreamt yet again of a similar phenomenon: Seven ears of corn before him, healthy and ripe, are quickly swallowed by their thin, scorched counterparts. Our Torah states, “In the morning, his spirit was troubled; he put out a call for all the soothsayer-priests and sages of Egypt; Pharoah related his dream to them, but no one could interpret them for Pharaoh.” (Genesis 41:1-8)

It is these dreams that become a catalyst for the rest of the Joseph narrative, during which Joseph is released from prison to advise Pharaoh of their meaning. He becomes a trusted advisor to the Pharaoh and is eventually placed “in charge of the entire land of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:41) From there, we as readers can follow Joseph reuniting with his family, and in an unusual thematic spin, read of a happy ending to the Joseph narrative.

Pharaoh’s dreams are awful, but he does not allow himself to remain in a state of emotional paralysis. He acts. Moreover, he accepts advice from among the most marginalized in his kingdom: a foreigner, a prisoner, a slave. And when Joseph’s words ring true for him, he does not hesitate to put power and authority in Joseph’s hands.

Unlike the pharaoh of Joseph’s world, we live now in a time and place where our fears for humanity’s future do not solely exist in our hearts and minds; the nightmares of now do not come from nowhere, but are predictions of the future that can be reliably foretold by advances in science, statistics, and technology. And yet the dreams of Pharaoh then are not far from the dreams that plague our minds now: Cows devouring cows and corn swallowing corn have transformed to humanity consuming itself.

We see this, and know this, when it comes to issues of climate change and a crumbling environment, the effects of generational trauma upon different communities’ physiological and mental health, and the systemic forces of oppression that inhibit minority groups from social and economic advancement in future generations. We look to the future with reluctance, despair, and fear; or at least, I certainly do.

Rashi adds a comment that offers an extra dimension of Pharaoh’s dreams. On the thin cows devouring the healthy ones (41:4), he writes, “This was a sign that all the joy of the years of plenty would be forgotten in the years of famine.” That is to say, there are two dimensions to the risks we face. The first, of course, is the actual crisis at hand — climate change, racism, and so on. The second is our emotional and spiritual state in response. If we allow fear and despair to paralyze us, we lose

all ability to respond to the crisis, which digs us deeper into a destructive cycle. But if, like this Pharaoh, we can move beyond the terror to seeking options with an open mind, we may find ourselves with more resources at hand than we ever realized was possible. (*Rabbi Becky Jaye is Program Manager of Emor, T'ruah's new public thought leadership institute.)*

Sarah, Rebecca and Joseph by Bex Stern-Rosenblatt
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JZ-GSkTrV2LWVZnfgC-f5Y7Bs4NrvCBx/view

Just as his father and grandfather did before him, Jacob faces famine in the land of Israel. Just as they did, Jacob will have to make a decision to go elsewhere in search of food. And just as happened in
their stories, a family member's hidden identity will be revealed. However, unlike Abraham and Isaac, Jacob is reluctant to leave Israel and tries to send his sons instead of him. Moreover, it is his son,
Joseph, who will reveal a hidden identity, in place of the wives, Rebecca and Sarah, doing so.

Food and its absence is important in the stories of Jacob's sons. Last week we read of Jacob's sons sitting around feasting while Joseph was below in a pit, without even water to drink. When the sons come back to Jacob and ask him to recognize Joseph's bloody coat, Jacob's mind immediately jumps to food. He imagines an evil animal eating Joseph up, devouring him. It seems only appropriate that these
people who feasted and imagined feasting while Joseph was without food should become dependent on his food to help them out during a famine.

Similarly, Isaac's descent in a time of famine comes after a story of food. We read, "Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. And he ate and he drank and he got up and he went. And Esau spurned the birthright," which is immediately followed by, "And there was a famine in the land." Isaac goes to Gerar instead of Egypt, where he passes Rebecca off as his sister for fear he might be killed on account of her beauty. Abraham's descent shares the sister-wife theme with that of Isaac, but in this first telling of descent in time of famine, no food is involved.

Three times the story of famine and concealed identity is told in Genesis. Each successive telling is longer than the one before it, filling in details. In Jacob's story, it is easy to read the famine as
measure-for-measure punishment - those who were food-driven and denied food to Joseph now depend on Joseph for their food. It is easy to understand Joseph's taking on a new identity. He becomes
Zaphnath-Paaneah, Pharaoh's right-hand man and in doing so saves his family. It is also easy to understand Jacob's grief. Through his actions, he has lost a loved one. Much of this second half of Genesis is propelled by Jacob's sorrow at the loss of the son he sent away.

We needed this third retelling to flesh out the details of the first two famine stories. In the first two stories, we do not hear anything from the one sent away, the one with a new identity. Sarah and Rebecca are silent. The rewards of wealth that come at the ends of the stories are not attributed to their cleverness or the skill with which they navigated their roles. It is difficult to see how much is asked of them, to see them put their lives and dignity on the line in order to save their husbands. It is most difficult in the case of Sarah, who lives through it twice. As we have seen, for Sarah, the famine is not a case of measure-for-measure punishment. She and Abraham had no sooner arrived in Israel then the famine came.

Reading Joseph as parallel to Sarah and Rebecca helps to rehabilitate them. Joseph stands in here for the wife, for his mother, for Rachel. He too is beautiful. Most important, in this telling, Joseph is the hero. Joseph consciously works as God's tool to help save his family and the world. Perhaps Sarah and Rebecca did as well. Perhaps they acted as Esther did. Perhaps they did not. But the third famine in Genesis reminds us that in the face of famine, in the face of tragedy, we can act. We can acknowledge what went wrong and take steps to make it right, not just for us but for the whole world. *(Bex Stern Rosenblatt is the Conservative Yeshiva's Faculty-in-Residence for the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States, teaching Tanach, using the techniques of close-reading, theater, feminist readings, and traditional commentators.)*

Hanunukah-Not just the Menorah Story – Haftarah by Vered Hollander Goldfarb
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JZ-GSkTrV2LWVZnfgC-f5Y7Bs4NrvCBx/view

This haftarah seems like an obvious choice for the Shabbat of Hannukah. The golden menorah with 7 candles perfectly connects the miracle of the renewed Mikdash (Temple) with our commemoration of the miracle by lighting candles. However, if that was the case, the haftarah should have opened with the menorah scene and continued past the end of the haftarah, since the story of the menorah does not end there. There seems to be a different message of Hannukah here. The events of Hannukah took place in the second century BCE, after the events described by Zechariah (end of 6th century BCE) in the haftarah. But the events share plenty of points. In both, the Mikdash plays a central role, and in both it was a means to an end – not the goal itself.

Zechariah spoke to the people who had received permission to rebuild the religious center in Jerusalem. From the haftarah it appears that this task was not going smoothly.

Intertwined with the building of the Mikdash was a greater dream: the renewal of an independent state, just as in the days of the first Mikdash. The benevolent Persian king allowed freedom of religion but did not offer any hope of political freedom. That did not quench the thirst for a sovereign state, but it might have forced it underground, as can be seen in the haftarah:

(3:8)‘Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, they are men of wondrous sign; For behold, I am bringing forth My servant Branch. (9)…And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day’.
The key to understanding Zechariah’s ambiguous reference to God’s servant “Branch” is found in Jeremiah 23:5-6:
(5)“Behold, days are coming,” says the Lord,
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper, and do judgment and righteousness in the earth.
(6)In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely…
Jeremiah (who prophesied on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem) spoke of a future king from the house of David, one we might refer to as the Messiah. He will be a sovereign head of a kingdom in which justice reigns, making personal and national safety possible. Zechariah speaks of sitting under the vine and the fig, a picturesque depiction of long-term peace found also in the days of Solomon. Zechariah had to speak cautiously to his generation’s desire for such a kingdom. He spoke in code that could be understood by those who treasured Jeremiah’s prophecies. Just as in the Hannukah event, purifying the Mikdash and lighting the Menorah are not the entire story, neither is the building of the Mikdash the final goal in the days of Zechariah. In both events the Mikdash is a religious symbol that is part of the greater desire for an independent, autonomous state. Zechariah spoke about it; the Hasmoneans saw it happen. The haftarah, just like the Hannukah story, is about a combined spiritual and national recovery. *(Vered Hollander-Goldfarb teaches Tanach and Medieval Commentators at the Conservative Yeshiva. Before making aliyah, Vered taught at Ramaz School and Stern College in New York.)*

The First Hakakhic Change in History by Joshua Kulp
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JZ-GSkTrV2LWVZnfgC-f5Y7Bs4NrvCBx/view

Although we’re not reading from the books of the Maccabees in our synagogues, my column this week will focus on this book and an important halakhic episode that is a crucial part of the story. In Maccabees I chapter 2, Mattityahu sets off the revolt in Modiin (my home city) by refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods and then killing a Jew who did. Pursued by Greek soldiers, Mattityahu’s followers are forced to flee. Hiding in caves, they refuse to come out and obey the king’s command. In response, we read in verses 35-37, “The soldiers attacked them immediately, but the Jews did nothing to resist; they did not even throw stones or block the entrances to the caves where they were hiding. They said, ‘We will all die with a clear conscience. Let heaven and earth bear witness that you are slaughtering us unjustly.’ So the enemy attacked them on the Sabbath and killed the men, their wives, their children, and their livestock. A thousand people died.” It is unclear whether or not the Greeks knew that the Jews would not fight back on Shabbat, but one can only imagine that once it was clear that they would not, the Greeks

now had an easy way to defeat the rebels.

Mattityahu and his followers had a choice: They could fight on Shabbat and attempt to overthrow their Greek enemies, or die as martyrs for their cause. They chose the former. “When Mattityahu and his friends heard the news about this, they were greatly saddened and said to one another, ‘If all of us do as these other Jews have done and refuse to fight the Gentiles to defend our lives and our religion, we will soon be wiped off the face of the earth.’ On that day they decided that if anyone attacked them on the Sabbath, they would defend themselves, so that they would not all die as other Jews had died in the caves.” Mattityahu’s decision allowed them to fight the next Shabbat, eventually overthrow their Greek enemies and purify the defiled Temple. So powerful was their decision that it was really not questioned for the rest of Jewish history. In Hebrew we say, “פיקוח נפש דוחה את השבת”-- “Saving a life overrides the Shabbat.”

But there is more to the story. The Book of Maccabees is not just a recording of historical facts. Like all books in the ancient world, it shapes its tale to convey a pedagogical message to the reader. The author here has carved out a careful message concerning which battles are worth dying for and which are not. When the Greeks command the Jews to offer foreign sacrifices or to eat pig (as we find in the tale of the seven sons in Maccabees II), Jews lay down their lives and are praised for doing so. Life is of course an important value, but the struggle to physically survive does not take precedence when one’s entire way of living is threatened. Abrogating the prohibition of idolatry or the dietary rules at the command of the king are instances in which the Greeks were attempting to destroy Judaism itself. As such, the editors of these books advocate for martyrdom. However, the case of fighting on Shabbat is different. The Greeks were not commanding the Jews to break Shabbat. They were simply taking advantage of the Jewish reticence to fight on Shabbat. This was not a case of “martyrdom”--demonstrating one’s fealty to God at the cost of death. At certain times, commandments must be broken in order to achieve the higher goal of preservation of life and the Jewish people.

Following the precedent of the Maccabees, the rabbis were adamant that “pikuach nefesh” the saving of life, overrides the commandment to keep Shabbat – but only when it is not done as part of religious persecution (see Bavli Sanhedrin 74a; Maimonides, *Foundations of the Torah* 5:1-2). Today, Shabbat is routinely violated in hospitals throughout the Jewish world. Indeed in any case where there is even a potential threat to life, not only may Shabbat be violated, but it must be violated. The Israeli army violates Shabbat in order to protect its citizens. Today we take this for granted, but we can look back to Mattityahu and his embattled partners and thank them for this remarkable innovation–life is a more important value in Judaism than (almost) any particular commandment. (*Kulp was one of the founders of the Conservative Yeshiva, where he is (as of 2022) a member of the faculty and rosh yeshiva.*

[6] He also teaches at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies and coordinates the Mishnah Yomit project through the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the congregational organization for Conservative Judaism, in both North America and the world)

Add More Light by Rabbi Felicia Sol

https://mailchi.mp/bj/toward-shabbat-db686z13y1-2965702?e=dbb31826ea

ust a couple of weeks ago, Dr. Moshe Halbertal **spoke to our community** about the Israeli elections and the formation of Israel's new government. These winter days, a physical darkness overwhelms us. But in his discussion, Dr. Halbertal expressed a spiritual darkness prevailing in Israel as well, with the new government that has led to, what he termed, "a betrayal of memory and a breakdown of a certain sensitivity to equality of all that is God-given." His analysis was grim. Yet his assessment of what to do was clear: "Surrender is self-fulfilling." He did not downplay the darkness. He warned against disengagement. He asked us to invest in Israel and to commit faithfully to a brighter future.

It is this same intention that our rabbis teach is the essence of Hanukkah. There is a famous debate between the scholars of Hillel and Shammai in the Talmud about how to light the Hanukkah candles:

בֵּית שַׁמַּאי אוֹמְרִים: יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן מַדְלִיק שְׁמוֹנָה, מִכָּאן וְאֵילָךְ פּוֹחֵת וְהוֹלֵךְ. וּבֵית הִלֵּל אוֹמְרִים: יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן מַדְלִיק אַחַת, מִכָּאן וְאֵילָךְ מוֹסִיף וְהוֹלֵךְ.

Beit Shammai say: On the first day one kindles eight lights and, from there on, gradually decreases the number of lights until, on the last day of Hanukkah, he kindles one light. And Beit Hillel say: On the first day one kindles one light, and from there on, gradually increases the number of lights until, on the last day, he kindles eight lights (Shabbat 21b).

We know who won the debate. And we continue to light the hanukkiyah according to Hillel's idea that one should ascend in holiness, and not descend:

מַעֲלִין בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵין מוֹרִידִין.

In the famous rabbinic story of the Maccabees, who find only a small flask of oil in the Temple, they had the faith to light that little bit of oil for the possibility of making light in the darkness. And then, one day at a time, the light increased.

That decision to light the first candle is perhaps the most important of all. Even when it doesn't appear that sustaining light is possible. Even when the odds are not in our favor. Even when there is uncertainty about being successful—we must still try. We light and then we light again, increasing the possibility to rise in holiness. Surrendering will most certainly keep us in the dark.

Rebbe Nahman teaches that cynicism is a form of evil speech. Lighting the hanukkiyah is an affirmation of faith, hope, and possibility. (*Rabbi Sol has served as a rabbi at B'nai Jeshurun in New York City since 2001, becoming the first woman to serve as a rabbi to the community in the congregation's almost 200-year history. In June 2021, she was appointed as a senior rabbi of the congregation, also a first in the congregation's history.)*

Yahrtzeits

Harriet Hessdorf remembers her mother Miriam Achtentuch on Mon. Dec. 26 (Tevet 2)

Francine Nelson remembers her sister Sara Rapaport Amoni on Wed. Dec. 28 (Tevet 4) and her Aunt Ester Miller on Thurs. Dec. 29(Tevet 5).