



# Ohr Yerushalayim News

כ"ג כסלו תש"פ - 21st December 2019 - Volume 12 - Issue 21

## News This Week

### מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Richard and Gaby Danziger on the birth of a boy. The Sholom Zochor takes place at 12 Craigwell Road.

### Kiddush This Shabbos

There will be a Kiddush after Davening in honour of Dani Epstein's 50th birthday sponsored by his kids.

### Winter Holidays Shacharis Minyonim

Over Channukah and the winter holidays there will be Minyonim for Shacharis as follows:

Mon 22nd - Fri 27th 7.10 & 8.10

Rosh Chodesh Sun 29th 7.00 & 8.00 Mon 30th 7.10 & 8.10

Tues 31st & Weds Jan 1st 7.15 & 8.20

There will also be a 3rd minyan daily at 9.30 from Weds 25th Dec - Weds 1st Jan inc

### Special Spirits Shabbos

Thank you to all the members who donated so generously to the recent appeal, a total of £1,300 was collected from our Shul.

## Groundhog Day

Avi Schwartz

The protagonist in this week's sedra and beyond is none other than Yosef. There are many experiences Yosef has that we can read with a quick glance, yet I would like to share with you something that may be going on underneath the surface of the text. A pattern that seems to permeate a vast expanse of this story. I want to share the pattern with you – and ponder what it might mean.

So this pattern, if its right to call it that, starts in chapter 38, right after the story of the Sale of Yosef begins. In many ways, this chapter is actually the most perplexing chapter in the entire Book of Bereishis, just because... it seems so entirely out of place.

I mean, there's this horrific, terrible story going on... Brothers jump their brother, kidnap him and engineer his sale as a slave. They cover it all up by putting blood on his coat, and suggesting to their father that his beloved son has been ripped to pieces. And then BANG all of a sudden, the Torah just hits the pause button on that story, leaving us completely hanging as to what happens to these people – to Joseph, the victim; to the band of brothers who did this; to father who's grieving – and instead, the Torah launches us into just an extended digression that seems to have nothing to do with anything: The story of Yehudah and Tamar.

So what happens in that story of Judah and Tamar? Well, it's lengthy but here's the basic gist of it: Yehudah has three sons. The oldest of his sons, Er, marries a woman by the name of Tamar. Er, he dies young and he's childless, so it falls to Onan, the next oldest child of Judah, to marry Tamar and hopefully have children, in order to carry on the name of the deceased Er. But Onan isn't interested, and before you know it, G-d does away with him – leaving only the last child of Yehudah, Shelah, who could possibly marry Tamar and give birth to a child that would extend Er's legacy.

So you see what I mean about this seeming like a digression. But now, keep on reading, because at this point, all sorts of strange things start happening. For our purposes, let's just say there's a disguise, there's an act of seduction, and along the way, Yehudah finds himself promising a goat to Tamar. But, he doesn't happen to have a goat handy, so he gives her his coat, as collateral. So it's certainly an intriguing story, this episode involving Yehudah and Tamar. But of course, what, in blazes, does it have to do with the story of Yosef?

Why is this story even here?

Well, here might be the beginnings of an answer. This whole story of Yehudah and Tamar, this supposed digression, it does have something to do with the Sale of Yosef. The key to the puzzle is: "No goat. Coat?"

You see, Yehudah, in the Tamar story, he finds himself dealing with goats and coats. Later, at the very end of the story, Tamar – who's got Judah's coat – challenges him to recognize whether the coat is his, asking him: haker na, do you recognize this coat?

Well, we've heard all that before. Because Yehudah had once, before, had dealt with goats and coats. He had done so back in the Sale of Yosef.

In that story, Yehudah and the brothers had stripped Yosef of his coat; then, they slaughtered a goat and put its blood on that coat, sending it to their father. And as they did that, what did they ask father? Haker na, 'Do you recognize this coat?'

It's a remarkable series of connections. And the truth is, it's just the beginning. This is really just scratching the surface of the connections between the story of Yehudah and Tamar and the Yosef story.

Time doesn't allow me to go into all of them now. But trust me, manifold connections are there. But suffice to say, for the time being, that we might be seeing the beginning of a pattern. The pattern kinda goes like this. There's this terrible story, the sale of Yosef. But it seems to be repeating itself, somehow, in the very next episode.

So now I want to go to the third episode in the Yosef saga, and let's examine whether this pattern of repetition sort of continues. The third episode involves Yosef's interactions in Egypt, in the House of Potiphar.

So just to summarize this third episode: Yosef has been sold off as a slave to Egypt, and has entered the house of Potiphar, an Egyptian nobleman. And Yosef earns the complete trust of his master, he puts him in charge of the whole house. But then that trust is put to the test when Yosef is faced with advances from Potiphar's wife.

Yosef resists, and when she won't take no for an answer, she grabs hold of his coat. In a split second, he makes this choice: he slips out of his coat and runs outside. And Mrs. Potiphar, enraged, turns the situation around.

Using the coat in her hands as evidence, false evidence, she lodges an accusation of attempted rape against Yosef. Yosef is condemned to the royal dungeons, where he languishes for many long years.

All right, so that's the story... does any of this remind you of anything we've

## The Week Ahead

### שבת פרשת וישב

Candle Lighting  
Mincha  
Rov's Shiur  
Shacharis  
סוף זמן ק"ש  
Children's Group  
1st Mincha  
2nd Mincha  
Shalosh Seudos  
Motzei Shabbos  
Ovos uBonim  
Sun  
Mon / Tues  
Wed / Thurs / Fri  
Mincha & Maariv  
Late Maariv

### מברכין סבת

No later than 3.35pm  
3.40pm  
8.45am  
9.15am  
10.14am  
10.45am  
1.30pm  
3.30pm  
Following  
4.50pm  
5.50pm  
7.15am / 8.15am  
7.10am / 8.10am  
7.10am / 8.10am / 9.30am  
3.40pm  
8.00pm

heard before?

Well, of course it certainly does. Just ask: When else does Yosef occupy a similar position of responsibility in a household, second in charge to the man of the house? When else does Yosef face a crisis, brought about by other members of that household? When else does he lose a coat? When else do adversaries of his use the coat as false evidence, and lie about him to the master of the house? When else is Yosef condemned to go in a veritable hole in the ground afterwards?

Well, the answer of course to all that is clear. All this happened in the story of Yosef's sale, of course.

So, it really does seem like there's this pattern going on here, right? You know, first we found that the supposed digression involving Yehudah and Tamar wasn't really a digression; instead, it seemed like this repetition of these things that happened back when Yosef was sold.

But now, it's larger than just that: All this stuff that's happening between Potiphar, Mrs. Potiphar and Yosef in the very next story that, too, feels like a big replay of the story with the pit! And so it sort of seems like there's this kind of pattern happening.

If it's really a pattern... you'd expect it to happen again, right? As the old saying goes, once is an accident, twice is a coincidence and three times... is a pattern. So... does all this happen a third time?

Well, I'm glad you asked. Because, as it happens, it does.

Let's look at what happens after Yosef gets thrown in the dungeon by Potiphar. The next major story in the Yosef saga is about how Yosef gets out of that dungeon. Here's basically what happens.

Pharaoh, king of Egypt, he's experiencing these disturbing dreams. And searching for an interpretation that feels right to him, he hears of this young guy who'd been imprisoned, who happens to have a knack at understanding dreams. So Pharaoh wastes no time in calling for Yosef and: וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא Pharaoh sent for Yosef, and pulled him out of the pit.

But here's the thing: Yosef wasn't, really, strictly speaking, in a pit. The Hebrew term back when Potiphar put him in those dungeons was *beit hasohar*: a jail. But now the Hebrew has changed. The *beit hasohar* was gone and all of a sudden, Yosef was in... a pit, a bor.

Well... was Yosef ever in a pit? He sure was. Thirteen years ago, his brothers threw him in a pit. It seems as if the Torah is somehow intentionally blurring the narratives here.

But let's kinda continue with the Pharaoh story. What happens right after Pharaoh extricates Yosef from that prison? The text tells us: וַיְגַלְחֵהוּ וַיַּחֲלֵף שְׂמֹלֹתָיו After he takes a haircut, Yosef gets this change of clothes.

He gets to wear these nice, beautiful new clothes. Well, does that remind you of anything that happened back in the Sale of Yosef?

And of course, it sure does. Right before the brothers threw him in that pit, what did they do? They forcibly stripped Yosef of his beautiful coat of many colours...

Oh. So events are taking place now that seem to remind us of events that took place 13 years ago back at the pit. Except things are also kind of different now. Things are somehow... reversed.

Back at the pit, Yosef first lost his clothes and then was thrown in a pit. Now, first he gets taken out of a pit and then he gets these new clothes. So it's all kind of a reverse. And then this change in fortune continues... because look the next thing that happens between Yosef and Pharaoh.

וַיָּבֵא אֵלַי פַּרְעֹה And Yosef came before Pharaoh.

Here is Pharaoh, this ultimate authority figure, and he is beckoning for Yosef to come to him... and Yosef in fact comes. And think about the reverse of that event. It would be... an authority figure sends away Yosef.

Which, of course, is exactly what happened 13 years ago. Because right before Yosef was thrown into that pit, right before he lost his clothes... father had actually sent him away from him, on that ill-fated mission to go check on his brothers.

Next what happens? Pharaoh calls to Yosef and says: "I had this dream," and I need you to interpret it for me. Of course, 13 years ago, that reminds you of something. It reminds you of something that happened right before father sent Yosef away.

Right before that, Yosef had told Yaakov about his dreams. And here too, of course, it is kind of a 'reverse.' You see, the reverse of a father figure telling a dream to Yosef... would be Yosef telling a dream to father figure, like he does with Yaakov. Moreover, Pharaoh thinks his dream is inscrutable: הֲלוֹם הֲלוֹם – no one can interpret my dream.

Well, of course, the reverse of a dream that is impossible to interpret would be one whose interpretation is glaringly self-evident; so obvious that it doesn't even need interpretation. Which was exactly the kind of dream

everyone thought Yosef had had 13 years ago... his dream of the sun and moon and 11 stars, all bowing before Yosef. Very subtle Yosef.

It seems so obvious what that means: A father, mother, and 11 siblings, all bowing to you. Did Yosef want to be ruler over the family, father had caustically asked him?

So again, just sort of stand back and look at the whole picture here. It seems almost indisputable that the events of the Sale of Yosef are just occurring again and again, in various iterations, throughout Parshas Vayeishev, extending into at least the beginning of Parshas Miketz. It happens with Yehudah and Tamar, it happens with the story of Potiphar, and it happens with the story of Pharaoh.

The question is: why.

I'd like to suggest, by way of analogy, that a "Groundhog Day" scenario might be playing itself out here. In "Groundhog Day," a film released a good while back, a charming, but flawed weatherman, finds himself trapped in time, condemned to relive the events of a particular day, over and over again – until somehow, at some point, he can get things right, and return to normal life.

Something like that seems to be happening in the Yosef saga. And ground zero in these "Groundhog Day" replays... is the episode of the Sale of Yosef. In other words: Things went wrong in the Sale of Yosef – badly, catastrophically, wrong. And the catastrophe, it wasn't really owned by one particular person or even a group of people.

You see, it's not just the brothers who are responsible for what happens. Sure, they bear direct responsibility. The brothers are the ones who kidnap Yosef and plot to sell him as a slave. But... at some level, everyone shares some degree of responsibility, greater or smaller. No one escapes.

The Torah goes out of its way to tell us, for example, that Yaakov favored Yosef, leading the brothers to hate him: וַיְרַאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אֵתוּ אֹהֵב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיְרַאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אֵתוּ אֹהֵב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיְרַאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אֵתוּ אֹהֵב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו. The brothers saw that their father loved Yosef more – so they hated him. So Yaakov contributed in some way, here.

And Yosef, he too, contributed to the cataclysm. Because back when he's shepherding with his brothers, the Torah goes out of its way to tell us something about him: וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבְתָּם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם, he brings back these bad reports about them to father. And that, of course, gives the brothers additional reasons to hate him.

Somehow, all this combines to create a perfect storm of sorts – a scenario so ghastly, that before it happened, hardly anyone in the family could have possibly imagined it actually transpiring: The Sale of Yosef.

So... what happens after the sale of Yosef? Evidently, Groundhog Day is what happens next.

Groundhog Day is a kind of curse for our erstwhile weatherman – he's locked in this day; it is his prison in time, as it were. But it is also an opportunity for him: An opportunity to replay, as it were, a badly imperfect series of events... with the possibility of actually redeeming those events. It is a real second chance.

And here, in Parshas Vayeishev, maybe that is exactly what is happening: Some of the key players in this original cataclysm get a chance to revisit their roles and see if somehow they can 'replay the day' in a way that works better. Can they somehow redeem the past through their present actions?

Now, how, exactly, do these Groundhog Day scenarios work to redeem events of the past? That is a very intriguing question, and if this theory is correct, I think we can say with confidence that one very important thing is true: in the Yosef story, even as each human being pursues his or her narrowly defined goal, there seems to be another hand working: the hand of fate, or the Hand of heaven.

Events are mysteriously conspiring to give human beings a second chance to somehow fix some of the greatest mistakes they've ever made in their lives. It is an astounding, but awe-inspiring, phenomenon in our history. It is a phenomenon that bequeaths hope.

Do we get second chances, in our own lives? Does G-d give us these sorts of opportunities, too? Do we sometimes find ourselves locked in what seems our own 'prisons of time', only to discover, years later, that the prison was less a prison than an opportunity, that we've been given the chance to fix something?

These are big questions that we can only answer for ourselves, but perhaps the Torah this week is illuminating for us just a little bit how our reality works. Hindsight may be 20/20, but to live with the emunah that our challenges and obstacles are opportunities is for sure a *madreiga* that we should be aiming for. The ability to look back and see the *hasgacha pratis* in our lives is also a *madreiga* we should be aiming for. This week's *sedra* shows us that whilst it may be difficult to reach that *madreiga*, it is worthwhile to at least try do so.