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**Can One Take Any Time**

**Off from the Obligation**

**Of Ahavas Hashem?**

**By Daniel Keren**



**Rabbi Yosef Viener**

One of the featured speakers at the recent Flatbush Thanksgiving Day Hakhel Yarchei Kallah Event was Rabbi Yosef Viener, mora d’asra of K’hal Shaar Hashomayim in Monsey who spoke about the obligation of a Jew to develop an attitude of Ahavas Hashem (love of G-d) 24/7. The title of his lecture was “Total Immersion: Can You Have Your Turkey and Eat it Too?”

Rabbi Viener told the Hakhel audience that whenever you bring up the topic of Ahavas Hashem, many people react by declaring that such a mitzvah is for the lamed vavniks (the 36 hidden tzaddiks in every generation) and that they still have to work on developing their Yiras Hashem (fear of G-d).

The Rambam in Hilhos Teshuvah in his classic sefer Yad Chazakah, in Perek Yud (chapter 10) describes the concept of Ahavas Hashem. He declares that Ahavas Hashem has to always be in your mind 24/7. You need yiras Hashem (the fear of G-d) as a backstop for one’s ahavas Hashem.

Rabbi Viener quoted the Rambam as declaring that one has to keep Hashem in your mind 24/7 in the goal of pursuing one’s love of Hashem. The Rambam is talking to all of us whether or not we are at that level or not there yet. This might require one to cut back on their sleep, in order to achieve this goal.

**Sacrificing Your Sleep for What You Desire**

Many people are able to sacrifice their sleep, in pursuit of enjoying a popular vacation by getting up early in order to pursue it or their goal of developing a high- tech business.

This goal according to the Rambam of constantly thinking about Hashem in order to love Hashem constantly is not just for the tazdik (righteous individual) or lamed vavnik, but for every Jew regardless of his or her spiritual level.

None of this effort in trying to develop a strong ahavas Hashem can be accomplished unless you make this your only desire 24/7 even when doing other things that you need to do in order to continue living such as eating, working and sleeping.

Rabbi Viener recalled a fellow, a graduate of a yeshiva who later on in his life when he was in his 40s or 50s expressed his appreciation for his development in his youth that allowed him to reach his current spiritual level. Unfortunately, he had plateaued and was quite satisfied with himself. This, however is not the goal that the Rambam teaches. One must constantly be working on continuously elevating his ruchnius (spiritual level.)

Many people, Rabbi Viener says, quote the Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud) that declares that after 120 years, everyone will be questioned in the heavenly court after this life in this world whether or not they enjoyed all of the pleasures of this world such as viewing the beauty of the mountains of the Alps. Does this mean that we will be punished for not having tasted every flavor of ice cream or every type of sushi?

**Avoiding the Addiction of Every Day Pleasures**

Rabbi Viener offers that what the Yerushalmi is really teaching us that it is enough for a person to have enjoyed that taste of ice cream or sushi once in their lifetime, preferably at a simcha (wedding or bar mitzvah) or the Shabbos table, without getting addicted to eating such tasty treats during the rest of the week when there is no seudos mitvah.

It is true, Rabbi Viener noted, that one should have a sincere love for their spouse, their children and their parents. But this should be connected to a gratitude one should have to Hashem for allowing him to have such close family members to love and thus simultaneously strengthen one’s ultimate goal of ahavas Hashem.

Some Jews may believe that if they fulfill the basic mitzvahs, they are then entitled to use the remainder of their “free” time for those things they enjoy doing. This person, for example, woke up for an early morning Daf Yomi shiur, then davened with a minyan, wrote checks for various tzedokos (charities) and maybe even learned at another seder. Do these laudable achievements then allow one to use the rest of the day to ride his bike that he very much enjoys doing or watch the Super Bowl for four hours?

According to the Rambam there is no concept for permitted “free time” to do seemingly permitted activities that are very American. If these activities are needed to maintain one’s composure and sanity, then it may be permitted as helping one to be strong in further developing his or her ahavas Hashem.

**The Benefits of Striving for Ahavas Hashem**

Rabbi Viener said that many people get nervous because they are human and are not always on the highest spiritual level. They should realize that striving to strengthen their ahavas Hashem is very beneficial. This results in their avoiding kina (jealously) and other terrible traits that harm a person in Olam Hazeh (this world.)

People who choose on their own to place their trust in Hashem, don’t have to waste their time during the next two years worrying about who is going to win the election for President of the United States and the leader of the Free World.

The Steipler Gaon had a very difficult life. He taught that one has to ignore those tzoros (problems) or one would never open a sefer (Torah book) to study. If you allow yourself to waste too much of your time reflecting on your challenges, you will never make progress in both your ruchnius (spirituality) or gashmius (material pleasures).

*Reprinted from the December 8, 2022 edition of the FJJ (Flatbush Jewish Journal).*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Shopping Deals in Manhattan**

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**QUESTION:** **Should women travel long distances to go shopping in Manhattan in order to save a little bit of money?**

**ANSWER:** Now, we have to know that women who go out on the search for the holy grail in Midtown New York – they’re seeking to buy a bargain – many times they are exposing themselves to perils.  It’s not so easy for a woman to be waltzing around in New York today. It’s not so simple. If you can avoid it, it pays even to shop locally and lose money.

Now this has been said here again and again.  And things have happened unfortunately and people just close their eyes and say, “There was an accident.”  I don’t want to quote an example – it happened three years ago.  A woman went shopping, a young woman; she was pregnant and she was going downstairs in an elevator in that building.  They took her to a wholesale place where she gets special prices and a tragedy happened in the elevator.  And she ended up losing her life, unfortunately.

Now, Jews have to beware – Jewish women especially.  If you can keep out of Manhattan, do so.  Manhattan today is teeming with crooks and with perverts, and they’re experienced in performing crimes.  And therefore, stay away from Manhattan if it’s at all possible! If you have to go there to work, it can’t be helped, but try to shop in your neighborhood.

*Reprinted from the November 25, 2022 email of Toras Avigdor (Tape #495 – February 1984).*

**Understanding the Difference**

**Between the Dreams of**

**Joseph and Pharaoh**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Vayeishev, we read about Joseph's two dreams, both of which revolved around the same theme: that Joseph would one day rule over his brothers.

Next week, in Mikeitz, the Torah relates the two dreams of Pharaoh, which also shared a common message. There, however, the Torah tells us that the reason Pharaoh had two similar dreams was to emphasize that G-d was about to fulfill them imminently. No reason is given for the repetition of Joseph's dreams; we must therefore conclude that although the two dreams shared a common theme, each one alluded to a different matter.

Let us now compare and contrast the dreams of Joseph and Pharaoh in order to obtain a better understanding of them.

In Joseph's first dream his brothers' sheaves of grain were bowing down to his, alluding to the physical plane of existence - ("And behold, your sheaves placed themselves round about, and bowed down to my sheaf.") His second dream involved "the sun and moon and the eleven stars," alluding to celestial and heavenly matters. In other words, Joseph's second dream represented an ascent from the material realm to the realm of the spiritual.

**The Physical Versus Spiritual**

**Nature of Pharaoh’s Dreams**

Both of Pharaoh's dreams, however, referred to the physical plane. The first dream involved the animal kingdom (the seven cows), and the second dream pertained to the lower level of plants (the seven ears of corn). Neither of Pharaoh's dreams had anything to do with higher spiritual matters at all.

This underscores the essential difference between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. The Jewish people, even while leading a physical existence, are intimately connected with both worlds -- the physicality of the material world and the spirituality of the World to Come.

**The Unique Task of the Jew in**

**Elevating the Materiality of the World**

In truth, this is the task of every Jew: to properly utilize both realms and turn them into one. Not only must the Jew's physical concerns not hinder his spiritual progress, his role is to harness the materiality of the world and transform it into spirituality, as Rabbi Shmuel, the fourth Chabad Rebbe, once explained to a group of young children:

"The Jew's nature is that he eats in order to live; he needs to live in order to be a Jew and perform G-d's mitzvot." Because the Jew's underlying intent in all his physical concerns is spiritual, the material plane itself is successfully transformed, as the Baal Shem Tov declared: "Wherever a Jew's will is, that is where he is found."

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeishev 5758/1998 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Volume 3.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshas Vayeishev 5783**



Modern writers and commentators have found the biblical narratives of the book of Bereshith irresistible in their penchant for psychoanalyzing people described in terms of modern understanding and current correctness. In so doing they do a great disservice to Jewish tradition and present a distorted picture of the message that the Bible is attempting to convey.

The narrative regarding Joseph and his brothers has engaged mankind for millennia. In it is represented all of the personality characteristics of nobility, self-justification, blindness and deception throughout history. The narrative stands by itself and needs no “deeper” exposition or analysis. It is what it is and that is how Jewish tradition has always viewed it.

The tendency to “understand” the characters of the people presented in the Torah narrative leads to all sorts of weird ideas that serve to undermine Jewish values and traditions instead of strengthening them. In all of the narratives that appear in this holy book the unseen hand of Heaven, so to speak, is present and active. And that part of the story is not subject to any psychological or personal analysis or perspective.

Rashi points this out in his opening comment to this week's Torah reading. The plan of Yaakov is to enjoy a leisurely retirement in his later stage of life but Heaven interferes as the story of Yosef and his brothers unfolds. No matter how you will analyze the motivations of the characters in this biblical narrative, we still will not know the entire story. It is always the inscrutable hand of Heaven that governs the story and mocks our pretensions.

One of the great differences between the traditional commentators and the more modern versions of this genre is this G-sd factor. Midrash, Talmud, and the great medieval and later commentators that created the framework for understanding the narrative of the Torah, also delved deeply into the personalities and motives of the people represented in the Torah. They were always careful not only to include but also to emphasize that ultimately it was the will of Heaven that was guiding events towards Divine purposes.

The Bible is not a psychodrama or rebuke of history and psychology. It is a book of fire and holiness and one has to be careful in handling it. But modern commentators – even those who are observant and scholarly – many times insert currently faddish values and interpretations into its eternal words. Keeping this in mind in dealing with the great narrative regarding Joseph and his brothers, one of the key narratives in the entire Torah, we should do so with caution and tradition.

To do otherwise, is a great disservice to the text of the story itself and to the value system that Jewish tradition has assigned to it. The dispute between Joseph and his brothers has heavenly and historic consequences and still hovers over Jewish life today. To treat it as a matter of sibling rivalry is a misunderstanding of the entire purpose of the Torah narrative.

Shabbat Shalom

*Reprinted from this week’s website of rabbiwein.com*

**What If Every Nation is**

**"The Chosen People?"**



***The term "Chosen" has long confused both lovers and haters of the Jewish People.***

I write this during the election season in Israel. But don't worry, this isn't a post about party politics. Thinking about the election has merely got me thinking about the Jewish doctrine of the election.

When scholars of religion talk about the doctrine of The Election, it's just a fancy way of them talking about the idea that the Jewish people are the chosen people. Few doctrines are so central to the story and mission of the Jewish people. And yet, our chosenness is also controversial, and it can easily collapse into something that looks like racism or national supremacism. Sadly, some Jewish thinkers have taken it in that direction. Moreover, some antisemites certainly take it that way, fixating upon the doctrine as a pretense for their inexcusable hatred.

When G-d elected Abraham, he was told exactly the role for which he had been chosen. He had been chosen so that "all of the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" ([Genesis 12:3](https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.12.3?lang=he-en&utm_source=aish.com&utm_medium=sefaria_linker)). Admittedly, it's not immediately clear how choosing one family from all of the others and giving them a special covenant and a particular set of laws, would bring blessing to all people.

Perhaps they would do so by setting an example. Maybe they would do so through the particular story of their history and the message it would communicate to those who witness it. Perhaps some mystical mechanism translates the observance of Jewish law into blessings for all people. That's an issue that's open to debate.

***What isn't open to debate is that the Jews were chosen specifically for the good of Jews and non-Jews alike.***

**Bottom of Form**

This theme continues when G-d describes us as a "kingdom of priests" ([Exodus 19:6](https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.19.6?lang=he-en&utm_source=aish.com&utm_medium=sefaria_linker)). You can't have a priest without a community for the priest to serve. But if there's a sense in which every Jew is a priest, then the community that we're called upon to serve must lie outside the kingdom of Israel. We are supposed to be priests unto the entire world: ambassadors of an ethical monotheism.

This theme is amplified in the words of the prophet Isaiah, who called upon us to be "a light unto the nations" (see, for example, [Isaiah 42:6](https://www.sefaria.org/Isaiah.42.6?lang=he-en&utm_source=aish.com&utm_medium=sefaria_linker)). And so, the first overlooked aspect of chosenness is its focus on the good of the non-Jew. Once this aspect of chosenness is understood, it becomes easier to see how chosenness differs from the toxic notions of racial supremacy or a master race. As explained by my teacher, the late [Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks](https://aish.com/beacon-of-faith-a-conversation-with-rabbi-jonathan-sacks/):

A chosen people feels called to serve; a master race [by contrast, feels called] to dominate. The characteristic emotion of a chosen people is humility; the virtue of a master race is pride, in Latin superbia. A master race sees victory in terms of its own merits; a chosen people attributes it to G-d or Providence or history, not itself. A master race sees defeat as humiliation; a chosen people sees it as a call to repentance.

**Not a Holy Attitude**

Suppose a person manifests a lack of humility and a disregard for the welfare of others. That is strong evidence that they don't see themselves as chosen – called upon to serve others – but that they really think of themselves as supreme. That is not a holy attitude. It is a vice.

A second, and surprising aspect of chosenness in the Bible is that it isn't exclusive. There are passages of liturgy and sections of the Bible and Talmud that can make it seems as if the Jews were chosen and that the non-Jews were left to one side, without the ability to have their own relationship with G-d, either as communities or as individuals. But I would argue that those appearances are deceptive. Indeed, there is a passage in the Hebrew Bible that would shock any ill-informed reader who thought that G-d only cared about having a relationship with Jews.

I'm not here talking about the book of Jonah, in which G-d manifests his care for the non-Jewish inhabitants of Nineveh and calls upon them to repent. I'm talking about the passage in Isaiah, in which G-d declares, "Blessed be My people Egypt, My handiwork Assyria, and My inheritance Israel." Is it shocking to see G-d talk about other people as His own? It shouldn't be. This is why another former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, Rabbi Lord Jacobovitz, could write:

I believe that every people—and indeed, in a more limited way, every individual— is "chosen" or destined for some distinct purpose in advancing the designs of Providence. Only some fulfill their mission, and others do not. Maybe the Greeks were chosen for their unique contributions to art and philosophy, the Romans for their pioneering services in law and government, the British for bringing parliamentary rule into the world, and the Americans for piloting democracy in a pluralistic society.

G-d chose the Jews to be "peculiar unto Me" as the pioneers of religion and morality; this was and is their national purpose.

In this time of election, I wanted to explore these two features of the doctrine of the election: (1) to be chosen is to be called upon to serve (and therefore to care about) others; and (2) everybody in the world, be they Jewish or Gentile, should view themselves as elected. Election isn't exclusive. We are all called upon, each in our unique way, to contribute to the world around us and answer to the call of G-d.

*Reprinted from the November 6, 2022 website of aish.com*

**What's Wrong**

**With Retirement?**

**By [Yossy Goldman](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/1351/jewish/Goldman-Yossy.htm" \o "Browse more articles by Goldman, Yossy)**

We all dream of enjoying a peaceful and serene life. But can too much serenity lead to senility?

In this week’s Torah portion, our patriarch Jacob finally returns to the Holy Land after two decades working for his father-in-law, Laban, in Haran: *Vayeshev Yaakov,*“And Jacob settled.”[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a5730624');)

Jacob was looking to “settle down” and enjoy some much-needed quiet time after the many difficulties he had experienced in his turbulent life, Rashi explains:



When Jacob sought to settle in tranquility, the anguish of Joseph’s disappearance pounced upon him. The righteous seek to settle down in tranquillity. Said G‑d, ‘Isn’t it enough for the righteous to enjoy the rewards prepared for them in the World to Come, that they seek to live at ease in this world as well?’ ”[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a5730624');)

And so, the troubles with Joseph began. The dream coat and the sibling rivalry. He is sold into slavery, missing and presumed dead, and his loving father Jacob is suddenly feeling very bereaved.

I must confess to struggling with this Midrashic statement. Is it really so terrible for this man to have a break?

The last few decades of Jacob’s life had been nothing if not tumultuous. First, he had to flee the wrath of his own twin brother Esau. Then, he endured over 20 years of struggle with his swindling father-in-law, Laban, followed by another frightening encounter with Esau. To add salt to his wounds, he then suffered the terrible abuse of his daughter Dinah at the hands of Shechem.

With one trauma after another, would it really be a crime to take a deep breath and relax for a while? Is it a sin to chill?! Surely, Jacob could be forgiven for wanting a little time out? What was so awful about hoping for some well-earned serenity?

In 1972, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, zt”l) responded unequivocally to those who suggested he start “taking it easy.” He would have none of it. He quoted the Biblical phrase that “Man is born to toil.”[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a5730624');) Life is meant to be productive, not vegetative. In fact, he went on to call for the establishment of at least 71 new Chabad institutions that very year.

Clearly, in the Rebbe’s view, being alive means that we ought to be productive. Otherwise, why did [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm) give us these years? Just to go fishing and play golf? No doubt many would find those activities enjoyable and worthwhile, but surely there must be a higher purpose to our lives.

Work is not a curse, but a blessing. Hard work never killed anybody, but I have seen too many people retire and then deteriorate to death. Literally.

In my own recent personal experience, I passed on the baton of rabbinic leadership of my congregation to my associate of 14 years in what was a remarkably smooth and seamless transition. I’m still there regularly, continue to speak and teach, but I don’t have the day-to-day responsibilities of running the shul. Am I bored? Far from it. I am always busy ,and somehow there is still never enough time in the day to get everything done. And I thank G‑d for it. With fewer fixed commitments, I am enjoying traveling and doing speaking tours around the world, and I have more time to write.

**Please G‑d, may I be busy forever.**

Many years ago, I initiated the Studies for Seniors program at our Chabad House in Johannesburg. It was, in fact, the Rebbe’s idea that every community should offer its senior citizens a daily [Torah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1426382/jewish/Torah.htm) study program to help keep them busy and intellectually active.

Not long after we started it, I received a call from a woman who thanked me for “saving her father’s life.” I wasn’t aware that I had rescued anyone from near-death, so I asked her to explain. She said her elderly father had retired and would just sit at home in his pajamas waiting for the next meal. When she signed him up for Studies for Seniors, he became a new man. He was up early, dressed, ready and waiting for the bus to pick him up. He, quite literally, had a new lease on life.

I guess when you think about it, G‑d’s response to Jacob’s attempt to “settle down” wasn’t all that radical after all.

May we all be well and continue to be productive in one way or another for a good, long time.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5730624/jewish/Whats-Wrong-With-Retirement.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a5730624) [Genesis 37:1](https://www.chabad.org/8232#v1).

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5730624/jewish/Whats-Wrong-With-Retirement.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a5730624) Rashi, [Genesis 37:2](https://www.chabad.org/8232#v2).

[3 .](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5730624/jewish/Whats-Wrong-With-Retirement.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a5730624)[Job 5:7](https://www.chabad.org/16407" \l "v7).



Rabbi Yossy Goldman was sent by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to South Africa in 1976, where he was founding director of the country’s first Chabad House. In 1986, with the Rebbe’s guidance, he accepted the invitation to become the rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul, where he is now Life Rabbi Emeritus. He is also president of the South African Rabbinical Association and often represents the Jewish faith on South African radio and television

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeishev 5783 website of Chabad.Org*

**“All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, Vayimoen / but he refused to be comforted.” (37:35)**

Rashi z”l explains: A person does not accept consolation for one who is living, but whom he believes to be dead. The reason is that, while G-d has decreed that one who is dead will eventually be forgotten [at least in a relative sense], it was not so decreed with regard to the living.

R’ Dov Kook (Teveryah, Israel) adds: Yosef was alive not only physically, but spiritually, as demonstrated by the fact that he refused to be seduced by Potiphar’s wife.

Notably, the same word (Vayimoen / but he refused”) is used to describe Yaakov’s refusal to be comforted and (in 39:8) Yosef’s rejection of the advances of Potiphar’s wife. (Zvi Kodesh)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeishev 5783 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parsha sheet for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn, NY.*