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**Don’t Let Your Spiritual**

**Mistakes Discourage You**

**From Serving Hashem**

**By Daniel Keren**



**Rabbi Yosef Viener**

One of the featured speakers at the recent Flatbush Thanksgiving Day Hakhel Event was Rabbi Yosef Viener, mora d’asra of K’hal Sha’ar HaShomayim in Monsey. He addressed the topic of “Decision-Making, Regrets and Measuring Success.”

Rabbi Viener spoke of various major figures in Jewish history who made decisions that may have been wrong, but did not allow themselves to get distracted from their avodas Hashem (spiritual service).

He first spoke of Chizkiyahu Hamelech (King Hezekiah), one of the greatest Jewish kings of Malchus Dovid (the royal house of David). When he realized that he was faced by a hostile army of 180,000 soldiers who had surrounded Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), he understood that with his smaller army, he could not defeat the enemy. Chizkiyahu therefore decreed that everyone in Yerushalayim under threat of death had to go to the Batei Medrashim (Torah study halls) and incredible increases in Torah knowledge was the result and in that merit of that action the king was able to miraculously defeat the much larger enemy forces.

**An Action of Chizkiyahu**

**that Chazal Criticized**

Some of his other actions at this time to defeat the enemy were highly criticized by Chazal, our Sages of blessed memory, such as his decision to plug the water-fountains in Jerusalem to deny its availability to the enemy that was threatening Chizkiyahu’s kingdom.

Rabbi Viener also referred to the Hashanah Rabba prayers where we recall the “mistake” of Moshe Rabbeinu who had struck the rock in order to bring forth the water for the people in the Midbar (desert of Sinai) and their animals.

Why are these two actions which were of Moshe and Chizkiyahu which were “wrong” listed in the Hashanah Rabbah prayers as zechusim (merits) that we ask Hashem to remember in our behalf for a good year?

**Winning the Favor of**

**the Roman General Vespasian**

Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai who escaped from the Roman siege of Yerushalayim and after winning favor from the Roman general Vespasian (and future emperor of the Roman Empire) was offered three wishes. Yochanan ben Zakkai used one of those wishes to be given the town of Yavneh as a safe refuge for the Torah sages of Israel. Chazal strongly criticize Yochanan ben Zakkai for not having asked Vespasian to spare Jerusalem. Was that really a mistake or was that the best that Yochanan ben Zakkai could have done under the circumstances?

The yetzer hora (our evil inclination), Rabbi Viener noted, just wants us to get depressed over the decisions that we have made and to give up on our commitment to continuing our avodas Hashem and just fall into great despair.

When Chana was crying bitterly over the fact that she was unable to give birth to any children, her husband Elchanan tried to comfort her by asking her if he as a good husband wasn’t worth more than many children. Was he right in trying to persuade his wife to overcome her sadness and continue with the best of her ability to serve Hashem? Yes, the lesson is that one should not let a great disappointment to take total control of one’s life and stop you from fulfilling the other mitzvahs from the Torah that one is obligated to observe.

**Refusing to Protect Himself**

**from His Father-in-Law**

When Shaul Hamelech (King Saul) was pursuing Dovid to kill him, a situation in which King David was by halacha (Jewish law) entitled to protect himself by killing his pursuer. On two occasions Dovid had an opportunity to protect himself by killing his father-in-law who was trying to take him out of this world and yet on both occasions he refused to do so. Was this a mistake on Dovid’s part?

Rabbi Viener declared that the rule is not to allow oneself to get down or depressed over a mistake that one makes in life, no matter how serious. One should learn from such mistakes. Rather one should just continue to do the other Torah mitzvahs that come one’s way as best one can.

When Yitzchok realized that he had “mistakenly” given his brocha, blessing that he intended to give to his firstborn son Eisav to Yaakov; instead of getting mad or filled with despair, he realized that this action was his Plan B and he immediately accepted this new reality.

**The Unrealized Zevulon-Yissachar Partnership**

Initially, Yitzchok’s reason for wanting to give his brocha of abundant gashmius (material wealth) to Eisav was so that his older son would help his brother Yaakov with a Zevulon-Yissachar partnership. When Eisav cried and begged his father for another blessing, Yitzchok after first saying he had no other blessing to bestow, nevertheless was able to come up with a special brocha for Eisav.

This new brocha for Eisav would give Eisav the ability to assist Yaakov from the outside. Thus, when Yaakov’s descendants (the Jewish people) would be careless in observing the holy Torah, Eisav’s descendants would be allowed by Hashem to punish the Jews and thereby push them to do teshuvah (penitence) and return to serving Hashem as per the Torah.

The lesson for us today is not to let our regret for a mistake in our avodas Hashem to cause us to give up on our spiritual obligations. Our avodah is when disappointments happen in our lives, is not to get lost in painful questions and aggravation over our mistakes.

*Reprinted from the Jewish Connection.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**What Does the Word ‘Boruch’ Mean in the Brachos We Say?**

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The word boruch comes from the word berech which means a knee. Fundamentally, ‘boruch’ means ‘the One to Whom our knees are bent.’ Boruch atah Hashem means ‘You Hashem are the only One to Whom we bend our knees’.

We don’t actually bend the knees except where Chazal tell us to, but the expression of this word is that we have an attitude of humility. Why do we bend our knees? In hachna’ah, in humility. Because You, Hashem are the One Who gives; You are the nosein and we can’t give anything back to you in return‡

**“What Can I Give Back to You, Hashem…?”**

What can I recompense Hashem for all that He bestowed upon me? (Tehillim 116:12). What can I give back to You, Hashem, for all the good that You’ve done for me? You can’t give back anything! All you can do is be nichna.

And the Chovos Halevavos says that this is called avodas Hashem. What is avodas Hashem? You’re an eved Hashem if you’re nichna to Him because of all that He does for you and your realization of your inability to pay Him back.

So, ‘Boruch atah Hashem’ means, “You are the One to Whom our knees are bent;” and to nobody else in the world. Of course, we thank those who You tell us to thank. We thank our father and our mother because You told us to thank them. We thank our rebbe because You told us to thank him. We thank the black bus driver and Italian fireman because You told us to.

But whatever we do to thank anybody in the world, it’s really because we are thanking You. Everything is really only from You. And every time we say the words ‘Boruch atah Hashem’ we’re thinking, You’re the only One in the universe Who deserves the bending of our knees.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayishlach 5784 email of Toras Avigdor. (Tape #E-178, February 25, 1999.)

**How Could Joseph Risk**

**His Life to Fulfill**

**His Father’s Request?**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



As related in this week's Torah portion, Vayeisheiv, when Joseph went at his father's behest to check on his brothers in Shechem he met a man "wandering in the field," who was actually the angel Gabriel. In response to Joseph's question if he knew where they might be, the man replied, "They have departed, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dotan.' "

Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator, explains that with these words the angel was trying to warn Joseph to keep away from his brothers, who were intending to harm him. "They have departed" suggested "they have removed themselves from brotherhood," and "let us go to Dotan" meant they were looking for a legal way ("datot") to kill him. Nonetheless, Joseph ignored these veiled warnings and continued on his way.

Thus, we see that in his desire to fulfill his father's request Joseph demonstrated true self-sacrifice, to the point that he was willing to endanger his life. Yet this in itself raises several questions: Jacob had asked Joseph to "go see the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word." If Joseph were to be killed by his brothers, he would obviously not be able to report back to Jacob.

**Not One of the Three Mitzvot a Jew Can Give Up His for**

Furthermore, what justification did Joseph have for endangering his life in order to fulfill the commandment of honoring one's parents, when it is not one of the three mitzvot a Jew is permitted to give up his life rather than transgress: idolatry, illicit relations and murder?

The great codifier of Jewish law, Moses Maimonides, explains that in certain circumstances it is indeed permissible to demonstrate this extreme level of self-sacrifice, even when it isn't "necessary": "If the person is tremendously great, pious and G-d-fearing, and sees that the generation is reckless [in observing that particular mitzva], he is permitted to sanctify G-d's Name and sacrifice his life for even a minor commandment, in order that the people see and take note."

Joseph was well aware that his brothers were lacking in the mitzva of honoring parents, which had been amply demonstrated by their behavior in the incident of Shechem as well as in their antipathy toward him. He thus resolved to fulfill his father's wishes at all costs.

**Going Beyond the “Letter of the Law”**

The same dynamics are also evident in the story of Chanuka, which we are now celebrating. Strictly speaking, there was no need for Matityahu and his sons to risk their lives and engage in war against the Syrian-Greeks. Nonetheless, it was their willingness for self-sacrifice above and beyond the "letter of the law" that ultimately led to miracles and wonders.

In fact, in the merit of their deeds they found the "cruse of pure oil with the High Priest's seal," symbolic of the inner essence of every Jew, and merited "to institute these eight days of Chanuka to give thanks and praise to Your great Name."

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeishev 5761/2000 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Volume 35 of Hitva’aduyot.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Vayeshev 5784**



The Torah parsha begins with the simple narrative statement that Yaakov settled and “dwelled in the land of the sojourn of his forefathers, the Land of Canaan.” That last clause in that sentence – the Land of Canaan – seems to be superfluous. We are already well aware from the previous parshiyot of Bereshith that Avraham and Yitzchak dwelt in the Land of Canaan. Since every word and phrase in the Torah demands our attention and study, the commentators to Torah throughout the ages examined this issue and proposed a number of different lessons and insights.

I believe that the lessons for our time from these words that open our parsha are eerily relevant. Yaakov is forced to live in a hostile environment. The story of the assault on Dina and the subsequent violence and bloodshed between Yaakov’s family and the Canaanites serves as the backdrop to this type of life that living in the Land of Canaan entails. Yaakov is living in a bad neighborhood, amongst many who wish him and his family ill. He is forced to rely on the sword of Shimon and Levi to survive but that is not to his liking or ultimate life purpose. The Land of Canaan is not hospitable to him and his worldview.

The Philistine kings who wished to kidnap and enslave his mother and grandmother are still around or at least their cloned successors are. At the funeral of his father at the Cave of Machpela he must have ruefully mused as to how his grandfather was forced to pay such an exorbitant price for a burial plot.

The Land of Canaan had many unpleasant associations connected to it for Yaakov to contemplate: a king’s ransom to Eisav, a rock for a pillow, and crippling encounters with an anonymous foe. All of this and more was his lot in the Land of Canaan.

So, what is Yaakov’s stubborn attachment to living in the Land of Canaan? Why does he believe that he will be able to eventually dwell there in serenity and security? The answer to these issues is that he realized that this was the land of his ancestors and that the L-rd had entered into a covenant with them to grant them that land. Now it could be that it is called the Land of Canaan but eternally it would be called after his name, the Land of Israel.

The land would know many populations and rulers but that would never change its eternal nature of being the Land of Israel. The land is home for Yaakov – the land of his past and his future. It is what binds him to his great ancestral heritage and mission - and he will demand to be buried there as well. Yaakov overlooks the difficulties and challenges inherent in the Land of Canaan because he lives not only in its geographic confines but rather in the ideal land of his forefathers – in a land of G-dly revelation and holy purpose. Yaakov will undergo much more pain and suffering in the Land of Canaan before he returns there in final tranquility. But his descendants, the Jewish people, will always know it to be the land of their fathers, the Land of Israel.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**What was the Sorrowful Event?**

“*Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man, Vy’hi/ and he remained in the house of his Egyptian master*.” (39:2)

The Gemara (Megillah 10b) teaches that the word “Vy’hi” introduces a sorrowful event that causes a person to cry “Vy!”–like “Woe!” in English or the Yiddish expression, “Oy vey!”

What was the sorrowful event here? asks R’ Peretz Steinberg (rabbi in Queen, N.Y.). R’ Steinberg answers: The sorrowful event was precisely that Yosef “remained in the house of his Egyptian master.”

Since “Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man,” imagine what he could have accomplished had he not been a slave in the house of an Egyptian master! So great was the whole world’s loss from Yosef’s being a slave! Surely it is appropriate to cry out, “Vy!” (Pri Etz Chaim)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Vayeishev 5784 email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parsha sheet for the Young Israel of Midwood in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Is It Kosher to Play Lotto?**

**By**[**Yehuda Shurpin**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15169/jewish/Shurpin-Yehuda.htm)



***Art by***[***Sefira Lightstone***](https://www.chabad.org/3159160)

If you’re wondering whether playing the lottery aligns with Jewish teachings, you’re not alone. In many ways, playing the lotto resembles gambling, which is frowned upon in Judaism and may even be forbidden by Jewish law. But there are some nuances that might make buying that lotto ticket OK.

Let’s start by understanding the Jewish approach to gambling.

**Gambling in Jewish law**

The Mishnah lists several classes of people who are generally disqualified from being witnesses, including those who play with dice, which was then a classic form of gambling.[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a6110139');)

The Talmud brings two opinions as to why this is so:

Rami Bar Chama explains that when the winner takes money from the loser, it’s as if he’s stealing. Why? Because when the loser agreed to play, he never expected to lose—or he would’ve never agreed to play in the first place. This form of agreement—accepting significant financial responsibility under the assumption that you’ll never really have to pay it—is known as an *asmachta*.

Conversely, Rav Sheshet is of the opinion that we are only concerned with an *asmachta* in a game that requires some measure of skill, since the player believes he is in control of the outcome and can reasonably expect to win. In a game that is entirely based on luck (for example, the [Mishnah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4329319/jewish/The-Mishnah.htm)’s case of dice-throwing), everyone plays knowing there is a chance they will lose, and collecting winnings would therefore be permitted.[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a6110139');)

Rather, in his understanding, the main issue with gambling is that a gambler does not contribute to society in any way. So Rav Sheshet would only disqualify a witness if gambling was his sole profession and he therefore had no real means of contributing to society.

In practice, Rabbi Yosef Caro, in the Code of Jewish Law, rules according to the opinion that all kinds of gambling are prohibited, even dice and other luck-based games.[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a6110139');) Others, including Rabbi Moshe Isserlis, rule according to the opinion that one may gamble with games that are entirely based on luck.[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a6110139');)

Sephardic communities generally follow the opinion of Rabbi [Yosef Caro](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/380611/jewish/Rabbi-Yosef-Joseph-Caro-The-Master.htm) and are stringent, while Ashkenazim generally follow the approach that some gambling is technically permitted.

Yet, even those who permit gambling under certain conditions decry it as an immoral and repulsive activity that can lead to all sorts of negative consequences.

**Buying a Lottery Ticket**

Let’s shift gears to buying lottery tickets. Is it the same as gambling, or is there room for leniency?

There’s a spectrum of opinions here. Some are of the opinion they are quite similar, in which case buying a lottery ticket would be permissible for Ashkenazic communities and prohibited for [Sephardic](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2617014/jewish/The-Rise-of-the-Sepharadim.htm) communities.[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a6110139');)

Most halachic authorities, however, point out a number of key differences between playing the lotto and gambling, in which case even Sephardic communities would be permitted to buy a lottery ticket. Here are a few distinctions:

**Paying in advance** — When betting or gambling, you usually pay when you lose, so to some extent you rely on winning the bet. But when you pay in advance for a lottery ticket, you acknowledge the possibility of losing and give your money with a full heart.[6](javascript:doFootnote('6a6110139');)

**They “want” to give the money** — With gambling, one person wins and the other loses. If you’re paying for the bet and you had some assumption or anticipation that would win, it’s considered an*asmachta*. In a lottery, the payout is guaranteed to occur and the organization or government overseeing the lottery and disbursing the winnings does not operate under the assumption that they will “win.” On the contrary, they*want* to give a payout because that’s how they make even more money in the long run.[7](javascript:doFootnote('7a6110139');)

**You know you’ll probably lose**— Since the odds of actually winning are extremely low, no one purchases a ticket with a real assumption that they’ll win. Therefore, doing so would not be considered an *asmachta*(accepting significant financial responsibility under the assumption that you’ll never really have to pay it).[8](javascript:doFootnote('8a6110139');)

**The ticket already has monetary value**— Since the lotto ticket has a specific value, purchasing a lottery ticket is considered a transaction involving the acquisition of a product rather than a form of gambling. Prior to the lottery drawing, you even have the option to sell the ticket for its initial purchase price. As a result, you are essentially participating in an investment where some of the funds collected are allocated to cover expenses, while the remaining amount is distributed as dividends to randomly selected investors.[9](javascript:doFootnote('9a6110139');)

**For Charitable Causes**

If you buy a raffle ticket as part of a fundraiser for a charitable organization, then even if you lose it’s not considered an *asmachta*. Giving the money is a mitzvah, and the assumption is that you gave it willingly, regardless of whether you win.[10](javascript:doFootnote('10a6110139');)

**Buy Just One Ticket**

As evident from the above discussion, buying a lottery ticket is acceptable according to Jewish law. But it's essential to remember that, like gambling, purchasing lottery tickets can be highly addictive. Certain lotteries specifically target individuals with addictive tendencies, exacerbating the financial difficulties of those already struggling.

There are anecdotes in which the Lubavitcher Rebbe sometimes advised individuals to purchase a lottery ticket.[11](javascript:doFootnote('11a6110139');) But when asked about playing the lotto, he would say to buy just one ticket—because if G‑d wills it that you win, one ticket is enough to accomplish the job.[12](javascript:doFootnote('12a6110139');)

Interestingly the Rebbe records in his notes that “The Tzemach Tzedek [third Lubavitcher Rebbe] purchased lottery tickets many times, for himself, and for his son, the Rebbe Maharash [Rabbi Shmuel, who later became the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe]. There was a manuscript found written in his [the [Tzemach Tzedek](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3268073/jewish/The-Tzemach-Tzedek.htm)’s] holy handwriting: [praying that] ‘May it be the will [of [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm)] that Rabbi Shmuel should win the lottery.’ ”[13](javascript:doFootnote('13a6110139');)

The Rebbe adds that the [Rebbe Maharash](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/626953/jewish/The-Rebbe-Maharash.htm) actually won the lottery a number of times, and it was quite a significant sum. The Tzemach Tzedek, however, never won the lottery.[14](javascript:doFootnote('14a6110139');)

Other leading rabbis[15](javascript:doFootnote('15a6110139');) would also purchase a lottery ticket from time to time as a means of creating a medium to channel G‑d’s blessings. Ultimately, our livelihood comes from G‑d, and we need to trust and have faith in Him. All that is needed from us is to make a vessel for the blessings.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a6110139) Talmud, Sanhedrin 24b.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a6110139) See*Rama, Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat*207:13. Additional conditions are that the money be placed before those betting and the table be owned by both parties.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a6110139) *Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 370:2-3.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef4a6110139) *Rama, Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat*370:3.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef5a6110139) See, for example, *Responsa Yabia Omer* 7:106.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef6a6110139) *Mishpatei Tishmaro*, 16.

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef7a6110139) *Yaskil Avdi*, vol. 8; *Yoreh De’ah* 5:3.

[8.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef8a6110139) *Teshuvot Ve’Hanhagot*, 4:311.

[9.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef9a6110139) Ibid.; *Mishneh Halachot*,15:176.

[10.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef10a6110139) See *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah* 258:10 and *Taz* 6; *Teshuvot V’hanhagot*4:311; *Shevet Halevi* 9:200.

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef11a6110139) See, for example, *Igrot Kodesh, Rayatz*, vol. 17, p. 108.

[12.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef12a6110139) See, for example, encounter during audience for supporters of Machne Israel Development Fund on 7 Tishrei 5752 (available on video).

[13.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef13a6110139) *Reshimot haYoman* entry for 9-11 Sivan 5691 (1931).

[14.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef14a6110139) Ibid.

[15.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6110139/jewish/Is-It-Kosher-to-Play-Lotto.htm" \l "footnoteRef15a6110139) See, for example Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler in *Michtav m’Eliyahu,*vol. 1, p. 187 *(Emunah Ubitachon)*;

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**And the vine had three branches (Gen. 40:10)**

As explained in the Midrash, the "vine" is an allusion to the Jewish people, as it states in Psalms (80:9): "You have brought a vine from Egypt." In the same way that wine is described as "bringing joy to G-d and man," so too does every single Jew possess this quality of "wine": an innate love for G-d, inherited from his ancestors, that enables him to rejoice in the L-rd. *(Torah Ohr)*

**The chief butler did not remember Joseph, and forgot him (Gen. 40:23)**

While "not remembering" Joseph indicates a passive, unintentional action, "forgetting" refers to the chief butler's deliberate attempt to dismiss him from his mind. His failure to remember Joseph was purposeful. *(Ohr HaTorah)*

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