

## Vayeishev/Chanukah 5776

Good Shabbos, and a warm welcome to any and all current and future alumni of Akiva school, which is a wise choice for some Jewish parents, but is, by far, the only school of choice for those parents who require their children to have a full Jewish education.

But if there were no Akiva school, and consequently, if we didn't live in Nashville, TN, I think I know where I would want to send my kids.

I recently read an article on ynetnews titled: "School of prophets opens in Tel Aviv. New course aims to train next generation of Jewish prophets for the first time since days of Second Temple."

This school is called the "Cain and Abel School of Prophets" and its founder is a man named Rabbi Shmuel Portman Hapartzi. In the article Hapartzi claims that what he is doing is totally within the guidelines of the Jewish tradition. He protests, "I'm not a freak." He claims he is serious about trying to revive prophecy, a long lost skill in the Jewish community.

We don't think too much about trying to become prophets today – probably because the Talmud tells us that after the destruction of the Temple prophecy was given over to fools (Baba Batra, 12a).

And since we have our own new school to nourish and to support, JMS, Jewish Middle School of Nashville, I am not running over to enroll in the "School of Prophets". But the article is still timely. Chanukah is here and it is therefore appropriate to highlight the deep connection between the celebration of Chanukah and the words and teachings of our *neveim*, our prophets.

Every Shabbat after we read from the Torah, we also read a passage called the Haftarah which is, in essence, a passage from the prophets. There are many different opinions as to the source of reading from the prophets on Shabbat morning.

Some of our great rabbis, like Yom Tov Lipman Heller (1578-1654), trace this practice to a decree of the wicked Greek king, Antiochus. Antiochus had decreed that Jews were not permitted to study Torah, but this decree did not extend to the writings of the prophets. So the custom began of picking a passage from the prophets that had a similar theme to the Torah portion and reading it on Shabbat morning in place of Parshat Hashavua. This became known as the Haftarah.

After the Maccabees' victorious revolt, the decree against the reading of the Torah was lifted but the practice of Haftarah remained. *Af shebatlah hagezeirah lo batlah haminhag*, the decree was nullified but the custom remained.

So without the persecutions of Antiochus today we would not have a Haftorah. Without Chanukah we would not be reading a passage from our prophets every Shabbat, (and subsequently, there would be no Kiddush club.)

This is a powerful idea to consider. When the decree of Antiochus came upon the Jewish people it was brutally harsh. But, as Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld so beautifully put it, “*Our response to his decree far outlasted his harshness. From an anti-Torah decree came a practice that has spread far and wide and taught us the holy words of our prophets.*”

Last week, I saw online a Menorah that was fashioned by an artist from discarded Kassam rocket shells that were fired upon Jews living in southern Israel. Anyone can own this Menorah, for just \$2,299. Just visit [rocketsintoroses.com](http://rocketsintoroses.com). Wouldn't that be a nice addition to our Judaica collection.

The message of that Menorah is the same message of why we still read the Haftorah to this day: *From the brutal persecution of Antiochus we created a beautiful response. A spiritual response is the greatest antidote to evil.* (Herzfeld)

The Menorah made from rocket shells is not just a sign that the state of Israel remains physically strong – it's also a spiritual response to the rockets attacks. In fact, it's a prayer from the prophet Isaiah: “May they beat their swords into plowshares” (2:4).

There is another Chanukah message that we can draw from our prophets as well.

Our parsha began with “Vayeishev Yaakov, and Jacob settled” (37:1).

Rashi writes (37:2): “*Bikesh Yaakov leishv beshalvah, kafatz alav rogzo shel yosef.* **Jacob sought to dwell in tranquility, so the troubles of Joseph sprang upon him.**

Yaakov had had a hard life. His brother wanted to kill him. He had problems with his father-in-law, his father, with his wives, with his daughter, with his sons, and so now he just wanted some rest. He needed a break. And what's so bad about that? What's so bad about Yaakov wanting to spend his golden years in Miami Beach?

According to Rashi, Yaakov wasn't being punished for wanting to rest, (there is nothing wrong with wanting a little bit of rest now and then), but rather, he was being punished for the approach he now brought to life.

As he gets older, Yaakov takes a more laid back outlook to life. *Let me just live my life. Just let me go. No more worries.*

But that's not what God wanted. We are not put us on this earth to settle. We should be constantly asking ourselves how we can improve; how we can live up to our potential; how we can pitch in; how we can have a closer relationship with the Divine.

And so Rashi writes that when Yaakov sought to settle, *kafatz alav rogzo shel yosef*, the turmoil of Yosef jumped upon him.

What was the *rogez shel yosef*? It wasn't just a simple punishment. Where did Yosef's problems come from?

So let's be honest: wasn't Yosef asking for it?!? Wasn't he walking around telling everyone how great he was, telling his brothers of his dreams and that he was destined for greatness?

Even Yosef's father was annoyed with his dreams... "*vayigar bo aviv*, and his father rebuked him" (37:10).

When the brothers see Yosef and they say, "here comes the dreamer" (37:19) - they mean it in a derogatory sense. *Let's kill him and then see what comes of his crazy dreams!*

The Talmud tells us, "*ein adam cholam balailah elah mihirhurei libbo*, a person's dreams at night come from the thoughts one has during the day" (Brachot, 55b). Yosef might have had grandiose dreams.....but at least he dreamed! And those dreams came from the high hopes and expectations he had for himself.

The great Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin explains that this is precisely why his brothers hated him. They knew that his dreams weren't just mere dreams. They were part of a larger vision of who he was and who he wanted to be. They knew that in Yosef's own imagination he saw himself as the king over all his brothers. And this fact distressed them. (Machashavot Charutz 3:5.)

Yosef was now a dreamer. True, he wasn't at all tactful about his ideas and plans. And, yes, he was immature with the way he shared his dreams. But at least he dreamed. At least he dreamed big. At least he dreamed of changing the world.

This is what our prophets were about. They dreamed of changing the world for the better. Many of them were hated for it. But they all dreamed big.

In many ways this is also what the holiday of Chanukah is all about. It is about not settling for the easy way out in life. It is about dreaming of something pure and great.

The miracle of the oil is a miracle that was not really needed in the first place.

The Maccabees came into the Temple and all the oil they found was ritually impure with the exception of one flask that still had the seal of the Kohen Gadol.

Our sages point out that they had other options at this point. There is a principle that oil used for a communal need needn't be pure. (*tumah hutrah betzibbur*). There is another principle that the laws of purity are suspended during war time, or even better, *mashkin einan mekablin tuma*, that liquids cannot become impure.

They could have also used tiny little wicks. The flame would have been small, but at least it would have lasted longer. Or instead of pouring all of the pure oil into the Menorah on the first night they could have used just a little bit of oil and saved the rest of the pure oil for the remaining nights.

But the Maccabees didn't take that approach to the oil. They said let's dream of making a perfect menorah with pure oil that shines brightly. They went for it. They poured all the oil in.

The Maccabees were like Yosef. They were dreamers.

And if you want to walk into one of Yosef's dreams, or experience the passionate energy of the Maccabees, all you need to do is to get into your car, drive up to the Gordon JCC, ride down the hill, and walk through the doors of Akiva school – where our children are not only nurtured and loved, each individually, but empowered and challenged to think and learn creatively, spiritually, with joy, with strong Jewish roots, with passion and devotion and with great wisdom.

While most of us in this Shul today have strong ties to Akiva, either past, present, or future, most Jews in Nashville do not. Perhaps they haven't about Josef's dreams, or perhaps, Vayeshev, perhaps they've settled. And while we see Akiva not only continuing to inspire and to educate hundreds of children and families as it has through the years, we hope that we can continue to share this dream with others, as Yosef did, with his brothers.

Through one of the customs of Chanukah that we all share, we demonstrate that we too want to be dreamers.

According to the Talmud, the obligation on Chanukah is simply to light one light per household for each night of Chanukah (*ner ish ubeito*). Those who want to do the mitzvah in a more beautiful way—*mehadrin*—should light one candle every night of Chanukah for each member of the household (*ner le-kol echad ve-echad*). But those who want to do an even more beautiful mitzvah should add a candle each night of the holiday. (*mosif ve-holekh*)

It's the only example of a *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, beautification upon beautification in the entire Talmud, and is practiced by Jews everywhere as the norm. Because on Chanukah we're all trying to fulfill the mitzvah in a manner that is "*mehadrin min hameadrin*, more beautiful than even the beautiful."

Chanukah is a reminder to be like Yosef, to live like our prophets, to dream big.

Don't just live. Don't just settle. Let's Dream. And let's dream big.