

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Vayeshev  
December 21, 2019 \*\*\* 23 Kislev, 5780

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

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Vayeshev in a Nutshell

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Jacob settles in Hebron with his twelve sons. His favorite is seventeen-year-old Joseph, whose brothers are jealous of the preferential treatment he receives from his father, such as a precious many-colored coat that Jacob makes for Joseph. Joseph relates to his brothers two of his dreams which foretell that he is destined to rule over them, increasing their envy and hatred towards him.

Simeon and Levi plot to kill him, but Reuben suggests that they throw him into a pit instead, intending to come back later and save him. While Joseph is in the pit, Judah has him sold to a band of passing Ishmaelites. The brothers dip Joseph's special coat in the blood of a goat and show it to their father, leading him to believe that his most beloved son was devoured by a wild beast.

Judah marries and has three children. The eldest, Er, dies young and childless, and his wife, Tamar, is given in levirate marriage to the second son, Onan. Onan sins by spilling his seed, and he too meets an early death. Judah is reluctant to have his third son marry her. Determined to have a child from Judah's family, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces Judah himself. Judah hears that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant and orders her executed for harlotry, but when Tamar produces some personal effects he left with her as a pledge for payment, he publicly admits that he is the father. Tamar gives birth to twin sons, Peretz (an ancestor of King David) and Zerach.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the minister in charge of Pharaoh's slaughterhouses. G-d blesses everything he does, and soon he is made overseer of all his master's property. Potiphar's wife desires the handsome and charismatic lad; when Joseph rejects her advances, she tells her husband that the Hebrew slave tried to force himself on her, and has him thrown into prison. Joseph gains the trust and admiration of his jailers, who appoint him to a position of authority in the prison administration.

In prison, Joseph meets Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker, both incarcerated for offending their royal master. Both have disturbing dreams, which Joseph interprets; in three days, he tells them, the butler will be released and the baker hanged. Joseph asks the butler to intercede on his behalf with Pharaoh. Joseph's predictions are fulfilled, but the butler forgets all about Joseph and does nothing for him.

Haftarah in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/1019527/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1019527/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's haftarah contains an allusion to the sale of Joseph by his brothers, an incident discussed in this week's Torah reading.

Amos opens with a rebuke to the Jewish People. G-d had been patient with them notwithstanding their transgression of the three cardinal sins — sexual impropriety, idolatry and murder. Their fourth sin, however, crossed the line — the mistreatment of the innocent, widows, orphans and the poor.

G-d reminds the Jewish people how He lovingly took them out of Egypt and led them through the desert for forty years and settled them in the Holy Land. There, He bestowed the gift of prophecy on some and inspired others to become Nazirites. Yet the Jewish people did not respond appropriately, giving wine to the Nazirites and instructing the prophets not to prophesy. Amos then goes on to describe G-d's punishment for the errant behavior: "And the stout-hearted among the mighty shall flee naked on that day, says the L-rd."

The haftorah ends with an admonition from G-d, one that also recalls His eternal love for His people: "Hearken to this word which the Lord spoke about you, O children of Israel, concerning the entire nation that I brought up from the land of Egypt. 'Only you did I love above all the families of the earth; therefore, I will visit upon you all your iniquities...'" As opposed to other nations to whom G-d does not pay close attention, G-d's love for His nation causes Him to punish them for their misdeeds, to cleanse them and prod them back onto the path of the just.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[The Angel who did not know he was an Angel \(Vayeshev\) 5780](http://rabbisacks.org/vayeshev-5780/)

<http://rabbisacks.org/vayeshev-5780/>

The story of Joseph and his brothers, spread over four parshiyot, is the longest and most tightly-scripted of all the narratives in the Torah. Nothing is there by accident; every detail counts. One moment, however, seems gloriously irrelevant – and it is this that contains one of the most beautiful of the Torah's ideas.

With great speed, we are introduced to the broad lines of the story. Joseph is envied and hated by his brothers. So deep has the animosity gone that they cannot talk peaceably with one another. Now the brothers have left home to tend their sheep, and Jacob tells Joseph to go and see how they are doing. This encounter will set in motion the central drama from which all else will follow: the moment when the brothers sell Joseph into Egypt as a slave.

But it nearly didn't happen. Joseph arrived at Shechem where he expected his brothers to be, but they were not there. He might well have wandered around for a while and then, failing to find them, gone home. None of the events that take up the rest of the Torah would have happened: no Joseph the slave, no Joseph the viceroy, no storage of food during the years of plenty, no descent of Joseph's family to Egypt, no exile, no slavery, no exodus. The entire story – already revealed in broad outlines to Abraham in a night vision – seemed about to be derailed. Then we read the following:

A man found [Joseph] wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?" He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?" "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. (Gen. 37:15-17)

I know of no comparable passage in the Torah: three verses dedicated to an apparently trivial, eminently forgettable detail of someone having to ask directions from a stranger. Who was this unnamed man? And what conceivable message does the episode hold for future generations, for us? Rashi says he was the angel Gabriel. Ibn Ezra says he was a passer-by. Ramban however says that "the Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a guide without his knowledge."

I am not sure whether Ramban meant without Joseph's knowledge or without the guide's knowledge. I prefer to think both. The anonymous man – so the Torah is intimating – represented an intrusion of providence to make sure that Joseph went to where he was supposed to be, so that the rest of the drama could unfold. He may not have known he

had such a role. Joseph surely did not know. To put it as simply as I can: he was an angel who didn't know he was an angel. He had a vital role in the story. Without him, it would not have happened. But he had no way of knowing, at the time, the significance of his intervention.

The message could not be more significant. When heaven intends something to happen, and it seems to be impossible, sometimes it sends an angel down to earth – an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel – to move the story from here to there. Let me tell the story of two such angels, without whom there might not be a State of Israel today. One was a remarkable young woman from a Sephardi family who, at the age of seventeen, married into the most famous Ashkenazi family in the world. Her name was Dorothy Pinto; her husband was James de Rothschild, son of the great Baron Edmond de Rothschild who did so much to support the settlement of the land in the days before the proclamation of the State.

A critical juncture occurred during the First World War that would eventually lead to the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the placing of Palestine under a British mandate. Suddenly, Britain became absolutely central to the Zionist dream. A key figure in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann, was in Britain, experimenting and lecturing in chemistry at Manchester University. But Weizmann was a Russian immigrant, not a prominent member of British society. Manchester was not London. Chemistry was not politics. The most influential and well-connected Jewish family was the Rothschilds. But Edmond was in France. James was a soldier on the battlefield. And not every member of the British Rothschilds was a Zionist.

At that moment, Dorothy suddenly assumed a leading role. She was only nineteen when she first met Weizmann in December 1914, and understood very little of the political complexities involved in realising the Zionist dream. But she learned quickly. She was perceptive, resourceful, energetic, delightful and determined. She connected Weizmann with everyone he needed to know and persuade. Simon Schama, in his definitive account of Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel, says that “young as she was... she combined charm, intelligence and more than a hint of steely resolution in just the right mixture to coax commitment from the equivocal, enthusiasm from the lukewarm and sympathy from the indifferent.”

His judgement on the effect of her interventions is that “through tireless but prudent social diplomacy she had managed to open avenues of influence and persuasion at a time when they were badly needed.”<sup>[1]</sup> The result, in 1917, was the Balfour Declaration, a milestone in the history of Zionism – and we should not forget that the Declaration itself took the form of a letter to Lord (Walter) Rothschild.

Dorothy's husband James, in his will, left the money to build the Knesset, Israel's parliament building. In her own will, Dorothy left the money to build a new Supreme Court Building, a project undertaken by her nephew Jacob, the current Lord Rothschild. But of all the things she did, it was those connections she made for Chaim Weizmann in the years 1914 to 1917 that were surely the most important. Without them, there might have been no Balfour Declaration and no State of Israel.

The other figure, who could not have been less like Dorothy de Rothschild, was Eddie Jacobson. The son of poor Jewish immigrants, born in New York's Lower East Side, he moved with his family to Kansas City where he met a young man called Harry Truman. They knew one another in their youth, and became close in 1917 when they underwent military training together. After the end of World War I, they opened a haberdashery business together. It failed in 1922 because of the recession.

From then on, they went their separate ways, Jacobson as a travelling salesman, and Truman successively a county administrator, Senator, Vice-President, and then when F.D. Roosevelt died in office in 1945, President of the United States. Despite their very different life-trajectories, the two stayed friends, and Jacobson would often visit Truman, talking to him about, among other things, about the fate of European Jewry during the

Holocaust.

After the war, the position of America vis-à-vis the State of Israel was deeply ambivalent. The State Department was opposed. Truman himself refused to meet Chaim Weizmann. On 13 March 1948, Jacobson went to the White House and persuaded Truman to change his mind and meet Weizmann. Largely as a result of this, the United States became the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel on 14 May 1948.

Many years later, Truman wrote:

One of the proudest moments of my life occurred at 6:12 p.m. on Friday, May 14, 1948, when I was able to announce recognition of the new State of Israel by the government of the United States. I remain particularly gratified by the role I was fortunate to play in the birth of Israel as, in the immortal words of the Balfour Declaration, "a national home for the Jewish people."

Two people, Dorothy de Rothschild and Eddie Jacobson, appeared on the scene of history and connected Chaim Weizmann with individuals he might otherwise not have met, among them Arthur Balfour<sup>[2]</sup> and Harry Truman. They were like the stranger who connected Joseph and his brothers, but with infinitely more positive consequences. I think of them both as angels who did not know they were angels.

Perhaps this is true not only about the destiny of nations but also about each of us at critical junctures in our lives. I believe that there are times when we feel lost, and then someone says or does something that lifts us or points the way to a new direction and destination. Years later, looking back, we see how important that intervention was, even though it seemed slight at the time. That is when we know that we too encountered an angel who didn't know he or she was an angel. That is what the story of Joseph's stranger is about. <sup>[1]</sup> Simon Schama, *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel*, Collins, 1978, 196-98.

<sup>[2]</sup> Weizmann had met Arthur Balfour already, but without Dorothy he would not have had the influence that he eventually came to have over a whole circle of leading politicians.

### [Thomas Mann's Portrayal of Tamar—A Self-Reflection?:Vayeshev By Rabbi Len Levin](https://ajrsem.org/teachings/divreitorah/)

I first encountered Thomas Mann's portrayal of the biblical heroine Tamar (from *Joseph and His Brothers*, pp. 1016–42) as a high school student; it was assigned reading in our Jewish day school. I have never been able to see her otherwise since.

Thomas Mann was arguably the greatest German writer of his age. He worked on his massive fictional rendition of the Joseph saga from 1924 to 1942, years of turbulence and tragedy for Germany and Jewry. He modeled his portrayal of Rachel on his wife Katia, who came from an assimilated German Jewish family. Seeking a leading female character for the fourth part of his tetralogy, he chose Tamar, daughter-in-law of Judah who became the progenitress of the two leading clans of the Judah tribe, Peretz and Zerah, and ancestress of the Davidic dynasty.

Mann masterfully reworks the bare bones of the narrative of Genesis Chapter 38 into a vivid saga. In his telling, Tamar came from a family of olive growers near Hebron to become an eager disciple of the elderly Jacob, who taught the worship of the one God of the world and whose family was covenanted to God's blessing. Dissatisfied with the pallid Baal-worship of her ancestors, she was determined to join the people of the blessing and work her way into their history and destiny. She combined beauty and intellect with a fierce sense of ambition and desire to make a difference in the world.

Mann places Tamar midway in age between Judah and his sons, more attracted to Judah but settling on Er, Judah's firstborn, as the more available option. This match did not end well, as the text relates. Mann next credits Tamar with originating the custom of levirate marriage, an idea which Jacob adopts and legislates for Israel in perpetuity at her initiation. The tragic result of this ploy, with Onan's death, left Judah twice bereaved, a pathetic parallel to Jacob now mourning the loss of his beloved Joseph whom he

believed dead. As Jacob is loath to give up Benjamin, so Judah understandably is protective of his remaining son Shelah.

The rest of the story is more fully spelled out in the biblical text—how Tamar donned the garments of widowhood at the family's behest; how after years of waiting she seduced Judah on his way back from a sheep shearing celebration; how when he condemned her to death for whoring she produced the tokens he had left with her, proving his paternity without explicitly naming him, thus eliciting Judah's confession, "She is more righteous than I"; how she gave birth to twins, thus symbolically replacing his first two sons who had died. The listener of the biblical tale knows the sequel—how Peretz became the foremost of the Judah tribes, producing Nachshon, Boaz, and David.

Mann's enlargement of the biblical narrative consists of entering into the characters' personality and motivations, and especially in making Tamar a precursor of Ruth and thus a prototype of the proselyte in Jewish history. (The rabbinic midrash invents a Terahite ancestry for her, for which there is no basis in the biblical text.) This tempts me to speculate about Mann's own personal motivation for this move. Though Mann was reticent about his own feelings about Jews and Judaism, two facts beg for interpretation. The first is that he married a Jewish woman, Katia (though she converted to Lutheranism during the marriage). The second is that he devoted eighteen years of his life to his masterpiece on the Joseph saga, and in the course of this project did exhaustive research on the rabbinic midrash on that narrative, using it as well as the biblical text as scaffolding for his own imaginative recreation of the story. When I read about Tamar sitting at Jacob's feet, eagerly taking in his recounting of the wisdom of the past transmitted by his family, I detect more than a hint of Mann himself, taking in the lore of the Jewish tradition in order to ponder the mystery of the fate of the Jewish people in the course of world history.

The Bible often addresses questions of doctrine and speculation through the medium of narrative. One of the questions attracting attention and discussion today is the status of Judaism itself—is it a religious or an ethnic identification? On this question, different voices within the Bible debate pro and con. On the one hand, there is the injunction of Abraham and Isaac to their favored sons, not to marry among the Canaanite women, but to go back to Aram to marry among their kinfolk. On the other hand, there are the examples of Tamar and Ruth, women of the local nations, who married in and became heroines and progenitresses of the royal line. To this we must add Jethro, who proclaimed the one God and gave Moses crucial advice on setting up the governance of the Israelite people, and his daughter Zipporah, whom Moses married.

And in recent memory, we must include Thomas Mann himself, who though he identified as a German writer throughout his life, was a fierce advocate of democracy and humane values during the crisis of the twentieth century, and who proved his friendship to the Jewish people by giving us an enduring imaginative recreation of its heroes and heroines. (*Rabbi Len Levin is Professor of Jewish philosophy at AJR and editor of Studies in Judaism and Pluralism*)

[To Fulfill a Mitzvah: Vayeshev by Eliezer B. Diamond](http://www.jtsa.edu/fulfill-a-mitzvah)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/fulfill-a-mitzvah>

There is an interesting moment in this week's parashah during Joseph's search for his brothers. Initially, Joseph seeks them in Shechem, where Jacob supposes them to be. As Joseph fruitlessly seeks his brothers, a man who perceives that Joseph is wandering aimlessly asks Joseph the purpose of his search. When Joseph replies that he is seeking his brothers, the man tells him he has heard that they are headed for Dothan. (Gen. 37:14-17) Joseph then follows his brothers there, and the story unfolds of his sale as a slave and his descent to Egypt.

One wonders what purpose this episode serves. Rashbam and others suggest that the Torah intends to praise Joseph for assiduously seeking his brothers in accordance with Jacob's wishes despite his own knowledge of his brothers' hostility toward him. Read this

way, the inclusion of the anonymous supplier of information is simply a device to highlight Joseph's fidelity to his father's request in the face of obstacles that might have deterred a lesser human being.

However, the Midrash (Tanhuma, Vayeshev 2:3) identifies the anonymous informant as the angel Gabriel; behind this identification lies the assumption that Joseph's encounter with his informant is not coincidental but rather divinely ordained. God sends a celestial messenger to ensure that Joseph finds his brothers; his consequent descent to Egypt is a vital part of the divine plan to lead Jacob's descendants into enslavement there as had been foreordained.

The Midrash puts it as follows: "[Joseph's descent to Egypt] can be compared to the case of a cow that refuses to be led to the slaughterhouse. What did they do? They led her calf in front of her and she followed against her will." (Tanhuma (Buber ed.), Vayeshev 15:3)

So too it is Jacob's love for Joseph that compels Joseph to journey to Egypt and slavery. One is reminded of Banquo's dark observation in Macbeth: "The instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to betray us in deepest consequence." (I.iii)

The above exegeses notwithstanding, I wish to propose an alternative reading: The man was in fact a mere mortal. Just as Joseph was divinely directed to his encounter with him, the man himself was an instrument in God's hands, placed in the right location and time to be able to lead Joseph to his brothers.

Adopting, for argument's sake, this interpretation, let us imagine what goes through the mind of this man as he walks away from his encounter with Joseph. No doubt he is pleased to have helped a fellow human being; and indeed from a human perspective this is unquestionably the case. Yet when we view this incident from the perspective of subsequent events, it is clear that, however unintentionally, he has pointed Joseph in the direction of disaster. This dissonant juxtaposition of good intent and evil consequence is a reminder of man's inability to decipher the relationship of his actions to God's master plan. The words that Isaiah prophesies in God's name remind us of the gulf that separates human and divine perception: "For my plans are not your plans, nor are my ways your ways" (Isa. 56:8).

However, despite the words of Isaiah, man is periodically tempted to believe not only that he can anticipate God's designs, but that through human action these designs can be frustrated. The rabbinic gloss to Isaiah's prophetic declaration to the ill Hezekiah, "You are going to die, you will not live" (2 Kings 20:1 and Isa. 38:1), cautions against falling prey to this illusory notion. The Rabbis account for the apparent redundancy in Isaiah's words by interpreting them as "you will die—in this world; you will not live—in the next world." The reason for this is that Hezekiah has failed to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful and multiply. Hezekiah defends himself, saying that through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he had seen that his offspring were destined to be evil—as indeed his son Menasseh was. Isaiah rebukes him in reply, saying, "What concern of yours are God's secrets? Your obligation is to do what God has commanded, and God will then do as He sees fit" (BT Berakhot 10a).

In this rabbinic narrative, Hezekiah refrains from fulfilling a mitzvah in an attempt to forestall his divinely decreed fate. Isaiah observes that in so doing Hezekiah trespasses the boundary separating human obligation from divine reckoning. The human role is to carry out God's commandments; the resulting consequences are part of a larger scheme that transcends both our control and our understanding.

There is an important corollary to this axiom. Just as one cannot forestall the possible negative consequences of a good deed, one cannot anticipate the magnitude of the good that may result from a seemingly insignificant act. "Be as careful to observe a light precept as you are to observe a weighty one," says Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, "for you do not know the recompense of reward for each precept" (M. Avot 2:1). Therefore one must fight the inclination not to perform a mitzvah that seems to be of little consequence. The temptation to do so may reflect one's disdain for the seeming pettiness of the

mitzvah itself; alternatively, one may feel that engagement with “light precepts” feeds one’s own sense of insubstantiality.

I once had reason to meditate on the truth and relevance of this teaching while attending the wedding of a friend’s son. At one point during the dancing I stood at the outer periphery of several large concentric circles of men and boys who were singing and dancing with great joy. I had already danced a great deal myself and I needed some respite. At that moment I felt entirely irrelevant to the celebration and it seemed to me that I might as well return to my table with the hope that my salad plate had not been whisked away by an overzealous waiter.

All of a sudden the words of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch flashed through my mind: “for you do not know the recompense of reward for each precept.” I realized that my thinking was skewed; in a way it was a form of hubris. It was not for me to calibrate the degree to which my presence or absence increased or decreased the intensity of the rejoicing. My obligation was to gladden the hearts of the bride and groom in whatever way I could. That meant, at the very least, being part of the entourage of celebrants, whether or not the bride and groom, or anyone else for that matter, were aware of my presence.

This realization led to two others. The first was that if the Torah thought my presence significant enough to demand it of me, then I needed to take the obligation more seriously. True, I was too tired to dance; could I not at least clap, or in some other way actively join in the celebration? Indeed I could, and I began to clap and sing.

The second was that participation in the festivity was as important for my own spiritual well-being as it was for the fulfillment of my obligation to the bride and groom.

Participation gave meaning to those moments of my life; it transformed me from a spectator to a partner in the important work of bringing joy to two people and their families at this important juncture in their lives. It connected me to everyone else who was rejoicing; each in his or her own way was engaged in the same holy task, and together we produced an expression of joy that surpassed the individual acts of which it was composed.

Our lives are full of mitzvah opportunities if we but have eyes to see them. Greeting a stranger, tempering a criticism so that it does not sting, or complimenting someone on a new haircut, each small act helps tip the cosmic scales toward the side of goodness and merit; each one binds us closer to God and to our fellow human beings; and each one is an instrument for making meaning in our own lives. No, we do not know the ultimate consequences of our actions; as mortals, it is enough that we do mitzvot in the hope and belief that each mitzvah brings another in its wake. (*Eliezer B. Diamond is Rabbi Judah Nadich*

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### Vayeshev by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt

<https://mailchi.mp/cc0dc989ec9e/weekly-davar-2577089?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

This is the portion of Joseph and his ‘coat of many colours’. Joseph is the second youngest of 13 children – but his father’s favourite (my favourite too). He dreams of greatness and his brothers are jealous. Wrongly believing him to be a threat to the fledgling Jewish nation, they sell him to Egypt where he becomes a slave to Potiphar. Joseph is a man for whom everything turns to gold and so his master’s house prospers. But his master’s wife falls for him. She is one of the most beautiful women in Egypt and tries every trick in the book, but Joseph resists. Eventually, in her frustration, she has him thrown into prison – hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. After a few years, he interprets the dreams of Pharaoh’s butler and baker (Pharaoh didn’t have a candlestick maker). When the butler is released, Joseph asks that he request a pardon from him from Pharaoh. The butler promises – and promptly forgets.

The word from which this portion derives its name means ‘and he rested’. The rabbis tell us that Jacob wished to rest, wanted some time off – and, as a consequence, the

greatest challenge of his life, that of believing he had lost his favourite son, came up on him.

It's always sounded very harsh to me. From the moment Jacob had taken the birthright from Esau, his life had been one of struggle. Let's just take a moment to recall the non-stop sequence of events. He had left home penniless; he was swindled left right and centre by his conniving uncle Laban; he had survived Laban's murderous wrath when he left his home; his brother had come to kill him; his wife had died giving birth to his last son; his daughter had been raped; his sons had murdered an entire tribe, the list goes on.....and he had come through it all with flying colours – never once compromising his values, always steadfast in his commitment to God. Surely, SURELY he would be entitled to some time off; a holiday? A week in the Bahamas or just a few days binging on Netflix would not have been unreasonable? Why did God deal with him so harshly for simply wanting a break?

This question comes down to something that my wife and I often discuss – the purpose of life itself. There are often times when I feel like Jacob. I burnt the midnight oil and rose early in the cold and dark to pray; I took the kids to school battling through the merciless London traffic; I had a working breakfast, skipped lunch and arrived home in the early evening with the prospect of two more meetings later that night. There is a window of opportunity for a break and then my wife tells me how tired she is and could I get the kids ready for bed? Not the challenges Jacob faced, to be sure, but I do get how he felt. I beg my wife for a break and she responds with her usual merciless line, 'there will be plenty of time for rest in the grave'.

She's right, of course (but that doesn't mean I like it!) She's right because for me, life is about service; life is what I can give, not what I can take; life is a very precious opportunity to contribute; and even if you aren't certain about all of those things, you will agree with me that life is certainly a limited commodity. And so, in my heart of hearts, I know that putting the kids to bed is much more meaningful than watching NFL Gamepass. I might not feel like doing it, but it's certainly what I want to do. And, of course, I still have the energy and patience for it; of course I can enjoy doing it; of course being a father is a privilege, partnering with my wife in the endeavour of building a family, a valued commitment I signed up for long ago.

Yes, we all do need breaks at times so that we can come back stronger. Sleep, something no one can do without, is the classic example. But a break to come back stronger is very different to running away because life is too much trouble; selling myself short because it's too much hard work.

Jacob didn't want a break; he wanted to run away.

I recall that feeling well when my wife passed away. I just wanted to run as far and as fast as I could; preferably to oblivion if I could find it. If I had not had kids, I would have done so – like David Copperfield, gone travelling the world for a few years or decades. But I had kids and so I stayed and faced the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune – and how glad I am that I did. And equally, how glad I am of my wife's refrain. She is correct. There will be plenty of time to rest in the grave and I can make up for all the lost opportunities with interest. In the interim, time is a limited commodity and I wish to use it to its maximum!

And just to say..... yes, I'm human and there are times, many of them, that I don't live up to what I know makes sense. My wife will testify to that! But this is my trajectory and as best as I can live it, I do. Some of life's most precious moments come for me when I put our kids to bed. None of life's precious moments come when I escape into NFL Gamepass.

[Happy Happenstances by Rabbi Rebecca Schatz](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Oj0EWDFB971vLe_-yIeIFj3FiVQXNVVSTjYzFnmJAQ/edit#)

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Oj0EWDFB971vLe\\_-yIeIFj3FiVQXNVVSTjYzFnmJAQ/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Oj0EWDFB971vLe_-yIeIFj3FiVQXNVVSTjYzFnmJAQ/edit#)

Coincidences can be wonderful, surprising, meant-to-happen, beshert! We can't rely on them to occur but we love it when they do. We feel well-fated, the beneficiaries of Divine intervention. Maybe it's a little of all of those things. But maybe, really, it's partly due to something uniquely us. Maybe we can be prone to creating coincidence, attracting happy happenstances.

I came home from a late synagogue board meeting Monday night to find a car blocking access to my assigned garage off the alley behind my home. The car was facing me and I wondered how to approach without startling or angering whoever was behind the wheel. I inched forward, leaving space to get around me, and making clear my intention to enter the garage. As the car moved away the young driver smiled at me. And I saw that the car seemed overfilled with unusual things--lots of clothes, books, and household things. And I thought maybe I recognized the smile. I sat in my garage, texting and emailing people closer to this community member to find out whether or not it could, in fact, be who might have been able to verify my suspicions, and finally emailed who I guessed the person to be. The last email was to this person who fashioned a similar grin. I wrote that I hoped it was just a look-alike and that we could catch up over coffee, but that if it was, in fact, the case that their car was home that I wanted to help. The next day I received an email response that said: "I did not know how to respond, but would be happy to meet and chat." I knew.

In Parashat Vayeshev, we begin the Yosef story, one dream is shared with Yosef's family and we meet an anonymous character. The unnamed one. In perfect Jewish counter-intuitiveness, the one who is unknown and unidentified, unlabeled and uncategorized, is the humble keystone of a castle. Israel (Yaakov) encourages Yosef to go out and check on his brothers and their flock and Yosef happens upon an *שיא* a person or man. Yosef is wandering in the fields of Shechem where his brothers should be and the person asks him, "מה תבקש" – what do you seek or request or colloquially, "what are you looking for?" Yosef hears in response that his brothers have gone to another town, and ventures on to find them there. He goes off to them and falls into the trap of brothers conspiring to kill Yosef.

Is this a coincidence? Is it a lesson waiting to be learned? Is the person a Divine character helping a story progress a certain way? This person moves Yosef closer to his brothers and their torment, but also moves him toward a future of blessing and significance.

The Netziv, from 19th century Europe, comments on this unidentified stranger as a messenger from Heaven "to encounter Yosef and bring him to [his brothers]. However, the Netziv continues to say that the Torah should have written that Yosef found this person. Yosef was the one wandering and happened upon the *שיא* who was just walking this way, coincidentally.

The person outside my garage did not know that I lived there. Coincidence. The person is receiving help, living in a home and is the catalyst for our community building a food pantry for our own food insecure. Coincidence. That person has the attention of helpful "strangers", nameless ones. Coincidentally Divine, perhaps. We need to focus more on those who are unidentified. But we need to relate many more such "coincidences". We need to seek out an unraveling livelihood or family. Don't assume that everyone is ok. Look and listen. Even if you know their name, do not assume that you can "tell." This anonymous person in the Yosef story began the narrative that acquired for us a people and a homeland. The person was not the coincidence; Yosef trusting and following instructions was the coincidence. Lean in, ask a deeper question, and follow unsolicited advice. We are a family, a people, and a home all because of coincidence. *(Rabbi Rebecca Schatz, a Conservative Yeshiva Alum, is Assistant Rabbi at Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles, CA)*

[Haftarah: Privilege & Responsibility by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Oj0EWDFB971vLe_-yleIFj3FiVQXNVVSTjYzFnmJAQ/edit#)

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Oj0EWDFB971vLe\\_-yleIFj3FiVQXNVVSTjYzFnmJAQ/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/17Oj0EWDFB971vLe_-yleIFj3FiVQXNVVSTjYzFnmJAQ/edit#)

Prophets were not very popular. They said things that people did not want to hear, often in ways which were biting. They turned prideful messages into societal challenges and privilege into accountability. Here is an example of Amos' approach to the idea of "chosenness": "Hear this word which the Lord has spoken to you, O Israelites, concerning the entire clan that I brought up from Egypt, saying: Only with you was I intimate of all of the clans on earth. Therefore, I will make a reckoning with you for all of your crimes." (3:1-2)

In these two sentences, Amos reminds the people of God's great act of mercy, the redemption from Egypt and with it the founding of the nation. But, instead of touting it as a badge of honor, a claim to a unique and special identity, with an expectation of future acts of grace and mercy, he turns this story into an indictment and expectation of a turnabout in the nation's behavior.

The classical commentators try to characterize the exact nature of Amos' plaint. According to Rabbi David Kimche (12th century Provence), "since [Israel] saw the signs and wonders that God did for them, it seems an appropriate legal expectation that God as King should be angry [at them], for when servants stand before the king, he pays greater attention to their transgressions than he would to the sins of others" (abridged) Rabbi Yosef Kara (12th century Northern France) also notes that since God took note of their troubles [and saved them from them], he also pays special attention to their sins. Today, we might call Amos' message to his fellow countrymen an examination of the nature of "privilege". The people likely concluded from their shared history that they should enjoy the perks and benefits of a favorite child or member of an exclusive club. Amos delivered to them a rude awakening. Their "chosenness" carried with it not privilege but obligation and added attention to how they act.

These days Jews are very much on the defensive, aspersions cast upon them from left and right. Still, we cannot let the distorted voices of others define us. We need to define ourselves according to our own moral and religious compass. Amos reminds us where we come from and what its true implications are for who we are and how we are to behave. (*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein is a faculty member at the Conservative Yeshiva*)

### Yahrtzeits

Russett Feldman and Nikki Pusin remembers their father Max Nathaniel Pusin on Saturday December 21st (Kislev 23)

Steve Kissner remembers his father Abe Kissner on Tuesday December 24th (Kislev 26).

Irwin Primer remembers his mother Sarah Primer on Thursday December 26th (Kislev 28).

Stuart Sender remembers his father Jack Sender on Thursday December 26th (Kislev 28).

### ~~~~~Chanukah Recipes~~~~~

#### [Crispy Carrot-Parsnip Latkes By Miriam Szokovski](#)

[https://www.chabad.org/recipes/recipe\\_cdo/aid/4095586/jewish/Crispy-Carrot-Parsnip-Latkes.htm#utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=99\\_kosher\\_cooking\\_en&utm\\_campaign=en&utm\\_content=content](https://www.chabad.org/recipes/recipe_cdo/aid/4095586/jewish/Crispy-Carrot-Parsnip-Latkes.htm#utm_medium=email&utm_source=99_kosher_cooking_en&utm_campaign=en&utm_content=content)

*My two main tips for making latkes are:*

1. Stick a small piece of carrot in the oil. The carrot absorbs the burnt taste the oil sometimes gets. When the carrot looks dark and shriveled, take it out and replace with a new one.
2. To make the latkes a uniform size, use a cup measuring cup to scoop up the batter. The size doesn't matter as long as you use the same for all - I use 1/8, 1/4, or 1/3 depending on what size latkes I want.

#### Ingredients

- 1/2 lb. carrot (approximately 4 carrots)
- 1/2 lb. Yukon Gold potato (1 large potato)
- 1/2 lb. parsnip (1 large or 2 small parsnips)

- ½ lb. onion (approximately 1 large onion)
- 4 eggs, beaten
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt
- ½ cup flour
- oil for frying

### Directions

1. Grate the vegetables and transfer to a large bowl. Add the eggs, salt, and flour. Mix well.
2. Use a large frying pan. Heat oil over medium heat until it sizzles when you drop the batter into it.
3. Use a ⅛ or ¼ cup measuring cup to measure the batter so that all your latkes will be the same size.
4. Drop the mixture into the oil and gently flatten with the back of the measuring cup (or a spatula). Cook for 3-4 minutes on the first side, until it is crisp and golden. Flip and cook an addition 2-3 minutes on the second side. (Depending on the size and material of your pan, you may need to increase or decrease the frying time).
5. Continue to fry in batches until all the batter has been fried.

### Doughnuts with Feta, Honey and Pistachios By Miriam Szokovski

[https://www.chabad.org/recipes/recipe\\_cdo/aid/3707348/jewish/Doughnuts-with-Feta-Honey-and-Pistachios.htm#utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=99\\_kosher\\_cooking\\_en&utm\\_campaign=en&utm\\_content=content](https://www.chabad.org/recipes/recipe_cdo/aid/3707348/jewish/Doughnuts-with-Feta-Honey-and-Pistachios.htm#utm_medium=email&utm_source=99_kosher_cooking_en&utm_campaign=en&utm_content=content)

It might seem odd to use feta cheese in a dessert recipe, but it pairs perfectly with the sticky sweet honey, and the pistachios provide crunch and additional depth of flavor.

### Ingredients

- |                                    |                              |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • 2¼ tsp. dry yeast                | 1 egg                        |
| • 2 tbsp. warm water               | 3 tbsp. oil or melted butter |
| • 1 tsp. Sugar                     | 3+ cups flour                |
| • ¾ cup milk                       | Oil for frying               |
| • 6 tbsp. Sugar                    | ¼ cup honey                  |
| • ½ tsp. kosher salt               | ½ cup crumbled feta cheese   |
| • ½ cup roughly chopped pistachios |                              |

### Directions

1. Place yeast, warm water and 1 tsp. sugar in bowl. Let sit for 10 minutes until frothy.
2. Mix yeast mixture with the remaining sugar, oil, egg, salt, and soy/almond milk and 1 cup of flour on a low speed.
3. Slowly add in the rest of the flour until dough is no longer sticky. It should feel somewhat like a bread dough.
4. Knead for 5 minutes, then cover the bowl with a damp cloth and let rise approximately 1 hour, until dough has doubled in size.
5. Roll the dough into small balls. Lay the balls out on parchment paper and let rise 30-60 minutes.
6. Heat oil in a frying pan or pot. Drop in a few doughnuts at a time. Flip each doughnut so each side can brown.
7. Remove the doughnuts from the oil and place on a plate lined with paper towels to absorb the excess oil.
8. Transfer the doughnuts to a serving platter. Drizzle generously with honey, and sprinkle with crumbled feta and chopped pistachios.

### Fried Mozzarella Sticks for Chanukah By Miriam Szokovski

[https://www.chabad.org/recipes/recipe\\_cdo/aid/3085964/jewish/Fried-Mozzarella-Sticks-for-Chanukah.htm#utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=99\\_kosher\\_cooking\\_en&utm\\_campaign=en&utm\\_content=content](https://www.chabad.org/recipes/recipe_cdo/aid/3085964/jewish/Fried-Mozzarella-Sticks-for-Chanukah.htm#utm_medium=email&utm_source=99_kosher_cooking_en&utm_campaign=en&utm_content=content)

This recipe combines two elements of traditional Chanukah food—cheese and oil.

*The two most important things to keep in mind when making this recipe are:*

1. Make sure you freeze the breaded cheese for at least 30 minutes before frying.

2. Make sure your oil is not too hot, otherwise the crumbs will burn and the outer layer of melted cheese will push its way through the crumbs and stick all over the bottom of the frying pan, while the inside stays frozen. In other words, you will end up with an inedible, burned mess.

#### Ingredients:

- 10 mozzarella sticks (you can use string cheese, or cut a block of cheese to size)
- 1 egg, beaten
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ cup flavored Panko crumbs
- Oil for frying
- Marinara sauce for dipping (optional)

#### Directions:

1. Coat each cheese stick in flour, then dip in egg and coat with the crumbs.
2. Place the coated cheese sticks on a tray or plate lined with wax or parchment paper. Freeze for 30 minutes.
3. Heat the oil to medium, then drop 2–3 sticks in the oil. Cook until brown on one side, then gently flip and cook until the other side is lightly browned. Remove from pan and place on a piece of paper towel.
4. Serve immediately, with warm marinara sauce for dipping (optional).

