

# PARSHA MIKEITZ

DECEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup>, 2015  
KISLEV 30<sup>TH</sup> 5776

## 625



Publication of  
**HEVRAT PINTO**

Under the Direction of  
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## PEACE AND IDLENESS PREVENT THE STUDY OF TORAH

*Rabbi David Pinto Chlita*

*“Their father Jacob said to them, ‘I am the one whom you bereaved! Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and now you would take away Benjamin?’”* (Gen 42:36). Rashi cites the Midrash: *“He suspected them of wanting to kill or sell Benjamin, just as they had sold Joseph”* (Bereshith Rabba 91:9).

The sale and story of the bloodstained tunic that Jacob was alluding to indicates to us that he suspected them, which is something new. One must ask why he didn’t believe their story.

Let us first cite some verses that deal with this subject. This will allow us to clearly understand the entire episode.

It is written, “He recognized it and he said, ‘My son’s tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph has surely been torn to bits!’ ... But he refused to comfort himself and said, ‘For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son.’ And his father bewailed him” (Gen 37:33,35). Afterwards, when they went to Egypt to buy grain, it is written: “Behold, I have heard that there are provisions in Egypt. Go down there and purchase for us from there, that we may live and not die” (Gen 42:2). And so upon their father’s request (v.3), the ten sons of Jacob went down to Egypt to buy things to eat.

In the verses that relate the sale of Joseph and the subsequent pain of Jacob, that which is not stated is by far more than that which is. Based on this, we may ask the following questions:

1. Why was Jacob’s mourning so great? He had faith in G-d, and he knew that everything that happened came from Him. What was he afraid of then?
2. How is it that he suspected the brothers? Did he not know that “the one who suspects the innocent is punished for it” (Shabbat 97a)? He was certain that the brothers, “heads of the tribes of Israel” (Ps 122:4), were men without fault, upright and just (Shabbat 146a). Why then did he suspect them without proof or reason? Moreover, after the sale of Joseph, Jacob lost Divine inspiration (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). How then was he able to know that his sons were guilty (since G-d didn’t reveal it to him)?
3. How does one explain that all of Joseph’s ten brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain? One or two would have sufficed to accomplish that task.

The Sages tell us, “Jacob should have gone down to Egypt in chains, but his merit protected him” (Shabbat 89b).

For his part, Jacob would certainly have preferred to go down to Egypt in chains, and to make the prophecy given to Abraham come true, rather than to suffer the pain of Joseph’s sale and the loss of Divine inspiration (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). The prophecy to Abraham stipulated: “Your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own – and they will serve them, and they will oppress them – four hundred years” (Gen 15:13).

From the time that Jacob was told that Joseph was dead, Jacob served G-d in pain. He refused to let himself be consoled, and he feared that a lack of perfection (Pesachim 56a) prevented him from becoming “a receptacle for the Divine Presence” (Bereshith Rabba 47:8). Since he felt that he was missing such perfection, it meant that the fault lay in him, to the extent that he cried, “I will joint my son in the grave,” so great was his pain and grief at the thought that he himself was the cause.

Concerning the verse that states, “he has surely [תן] been torn to pieces” (Gen 44:28), we may add that the word תן always expresses a limit (Pesachim 5a). This indicates to us that Jacob wasn’t sure that a wild animal had devoured his son, and that’s the reason why he refused all consolation. The Sages even said, “A law desires that the deceased be forgotten, since one doesn’t accept consolation over a person who is still alive” (Bereshith Rabba 84:21). As such, Joseph would still have been alive in Jacob’s mind, and Jacob would have continued to pray to G-d, asking Him in His mercy to allow him to find his son. Jacob would have thereby known that his seed was perfect. Thus Jacob never lost hope of finding his son Joseph alive.

We can understand why Jacob hesitated so much to send his son Benjamin to Egypt, as it is said, “You will take Benjamin away!” (Gen 42:36). It is because “all roads are dangerous” (Yerushalmi Berachot 4:4) and “the Satan appears only at a time of danger” (Yerushalmi Shabbat 2:6). Jacob feared that “should trouble befall him on the journey which you shall take, then you will have brought down my gray hair in sorrow to the grave” (Gen 42:38). If Benjamin were to die, it would be because the children of

Jacob were not perfect. We see in this just how much suffering a man is prepared to accept, just as long as the Divine Presence doesn't leave him.

It's a known fact that there are some Jews that proclaim to be Jewish, yet don't at all hesitate to marry non-Jewish women. They should realize that not only does the Divine Presence abandon them when they distance themselves from the G-d of Israel, but that they also create enormous danger for the Jewish people as a whole. They especially cause their parents great suffering when they see their children leaving their people "to go feed in foreign pastures." Parents such as these prefer to die rather than to see their children assimilated among foreign peoples. Children such as these are guilty of selfishness, having acted this way only to satisfy their own desires, without thinking of the pain and suffering that they've caused.

When G-d saw the pain of Jacob, a man who longed for perfection, in His great goodness He restored to him a little Divine inspiration, as it is said, "Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt" (Gen 42:1). On this the Sages remarked: "By Divine inspiration, he saw that there was some hope by way of Egypt" (Bereshith Rabba 91:6).

In learning that his son Joseph was alive and that he was the governor of the entire country (Gen 42:6), life came back to the heart of Jacob (Gen 45:27). Rashi explains as follows: The Divine inspiration that previously left him now came back (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). Jacob feared that his offspring lacked purity, this being the reason for why the Divine Presence abandoned him. But then, upon learning that Joseph was the governor of Egypt and that he had remained a righteous man, Jacob understood that such was not the case. What's more, Divine inspiration was restored to him.

When Divine inspiration came back to him, he also knew that his sons, those who had sold Joseph, had prepared the journey down to Egypt, and that their intentions had been pure, since G-d Himself took part in the oath not to reveal the truth to Jacob (Tanhuma Vayeishev 2). For what reason, therefore, did Jacob suspect his sons up to that point?

Everyone knows that the kindness that we experience in this world comes only because of the righteous, and that the entire world enjoys prosperity because of them, as it is written: "The whole world is fed thanks only to the merit of my son Hanania" (Ta'anith 24b). Actually, Jacob at first thought that his son was dead, and he was in mourning. Yet afterwards, upon seeing that Egypt was enjoying material and spiritual prosperity, he understood that this was thanks to Joseph. Jacob had no further doubts that his son was alive and that he had remained righteous, as the Sages testify (Vayikra Rabba 32:5), and he therefore had no further reason to suspect his sons in the sale of Joseph. He understood that everything had been motivated by pure intentions so that the Children of Israel could prepare for the descent into Egypt.

Now we can explain why Jacob sent his ten sons (except Benjamin) to Egypt. The elation felt in Jacob's home was great

when they said that grain was for sale in Egypt. The reason for this joy was not because they had lacked food (since we know that some of the harvest still remained [Ta'anith 10b]), but rather because Divine inspiration had been restored to Jacob, and he was preparing himself to meet Joseph. He therefore sent all his sons to make peace with Joseph and to ask for his forgiveness. Finally, he also sent Benjamin so that the brothers could be reunited.

If there had not been a famine in the land of Canaan, the sons of Jacob would not have been able to descend into Egypt to find Joseph without awakening the suspicions of their father. The famine forced the brothers to descend into Egypt, which then gave them a pretext to look for Joseph without raising their father's suspicions.

## *Eishet Chayil*

### *Shabbat Candles – Part I*

*According to Rav Ovadia Yossef, Zatsal*

1. Lighting the candles before Shabbat is an obligation imposed by our Sages. It is important to perform this mitzvah with attractive candles, as Rav Huna said, "Whoever is accustomed to having beautiful candles merits learned sons" (Shabbat 23a). It is proper, therefore, that women pray after lighting the candles, as their prayer is more surely accepted after having performed the mitzvah.

2. According to Halachah, it is sufficient to light one candle only, but we are accustomed to lighting at least two of them, one for Zachor and one for Shamor. The more candles we light on Shabbat, the more merit we have.

3. A woman who normally lights a certain amount of candles in honor of Shabbat cannot light less than this amount. If for some reason (financial or otherwise) she wishes to light less than she normally does, she should perform Hatarat Nedarim (annulment of vows) in front of three men.

4. A poor person who has very little to eat is obligated to light at least one candle in honor of Shabbat. Someone who doesn't have enough money to purchase both a candle for Shabbat and some wine for Kiddush should first purchase the candle. He can perform Kiddush over bread.

5. If because of a breeze (or other such cause), the candles become extinguished after a few minutes, a woman should relight them without saying the blessing, but only if it is before sundown. On the other hand, if it is after sundown, she doesn't light them so as not to desecrate Shabbat. If she has accepted Shabbat upon herself by lighting the candles, she can ask a member of her family, who has not yet accepted Shabbat, to light them in her place (again, only if it is before sundown).

6. It is proper to put on our Shabbat clothes before lighting. However if this will take too much time, we first light the candles and then put on our Shabbat clothes. A married woman should cover her head to recite the benediction. It is customary to give money to tzeddakah before lighting.

### The Unpopular Doctor

*A Teaching of the Maggid of Dubno*

**“And now let Pharaoh look for an intelligent and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt”** (Gen 41:33).

Hashem gave Joseph the ability to explain Pharaoh’s strange dream. Seven years of abundance would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph even proposed a solution to confront this challenge.

Up to that point, Joseph had been but a simple prisoner. That we find him now raised to the rank of counselor to Pharaoh in so little time seems odd. Pharaoh didn’t lack counselors, and moreover they were all present for Joseph’s explanation of the dream. Up to that time, none of the counselors had given a satisfactory interpretation, and they were impatiently waiting to hear the interpretation of the Jewish prisoner.

Didn’t Joseph fear arousing their jealousy?

The Maggid of Dubno explains what Joseph had in mind by means of a parable.

There was once a king whose son fell gravely ill. Neither the court doctors nor those who had come from the four corners of the kingdom could find a remedy to the prince’s affliction. The king was in the grip of desperation. He sent his messengers to look for any individual capable of coming to his aid. It didn’t matter to him whether he was a doctor, magician or sorcerer. His son had to be cured at all costs. He thus ordered that there be allowed easy access to any doctor who wanted to examine the prince. The king didn’t want to waste any opportunity to save him.

In the capital there lived a very competent, but unpopular doctor. He used methods unfamiliar to his colleagues. He possessed remarkable expertise, but had been kept on the sidelines because everyone thought that he was a bit strange.

When the prince fell ill, he didn’t dare offer his services to the palace because of his reputation. Yet he was certain that he could cure the young boy with the help of a plant whose existence only he knew of. But why wear himself out by recommending this method, for all his associates would surely refuse to listen to him.

However, when he heard that all those thought capable of being of assistance could freely come and examine the prince, he presented himself at his bedside. He immediately understood that his solution was the most appropriate for the situation, and fervently wanting to save the boy, he hastened to ask for an audience with the king.

The king was sitting on his throne surrounded by all the doctors that had come there from around the world. Some

had even brought cases full of rare medications. They would surely ridicule the simple treatment that he wanted to prescribe. He therefore needed a way to persuade them that his solution was the best possible one.

He asked for permission to relate the findings of his examination to the king and the doctors gathered there. His report completed, he made it known to them that he possessed a miracle treatment. But he didn’t stop at that.

“The potion of which I speak,” he added, “should be prepared by a thoroughly competent professional. He should collect the plant by the banks of the river, dry them, and crush them in very specific manner. He must absolutely be extremely skillful in order to produce it. The prince’s recovery depends on it.

“It goes without saying,” he concluded, “that such a specialist should be generously rewarded for his services.”

In hearing these last words, all the doctors there thought, “I have such a good reputation that it will certainly be me that the king chooses. The king should follow the man’s advice at all costs.”

All of a sudden, everyone began to applaud and shouted out with admiration for the “unpopular doctor.” They greatly encouraged the king to try this miracle cure. What was happening, in fact, was that everyone was secretly thinking of the reward that they would get by turning that famed plant into powder. However they were quite disappointed when the king chose for this task ... none other than the “strange doctor” himself!

“It is you who is most suited for this task. Of all the eminent people that I consulted,” declared the king, “you are the only one to have proposed an effective treatment. I am sure that you can cure my son and heal his pain. No one can compare to you. I therefore choose you to prepare this remedy and to take care of my son.”

The righteous Joseph found himself in the same situation. He was but a humble prisoner, a stranger in that country, and above all he was an Ivri, a Hebrew, and as such the Egyptians detested him.

How could he manage to convince the counselors to accept his own interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream? He therefore suggested that the king name an inspector general and put him in charge of overseeing the economy of the entire country. Every one of his ministers, each viewing himself as eminently suited to occupy such an important position, was certain that he would be the one designated.

Yet Hashem had decided differently. He had chosen Joseph to be at the head of power. And this is why Pharaoh told him, “Since G-d has caused you to know all this, there is none so intelligent and wise as you” (Gen 41:40).

In each era, Divine Providence sends us great souls that leave their mark on the generation and whose influence is felt both in their era and many generations afterwards.

One of these exceptional sages was Rabbi Israel of Salant. He was neither a Rabbi nor a Posek, and he dressed like an ordinary person. He fled from official positions and behaved like a simple Jew. However he was a great man, and in his heart was the sacred fire of the burning bush, a divine flame that to his very last breath was never extinguished. According to Rabbi Yossef Dov Soloveitchik (the Rav of Boston), Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik of Brisk compared four Torah greats to the Rishonim, these being Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, Rabbi Israel of Salant, Rabbi Yossef Dov Soloveitchik (Rabbi Chaim's father), and Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim.

Even though many years have passed since his death, Rabbi Israel Salant's memory as the father of the Mussar movement remains alive, and his character serves as a beacon to this very day.

What follows are a few stories about his life:

Rabbi Israel Salant's confidence in G-d was extraordinary. He was certain that every prayer a person made would be granted if he had absolute faith in G-d. And if we see that a person's hopes are dashed, it is solely because his faith in G-d is not absolute.

Rabbi Israel once had a discussion with Rabbi Shemuel Strashun (the Rashash) on the Talmud. Their conversation centered on the question of whether it is legitimate to have faith in G-d for things that are unnecessary. Rabbi Israel believed that a person has the right to pray for something that he sees as superfluous, but Rabbi Strashun disagreed. Thus Rabbi Israel proposed that they attempt to see what in fact was the truth. When Rabbi Strashun accepted, Rabbi Israel said, "From this moment on, I have total confidence in G-d that He will send me a watch, something that I absolutely don't need [during that era only a few people owned watches]. Hence we will see if He will send me one."

Six months passed, until one day a Christian wearing a lieutenant's uniform came to Rabbi Shemuel and said, "A Jewish soldier in my regiment has just died, but before his death he gave me a watch to give to the local Jewish rabbi." Rabbi Shemuel took the watch and thanked the lieutenant for going to all the trouble. He then remembered his conversation with Rabbi Israel and asked that he come to see him. When Rabbi Israel arrived, Rabbi Shemuel gave him the watch and said, "G-d has heard your prayer and sent you this watch. From Heaven the Halachah has been proven to be according to your opinion."

When Rabbi Israel moved from his father-in-law's home, he settled in Kovno to find some work. Before anything, however, he began by going to the Beit Midrash to study some Torah. At that point a wealthy man from Kovno also entered the Beit Midrash, and when he saw Rabbi Israel he felt sorry for him. He went to say hello and asked him what he was doing in Kovno, to which he replied that he had come in search of work and wanted to go into business. The wealthy man looked at him and said, "Listen to me, my young man. You don't have the look of a merchant, and it's better for you to devote yourself to religious endeavors. I've heard that in a certain small town people are looking for a teacher of young boys. I will provide you with a letter of recommendation and they will give you the job."

Rabbi Israel refused and said, "The responsibility of teaching Jewish children is too great and heavy a burden for me – I cannot accept it. I would like to be a merchant."

The wealthy man thought for a moment, then he suggested that Rabbi Israel become a Shochet, for people were looking for one in Kovno. "Absolutely not," Rabbi Israel replied. "A Shochet must be extremely meticulous in his work, for it is a sacred responsibility. At the slightest mistake, he could

## Rabbi Israel Lipkin of Salant

end up giving treif food to the whole city! I would like to be a merchant."

The wealthy man then asked him if he had any money to open up a shop, and Rabbi Israel replied that he did not. "Under these conditions, how can you start a business?" he said in shock. "It's very simple," Rabbi Israel retorted. "You are going to lend me 300 rubbles to start one."

"What! What did you say?" the man began to mutter. "I'm going to lend you 300 rubbles? That's a huge amount, and I don't even know you! How do I know that I can trust you? Perhaps you're a swindler, a deadbeat! Do you think I'm crazy or something?"

Rabbi Israel arose and said to the man, "Listen to me, my dear Jew. A few minutes ago you considered me to be a person of trust. You wanted to give me a position as a teacher of precious Jewish children. You had enough faith in me to put the kashrut of Jewish homes in my hand. Yet when it comes to lending me a little money, you already don't know me and say that perhaps I am swindler! Our father Abraham behaved differently. In material matters, he trusted his servant Eliezer, as it is written: 'His servant, the elder of his household who controlled all that was his' [Genesis 24:2]. However when it came to spiritual matters, such as finding a wife for his son Isaac, he did not trust him. He made him take an oath."

One day a distinguished Rav was a guest at Rabbi Israel Salanter's home. Rabbi Israel offered him something to eat, and he added that the dish was strictly kosher. His guest was taken aback by this statement, and Rabbi Israel explained that for himself (Rabbi Israel), it was possible that the dish was not kosher because his earnings came from a generous disciple, one who may have been mistaken in believing that Rabbi Israel was a Tzaddik and a Gaon. Hence in giving Rabbi Israel money to buy this food under such a false assumption, the food would not be kosher, since the money would have stemmed from theft. However for his guest there was no question of the kashrut of the dish, since by taking it he became its new owner. Hence for him it was strictly kosher according to all opinions (Tenuat HaMussar).

For that matter, this is the reason why Rabbi Israel said in the presence of Rabbi Fishel-Ber of Rassein, an extremely wealthy man, that it was forbidden to desecrate Shabbat for him if he fell sick, for he had the status of a thief. Rabbi Fishel-Ber recounted this to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, the Rav of Kovno, who did not laugh when he heard this. Instead, he thought about it for a few moments and said, "Tell Rabbi Israel that he is mistaken. It is permitted to desecrate Shabbat for him." In fact, his disciples recounted that Rabbi Israel fell ill on a Sunday and died the following Friday morning, so that no one had to desecrate Shabbat for him (heard from Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky).

Rabbi Israel was born in 5570 (1810) in the town of Zhagory, Lithuania. His father was Rabbi Zev Wolf, author of Hagoat ben Aryeh on the Talmud.

Rabbi Israel was first educated by his father, and then studied with Rabbi Tzvi Broida, the Rav of Salant. He succeeded very well in his studies, and before turning 13 he already knew the Talmud by heart.

At the age of 18 he settled in Salant, whose name he carries. Other than his greatness in Torah, Rabbi Israel was a genius in Mussar and character development.

He published an important article entitled Iggeret HaMussar, in which he invites the reader to study Mussar. This article spread to every yeshiva, and people began to study his holy words in detail. This marked the beginning of a great event – the Mussar movement.

Rabbi Israel Salant fell ill while in Koenigsberg in 5643 (1883). He passed away on Shevat 25, his pure soul ascending to Heaven.

Rabbi Israel did not leave behind any books, but he did leave his disciples, and they spread his Torah throughout the world.