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How a Government that Failed us can Regain our Trust

Like many Jews in Australia, I am feeling completely numb, filled with deep pain at the loss of 15 of our brothers and sisters in the terror attack on Bondi Beach on the first night of Chanukah.

But alongside the hurt is seething anger towards those who were complicit in this atrocity. Not just the monsters who pulled the trigger, but to the State and Federal governments who have let us down and created the environment that allowed this to happen.

I, like many others, have been very vocal in my condemnation of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Home Affairs Minister and their Government. They allowed antisemitism to explode unchecked over the last 2 years through their inaction. And their policies further fueled the flames.

Someone asked me if there is any way that we can forgive them and what would it take to regain trust.

So, let's talk about Yosef. Yosef was greatly wronged by his brothers, when they cast him into a pit and sold him as a slave. He was failed by those who should have protected him.

In Parshas Mikeitz the table turned. Yosef was elevated to become the viceroy of Egypt. Not knowing that he was their brother, the brothers came before Yosef to purchase grain. Yosef did not embrace them and reveal who he really was. He was not yet ready to forgive. He spoke harshly towards them. He interrogated them, accused them of being spies and incarcerated them.

But the torment was not over. To prove their innocence, Yosef demands that they bring their younger brother Binyamin down to Egypt with them. Knowing how beloved Binyamin was to their father Yaakov, the brothers were thrown into panic.

Why did Yosef act so callously towards his brothers? Why did he treat them with coldness and put them through the wringer instead of embracing them? The commentaries explain that Yosef wanted to see that they were truly remorseful for having mistreated him and had sincerely repented.

And his actions bore fruit. Recognising that this must be punishment for having sold Yosef, they declared "indeed we are guilty concerning our brother, that we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we did not listen."

The commentators note that their greatest crime was not the sale alone. It was their cruelty; that they could hear Yosef's desperate pleas for help and ignore them.

Yosef heard their admission of guilt. Hearing their regret, he turned aside and cried. But this was still not enough and Yosef was not yet ready to accept them.

When the brothers eventually returned to Egypt with Binyamin, they presented Yosef with gifts, hoping that this would help them to find favour in his eyes. They also offered to give Yosef double the amount of money for their grain.

In a final act of torment, Yosef hid his silver cup in Binyamin's sack and accused him of stealing it. Yosef threatened to keep Binyamin as a slave.

Yosef had feared that the brothers harbored the same resentment to Binyamin, who, like Yosef, was also the son of Rachel and was also their father's beloved child. He feared that the brothers had not reformed and may not protect Binyamin, just as they had failed to take care of him. Yosef wanted to test them. Was their regret just lip service or would they take action and do things differently next time around.

Despite Yosef's great power, Yehuda confronted him, threatening to turn over all of Egypt if needs be, to protect Binyamin and bring him safely home.

Seeing a genuine transformation, not just in words but in action, Yosef could not longer hold himself back. He revealed his identity to his brothers, forgave them completely and finally embraced them.

I think that the message is the same vis-à-vis our relationship with our government.

For over two years, the Jewish community in Australia has been crying out for protection. We have pleaded with the government to address the frightening rise of antisemitism in our streets and on our campuses. We have begged for action against the violent rhetoric by threatening mobs at the Opera House and other icons.

But our pleas were also ignored and we were thrown into the pit.

Despite everything that we have suffered, we are a forgiving people. We believe in Teshuvah – that genuine repentance and change is possible. But like Yosef to his brothers, we say to you;

You will not earn our forgiveness with gifts; not with flowers, candles or other symbolic gestures. You cannot buy us off with offers of increased funding. You need to take ownership, to have the guts to admit "we were wrong, we are at fault, we are responsible for this".

But words alone are not enough. We need to see real immediate action to support these declarations. We need to see a real zero-tolerance crackdown on antisemitism, with robust legislation and enforcement, so that we can know that this will not happen again. Then, perhaps we can reconnect.

Chassidus on the Parsha

וַיַּכֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכִּרֻהוּ

Rashi explains that Yosef's brothers did not recognise him because he was so young when he was sold and did not yet have a beard. Chassidus presents a deeper explanation on why the brothers could not recognise Yosef as their brother.

The chosen profession of the children of Yaakov was shepherding. They feared that a profession such as commerce, that required them to engage with the material world, would threaten their connection and Dveikus to Hashem.

As shepherds, they were free in nature to meditate and engage in their spiritual service, relatively free from worldly involvement.

From their experience, they did not believe that it was possible for a Jew to be invested in the material world and at the same time retain a perfect, uninterrupted dedication to Hashem.

So when they saw Yosef, they concluded that he could not be one of them. Yosef, as the de facto ruler of Egypt, entrusted with running the Egyptian economy, was completely immersed in the world of commerce. No descendent of Yaakov could be in that position.

Chassidus explains that Yosef's soul came from a loftier source. The souls of the brothers came from the world of Beriah, a world that is part of the created reality and operates in a limited, natural manner. Accordingly they were right. It was naturally impossible to reconcile the 2 worlds of absolute Dveikus to Hashem while interacting heavily within the world.

But Yosef's soul came from a transcendent world where what seem like opposites can be synthesised. He passed this power on to us.

The Weekly Halacha Analysis

Does Lighting Chanukah Candles Require a House

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

The Gemora[1] teaches that the Mitzvah of Chanukah is Ner Ish Ubeiso – one candle for a man and his house. Many of the halachos concerning where to light the Menorah relate to positioning it at the doorway of a house. It seems that this Mitzvah requires having a house.

The Rishonim

Rambam[2] writes that the Mitzvah of Chanukah is that each house (כל בית ובית) should light.

Another source is based on the ruling of the Gemara[3] that one who sees Chanukah candles should make the some of the Brachos even if they will not be lighting themselves – this is referred to as Birchos Haroeh. We do not find a similar idea by any other Mitzvah. Why?

Tosfos[4] explains that these blessings were instituted because of the specialness of the miracle and also because many people do not have houses and are unable to fulfil the Mitzvah. This is similar to Mezuzah which can only be fulfilled when one has a house. Tosfos is of the opinion that one must have a house to fulfil the Mitzvah.

Rashi, quoting Rabbeinu Yitzchak ben Yehudah, explains that Birchos Haroeh was only established for someone who has not lit yet in his house, or someone who is on a boat (and will not light). This is also referenced by the Rosh[5].

Why would someone on a boat not be able to light?

Maharsham[6] explains that since the boat does not have a roof, it is not considered a house and is therefore exempt from lighting.

Az Nidberu[7] argues on the explanation of the Maharsham. It could be that Rashi is discussing someone who does not have the ability to light on the boat because he does not have candles. Alternatively he may not have permission to light on the boat. This argument is also advanced by the Tzitz Eliezer quoted below.

In contrast to Rashi, Orchos Chaim[8] Hilchos Chanukah writes that one who is travelling on a boat should indeed light Chanukah candles with the blessings. There are those who explain that the Machlokes between Rashi and the Orchos Chaim concerning a boat, revolves around the issue at hand i.e. whether the Mitzvah is on the person or on the house.

The Acharonim

Pnei Yehoshua[9] explains that the Mitzvah of Chanukah differs from other Mitzvos which are Chovas Haguf and must be done by each person individually (e.g. Tefillin and Lulav). Since the Mitzvah is to light the candles near the Reshus Harabim to publicise the miracle, the Chachomim established the Mitzvah as an obligation on the house.

Sfas Emes[10] discusses whether Chanukah candles are like Mezuza and dependent on the house, or whether they are an obligation on the person.

The Bach[11] is of the view that the Mitzvah is a Mitzvah on the individual. For this reason when one has already lit themselves, they may only make the brachos on behalf of someone else if the other person is present.

Aruch Hashulchan[12] writes clearly that the Mitzvah is on the individual and therefore even someone who does not have a house (in which they would be lighting) must light.

He also explains that even though the Halocha is that a traveller is discharged by his wife lighting at home, he may nonetheless have in mind not to be Yotzai and then light his own candles with a Bracha[13] and that this is the widespread practise of Bochurim and guests.

Trains, Tents, Cars, Campervans and Tanks

The classic Teshuvah referenced in this discussion (and quoted above) is the Maharsham[14] who writes that one who is travelling on a train should light candles with a Bracha. Because one pays for their seat and is able to eat and sleep there, the train becomes like a rented house[15]. The train is different to the boat mentioned by Rashi, as it does have a roof and the wind does not blow inside. If the boat had a roof, we would also light candles. Maharsham certainly requires a house for Chanukah candles, however there is no need that it be a permanent dwelling.

The Tzitz Eliezer[16] was asked about travellers who will be sleeping out in the open or in tents. He takes the approach of the Bach that the Mitzvah is on the individual and does not require a house. He rules that even when sleeping in the open, one lights Chanukah candles with a blessing.

Az Nidberu[17] likewise argues that there is no basis to those who claim that the Mitzvah of Chanukah candles depends on a house[18]. Therefore one may light with the Brachos wherever they are.

Mishna Halachos[19] writes about lighting Chanukah candles when travelling overnight by car. If one will reach their destination during the night, they should certainly delay lighting candles until they arrive. He quotes the Maharsha"m but notes that a car may differ from a train carriage. However he concludes that the obligation is in fact on the individual who should light wherever they are.

Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch[20] rules like the Maharsham that we require a house. He rules that soldiers who are sleeping in tents in the fields should not light Chanukah candles. If they are married, they should rely on their wife lighting at home. A single soldier relies on their parents lighting at home.

Harav Gavriel Zinner[21] writes that a campervan or trailer caravan certainly constitutes a house as it functions as a dwelling. One would light with a Bracha.

One who is sleeping out in the field may not light with a Bracha. They should nonetheless light (without a Bracha) in concern for the view of the Bach that one is still obligated even if they do not have a house.

If one's car is at least 10 Tefachim tall (approximately 80cm) and 4 Amos wide (approximately 2m), it too constitutes a house and one may light next to their car with a Bracha. In a Teshuva[22] on the topic, he writes that a tent is not considered a house.

Mikraei Kodesh[23] writes that a tent which has a roof and is protected from the elements does constitute a house according to the distinction of the Maharsham, and one would light with the blessings.

Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach[24] accepts as a matter of fact that for Chanukah candles one requires a house. His basis this on the Gemora and Rishonim above. Soldiers sleeping out in the open or in small tents, would not be able to light with a Bracha.

If they are sleeping in a large tent, it qualifies as a house. The minimum dimensions are 10 Tefachim tall and an internal area of 7x7 Tefachim. In Kuntres on Halachos for soldiers, Harav Shlomo Zalman writes that soldiers who sleep in their tanks may also light Menora in the tank.

1. Shabbos 21b
2. Hilchos Chanukah 4:1
3. 23a
4. Sukkah 46a ד"ה הרואה
5. Siman 8
6. Shu"t Maharsham 4:146
7. 6:75
8. Rabbi Aharon of Lunil a 13th century Rishon
9. Shabbos 21a
10. Shabbos 21a
11. OC 667 ד"ה מצאתי
12. OC 677:5
13. Magen Avraham 677:9 based on the Terumas Hadeshen. See Mishna Berura 677:14
14. ibid
15. Yemei Chanukah quoting Chovas Hadar writes that one does not need to actually rent the "house" to be able to light there. It is sufficient that they have the right to be there and use the dwelling.
16. 15:29
17. ibid
18. Although see the footnote there that he was later shown the Maharsham
19. 7:86
20. Moadim Uzmanim volume 8 2:143
21. Nitei Gavriel Chanuka 10:7
22. Ibid Teshuvah 8
23. Chanuka siman 18
24. Minchas Shlomo 2:51