

CHEVRAH TORAH...5777

With HEART in MIND

MUSSAR Teaching to Transform the Text & Our Lives

VaYeshev—Genesis 39:1-10

MIYUT S'CHORAH—Limiting Business

...Key KOSHI...

HOW do we see our success as a reflection of our work?

HOW is Joseph's understanding of his service in Potiphar's House a Covenant?



P'SHAT...Studying Torah—Encountering The Word—The Will—The ONE

The truly wise individual is not one who has achieved wisdom but a *talmid chacham*—a wise student...one who is constantly learning—including by observing and reflecting on what can be learned from other people.

39:1] Now Joseph was brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers, Captain of the Guard, an Egyptian man, purchased him from the Ismaelites who had brought him down there. 2] But the Eternal was with Joseph: he was a man who prospered. Now that he was in the household of his Egyptian master, 3] his master saw that the Eternal was with him, and that the Eternal was prospering whatever he touched. 4] Joseph [therefore] found favor in his sight and ministered to him; he [Potiphar] gave him authority over his household and over all that he owned in his hand. 5] From the time he gave him authority over his household and over all that he owned, the Eternal blessed the house of the Egyptian on account of Joseph; the blessing of the Eternal was on all that he owned in the house and in the field. 6] He left all that was his in Joseph's hands and gave no thought to what he had, other than the food he ate.

Now Joseph happened to be fair of form and fair of appearance, 7] and after all this, his master's wife set her sights on Joseph and said, "Lie with me!" 8] But he refused, saying to his master's wife, "Look, my master gives no thought to what is in this house; all that he owns he has put into my hands. 9] There is none greater than I in this house; he has withheld nothing from me, other than you, inasmuch as you are his wife; how then could I do this great evil, and thus sin against God?" 10] And so she would sweet-talk Joseph day after day, but he did not heed her plea to lie by her and be with her.

[חמישי] ¹ ויוסף הורד מצרימה ויקנהו פוטיפר סריס פרעה שר הטבחים איש מצרי מיד הישמעאלים אשר הורדהו שמה: ² ויהי יהוה את יוסף ויהי איש מצליח ויהי בבית אדניו המצרי: ³ וירא אדניו כי יהוה אתו וכל אשר הוא עשה יהוה מצליח בידו: ⁴ וימצא יוסף חן בעיניו וישרת אתו ויפקדהו על ביתו וכל יושלו נתן בידו: ⁵ ויהי מאז הפקיד אתו בביתו ועל כל אשר ישלו ויברך יהוה את בית המצרי בגלל יוסף ויהי ברכת יהוה בכל אשר ישלו בבית ובשדה: ⁶ ויעזב כל אשר לו ביד יוסף ולא ידע אתו מאומה כי אם הלחם אשר הוא אוכל ויהי יוסף יפה תאר ויפה מראה: [שש] ⁷ ויהי אחר הדברים האלה ותשא אשת אדניו את עיניה אל יוסף ותאמר שכבה עמי: ⁸ וימאן | ויאמר אל אשת אדניו הן אדני לא ידע אתי מה בבית וכל אשר ישלו נתן בידו: ⁹ איננו גדול בבית הזה ממני ולא חשד ממני מאומה כי אם אותך באשר את אשתו ואיך אעשה הרעה הגדלה הזאת וחטאתי לאלהים: ¹⁰ ויהי כדברה אלי יוסף יום | יום ולא שמע אליה לשכב אצלה להיות עמה:

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...*Acquiring Torah*...When Torah penetrates our entire being, not just our *seichel/intellect*, this is the acquisition of Torah. –R' Avi Fertig

v.2-4 *The Lord was with Joseph, and thus was he a successful man. and so he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master. And when his master saw that Adonai was with him—to all that he undertook the Lord lent success, he took a liking to Joseph. He made [Joseph] his personal attendant, putting him in charge of his household—all that he owned he put in Joseph's hands.*

AVOT D'Rebbe NATAN... “A person should love work and not hate it, for just as Torah was given as a covenant, so too, work was given us as a covenant.” [11:1]

RAMBAM... “The Lord was with him...” The connotation of “God being with someone” usually refers to Providence watching over the details of man's various daily activities...[Guide I, 3:18]

RASHI... “The Lord was with him...” The Holy One was fluent in his mouth; he'd refer to God in conversation.

RAMBAN... “When his master saw that the Lord was with him...” RASHI does not appear to be correct. The verse means that his master understood that since his endeavors were more successful than anyone else, that success must come from a greater Source

B'REISHIT RABBAH... “When the master saw the Lord was with him...” R' HUNA said in the name of R' Aha: Joseph whispered God's Name whenever he went in and whenever he came out...Or, when Potiphar bid Joseph, “Mix me a hot drink,” it was always hot. “Make it lukewarm,” and it was always lukewarm.

SARNA... “The Lord was with Joseph” This seminal phrase appears four times in this chapter, forming a literary frame within which the narrative is encased. The repetitious use of the phrase imparts meaning...enabling the reader to perceive how the spoiled lad of 17, utterly alone in a foreign land and in dire adversity, suddenly matures and acquires great strength of character.

ALSHECH...Joseph first performed menial tasks in Potiphar's house, but when his master realized how extraordinarily successful everything Joseph turned his hand to turned out, he promoted him to become his personal valet. Subsequently, he put Joseph in charge of his entire household. As a result, the entire estate of Potiphar enjoyed God's blessing.

v.5-6 *And from the time that the Egyptian put him in charge of his household, the Lord blessed his house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the Lord was on everything he owned...He left all that he had in Joseph's hands, and gave no thought to anything there save the bread that he ate. Now Joseph was handsome*

B'REISHIT RABBAH... The *Shechinah* accompanies the righteous and causes their environs to prosper. Just as Isaac brought prosperity to Gerar, [Gen 26:12] or Jacob to Laban [Gen 30:30] so, too, Joseph in Potiphar's house.

RASHI... “save the bread he ate...” He did not concern himself with anything he had entrusted to Joseph, “except the bread...” This is a delicate euphemism which means “his wife.”

RAMBAN... In the words of RASHI this is a refined expression for “his wife.” IBN EZRA says, “his food,” for it was an abomination, since it was abhorrent to the Egyptians for Israelites to touch their food. Perhaps it infers something about Joseph's behavior, that his master did not know of Joseph taking anything from him but his food, unlike other pleasures as the young are wont to do. Nor did Joseph gather wealth and prosperity to himself. His master knew—Joseph took nothing from him but bread.

v.8-9 *But he refused. He said to his master's wife: Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all he owns he's placed in my hands...He's withheld nothing from me save yourself, since you are his wife. How could I do this most evil thing, and sin before God?*

MIZRACHI... Apart from the wrong I'd be doing against your husband, it would also be immoral, against God.

TALMUD... R' Chana ben Bizna said in R' Shimon HaTzadik's name: Because Joseph sanctified The Name in private, one letter was added to his name of the Holy One's Name...HOW was it he sanctified? “And he went into the house to do his work.” R' Yochanan said: This teaches us that both he and Potiphar's wife had immoral intentions. Rav & Shmuel differ: One says—to actually work; the other, to satisfy his desire.

“And she caught him by his cloak...” At that moment, his father's image appeared to him in the window and said: Joseph, your brothers will all have their names inscribed on the stones of the Ephod. Is it your wish for your name to be expunged and be called a harlot's associate? [Sotah, 36b] “But he left his cloak in her hand & fled”

OR HaCHAYIM... How could I possibly do such a thing, for I'd lose everything I have achieved... Further, I'd create an unbridgeable gap to the holy roots of my soul, breaking the Covenant of *B'nai No'ach*.

D'RASH...*Helping the Heart feel what the Mind understands ...*

Rabbi JEFFREY SALKIN...

People who so explicitly take their religious values to the office may be in the minority. According to Robert Wuthnow, professor of the sociology of religion at Princeton University, “Many people of faith leave their faith at the church door on Sunday, and on Monday behave just like everyone else.”

But the survey also discovered that *religion* is the single greatest factor in creating a more moral workplace....

American Jews live with a paradox. They are disproportionately represented on the “Fortune 500,” run top universities, head major corporations and have scaled many of the walls of social exclusion that had formerly barred them. They are a vital voice in the making of national and international policy.

The Jewish community has never been as powerful as it is now. Yet, this power often does not extend to its own community...

But historically, Judaism was different. In the past, Jews set religious, moral, and economic standards for themselves—and made sure they were obeyed. When the rabbis of the Talmud spoke about business ethics, their words were not lofty speculation...Ever since the Enlightenment, when Jews entered the modern world and became subject to the laws of the state, Jews have lost *both* religious coercion and a sense of communal responsibility. As the Reform Jewish theologian Rabbi Eugene Borowitz has said: “We will have no significantly effective business ethics until we once again learn to feel shame for our business immoralities...On the whole,” he said, “we are not that invested in Judeo-Christian ethics. Brazenness, rather than moral sensitivity, is often trumpeted as the sign of a competent executive.”

The rabbis called this attitude *azut panim*, literally, “the strength of face,” summoning the inner strength to face down every twinge of conscience. The sages said that this ability to dull the conscience ultimately caused the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E.

The inability to feel appropriate guilt over transgression sent the Jewish people into exile. Each of us needs to come home from our individual moral exiles.

Judaism has always lived in “the real world.” Therefore, a Jewish approach to business ethics must be realistic...Nor is it opposed to wealth and prosperity. The most frequent euphemism in the Bible for success says that God was *with* someone, as in “*God was with Joseph*” in Egypt as he helped his master, Potiphar, prosper. It is not that we must choose *either* profits and riches *or* altruism and ethical responsibility. Judaism believes that one can –and should—have *both*. While *tzedakah* (righteous giving) is a *mitzvah*, poverty is not a virtue.

The ultimate bottom line in business ethics is even if *what* we do is not very spiritual, *how* we do it can be. As the traditional blessing after meals states: “*O Merciful One, may we earn our livelihood in a proper and not an improper way, with honor and not with shame.*” Even if our work itself does not allow us to reach the stars, at the very least we can and should deal ethically with people. When people carp that “It’s a jungle out there,” our job can be to sound a clarion call for sanity in the midst of that jungle.

“In a place where there are no people of decency,” says *Pirke Avot*, the section of the Mishnah that deals with ethics, “strive to be a decent person.”

[[Being God's Partner: How to Find the Hidden Link Between Spirituality & Your Work](#), Jeffrey Salkin, pgs 113-123]

SOD...*Helping the soul-light shine...*

Practice focuses on recalibrating the soul-traits that are obstructing your soul's light from shining into your life.

MARTIN BUBER....Tales of the Hasidim

Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov used to go to the fair, keeping a sharp lookout for anyone who was in need of help. On one such occasion, one of the traders left his stall to watch a performance of a troop of jugglers, and his cattle remained in the market in the stalls, unattended. The calves were thirsty and hung their heads. When the Rabbi noticed, he took a bucket and watered the animals as if had been his job all his life. Just then, one of the other traders returned, and, seeing the man kindly tending to the cattle of the others, asked: "Can you see to my animals as well? They are there on the side alley. Whatever your tender's fee, you will have no argument with me." The Rabbi of Sassov graciously obeyed, and stayed on the job until all the animals were watered and fed.

[Later Masters, pg 86]

Once, at the close of the Day of Atonement, when Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin was in a festive mood, he said he would tell all his disciples what he'd asked of Heaven and the answer the Rebbe had received...

To the first of his disciples who so urgently wanted some answers for his life-struggles, he explained: "What you asked of God was that he should give you your livelihood at the proper time and without travail, so that you might not be hindered in serving Him. And the answer was that what God really wants of you is not more study or prayer, but the sighs of your heart—which is breaking...because the travail of gaining your livelihood hinders you in the service of God.

[Early Masters, pg 280]

...PRACTICE...

ASK yourself:

How does my work reflect the values I keep?

WHAT are the greatest struggles work presents? HOW can I reduce them?

...Journal on WHAT your work/profession brings...

HOW is work a Covenant for you?

HOW could you make your work a Covenant?