



# OPENINGS

## Chanukah Light: Ending the Long Night of Darkness

Few sources of pain in this life are more intense or bring greater darkness than estrangement from those we love, especially when it's a parent or child. But it's also difficult when we're isolated from siblings and former friends.

We experience the pain in many ways. We may find ourselves cut off not only from the loved one but family and friends who have taken sides. We may perpetually carry bitterness that poisons other aspects of our lives. We may have bad dreams and nightmares. We may lie or dissemble to put a good face on the situation when we're asked about it.

Maybe the worst is that we pity ourselves and feel self-righteous. Too often we see ourselves as righteous avengers, scheming on how eventually we'll get even. In short, we lose perspective, which serves to sustain our suffering and prevent us from reaching out for reconciliation.

In the worst-case scenario, we may sicken and die alone

in our old age, estranged from loved ones for reasons we can no longer recall. Like Nipsy Russell, we may say, "I will love you when you're old and gray, but I will not be with you!"

Is there an escape hatch from this self-sustained suffering?

"Yes," some would say—we can end the suffering by one simple act: *forgiveness*.

But forgiveness must in some way be sought by the person from whom we're estranged, or it isn't likely to be accepted by that person.

And supposing the other person doesn't ask for our forgiveness?

Consider the Torah portion Miketz, which we read this month: Could there be in any family a greater basis for estrangement than what Jo-

seph experienced—to be sold into slavery by his brothers?

Many years later, in the midst of a famine in Canaan, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt, because it was known they could obtain food there.

Of course, unknown to them is the fact that Joseph is viceroy to Pharaoh over all of Egypt. (Genesis 42:1-2) Previously, when they sold him into slavery, "... Joseph had been at the mercy of his brothers; now he is master of the situation, and they come as suppliants." (N. M. Sarna on Genesis 42:1-43:34)

When they first appear before him, Joseph acts like a stranger, that is, "he hid his [true] identity from them" (N. M. Sarna on Genesis 42:7), and his brothers did not recognize him. (Genesis 42:8)

In the words of one of our modern commentators, "Joseph now finds himself caught in a maelstrom of conflicting emotions. . . . The . . . desire for revenge is tempered by the knowledge that his father and brother back in

*(Continued on page 3.)*



## Save the Dates: December 7 & 21— Shabbat Evening Services & Dinners

Kehillat Kharakim will offer Friday evening egalitarian services and Shabbat dinners on December 7 and 21 at the home of Rabbi Moshe and Khulda.

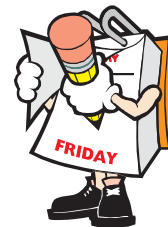
Services begin at 6:00 p.m. and include English and Hebrew prayers and singing.

After services there is a blessing of the children and a

sit-down dinner.

Dinner is followed by a readers' theatre Torah-drama, and zemirot (table songs).

Everyone who



comes is invited to bring a contribution to the tisch (table) in the form of a short story, a song, or a brief reading that's related to Shabbat generally or the Torah parsha (portion) for the week.

Call Rabbi Moshe & Khulda at (323) 934-2925 for more information, location, and to hold a place.

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### Otzar—Treasure

*For this reason does it say, A leafy tree, fair with goodly fruit has Hashem called Israel (Jeremiah 11:17) for just as oil gives forth light, so did the Temple give light to the whole world, as it says, And nations shall walk at thy light (Isa. 60:3). Our forebears were accordingly called A leafy olive tree because they gave light to all with their faith. It was on this account that Hashem said to Moses: that they bring unto thee pure olive oil beaten for the light (Exodus 27:20) —Kad Hakemah (11.1)*

# Torah Shmooze: He Sent (וישלח) Messengers

Jacob left the household of his father-in-law, Lavan, taking his wives and cattle. He sent messengers to his brother Eisav to tell him that he (Jacob) had sojourned with Lavan, and that he had much cattle; he sent to Eisav "... to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight." (Genesis 32:5-6) The messengers returned to tell Jacob that Eisav was coming with 400 men, which frightened Jacob. (32:8) Jacob then sent ahead to Eisav a gift of more than 500 animals. (32:15-16) Jacob prayed to God, acknowledging his unworthiness and God's promise to make his offspring "... as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." (32:10-13) That night Jacob wrestled with a "man" until dawn. (32:25-30) The next day Jacob saw Eisav approaching with his 400 men. He bowed to the ground seven times before his brother. (33:3) Eisav ran to greet and hug and kiss Jacob, both of them weeping.

According to Rashi, "[Jacob] was frightened lest he be killed and he was distressed that he might kill others." But another of our classical commentators teaches that "... Yaakov was altogether not concerned about anything happening to himself personally. After all, he was a recipient of God's promise and he considered this as perfectly adequate. He was concerned about his children, his wives, and the members of his household who had not received such an assurance from God." (Rabbeinu Bachya) "The reason ... [for] his fear was that he did not wish to rely on a miracle, as he did not consider himself deserving that a miracle should be wrought on his behalf." (Zohar, Bereshith 1:168a)

"Jacob, ever a man of action, takes precautionary measures. First he gathers intelligence, he then prepares a stratagem of escape in the event of battle. This is followed by a prayer and, finally, by the dispatch of a handsome gift." (N.M. Sarna)

"And Jacob sent angels ... to learn of

his brother's plans and intentions. ... He instructed the messenger not to acknowledge his [the messenger's] recognition of Eisav nor that he is being sent to him, lest Eisav think that Jacob is aware of his approach and is sending him this gift due to fear. Rather the messenger should act as though he is being sent to the land of Seir, unaware [that the man marching on Jacob's camp] is Eisav." (Sforno)

According to Rashi, the "messengers" Jacob sent to Eisav were angels. Why did Jacob send what we might think of as "special messengers"? He may have had a tactical reason, that is, to ensure that Eisav would not simply do away with the messengers and then attack him by surprise.

Why send messengers at all? He may have wanted to ensure that Eisav did not first hear of his approach from another source, but rather that he would have the opportunity to put the news of his arrival in the best possible light. (Or Hachayim)



Sending messengers to Eisav "... provided him [Jacob] with useful information about how to approach Eisav when he would meet him." (Akeidat Yitzchak) And when Jacob sent messengers to Eisav, he was saying in effect, I haven't become a big shot, I'm still on the road, moving around from place to place (גַּר), so there's no reason for you to hate me. (Rashi 32:4-5) The basic purpose of Jacob's message to Eisav was to say, "I am friendly with you and seek your love." (Rashi 32:6) Yet, by

telling Eisav that he had sojourned with Lavan, he may have been communicating to Eisav that he knew how to handle hostile behavior. (Or Hachayim)

Jacob's prayer, acknowledging that if he were not saved "all God's promises to Abraham and Isaac would come to nothing" (Akeidat Yitzchak), reveals his recognition of how great the stakes were in the situation.

Midrash Rabbah teaches that the "man" with whom Jacob wrestled was Eisav's "guardian angel," who could not prevail against Jacob. (32:26) Jacob was wrestling with a representation of the evil that had been and was to be the "orb of empire, the scepter and sword," in which human consciousness and mind are confused by a darkness like that of the blackest night." (S.R. Hirsch)

"It is worth our while to consider Yaakov's preparations for his fateful encounter with Eisav as something to use as a model for ourselves in our dealings with the descendants of Eisav. Yaakov used a three-pronged approach. (1) He prepared to wage war if it were forced upon him. (2) He prayed to God for deliverance. (3) He prepared gifts to soften the mood of his adversary." (Rabbeinu Bachya)

"But the order of priority in his preparations is puzzling. First he prepared for battle, then interceded with God and, after his prayer, dispatched a gift to placate the enemy." (N. Leibowitz)

- Do we have a choice between engaging in cooperation or engaging in conflict?
- How do we know if or when conflict is unavoidable?
- What's the relationship of prayer to conflict?
- What might have softened Eisav's heart?
- What can we do to soften our own heart and the hearts of those with whom we are in conflict?

## For Young People: A Wise Bird & A Foolish Man

Our tradition has many tales about animals, and this story is about a foolish man who was unable to learn from a wise bird.

A bird-catcher once caught a bird. But it was a very special creature that understood all the 70 human languages. So the bird pleaded with the man in his own language:



"Set me free, and I will give to you three

useful teachings."

"Tell them to me first. Then I will let you go," said the bird-catcher.

"First give me your solemn promise that you will keep your word," said the bird.

"I swear to set you free," said the man.

The bird then spoke: "Pay attention then! The first teaching is: 'Never regret what has already happened.' The second teaching is: 'Don't believe the incredible.' The third teaching is: 'Never try to achieve the unattainable.'" Having taught the man

her wisdom the bird pleaded: "Set me free now, as you promised."

And the bird-catcher agreed and set her free.

Then the bird spread her wings and flew to the top of a high tree nearby and from there she made fun of the man below:

"Fool that you are! You let me out of your grasp not knowing that I carry in my body a priceless pearl through whose magic power I have become wise."

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## Chanukah Light: Ending the Long Night (con't.)

Canaan may be starving and are dependent on the acquisition of provisions from Egypt. He is desperate for news of their welfare but dares not give himself away by overly anxious inquiry. Above all, he must find out whether or not his brothers regret their actions and have truly reformed. He decides upon a series of tests.” (N.M. Sarna on Genesis 42:9)

He first tests them by telling them to send one of their number back to Canaan to bring their brother Benjamin down to Egypt, while the rest of them remain in confinement. (Genesis 42:16)

In Joseph’s presence, unaware that he understands Hebrew, the brothers say to each other:

“... We are certainly guilty concerning our brother [Joseph], in that we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear. . . .” (Genesis 42:21) “He [Joseph] then became aware that they were sorry for what they had done to him. . . .” (Or Hachayim) Joseph turned and wept because of their genuine contrition and regret. (N.M. Sarna on Genesis 42:24) But he isn’t done testing them.

He seats his brothers for a meal, placing them “from the oldest in the order of his seniority.” (Genesis 42:33) The youngest brother [Benjamin] receives a portion that is several times that of everyone else’s. (Genesis 42:34) This is a test “. . . to see whether this obvious favoritism would arouse their envy or expose any hostile feelings that they might harbor against the one who is now their father’s favorite.” (N.M.

Sarna on Genesis 42:34) And there are more tests.

Why does Joseph test his brothers so thoroughly?

Despite the pain and suffering they had caused him, including separation from his family and years in prison, Joseph is open to forgiving his brothers—but not *automatically*. He realizes that if they don’t seek his forgiveness, then when he gives it they won’t accept it. Nor having been given, without being sought, is his forgiveness likely to relieve the emotional burden of his experience with them.

While our common sense tells us we can’t persuade someone to seek our forgiveness, that’s only partly true. By modeling the behavior we hope to encourage, we increase its probability in the other person. One way to do this is to acknowledge our own part in the estrangement by saying, “I imagine that I offended you, hurt your feelings, or somehow caused you pain or loss—is that true?”

But, of course, when we believe that *we* have been injured or treated unjustly, we usually respond with resentment and hurt, not forgiveness. Typically, our internal resentment is accompanied by outward expressions of anger or even rage, and our private hurts are accompanied by emotional pain or even tears. Internally these reactions run together—we experience them as cascading thoughts and feelings—but their external expression is a matter for us to *choose*. We can choose to express our anger or our hurt *first*.

If, on the one hand, we want to *increase* the distance between ourselves and those from whom we are estranged, expressing our *anger first* will accomplish that end. If, on the other hand, we want to *decrease* the distance between ourselves and those from whom we are estranged, expressing our *hurt first* will accomplish that end.

The problem is that we’re often resistant to revealing our own weakness or error. Such self-revelation is a form of confession, which demands courage and integrity. Obviously, however, such self-revelation is essential to achieve forgiveness and reconciliation.

And we can be encouraged by the thought that those from whom we are estranged won’t be surprised by what we confess to them. With rare exceptions they will be grateful and

moved by our risk-taking for the sake of renewing our relationships with them.

As we say on Yom Kippur, the gates remain open. We can choose to turn our lives. Midrash understands the words *מקץ ימיה*, the opening words of this parsha, to indicate an end to darkness. We can still draw together with those we have loved and who have loved us, even after a long night of darkness between us—and what better time to do so than during the Festival of Lights when our families come together to light the lights of the Chanukah.



## Chanukiah: The How-To of Lighting the Lights

On the first night of Chanukah, one light of the chanukiah is lit, and an additional light is lit on each successive night. The lights are added each night from right to left, but they are kindled from left to right. The extra light, called the shamash (servant), is used to light the other lights.

Three blessings are said before lighting on the first night: (1) “. . . commanded us to

light the Hanukkah lamps”; (2) “Who has done miracles for our fathers in bygone days, at this time”; and (3) “Who has given us life, and has sustained us, and brought us to this time.” On the following nights only the first two blessings are recited.

The lights should be placed so as to be publicly visible. They are lit when the stars appear, but lighting them later is permitted.

If a light accidentally goes out it should be rekindled without a blessing.

On erev Shabbat the Chanukah lights are lit first, then the Sabbath candles. At the end of Shabbat, the Havdalah candle is lit first and then the Chanukah lights.

Both men and women are obligated to light the Chanukah lights, as is a child who has reached the age of nine.

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When the bird-catcher heard there was a magical pearl, he was sorry that he had been foolish enough to release the bird.

To go after the pearl, he began to climb the tree upon which the bird was perched. But he was barely half way up to the bird when he lost his hold and fell to the ground. And he lay with broken bones, moaning in pain.

The bird looked down at him and laughed. “You stupid fool!” she scolded

him. “Only a few moments have passed since I told you my wisdom and already you have forgotten it! I told you never to regret what has already happened, and right away you regretted giving me my freedom. I taught you not to believe the incredible and, still you accepted as truth my fairytale that I carry in my body a magical pearl! The truth is, I am nothing but a common bird who has to search for her food from hour to hour! Lastly, I warned you against trying to achieve the unattainable and, nonetheless,

you tried to capture a bird on the wing with your bare hands. Because you did not listen to me, you now lie broken and bleeding. About one like you there’s an old saying: ‘A punishing word is heard more by a wise man than a hundred lashes by a fool.’ There are, unfortunately, many fools like you!”

*What’s the lesson of the story? If we’re wise, we should be able to learn when someone gives us a warning. We shouldn’t have to take a beating to get the point.*

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Published by  
Kehillat Kharakim

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### Rabbi Team

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## על קהלת חרקים—ABOUT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM

- Kehillat Kharakim—a community of *openings*—meets twice-monthly for Shabbat services.
  - Kehillat Kharakim Friday-evening services regularly include a devar Torah (“sermon”) in the form of a readers’ theatre Torah-drama.
  - Kehillat Kharakim’s formation is being sponsored by Gather the People (GTP), a nonprofit organization founded by a Sponsor Committee of rabbis from virtually all the major branches and movements of Judaism.
  - Kehillat Kharakim’s rabbinic leadership is provided by Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah, formerly the “Rabbi Team” for Congregation Beth Israel of Chico, California.
  - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is to create a community of *openings*, or “kharakim,” through which family members of all ages can draw upon Judaism and congregational life to increase meaning and fulfillment in their own lives.
- The goal is a community that, regardless of where one begins or ends in Jewish knowledge or commitment, encourages greater exploration, acquisition, and expression of Judaism—and regardless of where one fits religiously, treats each person with kindness and respect.
  - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is that, apart from our capacity as individuals, we also have a role as a kehillah, a *community*. Following the example of Nehemiah, who gathered the people to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem, we assume that we too can reduce the pressures and realize the hopes that will uplift our families. By doing mitzvot *collectively*, we can bring about change for the good in our day to day lives.
  - Kehillat Kharakim is independent, not affiliated with any of the movements or branches of Judaism.
  - Kehillat Kharakim has the following kashrut policy: all food must be dairy or parve, unless special arrangements have been made, and must be prepared according to kosher guidelines; packaged goods must be certified as kosher; fresh baked goods must be purchased from kosher bakeries; and home-baked goods must contain only vegetable shortening. Non-kosher food shall not be served.

Kehillat Kharakim is a project of  
**Gather the People**  
A Nonprofit Education & Training Resource  
for Congregational Community Development  
<http://www.gatherthepeople.org>

### PASTORAL COUNSELING AVAILABLE

Rabbi Moshe offers pastoral counseling without charge to any Kehillat Kharakim individual, couple, or family. Pastoral counseling addresses religious and spiritual as well as psychological and emotional needs. Moshe has a Ph.D. in Social Work, was a staff member of the Adirondack Samaritan Counseling Center of Glens Falls, NY, and was trained at the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Los Angeles. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information or an appointment.

**TAX DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUPPORT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM SHOULD BE MADE TO “GATHER THE PEOPLE”**

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