BS"D
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Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table and in the hallway in the back of Epstein.

Note: Fast of Asarah B'Tevet Tuesday, Dec. 14. Also, remember V'tain tal u'matar l'vracha.

The opening of Vayigash always brings tear to my eyes. With dramatic and beautiful words, Yehuda requests that the leader of Egypt take him as a slave instead of his brother Benyamin, because losing his favorite son would cause his elderly father to die. Yosef's reaction is similar to mine, only even more so. He has everyone but the brothers leave the room, cries, and reveals himself as their brother Yosef. After all his manipulations, Yosef has put the brothers into a position where they could repeat what they did to him 23 years earlier – let a son of Rachel be left as a slave in Egypt – or prove that they had repented by coming forth to save Benyamin. Yehuda shows that he is willing to sacrifice himself to save Benyamin – not only for his brother's sake, but also to save his father. Yehuda has performed complete teshuvah, repenting both to Yaakov and to the sons of Rachel. Yosef understands that the sons of Leah now truly deserve to be brothers to the sons of Rachel. For a more complete presentation of Yehuda's teshuvah, see the Devar Torah below by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, and the excellent presentation by Rabbi Eitan Mayer (attached by E-mail and preserved with the archives for Vayigash at www.PotomacTorah.org) .

Relations between the Leah and Rachel sides of B'Nai Yisrael affect Jewish history throughout Biblical history. When the brothers are growing up, Leah's sons cannot speak in peace with Yosef. This animosity leads to Yosef ending up as a slave in Egypt (and almost leads to his death). After Yaakov's death, Leah's sons are afraid that Yosef will seek revenge for their behavior many years earlier. Yosef reassures them, and later in the Torah, their descendants cooperate. For example, in the war against Amalek, Yehoshua (Yosef) helps Moshe, Aharon, and Chur (Levi and Yehuda) fight the war. Later, when Moshe sends representatives of the twelve tribes to tour Canaan, Yehoshua (Yosef) and Caleb (Yehuda) are the only two to counter the meraglim and advocate capturing the land that Hashem had promised to B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi David Fohrman asks when Benyamin ever thanks Yehuda for saving him from becoming a slave in Egypt. His primary answer is that the thanks comes in Shushan. By far the largest group of Jews at the time of Haman are from Yehuda. The Assyrians had dispersed (or killed) most of the lost tribes, who included Yosef and half of Benyamin. According to Google,

> *"In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and he carried them away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of Medes." In the years 722-721 BC[E], the Ten Tribes who comprised the northern Kingdom of Israel disappeared.*

In Shushan, Mordechai and Esther (from Benyamin) save the Jews (most of whom are from Yehuda) from death through Esther's bravery and astute unmasking of Haman's evil plot. Descendants of Benyamin therefore repay Yehuda's descendants for his brave intervention to save Benyamin in Egypt.

Earlier, however, another descendant of Benyamin saves a descendant of Yehuda. In Sefer Shmuel Alef (ch. 18), Goliath threatens Shaul, the first king of Israel. A shepherd boy, David, from Yehuda, kills the giant with a stone from his sling. Shaul brings David into the palace, and Shaul's son Yonatan loves David like his own self. When Shaul later threatens David, Yonatan saves him – even though by saving him, Yonatan loses the opportunity to become king after his father. Instead, the kingship goes to David and then remains in the house of David (Yehuda), as Yaakov predicts at the end of Sefer Bereishis. (Chazal interpret Yaakov's statement as instructing Yehuda's descendants to be kings.)

One can summarize the primary lesson from Vayigash through the lesson of Am Yisrael Chai. When we Jews recognize that we are all brothers and sisters, and when we care for each other, Jews are strong. When we forget this lesson, our enemies (Esav and Yishmael) become stronger than us and threaten our lives. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer reminds me that the Midrash in this week's parsha notes that peace between Yosef and Yehuda will be part of the ultimate peace of the times of Moshiach. The Midrash explains the famous quote of the lion lying with the lamb to be referring to the tribes of Israel.

The Torah and Navi remind us repeatedly that we have a responsibility to help the disadvantaged among us. Our primary obligation is to our family, then to our community, then to others. Our family and our community means fellow Jews. While it is nice that many Jews help non-Jews in American society and abroad, helping fellow Jews comes first. Our responsibility to fellow Jews (here, in Israel, and in other countries) is an important lesson of Vayigash, the Torah in general, and all of Tanach. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, visited Israel frequently, brought back books, art, and Judaica from Israel to make available to congregants (in the days before the Internet), and pushed hard to promote justice for Jews in the Soviet Union and other pockets of anti-Semitism. December is a good time to remember this lesson, when we can donate to Jewish causes and earn a tax deduction before the end of the year.

Note: While my focus is on thematic connections across time, Rabbi Moshe Rube (see below) explores thematic connections across a given year in the Jewish calendar. His brilliant discussion is another way of extending the layers of connections in our religion, and I strongly recommend that everyone learn from his insights.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Vayigash: For Crying Out Loud

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

It was a war of words, a battle of will, power, and courage. Who would blink first: Yehuda or Yoseph?

This is the scenario. Before the brothers departed Egypt. Yoseph had surreptitiously planted his silver goblet in his brother Binyamin's sack. Not long after Yoseph sends his brothers back to Canaan, his agents pursue them, arrest them, and

accuse them of robbery. Lo and behold, Binyamin is caught with the silver goblet. Binyamin is brought back to the palace where Yosef sentences him to eternal servitude. The brothers are helpless.

Yehuda, having accepted full responsibility for Binyamin's safe return, pleads with Yoseph while he also prepares for battle. After all, he exclaims, "How can I return to my father without my brother, lest I see the evil that will befall my father!" (cf. Genesis 44:34).

Yoseph sees the true feeling that Yehuda and the brothers show for the youngest one, and cannot continue his charade. He sends all the Egyptians from the room and bursts out, "I am Yoseph! Is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3) Hardly a commentary fails to expound upon the obvious question. Yoseph was just told how eagerly Yaakov awaits the return of Binyamin. Therefore Yoseph knew that Yaakov was alive. Why now did he ask the question?

It was the Jewish wedding of the century, the daughter of Rabbi Chaim Elazar Schapiro, the illustrious Munkatzcer Rebbe, was to marry the son of the Rebbe of Partzov. Both Chassidic dynasties were royal, aristocratic, and majestic. And the ceremony was to be equally regal. The bride and groom would ride in opulent carriages, drawn by four white horses. The wedding meal was so large that every needy member of the community would be allowed to partake. It was the Jewish event of the century!

There was so much excitement that an actual news crew came to film the wedding. The footage would be incorporated as part of the pre-feature newsreels shown at American movie theatres across the Atlantic! "Imagine!" thought the reporters, "this would attract hundreds of Jewish people who had roots in Europe into the theatre!" The difficult part was to convince the Munkatzcer Rebbe to speak for the cameras. The Rebbe vehemently opposed the frivolities and wanton ideas of the cinema, and would not participate in a film. The producer assured the Rebbe that only his voice, not his face (an assurance that proved to be false), would be presented to the large audiences.

"Rebbe, this is a wonderful opportunity for you to talk about the Hassidic court of Munkatzc! Imagine how many Jews would be fascinated by your life's work. It would also be a wonderful opportunity to send personal wishes to all your followers who have left Europe to come to America."

Finally, the Rebbe consented. The film caught the Rebbe speaking for the microphones and the camera that was obscured from his view. He was very brief. Tearfully, he repeated his message a few times and then turned his head and stopped talking.

The American crew was excited. They were going to present the wedding with its entire mystique and majesty to American audiences.

However, when the wedding film was shown in American theatres the scene of the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony was a stark contrast to the interview with the Rebbe. They did not see a jubilant Rabbi Schapiro toasting the large audience upon the joyous occasion. Instead, they saw Rabbi Schapiro pleading tearfully on the silver screen. "Yidden heet der Shabbos!" "Jewish Brothers! Keep the Shabbos!" Those were the only words he said. Then he turned his face and wept. Those were the only words that the Rebbe chose to speak. (The film is now archived at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.)

Yoseph had bottled his emotions from the moment he saw his brothers upon their entry to Egypt until the moment he revealed his identity in the privacy of his chambers. But all the while of his pent-up emotion there was one question he felt he had to ask. How is my father? Is he alive and well? Although the information was afforded him, he felt a responsibility — almost instinctive in nature — to ask about his dear father's welfare. All he had on his mind throughout the ordeal was that one question. The moment he was free to talk his piece, he instinctively asked, "Is my father still alive? How has he fared through this trying ordeal? Those words were on his heart and mind for 22 years. The moment he had the opportunity to speak, he did not chastise his brothers. He did not demand retribution. He did not seek vengeance. All he did was reveal his true feelings and asked the question that was quashed for 22 years. How is my father?

Good Shabbos

Don’t Forgive So Fast

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Psychologists and those offering religious guidance will often talk about learning to forgive those who have hurt us even if they have never — and will never — apologize. It is possible, however, to be too quick to issue that forgiveness. There are costs in rushing to forgive others. Some of us need to learn not how to forgive, but instead how to wait until an apology is offered.

Joseph is one of those people. When he reveals himself to his brothers, he forgives them immediately: “Now, therefore, to not be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:5). No harm, no foul! You didn’t do anything wrong — it was all for the good. And anyway, you didn’t even do it — it was all God’s doing. So don’t worry about it. I forgive you. There’s nothing, even, to forgive.

Well, that’s wonderful, right? Joseph lets them off the hook. But the real question is: Absent an opportunity to offer an apology, are Joseph’s brothers able to let themselves off the same hook? We know why an apology is important to the person receiving it, but why is it important to the person offering it?

An apology does a few things. For the person saying sorry, an apology says that you recognize that there is a rule of law, and it reaffirms that rule of law. It communicates to the injured party, and to oneself, that while the person who is apologizing acted badly, she knows that this is not the way she is supposed to act.

An apology also says — again, to us as much as to the other — that how I acted is not the person I truly am. My behavior does not reflect the person I truly want to be. The way I acted does not define who I am, or even if I have been that person, it is not the person who I am trying to be. An apology allows us to restore our perception of ourselves, and our faith in ourselves.

An apology can also bring about healing. It surfaces the issue that is painful and difficult to talk about, an issue that has been festering beneath the surface. Sometimes this healing comes through calm and reasoned discussion about how to correct what was done and how to best move forward. Just as often, it comes about through opening a space for emotions to come forth. The injured party can express how she has been hurt and is even still hurting. She can vent and let forth the emotions that have been simmering and boiling within herself. The offender, similarly, can give release to the guilt that he has been carrying around all this time. By owning up to what he did and talking about, allows for an unburdening, for catharsis.

An apology creates an opening for healing. Joseph’s over-hasty forgiveness was a band-aid. The wound, unhealed, remained open and festering underneath.

Why do some people rush to forgive? Some do so to avoid the discomfort that comes from revisiting the painful past. This might be about more than avoiding pain. Looking back at what happened, acknowledging that there has been real hurt, forces the injured party to also consider whether their actions were so pure. What part did they play in the dynamics? How did they react when this was done to them?

By not acknowledging the wrong that had been done to him and how he had suffered, Joseph was able to gloss over his own behavior. His tricking, accusing, and manipulating of his brothers in his role as viceroy was, undoubtedly in his mind, acting in the service of his dreams, of God’s will. Had he spoken with his brothers about how they had pained him, he might have had to consider that the way he acted might not have been so pure. Joseph might have been prodded, at least subconsciously, by a desire for revenge. A quick forgiveness saved him from all of that anguish and discomfort.

Others forgive quickly because they wish to avoid being placed in such a position of power to grant or not grant forgiveness, and they wish to avoid seeing the other person putting himself in such a position of need and powerlessness. The irony is that, without an apology, the power dynamic remains unacknowledged and very much in place. If I have forgiven you without any catharsis, healing, or acceptance of responsibility on your part, then by the same grace that I have offered you this forgiveness, I can revoke it as well.

The story of Joseph and his brothers and the harm that they did to him does not end with Joseph's forgiveness. At the end of next week's parsha, we read that after Jacob died, the brothers were terrified about how Joseph would now act. "Joseph will now hate us, and will certainly revisit upon us all the evil which we did to him" (Gen. 50:15). Joseph's over-hasty forgiveness — "it was not evil, it was good; it was not you, it was God" — made no impression on the brothers. In their minds, they thought: Joseph will now repay us for all "the evil" which "we" did unto him. Because there was no apology, Joseph's power over them was ever-present, and now they had to abjectly throw themselves to his feet. With no apology, there was no healing.

When asked for forgiveness, we should give it freely. But not too quickly. Let's make sure that we create the space to allow apologies to happen.

Shabbat shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/12/dont-forgive-so-fast/

Jewish Conversion

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

If I were to ask you, "What was the most inspirational religious experience you have ever had?" you might respond with recollections of Kol Nidrei, or the Pesach Seder of your youth. Perhaps you would recall the experience of prayer you had in an emotionally laden moment, or the feeling you had being close to G-d when you visited the Kotel for the first time. For me, one of the most inspirational experiences is being a part of a person's conversion to Judaism.

You see, many years ago, in a place called Sinai, the Jewish family gathered to become a nation. Until that point the Jewish family shared a biological connection, as well as many ideals, wisdom, and a culture. But at that moment, when they accepted the Torah, the Jewish people became more than a family. They became a nation.

Jewish tradition teaches that G-d offered the Torah to all the nations of the world, but they declined. Each nation found that the laws of the Torah didn't match the lifestyle that they wished to live. Some did not like the rules against theft, others did not like the laws of Kosher, Shabbat, morality, or murder. What enabled the Jewish family to accept the Torah? They understood that the Torah would impose and make demands on them. They understood that Torah would demand greatness. They understood that Torah would require that they do things that they did not want to do and refrain from things that they wished they could do. Out of love for G-d, out of a desire for truth, and out of a desire to become spiritually great and in touch with their souls, they accepted the Torah, and, as one, they became a nation.

Jewish tradition teaches that although the nations of the world, as a whole, declined to accept the Torah, there were individuals of the nations whose souls yearned to say "Yes." Perhaps they even answered "Yes" when G-d offered the Torah, but their response was drowned out by the collective response of their respective nations. These individual souls would be given the opportunity during the course of time to join the Jewish nation by choice. This is the essence of Jewish conversion.

The Rambam (Maimonides) writes, "Just as the Jews became a nation in Biblical times…so it is for generations. When a non-Jew wants to become Jewish and accepts the Mitzvos… in front of the Beis Din…" he or she becomes part of the Jewish nation.

Jewish conversion is a reenactment of the Sinai experience. Through this process of conversion, we can usher into the Jewish nation those who come by choice to accept the Torah.

Jewish conversion is momentous. It is often the culmination of years of searching and studying. Like Avraham, the first "Jew," it often comes after quite a bit of experimenting with different religious options. When a person reaches this point in their personal journey it is just plain awesome.

On a practical level, a Beis Din in our time will strive to act responsibly both to the candidate and to the Jewish nation which the candidate wishes to join. The Beis Din will require that the candidate has a sponsoring Rabbinic couple who can mentor the candidate and model what Judaism is in real life experience. Likewise, we typically require that the candidate

be part of a Jewish community and has integrated well, so that the prognosis is that of success. We will often be quite cautious regarding candidates who are in a particular emotional swing or have not settled down. Likewise, we will be quite cautious regarding a candidate who has much book knowledge but has not yet integrated into a Jewish community. The weight of Jewish conversion rests upon all those involved that the decision to become Jewish is authentic and is a decision that is indeed responsible and lasting.

The actual conversion takes place at a Mikva where the candidate is dressed in a particular type of robe, made of material that is not clingy, and will allow the Mikva water to make contact with the body. After exchanging pleasantries, the head of the Beis Din will begin asking the questions that define the acceptance of Mitzvos. The candidates' affirmative responses are the modern-day equivalent of that great "Yes" that we responded as a nation as we stood at Sinai so many years ago.

Sometimes, the candidate will get choked up with emotion, or find themselves crying tears of joy and success, having been able to reach this noble and authentic milestone. They may be responding to the Beis Din's questions, but at the same time they are communicating with G-d, accepting the Torah as the Jewish people did many years ago.

The story is told of a woman who crafted a beautiful cover for a Torah scroll. She brought it to the synagogue and was hoping to be greeted with great fanfare. She was greeted pleasantly, and the cover she crafted with such dedication and good will was tried. But it didn't fit the Torah scroll. Unfortunately, the cover she made was just a bit too small. As the story goes, the woman in her disappointment exclaimed, "Then cut the Torah a bit and it will fit."

To the awesome credit of the candidate there were times along the journey that the Beis Din gave feedback advising them to work more on certain areas to attain appropriate knowledge and proficiency, and they listened. He or she took the guidance to heart, studied, and practiced, until they were ready for another meeting.

When a candidate does reach the "finish line" it is like the expression we use by a wedding: "This is not an end; this is just a beginning." For a man who has converted, he will often ask to be directed to the nearest synagogue so that he can put on Teffilin for the first time. For a woman who has converted, she will often be embraced by her friends and mentors with the joy appropriate for a Kallah. Joyous cries of "Mazal Tov!" emanate from all, as she follows in the footsteps of Rus, matriarch of royalty.

Experiencing a Jewish conversion may be the closest I can get to experiencing Sinai in my lifetime. It is the wondrous moment when a human being expresses infinite trust in G-d and the system of Judaism, to join without conditions and without rewriting the script. It is a moment of infinite joy in heaven and on earth. It is an honor and a trust to be a part of. It is truly a religiously inspirational moment.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org. **Teach613 recently started a new Shulchan Aruch Zoom class this week. For information or to join, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Building a Jewish Future: Thoughts for Parashat Vayiggash

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Some years ago, I gave a lecture at the New York Public Library. Afterwards, a woman from the audience came up to speak with me. She told me that she was a Holocaust survivor. After the war, she came to the United States, married and had four children. With tears in her eyes, she went on to tell me that just the previous week her fourth child had been married to a non-Jew. In fact, all four of her children were now married out of the faith, and none of them were engaged in raising Jewish families.

"If I had known this would happen," she lamented, "I would rather have perished in the concentration camp."

I offered this woman whatever feeble words of comfort I could devise, but I could not begin to assuage the intensity of her sense of tragedy in her life. I asked her what synagogue she attended, thinking that I might consult further with her rabbi. She answered: “I don’t belong to a synagogue. I have never attended a synagogue. We are not religious.”

This woman, like so many other Jews, has assumed that children and grandchildren somehow inherit a strong feeling of Jewishness. Of course, this assumption is false, disproved virtually every day of the week and in almost every family. Judaism and Jewishness are transmitted meaningfully only where there is a commitment to Jewish observance and Jewish education.

Many Jews do not wish to confront this message. They point to examples of non-observant individuals who have transmitted Jewish identity. They also point to examples of religious families whose children have married out of their faith and/or who do not live active Jewish lives. Yet, one must look at the total picture and not simply point to the exceptional cases. Demographic studies have shown conclusively that Jewish continuity is directly correlated to the level of Jewish observance, education and commitment.

The Talmud, Berakhot 8a, teaches that one who does not frequent the synagogue “causes exile for himself and his children.” This statement has proven to be true, not only on a homiletic level but in its literal meaning. Praying regularly in synagogue is a reflection of a world view. One who takes the synagogue seriously is also one who is more likely to take other aspects of Judaism seriously. Moreover, those who are most attached to the synagogue are also those who are most likely to see to it that they, their children and grandchildren are involved in meaningful Jewish living and learning.

The synagogue is a repository of Jewish spirituality, learning and social commitment. It is a place where we strengthen ourselves as individuals, and join together in strengthening our community. It has a special quality: the more we experience its message, the more deeply connected we are with it.

Each individual must assume personal responsibility for the flourishing of Jewish life. Our homes should reflect our Jewish ideas and ideals, our traditions and our values.

This week’s Torah portion informs us that Jacob sent his son Judah to Goshen, ahead of the rest of the family (46:28). Rabbinic tradition has it that Judah’s task was to set up a house of teaching, so that when the family arrived in Goshen they would find a place already set up for them to come together for study and discussion. This has been a hallmark of the Jewish people since then: to set up schools and study halls, to create an environment for religious learning and exploring, to transmit the essential ingredients for a happy and identified Jewish life.

Jewish identity and values are not transmitted automatically. We need the wisdom and commitment to create vibrant Jewish lives for ourselves, our families and for our entire community.

To build a Jewish future is an ongoing challenge and responsibility. It is also an ineffable privilege and a source of infinite delight.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/building-jewish-future-thoughts-parashat-vayiggash

*** The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at www.jewishideas.org

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Simone Veil: From Survivor to World Leader

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Simone Veil (1927-2017) was born in Nice, France, into a secular middle class Jewish family. Her pleasant childhood was abruptly ended by the rise of the Nazis and the fall of France to German control. In 1944 she was deported to Auschwitz. Her father and brother were deported and murdered. Her mother died of typhus before the concentration camp was liberated in April 1945. She and two sisters survived.

Veil considered herself to be French; she felt betrayed that France allowed its Jewish citizens to be oppressed, deported and murdered. Yes, there were good French people who saved Jews, who spoke up for their Jewish neighbors. But too many did not. Moreover, after Jewish survivors began to return to their homes in France, they were not greeted with the warmth and understanding that Veil expected. Even the government remained aloof. “From top to bottom of the government, the same attitude prevailed: no one felt concerned by what the Jews had suffered. You can imagine how shocking this was for everyone whose lives had been disrupted by the Holocaust” (A Life: A Memoir by Simon Veil, p. 87).

After the liberation, she decided to study law at the University of Paris, where she met her future husband Antoine Veil. They were married in October 1946, and had three sons. She practiced law for several years, and in 1956 she passed the national examination to become a magistrate. She received a senior position at the National Penitentiary Administration, under the Ministry of Justice. From May 1974 to March 1977, she served as Minister of Health, and was responsible for advocating a number of significant laws, including legalizing abortion in France.

In 1979 she was elected as a member of the European Parliament; in the first European parliamentary election she was elected President, a position she held until 1982. She continued with her active political life, including years of service in the cabinet of France’s Prime Minister. During the course of her remarkable career, she won many awards and honors. When she died, her funeral was conducted as a national ceremony. It was attended by President Macron and many dignitaries, along with Holocaust survivors. President Macron announced the decision to rebury Veil and her husband in the Pantheon, a rare honor, and this was done on July 1, 2018.

Veil devoted her career to efforts to improve society. “No doubt what I suffered in the camps developed my extreme sensitivity to anything in human relations that generates humiliation and loss of human dignity” (Ibid. p. 101). She worked for prison reform; she advocated for women’s rights; she was a champion of environmental issues. Her devotion to France was central to her life…even though France had betrayed her and its Jewish citizens during World War II. She was sympathetic to Israel and saw its role as “a home for people who no longer had one, to provide a haven of peace for all those who had been displaced and lost families, houses and professions, and to give them a piece of land where they could finally put down roots” (Ibid., p. 118).

In 2003, she accepted the Presidency of the International Victims’ Claims Fund in the International Criminal Court. She made it clear that she was doing so in defense of the rights of victims, not to pose as a judge of actions from which they had suffered. “After the war, when the survivors of the Holocaust returned to France, they had to provide proof of the expropriations they had suffered. Even so, they were poorly compensated and only after a struggle. Seldom did money deposited in banks or contracts underwritten by insurance companies result in the payment of damages” (Ibid., p. 171).

It was not until 1995 that France officially recognized its complicity in the crimes against its Jewish citizens during the Second World War. President Jacque Chirac, on July 16, 1995, called on France to face its past and to make amends to the extent possible. A commission was established to deal with the immense losses of Jews whose property was expropriated during the war. The commission found that 50,000 Jewish businesses had been “Aryanized” and 90,000 Jewish bank accounts and insurance contracts had never been honored; 38,000 Jewish apartments had been looted of their furniture. Restoration of assets to Jewish families was arranged, to the extent possible. The commission pointed to France’s responsibility to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust, and Simone Veil was asked to serve as the first President of the Foundation for the Memory of the Holocaust.

On January 27, 2005, she spoke at Auschwitz on the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. To an audience including survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, she recounted the horrors of those days; she remembered the more than one and a half million people murdered here, simply because they were born Jewish. “Today, sixty years later, a new pledge must be made for people to unite at least to combat hatred of other people, anti-Semitism and racism,

and intolerance….It is the right and duty of us, the last survivors, to put you on your guard and to ask you to turn our companions' cry 'never again' into reality" (Ibid., pp. 248-49).

She not only worked to foster an understanding of the Holocaust and its victims; she also strove to highlight the heroism of those righteous people who fought against Nazism, who saved Jewish lives, who behaved honestly and admirably during a very difficult period of time. On January 18, 2007, she spoke as President of the Foundation for the Memory of the Holocaust at a ceremony honoring the righteous of France. "All of you, the Righteous of France, to whom we pay tribute today, illustrate the honor of our country which thanks to you, found a sense of fraternity, justice and courage….For those of us still haunted by the memory of our loved ones who vanished in smoke and have no gravestone, for all those who want a better world, more just and more fraternal, cleansed of the poison of anti-Semitism, racism and hatred, these walls will resonate now and forever with the echo of your voices, you, the Righteous of France, who give us reasons to hope" (Ibid., pp. 284-85).

Although she was fully and personally aware of human viciousness and cruelty, Simone Veil wanted very much to believe in the ultimate victory of a righteous, compassionate and humane society. She stressed the role of righteous French non-Jews who acted nobly during the war years. "I am convinced that there will always be men and women, of all origins and in all countries, capable of doing what is right and just. Based on the example of the Righteous, I should like to believe that moral strength and individual conscience can win out" (Ibid., p.295).

* * *

Although Simone Veil did not identify herself as being religious, her life embodied significant elements of a religious worldview. If faith in God was not part of her mindset, her faith in humanity was remarkable. After all she witnessed in Auschwitz, it might have been expected that she could no longer trust the goodness of human beings. After the cold reception she and other survivors experienced upon returning to France after the war, it would have been natural for her to feel alienation from France and the French people. But she did not lose faith in humanity, in the French people, in France. This faith was—in religious terms—messianic. She believed in a future age when humanity would overcome its hatreds and prejudices, when people of all nations, religions, races would live in peace and mutual respect.

But her faith was not merely a matter of lip-service to high ideals. She devoted her life to working for the betterment of her society. She strove to enact policies that enhanced human rights and human dignity.

In my more than fifty years of rabbinic service, I've learned to pay more attention to what people do rather than to what they say. Professions of faith and pious preachments may be fine, but they do not define one's religiosity. Righteous action is the true test.

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It's Not My Fight

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

The parsha opens with the intense final moments before Yosef reveals himself to his brothers. Yosef's brothers have come back to Egypt to face the viceroy, Tzafnas Pane'ach (still unaware that this viceroy is their brother Yosef) after his stolen goblet was found in Binyomin's sack. He has told them that he intends to keep Binyomin as a slave. They are devastated to consider what Yaakov will say if they would return home without Binyomin. Rash"i tells us in last week's parsha that the brothers were ready to wage war against all of Egypt if necessary to bring Binyomin home. Yehuda steps forward to plead their case and beg for Binyomin's freedom.

The Medrash adds another layer to the exchange between Yosef and Yehuda based on a passuk in Tehillim, "The kings gathered they passed (*avru*) together" (Tehillim 48:5). The Hebrew word "*avru"* can also mean they angered. The Medrash explains that the Kings are Yehuda and Yosef, and they angered at each other. Yehuda screamed in rage at

Yosef and his screams shook all of Egypt and were heard in the land of Canaan. Yosef responded by kicking the pillar of marble he was sitting on, and it crumbled in a pile of stones. The chapter in Tehillim continues and says “trembling gripped them” (Tehillim 487). The Medrash explains that this refers to the reaction of the other brothers. When the other brothers saw this display of anger between Yehuda and Yosef, they stepped back and said “Kings are fighting one with another, as for us, what does it matter to us? It is fitting for a king to fight a king.” The other brothers saw these two kings, Yehuda and Yosef, and felt it would be inappropriate to intercede between two kings. They, therefore, said nothing. This is why the parsha begins, “And Yehuda approached.” His brothers had stepped back. (Berieshis Rabbah 93:2)

While perhaps we can understand the reaction of the other brothers, the sentiment the Medrash presents is very difficult to understand. Even if they felt it would be inappropriate to support their king, as if he couldn’t stand on his own, or to contradict the other king, how could they say “what does it matter to us?” They had personally witnessed Yaakov’s distress when told that the viceroy wanted Binyomin brought to Egypt. They had delayed returning to Egypt for months, making do with what food they could find during the famine, waiting until Yaakov was ready to let Binyomin go. They had come back now to face the viceroy, after Binyomin was accused of theft, ready to battle against all of Egypt out of their concern for Binyomin and for the effect it would have on Yaakov if they did not bring him home. How could they possibly stand back and say “What does it matter to us? It’s fitting for a king to fight a king” ?!

The Eitz Yosef explains that this Medrash is teaching us a valuable tactic in handling ourselves in challenging situations. The brothers recognized the intensity of the moment and indeed were moved to jump to Yehuda’s side. However, they realized that it was not necessary and not appropriate for them to step in yet. Yehuda and Yosef had not actually begun fighting, and they should still wait and let the kings lead. Yet, it was extremely difficult for them to hold themselves back. They therefore stopped and said to each other, “The kings are fighting. It is not our place to step in now. As for us, if it is not our place, then what does it matter to us how this is handled? It is not our job and it is not our place. It is G-d’s world, and he wants us to step back.” With this attitude, they were able to hold themselves back and wait until it would be appropriate to step in.

We live in a time when our communities and societies are divided. Thank G-d, many people are distraught with all the discord and truly wish to find peace and friendship. However, there are so many issues we feel strongly about which may affect us and impact our lives in significant ways. This tool can allow us to achieve the peace that we seek. We can ask ourselves, “Does G-d really want me to engage in this debate now? Am I in the proper time and place?” When the answer is no, then I can say to myself, “Let it go for now, then.”

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

The Next Four Months

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

What will your family and their descendants look like in 200 years?

What do you think the worldwide Jewish community will look like in 500 years?

I would be surprised if you weren't at least a tad flustered by these questions. I sure am when I think about them. It's one thing to think about what will happen next week, next month, next year, or even 10 years from now. But once we start casting our gaze past 100 years, we get into "confusion territory."

Why is this? I'm not sure but maybe at that point we confront realities about our direct control over reality. While we know our actions today have far reaching effects, so many actions will take place between now and the future that also have influence. We realize we can't control such things and that's a bit scary.

But perhaps it's also a little calming? Maybe we don't have to worry so much about the far off centuries. That's not and cannot be our responsibility as it's beyond our zone of influence. We just have to do the right thing now and have trust in God that the world will be fine. So we can't and shouldn't send our focus too far into the future.

But our focal length for our life shouldn't be too short either.

Doing so would mean we open ourselves to the common experience of holidays sneaking up on us. Sometimes it feels like we're plodding through each week Shabbos by Shabbos, parsha by parsha, until all of a sudden, we're at a holiday.

But how about instead taking a global look at what's in store for us and how this full annual experience that the Torah gives us applies throughout the wide expanse of our lives. For instance, on Rosh Hashanah we (by which I also include rabbis, the people most responsible for giveing Divrei Torah) could talk more about Rosh Hashanah as it connects to the rest of the year and not as if it's isolated from holidays like Channukah or Pesach. Is there not a forest for the trees?

As another example, I could give a Dvar Torah now on a verse in Vayigash. I would call that an "isometric Dvar Torah." But there's another type of Torah we can say that I would call integrative. How does Vayigash play in the larger story in Genesis and Exodus? How does it relate to Channukah? Can we even connect it to Purim?

To be clear, I know there's a lot of value in isometric Divrei Torah. God forbid would I look down on anyone who gives an observation on something specific. In fact, if that's what you enjoy, go for it. I enjoy it and do it all the time. As long as we recognize that's not our only option, we're good

So let's take a more expansive look at what awaits us over the next four months (3 months plus the extra month of Adar due to the leap year). Let's see if we can make sense out of it and dig at the underlying themes of the symphony that is the Jewish year.

To recap, we just completed the first quarter of the year with the High Holiday season, and the first 6 days of Channukah.

Over the coming months of Teves, Shvat, and both Adars we have:

1) The last 2 days of Channukah

2) The Fast of Teves taking place on the 10th of Teves during the day of December 14th

3) Tu Bishvat, the New Year for the trees, taking place on the 15th of Shvat, Sunday night, January 16th through Monday night January 17th

4) Purim, taking place on the 14th of the 2nd Adar from Wednesday night March 16th through Thursday night of March 17th.

We could discuss each of these isometrically i.e. zoom in on each one and only talk about it in terms of itself. But let's see if we can make integrative sense out of this section of the Jewish calendar.

Do you see any underlying themes here? Themes that connect it to the rest of the year? Why do these holidays follow the first 3 months of the year? Is there a connection?

Think about it and please email me any insights you might have. Here are my two shekels.

It seems that we are repeating the holidays of the holiday season but in a different manner. Whereas Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos were full of pomp, circumstance, fancy services, and exotic foods galore, here we're a little more subdued as we celebrate similar themes.

On Rosh Hashanah, the new year for the world, we loudly proclaimed God as King, prayed for the whole world and all nations to be sealed for a sweet year, and for all evil to vanish. We celebrated a massive global vision.

But the Rosh Hashanah of this go around is a quiet one for the trees. On Tu Bishvat, the rains have stopped and we celebrate that the trees have absorbed enough water and will begin to bud. All the action takes place under the ground or inside the tree, where the unseen sap lies.

The rabbinical fast of the first 3 months was Tzom Gedaliah, the Fast of Gedaliah, which commemorates a high profile political assassination. The rabbinical fast of this season in Teves commemorates a siege. No tragedy and destruction had happened yet. The enemy lied in wait, quiet at the gates.

Purim is this round's Yom Kippur. The Talmud makes a direct comparison between the two calling Yom Kippur a day of forgiveness like Purim.

On Yom Kippur, God is felt in the room. His presence is palpable as we dress in white, prostrate on our faces, and call on Him as directly as we dare to achieve repentance for ourselves and the world.

But on Purim, God hides. He hides in the Megillah, working through the political intrigue of Mordechai and Esther (whose name means "hidden"), and we hide behind our masks.

And we only get a tiny 2-day slice of Channukah, which according to the Book of Maccabees was meant to be a stand-in for the Sukkos holiday that the Jews missed. So it's Sukkos but more subdued

What does this mean?

Maybe the calendar is giving us a wink that after all the partying, food, and ostentatious festivities, we can take it easy. We don't need to expend such copious amounts of effort to get close to God. God can be found not just in massive experiences, but also in the simplest things we do. We have holidays during this second quarter, but they act as a friendly nudge to point us to something. Not to a party where we are wrested from our routine, but to something that can be found within our day to day. The connection is always there and doesn't need anything big to access it. After all the that we've done, we need to know that even in our retreat for the winter (which even in Alabama can still be intense), we have all that we need.

This next section of the calendar could be our introverted balance to the first 3 months.

So what about the next part of the calendar where we have Pesach, Lag Baomer and Shavuos?

Good question. Let's talk in 4 months. See you then!

Shabbat Shalom,

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
VaYigash: The Reunion of Joseph and Judah

We all have limited amounts of time and energy and must learn how to apportion these resources wisely. In particular, we need to find a balance between activities that are directed inwardly, for our own personal development, and those directed outwardly, for the benefit of others. As Hillel taught, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I?” (Avot 1:14). Both areas are crucial. The difficulty lies in deciding how much of our time and resources should be dedicated to inner growth, and how much for reaching out to others.

The nation as a whole also needs to juggle these two competing spheres. The search for the correct balance was played out in the dispute between Joseph and his brothers. Their struggle corresponded to two different paths within the Jewish people — one stressing the nation’s own spiritual development, and the other emphasizing Israel’s universal responsibility and influence.

Eidut and Torah

The Jewish people are crowned with two qualities, Eidut (testimony) and Torah, as it says: “[God] established testimony in Jacob; He set down Torah in Israel” (Ps. 78:5). What are these two qualities?

The essence of Eidut is to accurately report facts as they occurred. Nothing may be added or altered when giving testimony. Torah study, on the other hand, involves chiddush — creative and innovative thought.

This dichotomy of Eidut and Torah is the root of the conflict between Jacob's sons. Joseph stressed the concept of Eidut, as it says, "a testimony (eidut) for Joseph" (Ps. 81:6). The aspect of Eidut reflects Joseph's desire to interact with the nations and expose them to the authentic message of monotheism and morality.

On the other hand, the other brothers — and especially Judah, their leader — emphasized the Torah and the special holiness of the Jewish people. They sought to develop and cultivate the unique heritage of Israel. Thus it was Judah whom Jacob picked to establish an academy of Torah study in Goshen. Furthermore, the Midrash credits Judah with burning the wagons that Pharaoh sent to bring Jacob's family to Egypt. Judah ordered that the wagons be destroyed when he saw that they were engraved with idolatrous symbols (Breishit Rabbah 94:3). This act, introducing the law of destroying idols with fire [later codified in Deut. 7:25], demonstrated Judah's focus on the aspects of purity and innovation in Torah.

The Message of Shema

Joseph and Judah, and their paths of Eidut and Torah, were united when Jacob brought his family down to Joseph in Egypt. The Sages noted a peculiar incident that took place during the family reunion. The Torah relates that Joseph cried on his father's neck, but is silent regarding Jacob's actions at this emotional meeting. What was Jacob doing? According to the Midrash, he was busy reciting the Shema. What was the significance of the Shema at that particular time?

The Shema's message is, of course, one of unity. "Listen, Israel: God is our Lord; God is one" (Deut. 6:4). These two phrases refer to two levels (or stages) of God's unity in the world. The first level is "God is our Lord." This is God's unity as it is currently revealed in the world, a world created according to the blueprint of Torah, and through which we can recognize the greatness of the Creator. The second, higher level is "God is one." This is God's unity as it will be revealed in the future, a unity that will encompass the entire universe. "After all has ceased to be, the One revered will reign alone" (from the Adon Olam hymn).

Judah represents the first level of God's unity, a unity manifested through the Torah and the special role of the Jewish people. Joseph, on the other hand, sought to sanctify God's Name among the nations and bring knowledge of one Creator to the entire world. He represents the second level, the universal unity of God. Jacob's recitation of the Shema thus encapsulated the combined visions of both Judah and Joseph.

The Scales of the Leviathan

The two paths within Jacob's family — Judah's path of particularity and Joseph's path of universality — split when Joseph was sold as a slave. The brothers' reconciliation and the unification of these two paths took place in Vayigash, when Judah drew near to his brother Joseph (Gen. 44:18).

The Midrash (Breishit Rabbah 93:2) chose a curious verse to describe the coming together of Joseph and his brothers. The word vayigash ("and he drew near") also appears in Job's description of the scales of the giant Leviathan: "One is so near (yig'shu) to the other, that no air can enter between them" (Job 41:8). What do the Leviathan's scales have to do with the reunification of Jacob's family?

According to the Sages, this fearsome sea creature belongs in a category of its own. All living creatures have both males and females, except the Leviathan (Baba Batra 74b). In other words, while all other creatures reflect a quality of duality and fracture that exists in our imperfect world, the Leviathan retains something of the universe's original unity. Thus the Talmud describes the Leviathan as being akalton — twisting around and encompassing the entire world (Rashi ad loc). The Zohar (2:179a) teaches that "its tail is placed in its mouth." In other words, this wondrous creature has neither beginning nor end. Undetected, it surrounds and unites the entire world. This hidden unity will be revealed in the future, when the righteous tzaddikim will feast on the Leviathan (Baba Batra 74b).

The future will reveal the underlying oneness of the universe, the ideal balance of Torah and Eidut, of Judah and Joseph, of our inwardly and outwardly directed efforts, of the particular and the universal. The two paths will be united like the scales of the Leviathan, magnificently arranged "one so near to the other that no air can enter between them."

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, vol. 10 (1930).)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYIGASH_67.htm

Vayigash (5768) – The Great Experiment

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

It is one of the most dramatic moments in Bereishith, a book full of dramatic moments. Judah has made a passionate plea for Benjamin's release. Yes, the missing silver cup has been found in his possession. Judah does not challenge the facts. Instead he throws himself on the mercy of the Egyptian ruler, of whose identity he is still unaware. He asks him to think of the impact Benjamin's imprisonment will have on his father. He has already lost one beloved son. The shock of losing another will kill him.

> *Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father.*

These are the words that finally break Joseph's heart. He is overcome with emotion. He commands all his attendants to leave, turns to his brothers, and reveals his identity:

> *Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.*

Their silence is eloquent. They are bewildered. The stranger turns out to be their brother. The ruler of Egypt is the young man that, years earlier, they had sold as a slave. The combination of shock and guilt paralyses them.

Breaking the silence, Joseph continues. He has yet another surprise for them. He does not hold them guilty. There is no anger in his words. Instead he does the least expected thing. He comforts them. He forgives them. He speaks with a majestic graciousness:

> *Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that G-d sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But G-d sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d."*

With this, the long story reaches closure. The estrangement, which began with the words, '[The brothers] hated him and could not speak peaceably to him," is at an end. Joseph is, as he twice dreamed he would be, a ruler. His brothers have bowed down to him. He has survived their attempt to kill him. He has risen from slavery to become the second most powerful man in the most powerful empire of the ancient world. But a question remains. What kind of story is this? What is its theme? What has been driving Joseph in these successive encounters with his brothers?

First, let us recall the sequence of events. Some time earlier, the brothers had come before Joseph for the first time. He recognises them. They do not recognise him. He "speaks harshly" to them, accusing them of being spies. He puts them in prison for three days.

He then releases them, holding Shimon as a hostage, telling them that they must bring Benjamin with them next time, to verify their story. Unbeknown to them, he has the money they had paid for the grain put back into their sacks. When they discover this, they are unnerved again. Something is happening to them, but they do not know what.

Eventually the food runs out and they have to return. It takes much persuasion on the part of Judah to convince Jacob to let Benjamin come with. This time, Joseph greets them with warmth, inviting them to eat with him. Eventually, having

provided them with fresh supplies of grain, he sends them on their way. Now, however, he does more than place money in their sacks. He has his favourite divination cup placed in Benjamin's grain.

The brothers have left the city, relieved that the visit has been unexpectedly painless. No sooner have they gone than they are overtaken by Joseph's steward. Someone has stolen his master's silver cup. The brothers protest their innocence. The steward searches their bags, starting with the eldest. Finally they reach Benjamin, and there, in his sack, is the cup. It is their worst nightmare come true. They knew that having once come home without Joseph, they could not lose Benjamin also. Judah had staked his honour on it. So the brothers appear before Joseph once more, and the drama moves toward its climax.

What is the logic of this sequence of events? The first possibility, suggested by the Torah itself ("Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them: You are spies"), is that Joseph was acting so as to fulfil his childhood dreams, in which his family bowed down to him.

This, however, cannot be the case. Before Joseph acts like a stranger, we read "When Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground" (42: 6). If the story were simply about the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams he should have devised a strategy that would bring the whole family, including Jacob and Benjamin, to Egypt. Jacob would have bowed down to him, the dreams would be fulfilled, and Joseph could then reveal his identity. Nothing of this kind happens. Joseph's actions do not advance, but actually delay, this outcome. Therefore Joseph was not acting so as to fulfil his dreams.

The second possibility is that the Joseph story is a tale of revenge. He is making his brothers suffer as they once made him suffer. This too is untenable. At every significant stage (42:24, 43:30, 45:1-2), Joseph turns aside to weep, careful not to let the brothers see him in this state. People engaged in revenge do not weep. That is why we are told this detail three times – precisely to exclude the possibility that Jacob was acting out of desire to do to his brothers what they once did to him. Those who repay evil with evil take satisfaction in so doing. Joseph takes no satisfaction at all. It is clear that he is acting against his inclination and that it causes him pain. The question therefore returns in full force. What is the logic of Joseph's carefully constructed plot?

One of the key concepts of Judaism – the theme of its holiest days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur – is teshuvah, a complex term involving remorse, repentance and return. The abstract noun teshuvah is post-biblical, but the idea it embodies is central to the Hebrew Bible. It is what the prophets call on Israel to do. It is what Jonah is sent to Nineveh to achieve. In a related sense it is what certain sacrifices (guilt and sin offerings) were intended to accompany.

Teshuvah, as analysed by the sages and later by Maimonides, has certain key elements. The first is confession and acknowledgement of wrongdoing:

> *How does one confess? The penitent says, "I beseech you, O Lord, I have sinned, I have acted perversely, I have transgressed before you, and have done such and such, and I repent and am ashamed of my deeds."*

The second in to commit oneself not to repeat the offence:

What he has repentance? It consists in this, the person abandon his sin, remove it from his thoughts, and resolve in his heart never to repeat it, as it is said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts."

There is a further condition of complete repentance. This is how Maimonides puts it:

> *What is perfect repentance? It occurs when an opportunity presents itself for repeating the offence once committed, and the offender, while able to commit the offence, nevertheless refrains from doing so because he is penitent, and not out of fear or failure of vigour.*

As soon as we understand these three points, the logic of Joseph's course of action becomes clear. The drama to which he subjects his brothers has nothing to do with the dreams, or with revenge. To the contrary, Joseph is not acting for himself but for the sake of his brothers. He is taking them – for the first time in recorded history – through the three stages of teshuvah.

Recall what happened as a result of his intervention. His initial move was to accuse them of a crime they have not committed (of being spies) to see whether this would remind them of a crime they did commit (selling their brother into slavery). The effect is immediate:

> *They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished [aval ashemim anachnu] because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us." . . . They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.*

The brothers have confessed and expressed remorse for what they did. The first stage of teshuvah has taken place.

The second takes place far away from Joseph, but he has so arranged matters that he will know whether it has happened or not. Joseph is holding Shimon as hostage (This is a significant detail. Shimon is the second oldest of the sons. By rights he should have held Reuben, the eldest. However, he knows that Reuben was the one brother who tried to save him. Shimon is therefore the eldest of those who conspired to kill Joseph). He tells the brothers that he will only release him if they return with Benjamin. Knowing his father as he does, Joseph has calculated, rightly, that Jacob will only let Benjamin go if his sons have convinced him that they will not let happen to him what they let happen to Joseph. This indeed happens when Judah says to Jacob:

> *"I myself will guarantee [Benjamin's] safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life."*

The second condition of repentance has been achieved: a commitment not to repeat the offence. Judah, on behalf of the brothers, undertakes not to let happen this time what happened last time, namely that they returned without their youngest sibling whose safety they should have guaranteed.

The third act is a master-stroke. Joseph constructs a scene – one could almost call it a controlled experiment – to see if his brothers have indeed changed. They had once sold him into slavery. He now puts them in a situation in which they will have overwhelming temptation to repeat the crime by abandoning Benjamin to slavery. That is why he plants the cup in Benjamin's sack, arranges for him to be accused of theft, rules that his punishment will be to remain in Egypt as a slave, and tells the other brothers that they are free to leave.

Why Benjamin? Because he, like Joseph, is a son of Rachel – and therefore envied and despised by the other brothers. There is, of course, one difference. The brothers' resentment of Joseph was heightened by the jealousy they felt at the sight of the many-coloured robe Jacob had given him. How can he put them into a similar situation now? How can he provoke them into being jealous of Benjamin? This is what he does: when he sits the brothers down for a meal he arranges that they be seated in order of age (Benjamin is the youngest) and then that "Benjamin's portion was five times as much as anyone else's" (43:34). There is only one explanation for this strange detail. Joseph is trying to make them jealous of their youngest brother.

As far as possible, the circumstances of their original crime have now been replicated. Their youngest brother, a child of Rachel, is about to be taken as a slave in Egypt. They have reason to be jealous of him as they were of Joseph. They rise to the challenge. As Benjamin is about to be taken into custody, they offer to join him in prison. Joseph declines: "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you go back to your father in peace."

The moment of trial has now begun. Joseph has offered the brothers a simple escape route. All they have to do is walk away. It is then, when "Judah went up to him and said . . ." that the story reaches its climax. Judah, the very brother who was responsible for selling Joseph into slavery, now offers to sacrifice his own freedom rather than let Benjamin be held as a slave.

The circumstances are similar to what they were years earlier, but Judah's behaviour is now diametrically opposite to what it was then. He has the opportunity and ability to repeat the offence, but he does not do so. Judah has fulfilled the conditions set out by the sages and Maimonides for "complete repentance." As soon as he does so, Joseph reveals his identity and the drama is at an end.

Not dreams, not revenge, but teshuvah is what has driven Joseph all along. His brothers once sold him as a slave. He survived – more than survived, he has prospered. He knows (he says so constantly) that everything that has happened to him is somehow part of G-d's plan. His concern is not for himself but for his brothers. Have they survived? Do they realise the depth of the crime they committed? Are they capable of remorse? Can they change? The entire sequence of events between the brothers' first arrival in Egypt and the moment Joseph tells them who he is, is an extended essay in teshuvah, a precise rehearsal of what will later become normative Jewish law. [emphasis added]
Why now? Because – unbeknown to any of the participants – the family of Abraham is about to undergo exile in Egypt, prior to their becoming a nation under the sovereignty of G-d. That will place more demands on Israel than on any other people in history. G-d knows that they will often fail – they will sin, complain, worship idols, break His laws. That He accepts, though at times it gives Him great grief. G-d does not demand perfection. By giving us freewill He empowers us to make mistakes. All He asks is that we acknowledge our mistakes and commit ourselves not to make them again – in a word, that we are capable of teshuvah. Judah showed they were. Jewish history, starting with exile and exodus in Egypt, could now begin.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. For older Devrei Torah, footnotes are not always available.

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5768-vayigash-the-great-experiment/

Perseverance Vs. Perfection: An Essay on Vayigash

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

Parshat Vayigash deals primarily with the events surrounding Jacob's arrival in Egypt. After many tribulations, Joseph reconciles with his brothers, Jacob arrives in Egypt and finally reunites with Joseph, and the story comes to a close. By the time we reach Parshat Vayechi, we are already dealing with Jacob's death and his final reckoning with his sons.

As a rule, the haftarah traditionally associated with each parshah emphasizes the central elements of that parshah as understood by our sages, and in effect constitutes a form of interpretation of the entire parshah. Sometimes the connection between the haftarah and parshah is clear and obvious, and sometimes it is so remote that, in order to understand why the sages paired a particular haftarah with a particular parshah, one must sit down and think. In the case of the haftarah associated with Parshat Noach, for example, the only similarity to the parshah seems to be the appearance of the words "the waters of Noah."1 When there are divergent opinions and customs regarding which haftarah we read – as in the cases of Parshat Vayishlach or Parshat Vayeitzei, for example – these disputes usually revolve around the question of what the parshah's essential point is.

The essence of Parshat Vayigash would appear to be the descent to Egypt, but the haftarah,2 which relates Ezekiel's prophecy of the stick of Judah and the stick of Ephraim, shifts the focus away from this subject to the meeting, or perhaps clash, of Joseph and Judah. This, according to the haftarah, is the essence of the parshah; everything else is ancillary material.

Judah and Joseph

The Joseph-Judah relationship and the points at which their paths converge continue throughout history. From the sale of Joseph onward, Judah and Joseph constantly interact with each other, and their relationship continues in various forms. Here, in Parshat Vayigash, their interaction is a confrontation, as the Midrash comments, "'Then Judah went up to him'3 – advancing to battle."4 The Midrash views this confrontation as a momentous event, adding, "'For lo, the kings converged'5 – this refers to Judah and Joseph; 'they grew angry together'6 – this one was filled with anger for that one, and that one was filled with anger for this one."7 This is an epic clash between two kings, one that continues to occur in various forms throughout history.

There are times and places where the Joseph-Judah relationship is one of cooperation and even love. In the battle against Amalek, the leadership of the People of Israel consists of Moses, Aaron, and two other people: Chur, a member of the tribe of Judah, stands by Moses' side opposite Aaron, while Joshua, from the tribe of Joseph, leads the actual war. This connection appears again in the story of the spies, where Joshua and Caleb are the only two spies who refrain from

“spreading calumnies about the land.”8 Moses himself is connected by blood to the tribe of Judah (Aaron married the sister of the tribe’s prince, Nachshon the son of Aminadav, and Miriam, Chur’s mother, was married to Caleb the son of Yefuneh). On the other hand, Joshua – of the tribe of Joseph – is his close disciple.

This duality does not end there but continues through the generations. The Shiloh Tabernacle stood in the territory of Ephraim for over 300 years, whereas the Temple was built in Jerusalem, on the border of the territories of Judah and Benjamin.9 The dirges of Ezekiel10 feature the sisters Ohola and Oholiva, who correspond to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel: “Ohola is Samaria, and Oholiva is Jerusalem.”11 In the royal house, although Saul is not from a tribe of Joseph, he is a descendant of Joseph’s mother Rachel, while David is from the tribe of Judah. The encounter between them is one of antagonism, but, as if to balance out that animosity, we read of a parallel and opposite relationship: the friendship and love between Jonathan and David. There is Joshua and there is Caleb; the tribe of Judah and the tribes of Joseph; the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel; David and Jonathan. We see that this duality is woven throughout our history, to the point that we ourselves are an example of it: The Jewish people today consists solely of descendants of Judah and Benjamin.

This complicated relationship between Joseph and Judah, in all its manifestations, continues to persist, and will continue until the end of days: Even our eschatological texts describe a division between the Messiah son of David and the Messiah son of Joseph.

Glory and eternity

The meeting of Joseph and Judah in Parshat Vayigash illuminates one aspect of their relationship. On the larger historical plane, Joseph possesses an aspect of glory that Judah lacks, in the real sense and in the esoteric sense. At their first meeting, members of the tribe of Joseph almost always overshadow members of Judah. Even from birth, Joseph has an advantage: He is smarter, more handsome, more successful, and more loved. In this respect he lives up to his characterization as the sun in his famous dream, in that he is far more lustrous than his peers, while Judah appears inferior from the very beginning.

This paradigm follows here as well. How do they meet? Joseph, unofficially the king of Egypt, meets with Judah, a peasant shepherd from some remote place. Joseph stands there in all his glory, and facing him, “Judah went up to him.”

What, in comparison to Joseph, does Judah have to offer? What is unique about him? It appears that Judah’s unique point is continuity and endurance. Judah perseveres, as he did when he admitted his responsibility to Tamar, and this is a point that can be observed in the cases of many other members of his tribe. Joseph outshines Judah with respect to glory, but as for perseverance and staying power – “‘and the eternity’12 refers to Jerusalem”13 – Joseph, for all his nobility, does not measure up.

Judah perseveres because he has the advantage of being able to fall, as it says, “Though he may fall, he is not utterly cast down.”14 When Judah falls, he is able to get up again. This is Judah’s special quality; it is part of his essence.

The point of “Judah went up to him” is that Judah, in spite of being a person of minor importance – the contrast between his and Joseph’s appearance must have been striking – nevertheless dares to approach the king. To some extent, this evokes the way in which Saul meets with David. Saul is the king, and David is a youth brought in from tending the flock to entertain Saul.

Intrinsic to Joseph and his descendants is a sort of perfection, but this perfection is very fragile: When something breaks, they are unable to fix it. For Joseph, every situation is all or nothing, whereas Judah is adept at raising himself up again.

For an example of this dichotomy, one must look no further than Saul and David. Saul and David both sinned. The difference between them is the following: After Saul “breaks” once, he breaks again a second time and a third time. Though Saul came from a distinguished family and was considered “of greater stature than all the people”15 – a courageous warrior; a humble, modest, and worthy individual; a pure soul – when he falls, he is unable to get up. When Saul sins, he reaches a state in which he is ready to die and is also willing to accept the entire punishment he deserves. In contrast, when David sins, he draws new wisdom and maturity from the experience, penning the book of Psalms in its wake. This is quite an accomplishment! King David can sink low, but he can channel that low point in his life into real spiritual growth. This is something that Joseph, by his very nature, cannot do.

This difference surfaces again when the Kingdom of Israel is divided in two, with the House of Joseph and the House of Judah going separate ways. Upon reading the assessment of the midrashim of the characters involved, it is clear whom our sages favored.

Yerovam is an exalted and impressive figure, a man chosen by God to rule over the ten tribes of Israel. No matter what we think of him, he is certainly an extraordinary personality, as demonstrated by a series of talmudic anecdotes: He is capable of rebuking King Solomon when the latter is at the height of his glory. When Yerovam is together with Achiyah the Shilonite, all the wise men are like the grass of the field in comparison with them,16 and God says to Yerovam, "Repent, and then I and you and the son of Jesse will stroll together in the Garden of Eden."17

Facing Yerovam is Rechavam. Who is Rechavam? On the whole, he is a man who is a bit confused, who does not know what to do exactly with the fairly large kingdom that he inherited and which, through ill-advised harshness and imprudent softness, he manages to lose. Besides this, we are told little of Rechavam.

Nevertheless, Yerovam – who certainly was a great man and a far greater scholar than Rechavam – is among those who have no share in the World to Come. He sinned and caused others to sin, and there is no way to atone for this. Rechavam may not have been a righteous king or an especially significant king, but he carried on the line of the House of David. No royal line of the kings of Joseph manages to last more than a few generations. By contrast, the kings of the House of David – who certainly count some wicked men in their number – are able to build a stable dynasty, and are able, ultimately, to persevere.

Elisha b. Avuyah, the tannaitic apostate known as "Acher" (literally, "Other"), was similar to Yerovam in this sense. He was perhaps the most brilliant man of his generation and was younger than all the other scholars with whom he would confer. According to his own account,18 Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer attended his circumcision; thus, they were already scholars when he was born. But Elisha b. Avuyah could not tolerate a world that lacked perfection, and when he discovers that there are problems in the world, he begins to fall apart. And when he falls apart, he cannot recover from the fall.

This conception of perfection is reflected in a saying of his: "One who learns when young, to what may he be compared? To ink written on fresh paper. But one who learns when old, to what may he be compared? To ink written on paper that has been erased."19 Elisha b. Avuyah does not want to write on erased paper; he wants ink written on fresh paper. He is saying – and this is part of his personality – that since he has been erased once, he cannot rewrite himself. By contrast, Rabbi Akiva is like Judah, a peasant from an undistinguished family. Unlike Elisha b. Avuya, who came from one of the prominent families of Jerusalem, Rabbi Akiva was the son of converts. Throughout his life, Rabbi Akiva "broke" not just once but several times, including during difficult events in his personal life, yet he always overcame his setbacks.

The tzaddik and the baal teshuvah

Joseph was a true tzaddik. Sometimes this identity is apparent in a person's character from birth, and it is immediately clear that this person is innately good. There is a type of personality for whom perfection is innate. Jonathan, Saul's son, seems to fit this characterization – he is a person with no apparent defects.

Let us note, however, that such a person – a man who bears an aspect of perfection by his very nature, who was born with all the great gifts and who exercises them in perfect fashion – must be judged by his ability to remain at this level. Possessing all the virtues is not enough if he is unable to rectify himself the moment he becomes flawed.

In nature, too, there are structures that do not reach perfection by way of development but, rather, emerge perfect from the outset. The Talmud20 mentions the possibility of using an egg to support the leg of a bed. This talmudic statement is strange and surprising. After all, even if this were possible, who would use an egg to support the leg of a bed? But the truth is that from a physical standpoint, an egg is one of the most perfect structures in existence. The only problem is that an egg's strength depends on its complete integrity. It is like a dome: The moment one stone falls, the whole structure collapses. This is often the nature of this kind of perfection: It can last only as long as there is no flaw.

In this sense – as is evident from their interaction before and after this point – the relationship of Joseph and Judah is that of a tzaddik and a baal teshuva. The story of Judah and Tamar compared to the story of Joseph and Potifar's wife is a striking example of this relationship.

Judah's character seems to deteriorate. He sells Joseph, which is a particularly despicable act. His conduct with Tamar demonstrates a moral deficiency as well. Nevertheless, he is also capable of confronting Joseph – "Judah went up to him." Here is a person who has quite a few matters on his conscience and an unsavory past. We might have expected him to sit quietly on the sidelines, but as we see, he takes action instead.

Judah not only puts his life on the line but is also willing to face up to his past actions. The wide gulf between those actions and his present conduct is precisely what defines Judah's essence. The Midrash21 comments that Joseph attempted – rightfully – to silence Judah, asking him, "Why are you speaking up? You are neither the eldest nor the firstborn. So what are you doing? Let your eldest brother Reuben speak. Why do you even have the right to open your mouth?" Yet Judah, despite all his baggage, rises anew, ready to come to grips with whatever he must face. That is Judah's strength. By contrast, Joseph – by nature and as a matter of principle – cannot change, cannot be flexible. He is a perfectionist, and this is precisely what breaks him.

The Talmud22 recounts an interesting conversation between Elisha b. Avuyah and Rabbi Meir. Elisha b. Avuyah asks Rabbi Meir to interpret the verse, "Gold and glass cannot match its value, nor can vessels of fine gold be exchanged for it."23 Rabbi Meir responds, "This refers to Torah matters, which, like vessels of gold, are hard to acquire, but like vessels of glass are easily lost." Elisha b. Avuyah says to him, "Rabbi Akiva, your master, did not interpret that way, but, rather, 'Both vessels of gold and vessels of glass, if broken, can be repaired.'" One can melt them and form them anew. But there are vessels – such as those of clay, mother of pearl, or even diamond – that, after being broken, remain forever broken. One cannot do anything about it; the defect remains a defect.

We read in Megillat Esther, "But Mordechai neither bowed down nor prostrated himself."24 On the one hand, this conduct reflects his strength and glory; but on the other hand, it gets him into trouble: According to the Talmud,25 the Jews became furious with him for not acquiescing to Haman's demands. "Why did you get us into all of this trouble?" they cried. "Bow down!" Mordechai is cast in the same mold as his ancestors Saul and Joseph before him. He is called "Mordechai the tzaddik,"26 and tzaddikim often cannot abide even the slightest flaw. Mordechai's essential nature requires that he be perfect.

Before going out to his last battle, Saul knows that he and his sons are going to die, and he does not care. An aspect of strength and idealism accompanies this man throughout his life – even at his fall. Just like Elisha b. Avuyah, Saul does not act in half measures; if his flaws cannot be corrected completely, then he does not want them corrected at all. He aims for the highest heights, but if he cannot achieve this, he will consign himself to the lowest depths. To go halfway is not an option.

By contrast, for someone like Judah – the true baal teshuva – the existence of flaws is intrinsic to him and to his personality. If he did not have flaws, he would not be who he is. The baal teshuva thrives on his ability to deconstruct his personality in order to reshape it in another form, to make changes within himself.

Judah begins entirely from below. Like David, he comes "from following the flock;"27 he begins from nothing. Judah is neither the firstborn nor the most physically imposing of Jacob's children. However, he "prevailed over his brothers" (I Chr. 5:2), and he continuously perseveres, generation after generation.

Joshua and Caleb seem similar, to a large degree. However, though the Talmud likens Joshua to Moses, saying, "Moses' countenance was like that of the sun; Joshua's countenance was like that of the moon,"28 Joshua had no children. Caleb had a son and a brother – he had successors, generation after generation. Not all of his descendants were important or significant people, and most certainly did not measure up to his eminence, but Caleb's essence lived on. When Joshua died, however, only a tombstone remained. After the tribes of Joseph were smashed and exiled, they did not return home. We – who are basically the Kingdom of Judah – had our first Temple destroyed, but we built the Second Temple. We were exiled again for a period of time, but once again, we are returning.

Wherever Judah and Joseph interact, it is a meeting between perfection and adaptability. Throughout history, Joseph represents splendor, even heroism. In contrast, Judah is flawed and beleaguered, beset with difficulties; but in the end, Judah always prevails.

Rectifying the world

At the end of the parshah, there is a section that the commentators discuss extensively, even though it seems to have little to do with the main theme of the parshah, and is connected to a different aspect of the relation-ship between Judah and Joseph.

The entire final section of Parshat Vayigash is the story of how Joseph handles Egyptian politics for Pharaoh and how he governs the Egyptians. That Joseph was a powerful ruler over the entire land has already been stated, but here we find a whole story about how Joseph interacts with the Egyptians.
Shortly before this story, the Torah states, “And he [Jacob] sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to show the way before him unto Goshen.”29 Where do Judah and Joseph stand at this juncture?

In contrast to Judah, Joseph is practically a king. He speaks seventy languages, while Judah no doubt stammers in the only language he knows. But that is not the point. Here we see that Joseph acts not only in his own interest; rather, he tries to rectify the world. Joseph endeavors on behalf of the entire country and puts it back on its feet. While Joseph is saving the country, Judah brings the family to the land of Goshen, where they organize themselves in their own matters. While Joseph is engaged in a great undertaking, Judah deals with the small matters: his flock, his herd, and the question of how to support the family.

The interpretation by our sages30 that Jacob sent Judah in order to establish a house of study does not affect the analysis. The same conclusion emerges: Joseph is not just the most successful son in his family. He is a man who concerns himself with the whole world, while Judah concerns himself with parochial Jewish pursuits. Whereas Joseph is universal, Judah is only a Jew, engaging in his own pursuits and his own matters.

On the surface it appears that Joseph, the man of the world, is the hero of this narrative, while Judah is of minor importance. Precisely here, the haftarah plays a crucial role, presenting the differences in the nature and character of Judah and Joseph as fundamental distinctions between two parallel worlds. When the Judah-Joseph duality is viewed under a different light, as it is in the haftarah, we see the world of Joseph – who transcends his own individuality and represents a whole way of being – and a world of Judah, whose essence is that he begins from below, from crisis, from distress, and from the minutiae of life.

What Joseph does almost instantly takes Judah several generations to accomplish. Even when Judah builds, the building is not straight; his progress is characterized by ups and downs. But which is the ideal path, the world view that we should adopt and strive for? Neither the book of Genesis nor the Torah as a whole presents a clear answer to this question.

When Jacob blesses his sons before his death and gives Judah and Joseph the biggest and most significant blessings, they are on equal ground, one facing the other. Evident in the blessings to Joseph is not just greater love for this son; they are blessings of tremendous scope – Jacob grants him heaven and earth: “May your father’s blessing add to the blessing of my parents, to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills. May they rest on Joseph’s head, on the brow of the elect of his brothers.”31 He gives him everything that can possibly be given. Correspondingly, Judah receives eternity: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet.”32 Joseph is given grandeur, while Judah is given eternity.

The conclusion is not found in this parshah, nor in the book of Genesis, nor anywhere in the entire Torah. The final reckoning is that of the Messiah: Who will be the true Messiah? Since this reckoning moves back and forth over the generations, it is clear that Joseph and Judah are equals: It is the ultimate conflict between the perfect and the imperfect, between those who begin with a stacked deck and those who forge themselves. [emphasis added]

The stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph

The haftarah presents Judah and Joseph as two branches, and the conflict between them is not personal but, rather, a conflict between essential natures. It is very difficult for them to join together, because they are two different character types that cannot be integrated.

The haftarah concludes that in this disagreement, although from time to time the scales tip to the stick of Judah or the stick of Joseph, it is impossible to truly favor one side or the other. According to the haftarah, ideally the two aspects should be able to work together, as the Likkutei Torah writes33 regarding the verse, “We will add circlets of gold to your points of silver.”34

In all the texts that deal with this subject, it is clear that there will be no solution to this question until the end of days. This conflict, like the “dispute for the sake of Heaven” of Shammai and Hillel,35 will ultimately endure.

When we say that these two aspects should go together, the meaning is not that they should be joined together like two planks, forcing each to adapt to the nature of the other. When the stick of Judah and the stick of Joseph join together, they should each exist independently, but side by side, in the perfect harmony of a string quartet. Judah and Joseph represent two different elements, each of which retains its distinctness. The inevitable internal conflict in this coexistence is the very thing that creates the beauty.

In Joseph’s case, there is an element of great tragedy. People who possess the character traits of Joseph are incomparable in their splendor and virtual perfection. They are radiant suns, but they have no way of recovering from a fall. Must it always be that those of us who approach closest to perfection are also the most fragile among us? Will the spiritual descendants of Joseph never be able to lift themselves up and repair themselves?

Apparently, until the end of time, these two types will remain: one who is characterized by wholeness and perfection, and one who is characterized by fault and repair; one who draws his strength from his perfection, and the other, from the power of renewal. These two will never completely unite, but together they comprise the tension that makes our lives so vibrant. We live between Judah and Joseph, and when the two elements work in perfect tandem, the symphony of life is formed.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Is. 54:9.

2. Ezek. 37:15–28.

3. Gen. 44:18.

4. Genesis Rabbah 93:6.

5. Ps. 48:5.

6. 48:5.

7. Genesis Rabbah 93:2.

8. Num. 14:36.

9. Yoma 12a.

10. Chap. 23.

11. 23:4.

12. Chr. I 29:11

13. Berachot 58a.

14. Ps. 37:24.

15. Sam. I 9:2

16. 102a.

17. 102a.

18. Ruth Rabbah 6:4.

19. Avot 4:20.

20. Beitzah 3b.

21. Tanchuma, Vayigash 4.

22. Chagigah 15a.

23. Job 28:17.

24. Est. 3:2.

25. Megill 12b.

26. 10b

27. Sam. II 7:8.

28. Bava Batra 75a.

29. Gen. 46:28.

30. Genesis Rabbah 95:3.

31. Gen. 49:26.

32. 49:10.

33. Shir HaShirim 13a.

34. Song. 1:11.

35. Avot 5:17.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4973830/jewish/Perseverence-Vs-Perfection.htm

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How Treat Our Benjamins

An Insight from the Rebbe

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

In this Parsha we reach the dramatic climax of the chronicle of Joseph. It begins as Yehuda approaches (Vayigash in Hebrew) Joseph in defense of Benjamin. Yehuda's willingness to save Benjamin convinces Joseph that the brothers have repented and risen above their previous jealousy, so he ends the masquerade and reveals his true identity to them.

Yehuda then approached Joseph (Genesis 44:18)

Yehuda did not shy away from speaking harshly with Joseph; moreover, he began his appeal harshly. He knew that when someone's life is at stake, we must not be diplomatic; our listeners must sense that we are not involved because of

ulterior motives, such as political or financial interests. When it is clear that the cause for which we are fighting cuts to the core of our being, it will evoke an honorable and compassionate response.

Today's "Benjamins," our Jewish children, are threatened by a different sort of "Egypt" — that of assimilation. To save these Benjamins, we cannot wait for someone to appoint committees that will conduct lengthy research and then deliberate over what should be done and how much it will cost, etc. When lives are at stake, we must do whatever we can to save them, immediately.

Yehuda's efforts proved unexpectedly fruitful: his presumed enemy proved to be his greatest ally, and even Pharaoh himself provided the greatest possible means for securing the uncompromised continuity of Jewish tradition. So it will be when we follow Yehuda's example, selflessly and vigorously exerting ourselves on behalf of our children.

* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

1. Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 3:4; Sichot Kodesh 5734, vol. 1, pp. 208–213.

https://www.chabad.org/dailystudy/dailywisdom_cdo/aid/2942279/jewish/Shabbat-The-Power-of-the-Deed.htm

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Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Volume 28, Issue 11 **Shabbat Parashat Vayigash** **5782 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Future of the Past

In our parsha, Joseph does something unusual. Revealing himself to his brothers, fully aware that they will suffer shock and then guilt as they remember how it is that their brother is in Egypt, he reinterprets the past: "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt." (Gen. 45:4-8)

This is markedly different to the way Joseph described these events when he spoke to the chief butler in prison: "I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon" (Gen. 40:15). Then, it was a story of kidnap and injustice.

Now, it has become a story of Divine providence and redemption. It wasn't you, he tells his brothers, it was God. You didn't realise that you were part of a larger plan. And though it began badly, it has ended well. So don't hold yourselves guilty. And do not be afraid of any desire for revenge on my part. There is no such desire. I realise that we were all being directed by a force greater than ourselves, greater than we can fully understand.

Joseph does the same in next week's parsha, when the brothers fear that he may take revenge after their father's death: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Gen. 50:19-20)

Joseph is helping his brothers to revise their memory of the past. In doing so, he is challenging one of our most fundamental assumptions about time, namely its asymmetry. We can change the future. We cannot change the past. But is that entirely true? What Joseph is doing for his brothers is what he has clearly done for himself: events have changed his and their understanding of the past.

Which means: we cannot fully understand what is happening to us now until we can look back in retrospect and see how it all turned out. This means that we are not held captive by the past. Things can happen to us, not as dramatically as to Joseph perhaps, but nonetheless benign, that can completely alter the way we look back and remember. By action in the future, we can redeem the past.

A classic example of this is the late Steve Jobs' 2005 commencement address at Stanford University, that has now been seen by more than 40 million people on YouTube. In it, he described three crushing blows in his life: dropping out of college, being fired by the company he had founded – Apple, and being diagnosed with cancer. Each one, he said, had led to something important and positive.

Dropping out of college, Jobs was able to audit any course he wished. He attended one on calligraphy and this inspired him to build into his first computers a range of proportionally spaced fonts, thus giving computer scripts an elegance that had previously been available only to professional printers. Getting fired from Apple led him to start a new computer company, NeXT, that developed capabilities he would eventually bring back to Apple, as well as acquiring Pixar Animation, the most creative of computer-animated film studios. The diagnosis of cancer led him to a new focus in life. It made him realise: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."

Jobs' ability to construct these stories – what he called "connecting the dots" – was surely not unrelated to his ability to survive the blows he suffered in life.[1] Few could have recovered from the setback of being dismissed from his own company, and fewer still could have achieved the transformation he did at Apple when he returned, creating the iPod, iPhone and iPad. He did not believe in tragic inevitabilities. Though he would not have put it in these terms, he knew that by action in the future we can redeem the past.

Professor Mordechai Rotenberg of the Hebrew University has argued that this kind of technique, of reinterpreting the past, could be used as a therapeutic technique in rehabilitating patients suffering from a crippling sense of guilt.[2] If we cannot change the past, then it is always there holding us back like a ball and chain around our legs. We cannot change the past, but we can reinterpret it by integrating it into a new and larger narrative. That is what Joseph was doing, and having used this technique to help him survive a personal life of unparalleled ups and downs, he now uses it to help his brothers live without overpowering guilt.

We find this in Judaism throughout its history. The Prophets reinterpreted biblical narrative for their day. Then came Midrash, which reinterpreted it more radically because the situation of Jews had changed more radically. Then came the great biblical commentators and mystics and philosophers. There has hardly been a generation in all of Jewish history when Jews did not reinterpret their texts in the light of the present tense experience. We are the people who tell stories, and then retell them repeatedly, each time with a slightly different emphasis, establishing a connection between then and now, rereading the past in the light of the present as best we can.

It is by telling stories that we make sense of our lives and the life of our people. And it is by allowing the present to reshape our understanding of the past that we redeem history and make it live as a positive force in our lives.

I gave one example when I spoke at the Kinus Shluchim of Chabad, the great gathering of some 5000 Chabad emissaries from around the world. I told them of how, in 1978, I visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask his advice on which career I should follow. I did the usual thing: I sent him a note with the options, A, B or C, expecting him to indicate which one I should follow. The options were to become a barrister, or an economist, or an academic philosopher, either as a fellow of my college in Cambridge or as a professor somewhere else.

The Rebbe read out the list and said "No" to all three. My mission, he said, was to train Rabbis at Jews' College (now the London School of Jewish Studies) and to become a congregational Rabbi myself. So, overnight, I found myself saying goodbye to all my aspirations, to everything for which I had been trained.

The strange thing is that ultimately I fulfilled all those ambitions despite walking in the opposite direction. I became an honorary barrister (Bencher) of the Inner Temple and delivered a law lecture in front of 600

barristers and the Lord Chief Justice. I delivered Britain's two leading economics lectures, the Mais Lecture and the Hayek Lecture at the Institute of Economic Affairs. I became a fellow of my Cambridge college and a philosophy professor at several universities. I identified with the biblical Joseph because, so often, what I had dreamed of came to be at the very moment that I had given up hope. Only in retrospect did I discover that the Rebbe was not telling me to give up my career plans. He was simply charting a different route and a more beneficial one.

I believe that the way we write the next chapter in our lives affects all the others that have come before. By action in the future, we can redeem much of the pain of the past.

[1] However, he did delay surgery for his cancer, believing that he could achieve an alternative cure. In this, he was mistaken.

[2] Mordechai Rotenberg, Re-biographing and Deviance, Praeger, 1987.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Joseph went up to greet Israel his father; he fell on his neck and he wept on his neck exceedingly" (Gen. 46:29) In these few words, our Torah describes a dramatic meeting between an aged father and his beloved son who had been separated for twenty-two years. Indeed, the father, who had given the coat of many colors to this favored son as a sign that he would bear the mantle of the Abrahamic legacy, had been led to believe that his beloved Joseph had been torn apart by a wild beast, in consequence of which he had been engulfed by inconsolable mourning for more than two decades. The son, who had basked in the glory of paternal favoritism, had been consumed with the agonizing possibility that his father had been so angered by his dreams that he had sent him on a suicide mission "to seek after the welfare of his brothers…."

And so they stand together now, father and son, each still with unanswered questions, but nevertheless each with unfathomable joy at their reunion.

But which one of the two wept on the other's neck? Our most classical commentary, Rashi, maintains that it was Joseph who wept on his father Jacob's neck but Jacob did not fall on Joseph's neck. Our Sages say that Jacob was reciting the Shema prayer at that time. The Shema? Was it then early in the morning or late evening that, specifically at that emotionally poignant moment, father Jacob had to recite the Shema? Moreover, Ramban (Nahmanides) maintains that if indeed only one of them was weeping, logic dictates that it most likely was the aged Jacob who wept, rather than the much younger and more calculating Joseph.

And if indeed Ramban is correct and not Rashi, then it was Joseph who was reciting the Shema, while father Jacob was weeping. But this interpretation still begs the question, why the Shema at this particular moment? Let us return to Joseph's initial dreams (Gen. 37:5-11), which ignited jealous hatred unto death against the "dreamer." How can we justify the sons of Jacob, progenitors of the tribal children of Israel, being overwhelmed with such base emotions? First he dreams that he and his brothers are binding sheaves of grain, and that the brothers' sheaves are all bowing down to his sheaves. What upsets the brothers is not merely Joseph's vision of his economic and political superiority over them; it is rather Joseph's hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt in all of Egypt's cultural ramifications. Remember that the Abrahamic traditional profession was shepherding, a nurturing pursuit which left much time for spiritual meditation and which was especially conducive to Israel's climatic condition and terrain. Egypt, "the gift of the Nile," specialized in back-breaking agriculture and the slave labor and dissolute lifestyle of the overlords which went with it.

Joseph then dreamt of the sun, the moon and the stars bowing down to him. From the brothers' perspective, this was nothing short of megalomania.

How different were those dreams from that of grandfather Jacob's dream of uniting heaven and earth with God at the center stage (not Joseph), promising to bring Jacob home to Israel (not to Egypt). They felt that they had to prevent this recipient of the coat of many colors from ever receiving the firstborn's legacy. He was a "turncoat" to the Abrahamic tradition.

The Bible, however, concludes Joseph's dream sequence with "his brothers were jealous of him, but Jacob observed the matter and anxiously anticipated its coming to pass." Jacob as well as Joseph understood that Abraham's mandate was a universal one, to spread "compassionate righteousness and moral justice to all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3, 18:18-19), allegorically speaking to the sun, the moon and the stars.

To be sure, Joseph was still an arrogant youth, who identified the Abrahamic legacy with his own eventual leadership; when a more mature Joseph stands before Pharaoh, ready to interpret his dreams, he declares, "This has nothing to do with me; God will answer in accordance with the welfare of Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:16).

And at the end of his life, with his very last breath, Joseph makes his brothers take an oath that when the Hebrews leave Egypt, they will take Joseph's remains to be buried in Israel. Egypt is merely a way-station on the road to world redemption; the great powers must learn the importance of vanquishing terror and depravity if divine peace and morality are to reign supreme.

Ultimately, all the nations will come to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to learn the word of God from Zion; but along the way, unless there is an America to act as the world's policeman on behalf of democracy and freedom, the dark forces of suicide bombers will control the global village.

Hence, when Joseph meets his father—who twenty-two years before seemed to have been vexed at him for the arrogance of his dreams—he responds to his father's tears with the fundamental purpose of Jewish being; "Hear, Israel my father, the God who is now our God, the God of love and peace who is now accepted by the family of Israel, will one day be the one God of the entire universe." In effect, his recitation of the Shma is telling his father that Egypt was a necessary way-station in bringing our God of redemption to the world.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Forgiveness: A Jewish Value

This has got to be one of the oldest "rabbi" jokes in the entire repertoire of American Jewish humor.

It tells us of the young rabbi, fresh from rabbinical school, who addresses his first several sermons to his new congregation on the varied subjects of meticulous Sabbath observance, refraining from malicious gossip, honesty in business, and the avoidance of inappropriately familiar behavior with other men's wives.

After these first several homiletic salvos, the president of the congregation approaches him with the suggestion that these topics are much too sensitive and have upset many of the synagogue's members. The president urges the rookie rabbi to try to find some more acceptable topics to speak about.

The rabbi objects, and asks, "But what, then, do you suggest that I speak about in my sermons?"

To which the president replies, "Judaism! Why not just talk about Judaism?"

Those of us with experience in the pulpit rabbinate typically do not find this story very funny. Each of us has, on more than one occasion, taken on causes in our sermons that our audiences have felt were not in our rabbinic purview, and indeed were somehow "not Jewish".

One of my favorite examples of this phenomenon in my own career has been my attempts, in sermons to the entire congregation, and in more intimate counseling sessions, to encourage forgiveness. I will never forget the first time I made "forgiveness" the theme of one of my sermons, only to be accused by one of the more prominent members of my congregation of preaching

Christianity. I urged people to forgive those who have offended them, only to find that, for many Jews, forgiveness is a Christian, not a Jewish, virtue.

Of course, this is not true. Forgiveness is a major teaching of our own faith. We are encouraged to forgive others who may have sinned against us, and we must seek forgiveness of those against whom we have sinned.

In this week's Torah portion, Vayigash, we have an outstanding biblical example of forgiveness. Joseph, after putting his brothers through tests and trials, finally cannot contain himself. He exclaims, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt." And immediately after identifying himself, he unequivocally forgives them: "Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither... it was not you who sent me here, but God..."

It is true that the brothers wore "blown away" by this unanticipated revelation of the true identity of their tormentor, and even more astounded by this assertion of total forgiveness. But this is not the first example of human forgiveness that we find in the Bible. Joseph may have learned about this value from his great-grandfather Abraham's precedent. Abraham, back in Genesis 20:17, not only forgives his adversary, Avimelech, but offers prayers on his behalf.

What, then, can be the basis for the misconception that forgiveness is a Christian virtue and is not preached by Judaism? I think that the answer can be found in a precious book called The Sunflower, by Simon Wiesenthal.

Wiesenthal relates his personal experience of when he was brought to the bedside of a dying Nazi officer by the officer's own mother, who pleaded with him to forgive her son for killing Jews. Wiesenthal had been an eyewitness to this officer's murderous brutality. He found himself confronted with a moral dilemma. Could he deny a mother's tearful entreaties? On the other hand, could he possibly forgive such unspeakable cruelty? And could he forgive on behalf of the victims, of others?

I will leave it for you, dear reader, to discover for yourself what Simon Wiesenthal actually did. *[Compiler's Note: He left without saying a word. SG]* But long after the event, he submitted this excruciating dilemma to several dozen philosophers, writers, and political leaders, asking them what they would do. Some of his respondents were Christians, some were Jews, and I believe one was a Buddhist.

The results were astounding. By and large, the non-Jews were able to find justification for forgiveness. On the other hand, most of the Jews could not express forgiveness for this soldier's heinous crimes, convinced that certain crimes were not subject to forgiveness.

For me, the lesson here is one that Judaism teaches well. Forgiveness must be earned, it must be deserved, it must be requested, and above all, it can only be granted by the person who was offended. I cannot forgive you for a sin you've committed against my brother.

In a sense, Joseph goes beyond the call of duty in expressing forgiveness to his brothers. They did not even know who he was, let alone beg forgiveness from him. But he knew from close observation of their concern for each other that they had long transcended their previous petty jealousies and rivalries. He was convinced that forgiveness was in order.

Joseph is an exemplar of how important it is for each of us to forgive those who have offended us. Forgiveness is a practice for all year long, and not just for the season of Yom Kippur. After all, it is not just on that one sacred day that each of us stands in need of the Almighty's forgiveness. His forgiveness is something we need at every moment of our lives.

The prophet Micah (7:18) says: "Who is God like You, tolerating iniquity and forgiving transgression..."

Upon which the Talmud comments (Rosh Hashanah 17a): "Whose iniquities does God tolerate? He who forgives the transgressions of another."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Analysis of the Opening Pesukim of Vayigash

At the end of last week's parsha (Miketz), Binyomin is "caught red handed with stolen goods." Of course, it was a ruse, but the brothers did not realize this at the time. The pasuk says, "And Yehudah said, 'What can we say to my master? How can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? G-d has found the sin of your servants. Here we are: We are ready to be slaves to my master – both we and the one in whose hand the goblet was found.'" [Bereshis 44:16]. Yosef responds: "It would be unseemly for me to do this; the man in whose possession the goblet was found, he shall be my slave, and as for you – go up in peace to your father" [Bereshis 44:17].

This statement of Yehudah, "What can we say? How can we speak? How can we justify ourselves?" is an act of great contrition on his part. "We are your slaves. You caught us red-handed!" He could not have been more contrite. That is the end of Parshas Miketz. Then, at the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, Yehudah suddenly seems to be a different person. "…May your anger not flare up at your servant…" [Bereshis 44:18]. Rashi says: "From here we see that Yehudah spoke harshly to Yosef." Two pesukim ago, this same Yehudah expressed such contrition. Now he changes his tune and is letting Yosef have it! What happened to cause this metamorphosis?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains what happened. Until now, the brothers felt that all of this was happening to them as a result of Divine punishment. The Almighty was paying them back for the way they treated Yosef. "Aval asheimim anachnu" ("indeed we are guilty!") [Bereshis 42:21]. They sensed that this was all a case of "From the L-rd this has happened" (may'ais Hashem hayesa zos) [Tehillim 118:23]. Now suddenly Yosef says "No. You can go free. It is the youngest brother, Binyomin, who will be my prisoner." As a result, their previous explanation of the events they were experiencing had to be rethought.

Yehudah said, "Wait a minute! This is not from the Ribono shel Olam. This could not be a punishment for what we did, because Binyomin was not involved in that incident at all. So why is this happening? It must be happening strictly because of the perverseness of this Egyptian ruler. I am going to give him a piece of my mind!" This is the great change that happened.

The Vilna Gaon shares a very interesting insight on the pasuk "Vayigash eilav Yehudah…" [Bereshis 44:18] Rashi explains regarding the words "Ki avdecha arav es hana'ar" [Bereshis 44:32] that Yehuda promised his father "If I do not bring Binyamin back to you, I am going to be excommunicated both in this world and in the world to come."

Yehudah stood to lose the most over here. The Gaon comments: The trop (cantillation notes) for the expression "Vayigash elav Yehudah va'yomer bi Adonee…" is as follows: Vayigash elav has the cantillation notes Kadma v'azla. Yehudah has the note reviyee. Va'Yomer bi Adonee has the notes zarka munach segol.

The Gaon interprets the trop as providing a hidden message: Vayigash elav – Kadma v'azla, meaning "Yehudah came forth." Yehudah says – You might ask why I am acting as the spokesperson for the family – after all I am only the fourth son (reviyee). The reason the fourth son (reviyee) is coming forth (kadma v'azla) is that zarka munach segol – meaning I will be thrown away (zarka) from resting (being munach) in the World-to-Come among the Am Segulah (the Chosen People). Therefore, it is my life that is on the line – both here and in Olam HaBah. That is why I put protocol aside and came forward to speak, even though I am only the fourth son.

Do Not Waste the Precious Years of Youth

As part of Yehudah's plea to the Egyptian ruler (who he did not yet know was his brother Yosef) Yehudah said, "For how will I be able to go back to my father if the youth is not with me." [Bereshis 44:34]. To appreciate the

thought that I am about to express, it may be necessary to have a bit of an inclination for Chassidishhe Torah. Also, please remember that Chazal say "one does not ask questions on Drush." This may not be the true interpretation of this pasuk, but the message it delivers is certainly true.

One day, each of us will go up to the Yeshiva on High after we leave this world. The above cited pasuk can be read; "How am I going to go to my Father (in Heaven) when the na'ar is not with me." — Meaning, if I wasted my youth, the easiest years of my life, on matters of nonsense – how will I be able to answer for myself before the Master of the Universe in that Final Judgement?

If there is one message my students at Ner Yisroel have heard from me over and over again throughout my entire teaching career it is: Do not waste these precious years. They are not repeatable. This is not to say, of course, that life ends at age 22 or 23. However, the care-free life that a typical yeshiva bochur lives today—from the age of say 18 until he gets married—is blissful. Baruch Hashem, most bochrim have parents. Their tuition is paid. Their cell phone bills are paid. Their car insurance is paid. Their health insurance is paid. They typically do not have to worry about earning a living or about chronic illness. These are the carefree years.

"How will I be able to ascend to my Father and the (years of my) youth will not be with me?"

I know that the demographic of the crowd I am speaking to tonight is well past the years of na'arus. But as I always say: The job of raising your children never stops, and the job of raising your grandchildren never stops. If there is one message that we should impart to our children and grandchildren and, IY"H, our great-grandchildren, it is: Do not waste these years. They are not going to repeat themselves!

The Kotzker Rebbe cited a pasuk from Tehillim: "Like the arrow in the hand of the mighty archer, such is youth" [Tehillim 127:4]. The Rebbe taught: When an archer pulls back his bow and is about to shoot his arrow, he still is in control of what is going to happen with that arrow. He can shoot it up, he can shoot it down, he can shoot it right, or he can shoot it left. Once the arrow leaves the bow, it is on its own. He cannot take it back. He cannot guide it. It is not like a 'smart bomb' that can be redirected mid-course. The Rebbe said, "So too it is with youth." When a person is young, he is in control. He does not have illness, he does not have all the worries that come with older age, and that frustrate his ability to accomplish what he wants to accomplish with the talents and strengths the Almighty has granted him.

There is a famous quip – Youth is wasted on the young. When a person reaches a certain stage in life, that youth-like freedom is there no more. I knew an older Jew who was in a retirement home. He used to get up in the morning and his fellow residents would ask him "What hurts today?" A person loses all kinds of powers and capabilities that he one once had when he reaches old age. Ah, for the days of youth – bnei ha'neurim!

This is a message that we need to impart to our children, and even if our children are grown, we need to impart it to their children. "You must not waste the precious years of youth."

Sensitive News Must Be Delivered with Sensitivity

"They told him that Yosef was still alive and that he ruled the entire land of Egypt…" [Bereshis 45:26] The Sefer HaYashar says that the brothers were afraid that if they would suddenly break the news to Yaakov that his beloved and presumed-dead son Yosef was still alive, he would die on the spot. The news would be too shocking. An older person can die from sudden shock.

So, what did they do? Serach, daughter of Asher, knew how to play violin. She played her violin and kept on singing "Od Yosef Chai; Od Yosef Chai." Yaakov Avinu thus already had put into his consciousness these words stating that Yosef was still alive.

Consequently, when the brothers came in and they said "Od Yosef Chai!" it was not the same shock as it would have otherwise been. Yaakov had been inoculated, so to speak, to the concept that Yosef was still alive.

This is all well and good. But what is the lesson we learn from this Medrash? Rav Pam writes in his sefer that the lesson we learn is how sensitive we need to be about how we say certain things. We need to anticipate how our words will be taken by the intended recipient. Sometimes news needs to be broken softly. In all cases, we must speak sensitive words with sensitivity!

Rav Pam writes that Rav Yaakov Bender (Rosh Yeshiva of Darkei Torah in the Five Towns) has two rules whenever he calls a parent on the phone. The first thing he says is, "Hello. This is Rabbi Yaakov Bender. Your child is fine." Why? Because whenever a parent gets a call from the principal the parent braces himself: "Okay. What did my kid do now? What did he break? What happened to him?" Therefore, the first thing out of the principal's mouth is "Your child is fine" thus relieving the parent.

The second policy Rabbi Bender has is that whatever a child has done, he never suspends a child on Erev Shabbos. That is all that is needed to ruin a Shabbos. The kid gets thrown out of school; the kid is suspended; the kid flunked…. The kid will sit there at the Shabbos table with this just having happened to him. It will put a pall over the entire Shabbos for the whole family. Maybe the child will be suspended… but that can always wait until Sunday morning. On Friday afternoon, he does not suspend students. That is a lesson learned from the Medrash about Serach bas Asher. "Od Yosef Chai." We must always break news gently, softly, — even good news. This is the sensitivity we must have when dealing with people.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Is judaism more a nation-culture or religion?

The opening three words in our Parsha could simply be understood as a confrontation of two brothers, where one brother does not even know he is related to the other (the viceroy of Egypt): *Vayigash Eilav Yehuda*-Judah approach him (Joseph)". On a deeper level, the Rabbis explain that this introduces the philosophical question about the essence of Judaism, which is still debated today by Jews. For most secular Jews in Israel, Judaism is predominantly a culture, with its own language, history, customs, etc. To most observant Jews in Brooklyn, Judaism is predominantly a religion. Yosef, as we will see, represents Judaism as a culture, while Judah represents Judaism as a religion. This essay will attempt to understand the implications of this essential difference in the way people view Judaism, which is more important, and attempt to discover the true basis of Judaism, according to the traditional understanding through the sources.

As noted above, these two concepts have always vied with each other from the very beginning. The battle for leadership among the Jewish people began in our Parsha between Joseph and Judah, each of whom had different visions of what Judaism should be. Joseph was the economic provider of food and other physical needs (Genesis 47:12), the ruler of Egypt who represented nationhood, government, and the economy. He believed in a Judaism that was dominated by the physical needs of the people, the cultural and historic components. Judah, on the other hand, was the man sent by Jacob to establish the House of Study in Egypt (Genesis 46:28 with Rashi commentary), representing the spiritual side of Judaism. And this battle continued throughout history through the descendants of these two leaders. Joseph was given the city of Shechem as an inheritance (Genesis 48:22), and it was the descendants of Joseph who broke away from Jerusalem to form the monarchy of Israel, and they stressed the nationalistic aspects of Judaism. Where did Jeroboam establish his capital? It was in the city of Shechem, the place of his ancestor Joseph (I Kings 12:25). The descendants of Judah continued to rule from Jerusalem, thus continuing the spilt between these two factions and two different philosophies of what Judaism should be. And this division and argument did not stop then. Even in the future, this split will continue, as there will be the first Messiah, the descendant of Joseph, before the Messiah, descendant of

Judah will emerge and bring the final redemption (Sukkah 52a, b).

Both Components Have Always Been Present in Judaism

These two elements have always been both intrinsic and necessary to Judaism, although this concept is often misunderstood by non-Jews and even Jews. For many years, other faiths and other peoples have used the phrase pronounced by God – "Let me people go" – when speaking about national aspirations. But the people uttering these words who yearned for peoplehood always forgot to look up the original text in the Torah. The words "Let me people go" in the Torah are always followed by the words "so that they can serve Me" (Exodus 7:16, 7:26, 9:1, 9:13) Therefore, God is clearly saying that nationalism is indeed important in Judaism, if it is followed by service to God, the core religious component of Judaism. Similarly, when God chose the Jewish people to be "His" people right before the Torah was given, he clearly defined what Judaism must become: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Normally, priests are associated exclusively with the religious realm, and a kingdom is part of the political or nationalistic realm. Yet here, God says that Judaism must combine the political concept of kingdom with the spiritual concept of priests. The very next phrase in the verse projects the same idea. Holiness usually is left to the realm of the religious, while nationhood is usually left to the physical, non-holy aspects of life. Yet God said that Judaism must combine the two and become a holy nation. When Ruth, the ultimate convert to Judaism and great- grandmother of King David, described the essence Judaism, she uttered just four Hebrew words: "*Ameich Ami Vailokayich Elokai*," your nation is my nation, and your God is my God (Ruth 1:16). This encapsulates the essence of Judaism, and one aspect without the other is not truly Jewish.

Clearly, both components exist within Judaism – both the religious aspects and national aspects. Logically, we might explain Pesach as the holiday where the Jewish people became free politically as a people, the symbol of national or peoplehood aspect of Judaism. The holiday of Shavuot, on the other hand, occurred when the Jewish people receive the Torah, and symbolizes the religious or spiritual aspect of Judaism. But further investigation shows that these symbols are not so clear cut. In fact, both the national and religious components exist within each of these holidays.

It is true that on the surface it indeed seems that Pesach is the ideal holiday to represent the nationalistic aspiration of Judaism. The Jews were freed from bondage and became a people politically, culturally, and historically. They experienced independence for the first time in defying the Egyptians by taking the Paschal lamb. They walked out of Egypt on their own terms. And yet, Pesach also symbolized the religious aspect of Judaism. It was God's specific religious commandments that the Jews observed in taking the Paschal sacrifice. And it was God who destroyed the Egyptian first-born sons, which allowed the Jews to achieve that freedom. But even from the very beginning, freedom from Egyptian bondage was not only about nationalistic aspirations. In his initial meeting with Moses, God explains the purpose of achieving freedom from Egypt: to serve God on this mountain, Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:12). Therefore, the nationalistic freedom achieved on Passover was always directed toward devotion to God and the religious aspect of Judaism. Similarly, on Shavuot, which should symbolize the unique religious aspect of Judaism through the giving of the Torah, God tells the Jewish people right before He pronounced the Ten Commandments: you, the Jewish people, will be My nation among all nations (Exodus 19:5). Thus, at the moment of highest spirituality, when Judaism became a religion, God speaks about the unique nationhood of the Jewish people. In fact, the two holidays are intertwined in the words of Ezekiel. When he refers to Passover, he calls it the holiday of Shavuot. Rashi explains that since the countdown to Shavuot begins on Pesach (with the counting of the Omer), Ezekiel depicts Passover as the beginning of the holiday of Shavuot (Ezekiel 45:21 with Rashi commentary).

In trying to discover the dominant component of Judaism, we shall see that both peoplehood and religion are equally necessary, and that Judaism itself cannot exist with only one and not the other. There are certain subtle aspects of Pesach and, more specifically, the Passover Seder, which demonstrate that both the religious and national aspects of Judaism are crucial, and both are needed to form what we today call Judaism. Ultimately, Judaism must be an amalgam of both nationhood and religion.

When trying to formulate the Hagaddah that is read on Passover night, the Rabbis debated the structure and content. In order for each Jew to "experience" both slavery and freedom and see himself as if he personally went out of Egypt, which is one of the requirements of the Hagaddah (Text of the Passover Haggadah right before the drinking of the Second Cup of wine), the Rabbis agreed that the first part of the Hagaddah must describe the disgrace and defamation of the Jewish people, and only later describe the glory, the praise (Pesachim 116a). While they also agreed about the text of the latter part of the Hagaddah describing the praise, there was a disagreement about what was considered the shame, the defamation of the Jewish people. Rav said it was that the origins of the Jewish people, before Abraham, when they were idol worshippers. Shmuel said that the defamation of the Jewish people was that they were slaves to Pharaoh. What is the underlying argument between Rav and Shmuel? It is possible to understand that these two Torah giants were arguing about the definition of the essence of Judaism, our very discussion. Rav saw Judaism at its core to be a religion, and, therefore, the defamation had to be religious in nature: the Jews were descended from idol worshippers. Shmuel, on the other hand, believed that Judaism at is core was its peoplehood, the nationalistic component. Thus, the height of the nation's defamation was to become a slave people to another country, Egypt.

These two positions and differences are clear. But what is interesting is that the later Rabbis, when finalizing the text of the Haggadah, did not choose one view over the other. They insisted that both components, which are both defamations of the Jewish people, should be included in Seder night. They wanted to teach us that both components are necessary in Judaism – the religious aspect espoused by Rav, and the nationhood aspect espoused by Shmuel.

There are many other examples in the sources which debate the primacy of the peoplehood or religion in Judaism. But clearly, one without the other is something else, but not Judaism. Our Parsha merely begins the debate that ultimately proves that both components are needed equally.

This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

God is Within Me
by Rabbi Noam Sendor

The scene is incredible. Eleven brothers standing in front of the Egyptian viceroy, the most powerful man on Earth, who at any moment could enslave all of them, or worse, for an apparent theft. When things seemingly reach the height of absurdity, Yehuda stands up and challenges the despot—"And Yehuda approached," putting his own life at risk. At that moment, Yehuda had no idea that this seemingly cruel man was in fact his long-lost brother Yosef. And so we must ask, what was it that gave him this inner-strength to stand up against injustice and falsehood?

When Yehuda begins to talk to Yosef, he opens by saying "בי אדוני" which is some form of supplication, meaning, "Please my master." However, Rav Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl (1730-1787) in his masterful Me-or Eynayim explains that this simple remark actually has a much deeper meaning. He says that the word אד-ני should really be read as the holy Name of God, and not as "my master." Yehuda is saying, בי -WITHIN ME, השם – IS GOD. Yehuda had a profound moment of contact with his soul, an experience of self-realization that he is a revelation of Hashem's Will. With the strength of this awareness, Yehuda could look into reality and say, "this is not right! I know and experience the truth of Hashem within me, and I know Him to be kind

and just, and THIS is not Kindness and Justice!"

Although these words are simple to write, they are in some ways quite frightening to contemplate. Spiritual teacher and author Marianne Williamson, in her bestseller Return to Love wrote, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us the most." Yehuda had to overcome his fear—not of the evil viceroy—but of the fact that he is truly powerful, and when he did so, he could step up and confront the evil that stood before him.

What does the individual who senses the presence of Hashem within them look like? How do they engage reality? An enlightened person of course carries themself with patience, tranquillity, wisdom and peace. But there is something else to it.

Rav Yehuda Shaviv, in his book "MiSinai Ba," based upon the Abravanel's insight that it would be impossible for a commoner to actually approach someone of Yosef's stature, explains that when it states that "Yehuda approached"—he was actually approaching Binyamin, not Yosef. At the end of the previous parsha, Binyamin had been sentenced by the viceroy to jail on account of theft. As we open our parsha, as the seriousness of the situation became frighteningly real to Yehuda, he realised he had to stand up for his innocent, scared and oppressed younger brother. In this moment, as Yehuda puts his own life on the line and stands up for his vulnerable brother, Yosef understands that his brothers had repented from their earlier sin of callousness and cruelty towards him and he reveals himself in dramatic fashion.

As we emerge out of a challenging year, we must still recognise the past year's events as a wake-up call. A wake-up call for us all to step more deeply into ourselves, to use our precious days and moments meaningfully, and commit ourselves to the path of seeking a deeper connection to Hashem; to know that Hashem is truly within all of us and that we are more powerful than anything we can possibly imagine. But when we know that Hashem is within us, we must also know that He is within everyone else, as well, and as such, we are obligated to stand up and support those around us, especially the most vulnerable. We must always remember that the greatest expression of how close one is to God is how one treats God's Creation.

In the merit of Yehuda who fixed that which was broken, may we sense Hashem's Presence within all of us and use our inner-strength, power and courage to help those around us, bringing us all one step closer to the redemption, may it come speedily and in our days.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Halacha Without Anger *[Excerpted]*

I. Yosef told his brothers, "Al tirgezu baderech - Do not become angry on the way" (Bereishis 45:24). Rashi offers three interpretations: 1) Do not become involved in a matter of halacha, so that the trip should not become a source of anger for you 2) Do not take quick steps 3) He was worried lest they quarrel on the way over the matter of his sale, by disputing with one another saying, "Through you he was sold," "You spoke lashon hara about him and caused us to hate him."

Why not become involved in a matter of halacha? The Sifsei Chachamim, quoting Rashi (Ta'anis 10b), explains that excessive involvement in halacha can lead to a dangerous failure to "watch the road" and thereby stray from the proper path. On the road, one should learn Torah which does not require deep concentration.

The Otzar Chaim suggests that Yosef said do not become involved in the halachic issue which led you to sell me (see Seforno 37:18,25, who describes a halachic decision that Yosef was a rodeif).

Why not take quick steps? The Sifsei Chachamim quotes the Gemara (Ta'anis 10b) that quick steps dim one's eyesight. The Iturei Torah, quoting the Dubna Magid, interprets: when one decides quickly, without yishuv hada'as (calm deliberation), he does not see properly. He can err terribly, as the brothers did when they sold Yosef.

In confirming Rashi's final interpretation, the Netziv adds that it is not wise to get angry about what has already happened. Yosef warned the brothers to avoid recriminations that are pointless and counterproductive.

The Kli Yakar states that anger leads to mistakes in halacha. Yosef warns, do not become involved in matters of halacha when you are angry, lest you err, as anger leads to mistakes (Rashi, Bamidbar 31:21). The Midrash (Koheles Raba 2:9) understands "Af chochamsi amda li" to mean "The Torah that I learned be'af stayed with me." In a remarkable twist, Kli Yakar explains that Torah learned in anger is mistaken. One does not master (omed) a halacha unless he firsts stumbles (nichshal) over it (Gittin 43a). Thus, Torah learned in anger, when the ensuing mistake is corrected, stays with the person forever. To avoid an initial mistake in halacha, Yosef told his brothers not to discuss halacha when they were angry. Chazal extend this instruction to all situations.

II. The Ramban (Bereshis 19:8) analyzes the tragic civil war between the tribes in Shoftim chapter 20, which pitted Shevet Binyamin against the others and which cost 40,000 lives. Neither side was blameless. Both deserved punishment, Binyamin for taking no action against the perpetrators of Pilegesh B'Giva, and the other tribes for launching an illegitimate war. It was up to Binyamin to judge its own members and not the responsibility of the other tribes.

Rav S.Z. Broyda (Sam Derech, Parshas Vayeshev p. 308) explains that each shevet is a nation unto itself (Rashi Devarim 33:19: "The nations of the tribes of Yisroel"). In his view, this began with the sale of Yosef. Although their hatred was based on an erroneous and hasty halachic decision that Yosef was a rodeif, it was rewarded by twelve separate paths through Yam Suf (Bereshis Raba 84:8). Each shevet has its own place and path, and its own gate and custom (Mishnah Berurah 68:4). Each shevet's uniqueness merges into a unified Klal Yisroel.

III. How should the Torah community, relate to other groups who respond differently? The eternal message of the Torah is: do not get angry over matters of halacha. In most cases, do not even discuss these matters with members of other groups. Instead of convincing others, these discussions are usually a source of anger. Sometimes they degenerate into pointless quarreling and recriminations.

Decisions and statements by doctors and Torah leaders require calm deliberation and consultation, and should not be made hastily. Explaining and defending one's position should not descend into polarizing rhetoric or ad hominem attacks. Anger leads to mistakes. If one errs because of haste, anger or simply by being misinformed, the corrected decision is more likely to be accurate and accepted.

Calls to demean and vilify other groups and some of their Torah leaders must be forcefully rejected. It is not the responsibility of one group to address the faults of another. An illegitimate war of words is counterproductive and endangers the unity of Torah Jewry. Notwithstanding fundamental disagreements on matters of life and death, each group should strive to respect others, as is the case with other ideological and religious disputes.

May we emerge healthy in body and spirit, with the unity that we merit the ultimate redemption.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Win the War

And G-d said to Israel in visions of the night, and He said, "Yaakov, Yaakov!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "I am G-d, the G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Joseph will place his hand on your eyes.(Breishis 46:3-5)

Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'So said your son, Yosef: "G-d has made me a

lord over all the Egyptians. Come down to me, do not delay. (Breishis 45:9)

And he said, “Behold I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; get down there, and buy us from there, that we may live and not die. (Breishis 42:2)

Now Yosef had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, Pharaoh’s chamberlain, chief of the slaughterers, an Egyptian man, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. (Breishis 40:1)

This may sound like a hyper technical point, but this is a large part of the task of the Talmud, to test and define boundaries. If some someone accidentally kills another person then he is sent to a city of refuge. Which action is considered accidental is a matter of great discussion. One dimension is that the person should have been aware and more cautious when making a downward movement. Here the Talmud in Makos wants to make a distinction between a motion, of let’s say swinging an ax, that is just going downward, and a motion that is first going down but only in order to go up, “Yerida L’Tzorech Aliya”.

This phrase, “Yerida L’Tzorech Aliya”, has standalone value. Yosef is described as going down to Egypt. He instructs his brother to bring his father down to Egypt. HASHEM tells Yaakov not to be afraid because HASHEM is going down with him to Egypt and will also bring him up. This is not just a Yerida- a move downward, it’s a Yerida L’Tzorech Aliya – a move downward in order to go up!

There are even greater implications for this phrase. The Meor Einayim describes Yosef’s entire descent to Egypt as a representing the journey of the soul which is sent into this world to complete a mission. The soul is made to descend from its close proximity to the Creator of Souls to this dizzying and distracting physical world. There is no real food here for the soul. It cannot find true satisfaction. However, there are diamonds of Torah and Mitzvos and qualities of generosity that the soul can relate to, develop, and acquire only here.

Like Yosef who went down deep into the pit of Egypt alone and rose to become the Viceroy in meteoric fashion, the Nashama of the Yid seeks to rise to the top, like oil separates itself from water and floats to the top. Eventually the soul weans itself form the charm of this world as it longs only for and cleaves exclusively to its ultimate destination.

Perhaps that’s what the Mishna in Avos intends when it writes, “Very – very humble because the hope of man is worms.” How is that a hope? At some point the soul happily relieves itself of the burden of a physical body.

During our journey in this world we experience many movements downward on our way up. It’s never a straight line. One of my teachers told us “Life is like a cardiograph, with peaks and valleys. If it’s straight, then it’s over.” King Solomon said, “The Tzadik falls seven times and gets up.” The fall is in order to get back up.

My wife had an uncle who went through seven concentration camps and I heard him speak at his great grandson’s Bar Mitzvah. He said about the Jewish People during WWII, “We lost all the battles but we won the war!” Yosef lost many battle in his lifetime. The Neshama faces many and constant challenges throughout its journey in this world.

It helps to know that we have come here from a higher station, and that even if we lose some battles along the way, like Yosef HaTzadik and the Nation of Israel, that HASHEM is with us, and yes we must win the war.

Weekly Parsha VAYIGASH 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

As the story of Joseph and his brothers reaches its dramatic climax in this week's Torah reading, we are left with many unanswered questions regarding this unique narrative. One unanswered question is how much did our father Jacob really know about the events previously described in the Torah readings? There are various streams of thought regarding this matter. Rashi and the Midrash seem to believe that Jacob, by the end of his life, certainly was aware of the entire drama and of the participants in the story. He indirectly refers to it on his deathbed, especially regarding Shimon and Levi, for their aggressive behavior towards Joseph.

Jacob also seemingly complements Yehuda for his original moderation in dealing with Joseph, and for his later courage and heroism in defending Benjamin and confronting Joseph. It is, perhaps, safe to say that even if Jacob was unaware of all the details of the story, he knew the general facts of the narrative, and was able to piece it together for himself.

Jacob's reaction is seen in the blessings he gives to his children, his final words to all the participants in this drama. It is difficult to believe that Jacob would not have asked Joseph how he came to live in Egypt, and how he rose to such a prominent position of power and influence. One of the hallmarks of the relationship between Jacob and Joseph was the fact that, more so than the usual relationship between parent and child, they understood each other, and were sensitive to all the nuances of character that they possessed

There are other sources and commentators that seem to feel that Jacob never really knew the entire story that led Joseph "to cover the eyes of Jacob with his hand" so that he would never know the rift in the family, and the consequences that eventually brought the children of Israel to the exile in Egypt.

All parents know that there are things about their children and their progeny that they do not wish to be informed about. Sometimes, in family matters, ignorance is truly bliss, and in his golden years, surrounded by family, Jacob felt comforted. There also is a natural tendency among children to attempt to hide unwelcome news, evil tidings, and unnecessary aggravation from their parents.

Now that the family has been reunited in Egypt and is living in the land of Goshen in comfort, if not even luxury, of what purpose would there be to retell the bitter story of family discord? The Torah seems to indicate that the last 17 years of Jacob's life were truly his golden years, surrounded by family, and respected and honored by the society it in which he now found himself living. Why burden the old man with a story that would only reopen wounds and create unnecessary anxiety and even regret?

Jacob will go to his final resting place emotionally whole, reconciled even with his brother Eisav, and certainly at peace with his children and family. Whichever of the narratives we choose to follow, the Torah has told us all we need to know about Joseph and his brothers and the descent of the Jewish people into Egyptian society, and their eventual slavery and their redemption.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Birth of Forgiveness (Vayigash)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There are moments that change the world: 1439 when Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press (though the Chinese had developed it four centuries before); 1821 when Faraday invented the electric motor; or 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web. There is such a moment in this week's parsha, and in its way it may have been no less transformative than any of the above. It happened when Joseph finally revealed his identity to his brothers. While they were silent and in a state of shock, he went on to say these words:

"I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you… it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen. 45:4-8)

This is the first recorded moment in history in which one human being forgives another.

According to the Midrash, God had forgiven before this,[1] but not according to the plain sense of the text. Forgiveness is conspicuously lacking as an element in the stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom. When Abraham prayed his audacious prayer for the people of Sodom, he did not ask God to forgive them. His argument was about justice, not forgiveness. Perhaps there were innocent people there, fifty or even ten. It would be unjust for them to die. Their merit should therefore save the others, says Abraham. That is quite different from asking God to forgive.

Joseph forgave. That was a first in history. Yet the Torah hints that the brothers did not fully appreciate the significance of his words. After all, he did not explicitly use the word 'forgive'. He told them not to be distressed. He said, "It was not you but God." He told them their act had resulted in a positive outcome. But all of this was theoretically compatible with holding them guilty and deserving of punishment. That is why the Torah recounts a second event, years later, after Jacob had died. The brothers sought a meeting with Joseph, fearing that he would now take revenge. They concocted a story:

They sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers for the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. (Gen. 50:16-18)

What they said was a white lie, but Joseph understood why they said it. The brothers used the word "forgive" – this is the first time it appears explicitly in the Torah – because they were still unsure about what Joseph meant. Does someone truly forgive those who sold him into slavery? Joseph wept that his brothers had not fully understood that he had forgiven them long before. He had no anger, no lingering resentment, no desire for revenge. He had conquered his emotions and reframed his understanding of events.

Forgiveness does not appear in every culture. It is not a human universal, nor is it a biological imperative. We know this from a fascinating study by American classicist David Konstan, Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea (2010).[2] In it he argues that there was no concept of forgiveness in the literature of the ancient Greeks. There was something else, often mistaken for forgiveness: appeasement of anger.

When someone does harm to someone else, the victim is angry and seeks revenge. This is clearly dangerous for the perpetrator and they may try to get the victim to calm down and move on. They may make excuses: It wasn't me, it was someone else. Or, it was me but I couldn't help it. Or, it was me but it was a small wrong, and I have done you much good in the past, so on balance you should let it pass.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with these other strategies, the perpetrator may beg, plead, and perform some ritual of abasement or humiliation. This is a way of saying to the victim, "I am not really a threat." The Greek word sugnome, sometimes translated as forgiveness, really means, says Konstan, exculpation or absolution. It is not that I forgive you for what you did, but that I understand why you did it – you could not really help it, you were caught up in circumstances beyond your control – or, alternatively, I do not need to take revenge because you have now shown by your deference to me that you hold me in proper respect. My dignity has been restored.

There is a classic example of appeasement in the Torah: Jacob's behaviour toward Esau when they meet again after a long separation. Jacob had fled home after Rebecca overheard Esau resolving to kill him after Isaac's death (Gen. 27:41). Prior to the meeting Jacob sends him a

huge gift of cattle, saying "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me" (Gen. 32:21). When the brothers meet, Jacob bows down to Esau seven times, a classic abasement ritual. The brothers meet, kiss, embrace and go their separate ways, not because Esau has forgiven Jacob but because either he has forgotten or he has been placated.

Appeasement as a form of conflict management exists even among non-humans. Frans de Waal, the primatologist, has described peace-making rituals among chimpanzees, bonobos and mountain gorillas.[3] There are contests for dominance among the social animals, but there must also be ways of restoring harmony to the group if it is to survive at all. So there are forms of appeasement and peace-making that are pre-moral and have existed since the birth of humanity.

Forgiveness has not. Konstan argues that its first appearance is in the Hebrew Bible and he cites the case of Joseph. What he does not make clear is why Joseph forgives, and why the idea and institution are born specifically within Judaism.

The answer is that within Judaism a new form of morality was born. Judaism is (primarily) an ethic of guilt, as opposed to most other systems, which are ethics of shame. One of the fundamental differences between them is that shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. In shame cultures when a person does wrong he or she is, as it were, stained, marked, defiled. In guilt cultures what is wrong is not the doer but the deed, not the sinner but the sin. The person retains their fundamental worth ("the soul you gave me is pure," as we say in our prayers). It is the act that has somehow to be put right. That is why in guilt cultures there are processes of repentance, atonement and forgiveness.

That is the explanation for Joseph's behaviour from the moment the brothers appear before him in Egypt for the first time to the point where, in this week's parsha, he announces his identity and forgives his brothers. It is a textbook case of putting the brothers through a course in atonement, the first in literature. Joseph is thus teaching them, and the Torah is teaching us, what it is to earn forgiveness.

Recall what happens. First he accuses the brothers of a crime they have not committed. He says they are spies. He has them imprisoned for three days. Then, holding Shimon as a hostage, he tells them that they must now go back home and bring back their youngest brother Benjamin. In other words, he is forcing them to re-enact that earlier occasion when they came back to their father with one of the brothers, Joseph, missing. Note what happens next:

They said to one another, "Surely we deserve to be punished [ashemim] because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us" … They did not realise that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter. (Gen. 42:21-23)

This is the first stage of repentance. They admit they have done wrong.

Next, after the second meeting, Joseph has his silver cup planted in Benjamin's sack. This incriminating evidence is found and the brothers are brought back. They are told that Benjamin must stay as a slave.

"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves—we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup." (Gen. 44:16)

This is the second stage of repentance. They confess. They do more; they admit collective responsibility. This is important. When the brothers sold Joseph into slavery it was Judah who proposed the crime (Gen. 37:26-27) but they were all (except Reuben) complicit in it.

Finally, at the climax of the story Judah himself says "So now let me remain as your slave in place of the lad. Let the lad go back with his brothers!" (Gen. 42:33) Judah, who sold Joseph as a slave, is now willing to become a slave so that his brother Benjamin can go free. This is what the Sages and Maimonides define as complete repentance, namely when circumstances repeat themselves and you have an opportunity to commit the same crime again, but you refrain from doing so because you have changed.

Now Joseph can forgive, because his brothers, led by Judah, have gone through all three stages of repentance: [1] admission of guilt, [2] confession and [3] behavioural change.

Forgiveness only exists in a culture in which repentance exists. Repentance presupposes that we are free and morally responsible agents who are capable of change, specifically the change that comes about when we recognise that something we have done is wrong and we are responsible for it and we must never do it again. The possibility of that kind of moral transformation simply did not exist in ancient Greece or any other pagan culture. Greece was a shame-and-honour culture that turned on the twin concepts of character and fate.[4] Judaism was a repentance-and-forgiveness culture whose central concepts are will and choice. The idea of forgiveness was then adopted by Christianity, making the Judeo-Christian ethic the primary vehicle of forgiveness in history.

Repentance and forgiveness are not just two ideas among many. They transformed the human situation. For the first time, repentance established the possibility that we are not condemned endlessly to repeat the past. When I repent I show I can change. The future is not predestined. I can make it different from what it might have been. Forgiveness liberates us from the past. Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of reaction and revenge. It is the undoing of what has been done.[5]

Humanity changed the day Joseph forgave his brothers. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are no longer prisoners of our past. The moral life is one that makes room for forgiveness.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel –"I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand" (Ezekiel 37:19)

Who is the most authentic claimant to leadership of the Jewish People: Judah or Joseph? The answer to this question has far-reaching implications for the future of the Jewish People, and I believe that we can find an answer in our Torah portion, Vayigash, where the palpable tension between Judah and Joseph flares up in ways that continue until today.

Can this clash be resolved? Yes, but each of them will have to change in ways unique to their divergent life paths, with each discovering the rare trait of humility.

Joseph first appears as an arrogant youth, his dreams leading him to see himself as lord over his brothers, their sheaves of wheat bowing down to his; then the sun, the moon and the stars doing the same.

To his brothers, Joseph is an elitist loner. They are not ready to accept him for what he is: a man of many colors, of manifold visions with cosmopolitan and universal dreams. Joseph accepts his brothers' judgement. He is, in fact, different, a seeker after the novel and dynamic Egyptian occupation of agriculture; a citizen of the world more than a lover of Zion. When in Egypt, he easily accepts the Egyptian tongue, answering to an Egyptian name (Tzafenat-Pane'ah), and wears Egyptian garb. He has outgrown his parochial family: not only are they not interested in him, he is not interested in them!

In contrast, as Joseph rises to leadership in Egypt, Judah stumbles, and becomes humbled in the process. He suffers the tragic losses of two sons to early deaths, and estrangement from his brothers, who faulted his leadership after the incident of the sale of Joseph into slavery.

Upon hitting rock bottom, Judah experiences a remarkable turnaround. Both with regard to acknowledging the righteousness of his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38:26), and in his dramatic offer to Jacob to serve as a guarantor for Benjamin's safety (ibid., 43:8-9), Judah demonstrates authentic humility and repentance, which catapults him to becoming "first among equals" in the family. By taking responsibility for Benjamin, he does what he did not do on behalf of Joseph!

Moreover, he is now well-conditioned for familial leadership, which crescendos with his soliloquy at the beginning of Parshat Vayigash.

As a result of Judah's speech, even Joseph is forced to recognize Judah's superiority. It is Judah who has apparently recognized the true identity of the Grand Vizier. If Judah had not understood that he was standing and pleading before Joseph, he never would have raised the tragic imagery of a disconsolate father bereft of his favorite son, the first child of his most beloved wife. The only one who would have been moved by such a plea would be Joseph himself!

And this moment of Joseph's understanding is also the moment of his repentance. He now sees the master plan, the hidden Divine Hand in all that has transpired. The brothers must come to Egypt not to serve him – Joseph – but rather to fulfill the vision of Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces (Genesis 15): to bring blessings to all the families of the earth, to teach even Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, the true majesty of the King of Kings, the Master of the Universe.

Joseph is ready to subjugate his talents in the fields of technology, administration and politics to Judah's Torah and tradition. Joseph – now able to surrender his dream of lordship over the brothers – requests that his remains be eventually brought to Israel, recognizing that the destiny of the family is ultimately in our eternal familial and national homeland. Joseph is now ready to reunite the family under the majesty of Judah.

Generations later, Ezekiel, in a prophecy that appears in this portion's Haftarah, provides an ultimate rapprochement – nay, unity – between all of the tribes. "I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand" [37:19].

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel in the 20th Century, felt the footsteps of the Messiah and the nearness of redemption. He saw in Theodor Herzl, architect of the administrative and political characteristics of the Jewish State, the Messiah from the House of Joseph-Ephraim, the necessary forerunner to the ultimate redeemer. He eulogized Herzl as such upon his death, in his famous Encomium from Jerusalem.

Rabbi Kook anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah from the House of David-Judah, who would give spiritual meaning and universal redemptive significance to the "hands of Esau" that so successfully waged wars and forged an advanced nation-state phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Holocaust. May this vision become reality speedily and in our time!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rav Shmuel ben Rav Usher Zelig Halevi, z"l. Sponsored by Kalman & Channah Finkel.

The Key to a Good Life

Yaakov said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourn are one hundred thirty years; the days of the years of my life have been few and bad, and they have not reached the days of the years of my forefathers' lives in the days of their sojourns" (Bereishis 47:9).

This is a perplexing statement for Yaakov to make. At the time of this exchange with Pharaoh, he was 130 years old and he lamented the fact that his life span had not reached those of his father and grandfather. But how could Yaakov have known that he would never reach their ages? It was certainly possible that he would go on to live for many years thereafter! Even Rashi's explanation – that Yaakov meant that his life hadn't been as good as his forefathers' lives – is difficult to understand. Wasn't it possible that Yaakov would not only live for many more years, but that he would ultimately have many more happy years?

In fact, it would seem that Yaakov should have every reason to have been more pleased with his life than Avraham and Yitzchak were with theirs, for a simple reason: Only Yaakov was blessed with children who were all righteous. Avraham was the father of Yishmael and the sons of Keturah, while Yitzchak had Eisav; only Yaakov had children who were all virtuous. Doesn't that contradict the sentiment he expresses in this possuk?

Clearly, none of these things are the basis for defining a person's life as "good." But what, then, is the definition of a "good" life?

The possuk in Mishlei states that "a person who has found a wife has found goodness," and the Gemara tells us that "one who is without a wife lives without goodness." The defining feature of a good life is a good marriage; without that, even having longevity and righteous children will not be enough to make one's life considered "good." In that respect, indeed, Yaakov's life did not reach the quality that Avraham and Yitzchak experienced.

We know that by the time Avraham Avinu was 52 years old, he and Sarah were working together on teaching the people of Charan to serve Hashem. Sarah was 10 years younger than Avraham and died at the age of 127; hence, we can ascertain that they were married for at least 85 years, and perhaps longer. Yitzchak's marriage to Rivka also lasted for many years; they were married for 20 years before Yaakov and Eisav were born, and Rivka passed away when Yaakov was returning from Lavan's home at the age of 99 (as he arrived there at the age of 77 and stayed away from home for 22 years); thus, they were married for a full 119 years. Yaakov, though, was married to Rochel Imeinu for less than 15 years; they married only after he had worked for Lavan for seven years, and Rochel died on the road after leaving her father's house. Thus, according to this definition, the goodness of Yaakov's life indeed failed to compare to that experienced by his father and grandfather.

Raising children can be very difficult. Indeed, we often find that the children who turn out the best are those who were the most difficult for their parents to raise. Thus, even if a person's children grow up to be outstanding adults, this cannot be the way to measure a "good" life. Rather, the definition of a good life is one in which a man had a positive relationship with his wife.

No Man Left Behind

And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him… (45:27)

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the wagons sent by Yosef hinted to the last Torah topic exchanged between father and son before Yosef departed – the mitzvah of Eglah Arufah. The Midrash (Beresishis Rabba 94:3, 95:3) notes the similarity of the words "Eglah," calf, and "Agalah," a wagon. In response to finding a corpse in the land of Israel, the elders of the closest town would decapitate a calf, an Eglah Arufah, as a communal atonement for the crime proclaiming that the townsfolk did not shed his blood (Deuteronomy 21:1-9).

Perhaps while escorting his son on his journey, Yaakov taught Yosef the mitzvah of Eglah Arufah, the calf whose neck was axed by the elders of the nearest town upon the discovery of a murdered corpse. It was commonly understood that a person who was not properly escorted from a city would easily fall prey to thieves and murderers. But there is a fascinating element to this law. The Talmud (Horayos 6a) explains that this atonement is actually for the generation that left Egypt. In fact, we learn a very important halacha from here; that a nation is a corporate entity and that a corporate entity is eternal. Even though the actual generation that left Egypt was long gone, the national identity remains and therefore an atonement can be brought even for those that left Egypt because the corporate entity remains.

Why would Yosef choose this mitzvah out of everything he studied with his father to send to Yaakov as a sign? In fact, as Rashi explains, it was something of a contrived message because Yosef didn't actually send the wagons, Pharaoh did! Yosef went out of his way to make sure that the brothers conveyed this lesson to his father. The question is why? What is so remarkable about this mitzvah that made it relevant to the current events that had transpired?

Clearly, Yosef (and pretty soon Yaakov as well) had come to the realization that this was the beginning of the fulfillment of Hashem's punishment to Avraham that his children would be in a foreign country for four generations. The only thing worse would be the possibility that they would never leave. However, in order to leave they first had to become a nation by overcoming the final barrier to achieving nationhood: appreciating the value of each and every member. That is

why in the process of Eglah Arufah an atonement is brought "for those that left Egypt." Because it was on that condition that they left Egypt and became a nation.

Yosef, remarkably, had already addressed this issue with his brothers. Firstly, he wanted to see if they would abandon Shimon after he took him captive. When they returned with Binyomin he created the whole charade of accusing Binyomin of stealing his silver "magical" goblet to determine whether or not his brothers had finally internalized the lesson that they must be "one for all and all for one." The brothers passed this test with flying colors when they all equally agreed to serve as slaves in place of their brother Binyomin.

Yosef never really held them responsible for what they did to him on a personal level. His real issue with them was whether or not they had what it takes to become a nation. They finally proved that they did, and this was the message he sent back to Yaakov. We will survive this exile into a strange land.

Did You Know...

Yaakov had two main wives (Rochel and Leah) and two other wives (known as maidservants) who had a lesser status. The Torah sometimes refers to the latter wives as "pilagshim." A pilegesh, commonly translated as concubine, actually has halachic status of a wife. though with lesser rights (e.g. a pilegesh doesn't have a kethubah, which is the security and financial protection that regular wives are provided).

It is very interesting that the word pilegesh is really a contraction of two words plag and isha. Plag means half and isha means woman. In other words, a pilegesh means half a woman. This explains a fascinating verse in the Torah. After Leah gave birth to her fourth child the Torah says, "She stopped giving birth" (29:35). What this means is that she was supposed to have four sons and her maidservant was supposed to have two and Rochel was supposed to have four and her maidservant was supposed to have two. Each "pilegesh" would have exactly half the amount of the main wives! Unfortunately, because Rochel "sold" Yaakov for the dudaim she lost two of the children that were supposed to be hers (Yissacher and Zevulon) and Leah ended up with six children.

But in the end, of course, Hashem guides everything to the way that is supposed to emerge. In this week's parsha we actually see how it all work out – Leah has thirty two descendants and her maidservant has exactly sixteen and Rochel has fourteen descendants and her maidservant has exactly seven. Each pilegesh has exactly half the descendants of the main wife!

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 11 December 2021 / 7 Kislev 5782
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Vayigash
The Promise

"I am the G-d of your father…Have no fear of descending into Egypt…I shall descend with you to Egypt and I shall surely bring you up." (46:3-4)

It was the first night of Chanukah. The single light of the menorah gleamed with a strange radiance. Its light came neither from wax nor oil. This was a very special menorah. It was made from an old wooden clog. And the oil was boot polish. This was Chanukah in Bergen Belsen.

The Bluzhever Rav chanted the first two blessings in the customary festive tune. He was about to make the third blessing but then he stopped. He paused for what seemed like a long time. He looked around the room at all the faces in front of him. And then, with a voice filled with strength, he said: "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our fathers, Who has kept us alive and preserved us and brought us to this time." "Amein" was the whispered reply from the huddled throng. Later, one of the men came over to the Bluzhever Rav and he said, "Can I ask the Rabbi a question?" "What is your question?" said the Rav. "How can you possibly make a blessing thanking G-d for bringing us to this time? Should we thank Him for bringing us to Bergen-Belsen? For bringing us to a time like this?"

"You know," said the Bluzhever Rav, "I had exactly the same thought as you. That's why I stopped in the middle. I was about to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and some of my other colleagues if I could really make that blessing, and then I caught sight of all the faces looking so intently at that wooden clog, filled with black camp shoe polish. I thought: Here we are in the depths, in the blackest darkness that could exist in this world. And here are some Jews lighting Chanukah candles. In spite of all the evil that those murderers are doing, we are lighting candles. And I thought to myself: Ribono shel ha'olam! Master of the world! Who is like your people Israel? Look how they stand with death staring them in the face and lovingly they hang onto every word — 'Who did miracles for our ancestors in those days, at this time' And I thought: If this is not the place to thank Hashem for bringing us to this time, then I don't know when is! I have a sacred duty to say that blessing now."

Chanukah is the only celebration in the Jewish calendar that spans two months. A month of light and a month of darkness. And despite the great light that was revealed on Chanukah, that light darkened in Tevet. On the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet we mourn three great tragedies: the translation of the Torah into Greek, the death of Ezra, which marked the end of prophecy, and, finally, the surrounding of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which led to the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash. Tevet is a month of darkness.

The total number of candles that we light on Chanukah is 36 (excluding the shamesh). In the beginning of the Creation, a supernal light called the Ohr Haganuz shone. With it you could see from one end of the world to the other, meaning that you could see cause and effect. You could see why things happened. All was revealed. After 36 hours, Hashem hid it away so that it could not be used by those who are evil. That supernal light reappeared in the lamps of the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash, and it can be found in the lights of our Chanukah menorahs to this very day. 36. If you count the number of days from the beginning of Chanukah until the end of Tevet, it also comes to 36. The light spreads into the darkness even though you cannot see it.

I always thought that the end of Chanukah was a bit of an anti-climax. True, on the last night we light all the candles in a blaze of glory, but the following morning all that's left to do is to clean up the mess from the olive oil. And apart from our mentioning al hanisim in our prayers, there's nothing we actually do on the last day except to put the Chanukah menorah away. It seems strange that the last day of Chaunkah is called "Zot Chanukah," "This is Chanukah." And yet this epitomizes the very essence and the message of Chanukah. Sometimes our lives are filled with darkness — the darkness of illness, the darkness of depression, of unhappiness. The lights seemed to have gone out in our lives, leaving us in a very dark world. Our comfort is to know that the lights have not gone out in our lives, but that they burn secretly, hidden from sight, and that very soon the whole world will be ablaze with a great light when Hashem's promise to Yaakov Avinu will be fulfilled, and the entire world will recognize the G-d of Israel.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayigash
Where Was the Rebuke in the Words "I Am Yosef"?

Almost every darshan who writes a commentary on Chumash gives an interpretation to the following famous Medrash in this week's parsha:

When Yosef said to his brothers "I am Yosef," the pasuk says that the brothers could not respond to him because they were frightened of him (Bereshis 45:3). They were so stunned by this sudden revelation that they became tongue-tied.

The Medrash Rabbah here comments: "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Tochacha (rebuke)." This is the way it is going to be in the future when a person leaves this world and stands in front of the Throne of Glory. We will have the same experience that the brothers of Yosef had that day in Mitzrayim. Yosef was the youngest of the brothers and yet his older siblings were unable to withstand his terse rebuke. How much more so will this be the case when the Holy One Blessed Be He comes and appropriately rebukes

every individual for their misdeeds while on Earth! If the brothers had nothing to say when rebuked by their younger sibling, what will we say after 120 years when the Almighty calls us on the carpet, so to speak? We certainly won't be able to open our mouths.

The question everyone asks is that the Medrash refers to Yosef's words to his brothers as a tochacha. Somehow in his brief statement, Yosef gave them mussar. It was a rebuke. But all he said were the words "I am Yosef". Where is the rebuke?

I myself have shared several answers to this question in previous years. This year, I found a new interpretation (which is based on a Ramban) in a sefer called Nachal Eliyahu from a contemporary author — Rabbi Eliyahu Diskin.

The Ramban in Parshas VaYeshev (Bereshis 37:15 D.H. VaYimtza'ay'hu) makes one comment which is really fundamental to the understanding of the entire story of Yosef and his brothers. The Ramban says the whole story really does not make any sense. Too many people made too many egregious errors here. Yaakov made an egregious error by favoring Yosef over the other brothers. Yosef made an error by suspecting that his brothers transgressed prohibitions such as ever min ha'chai and gilui arayos, etc. The brothers made a mistake by thinking that Yosef was out to kill them. Everyone was way off base despite the fact that we are talking about people here for whom the term "Gedolei Yisrael" is a major understatement, spiritually and intellectually. How did they all fall into this mess called "The Sale of Yosef" and all that transpired in its wake?

Says the Ramban, ***"Ki HaGezeira Emes v'ha'Charitzus Sheker, v'Atzas HaShem Hee Sakum,"*** which means, this is what G-d wanted to happen (ha'Gezeira Emes); and all the efforts that everyone made were not going to count for anything (ha'Charitzus Sheker); because the Ribono shel Olam wanted it to happen this way (Atzas HaShem Hee Sakum).

For example: Yaakov said to Yosef "Go find your brothers." How is Yosef supposed to find his brothers? They are out there somewhere in the dessert tending to their sheep. Canaan is a vast land. There were no cell phones. There were not even phone booths! How is Yosef supposed to find his brothers?

Yosef goes off to look for his brothers. He can't find them. What should he have done? He should have turned around and gone home and said, "Daddy, I can't find them." End of story. Suddenly, he meets a person in the wilderness. Who is it? It is a malach! The malach takes him to his brothers. Why? It is because this is the way it had to happen. Klal Yisrael had to go down to Mitzrayim. That is the way Hashem told Avraham that it would happen by the Bris Bein HaBesarim. This is the way Klal Yisrael will be formed—"in a land that is not theirs". (Bereshis 15:13)

HaGezeirah Emes. People try this and they try that. They make this effort and they make that effort. It is not going to work. V'HaCharitzus Sheker. All their efforts are going to fall by the wayside. They are for naught. At the end of the day Atzas HaShem Hee Sakum.

The reason why Yosef's saying the words "Ani Yosef" was a rebuke was because those two words sent the message, "You tried to sell me as a slave and now ANI YOSEF – I am the second most powerful man in the world. What happened to your plans? What happened to all your efforts to get rid of me? They were all for naught! Nothing came of them!" Why was that? Because the ***DECREE WAS TRUE (haGezeirah Emes) and EFFORTS TO THWART IT WERE DOOMED (v'ha'Chareetzus Sheker).***

This is the type of rebuke we will get in the future world. We all pay lip service to the famous Gemara that a person's annual income is fixed at the beginning of the year (Beitzah 16a). We all believe—or at least we all say—that it was decreed in Heaven last Rosh HaShanah how much each of us will make throughout the year, to the penny. Now, if we are faced with a challenge or a nisayon in the middle of the year that we can make another ten or fifteen thousand dollars by doing something that is untoward or if not illegal, at least not on the up and up, we might think "Listen, this is a windfall here. I can make another ten or fifteen grand here! I am not going to let this opportunity slip by."

So, do we believe that our income is fixed or not? In the future world, the Ribono shel Olam is going to have a list of all those situations where He said "This is the way I decreed it was going to be. You tried to outsmart me and to cut corners to get more money than you deserved—or whatever it may be…" That is the rebuke we will face in the World to Come.

It is the exact same rebuke that Yosef gave to his brothers: You thought that you could do me in. It didn't happen. That is because the ***DECREE WAS TRUE.*** This is the way the Ribono shel Olam wanted it to happen, and so this is how it happened. And your ***EFFORTS TO THWART IT WERE DOOMED!*** That was how it was going to happen.

The Ribono shel Olam will have a whole lifetime of these type of things to present to us as rebuke. The immortal words "Ani Yosef" ring out for eternity with the message that the Almighty is going to make everything happen as He decrees. All human effort to circumvent those decrees will not make a hoot of difference.

Yaakov's Disbelief Gives Way to Rejuvenation—How and Why Did That Happen?

My second observation comes from this same sefer, Nachal Eliyahu.

The brothers come back with good news and they tell Yaakov that Yosef is alive. The pasuk records: "Vayafeg leebo ki' lo he'emean lahem." (Bereshis 45:26). Simply put, Yaakov did not believe them. Is this not strange? Yaakov has been mourning for over twenty years for his lost son Yosef. He has been a depressed, broken, totally changed person. Finally, the brothers come in and tell him this wonderful news that Yosef is still alive. Why would he not believe them? This is the news he has been waiting to hear for twenty-plus years! Did he think they were trying to play a fast one on him – that five minutes later they would yell 'April Fools!'? No son would do that to a grieving father. This is not a subject to joke about! What does "He did not believe them" indicate?

The pshat in this pasuk is revealed through a Medrash Tanchuma: A wicked person is considered dead during his lifetime because a rasha is dead emotionally and religiously if he does not recognize the Almighty and acknowledge all that He provides for this world. For all intents and purposes, he is in a "vegetative state" – totally oblivious spiritually to the world around him. He may have a pulse and a heartbeat, but if he can't react spiritually to what the Holy One Blessed be He has provided for him, he is merely in a vegetative state. It is "life", but it is not really "chaim".

When the brothers came in and said to Yaakov, "Yosef is still alive" and Yaakov did not believe them, Yaakov did not think they were lying to him or playing a joke on him. Yaakov was concerned – what could be with a seventeen-year-old who was cut off from his family in his formative years and thrown into the fleshpots of Egypt? Yaakov reasoned – What kind of Jew could Yosef be at this point? Therefore, if he is alive but he doesn't recognize a Ribono shel Olam in this world – he is not the Yosef that I once knew and then for all intents and purposes, he is not alive. Yaakov heard "Od Yosef CHAI" but he thought to himself "that is not what I call LIFE."

What happened? Yaakov saw the wagons that Yosef sent…and the spirit of Yaakov their father rejuvenated (Bereshis 45:27). The famous Chazal says that Yosef was sending a signal to his father: The last thing that we learned before I was separated from you all those years ago was the parsha of eglah arufah. In other words, Yosef signaled that he still remembered the "sugyah that we were holding in." Then, the spirit of Yaakov came back to life. "If Yosef remembers the Torah we learned together, then he really is alive."

In 1940, Rav Elazar Shach (1899-2001) was in Vilna. Rav Shach was part of the Mir Yeshiva. The Mir Yeshiva went to Vilna at that time, as did most of the Eastern European yeshivos. Rav Shach met someone there, a Rav Kluf, and spoke to him in learning. They parted ways and did not see each other again until seven years later, after the war. They met again in Tel Aviv in 1947. When Rav Shach saw Rav Kluf for the first time after seven years of separation, the first thing he said to him was "I have an answer to that contradiction you raised in the Rambam." After having gone through everything that occurred to him in those intervening years, still remembering "the kasheh that we left off with"

and having "a teretz for that kasheh on the Rambam" exemplifies the meaning of preserving Chiyus (life) by a true Jew.

Medically speaking, a vegetative state is called life, but it is not much of a life in the eyes of people. In the eyes of upright Jews, life does not only mean eating, drinking and sleeping, but also recognizing that there is a Ribono shel Olam in the world.

That is what Yaakov did not believe at first, but when he saw the wagons – Ahh, Yosef is still thinking about learning; he is still thinking about that Sugya we studied together. If so, Yosef is in fact still alive and so, the spirit of Yaakov was then rejuvenated.

Finally, I have shared the following story in the past but it bears repeating.

A young fellow got married to a girl and then suddenly, in the middle of Sheva Brochos, he disappeared. He skipped town and abandoned his new wife, leaving her an agunah. Thirty years later a fellow walked into town and said "Honey, I'm home." He claimed to be this woman's long lost husband.

Twenty or thirty years later, we all look a lot different than we looked in our wedding pictures. Here comes this fellow and says "I am your husband." How well did they even know each other? She did not know whether or not to believe him. Was this really her husband or not?

The fellow was not a fool. He started telling her all kind of intimate things that, apparently, he could only ostensibly know if he was really her husband. He told her all sorts of details about the wedding. She assumed it must be him – because how else could he know this?

They asked the Vilna Gaon whether they could believe him to be her husband on the basis that he seemed to know these minutiae about her and the wedding and everything that only her husband could have known. The Gaon said to take the fellow to the shul that he davened in when he was a chosson. Ask him to point out where he sat. They brought the fellow into shul and they asked him, "Where did you sit when you were a chosson?" The guy froze. The Gaon said, "He is a liar!"

How did he know the other details? The answer is that at some point, he met up with the real chosson who was certainly a scoundrel and told him all the little details to make the fool-proof case that he was really that chosson. But he didn't tell him where he sat in shul, because a scoundrel like that doesn't remember or doesn't care where he sat in shul.

That is the acid test. A true Yid remembers the spiritual things in life. A scoundrel doesn't remember that kind of information. He remembers what color the flowers were at the wedding. Who cares about the flowers? Where you sit in shul – that is what counts.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz
The Little Secret Behind Incitement
Parashat Vayigash 5782

Parashat Vayigash tells us about Jacob's children who went down to Egypt to buy food due to the famine that affected their area. Judah and his brothers beg for favor from Egypt's viceroy until he can no longer contain himself and he reveals his identity to them. "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt" (Genesis 45, 4). Joseph moves his father, brothers, and their families to a very fertile area in Egypt, called the Land of Goshen, and he sustains them and provides them with grain.

At the end of the parasha, the Torah details the depth of the crisis in Egypt as a result of the famine. Joseph, who had collected a great amount of grain during the years of plenty that preceded the famine, sold it to the residents of Egypt during the years of famine. The result was that the Egyptians bought the royal grain until they were impoverished and their assets were transferred to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, leaving them to turn to Joseph to beg for bread.

Out of despair, they offered to sell their fields to the King of Egypt and themselves as slaves in return for bread. Joseph accepted their offer and bought all their fields. From then on, the residents of Egypt moved into cities and worked their fields for Pharaoh who took ownership of the land.

The Torah describes the journey of our nation's patriarchs and that of their sons who followed them. Even when it focuses on others who lived in the area where they were, it is only in the context of events linked to the patriarchs and their sons. Why, then, does the Torah give us such a detailed description of the socio-economic situation in Egypt that, seemingly, had no connection to the lives of the patriarchs and the tribes?

It seems that in order to answer this question, we must skip to the beginning of the book of Exodus, the second of the five books of the Torah. At the beginning of Exodus, we hear of a new Pharaoh ruling over Egypt who did not know Joseph. This Pharaoh incites his nation against the children of Israel who have since become a huge family. This incitement works and the Egyptians make the children of Israel their slaves, torturing them and killing their sons. Now we must look at this closely: What was the background of this incitement? Why did the King of Egypt incite his nation against the Jews and why was he so successful?

The answer to this is in the detailed description that concludes Parashat Vayigash. Divine will made it that the geopolitical situation that Joseph created in Egypt during the years of famine was the key to the incitement against his family years later. A situation was created in which most of the residents of Egypt lived in crowded cities, enslaved to the King of Egypt, forced to pay him a fifth of the yield they worked hard to grow. However, Pharaoh had tremendous wealth accumulated primarily during those seven years of famine when he sold grain to Egyptians in return for their assets.

Over time, this invariably led to great unrest and bitterness among the residents of Egypt. Pharoah, afraid of being overthrown, found a simple solution: He incited the Egyptians against the children of Israel – the only ones who had fields and were not enslaved to him. Thus, Pharaoh hoped to kill two birds with one stone – to take the children of Israel's wealth and to direct the Egyptians' rage in the Jews' direction. This phenomenon is not unique in the annals of history. Only eighty years ago, Adolf Hitler used the same exact method. Though the verses appearing in this week's Torah portion give us the background to the incitement against the children of Israel, their enslavement and murder, we can learn lessons from this story for our times as well.

In these days of social networks, it is very easy to incite against individuals, sectors and political groups. This incitement frequently succeeds in making us turn our feelings of anger and frustration toward a particular person, sector, or movement. This is the easy way to escape daily challenges – to find a guilty party. When we read about the way the King of Egypt behaved, we learn to sharpen our senses and pay attention: What is the goal of the inciter? Is he trying to help us or is he playing with our feelings for his own benefit?

Instead of inciting, we must take responsibility. Instead of resentment, we must grow and create change.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah
Vayigash: The First Exile
Chanan Morrison

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Hosea 528) makes a startling observation: "Jacob should have gone down to Egypt in chains. Yet God said, 'Jacob, My first-born, how could I banish him in disgrace? Rather, I will send his son to go down before him.'"

What did Jacob do to deserve being exiled in iron chains?

Two Purposes to Exile

We need to analyze the purpose of exile. The Jewish people have spent more years in exile than in their own land. Why was it necessary to undergo these difficult trials? Could they not be punished by other means?

In fact, the Midrash states that the Jewish people are particularly suited for exile. They are called "the daughter of exiles," since the Avot

(forefathers) were sojourners and refugees, subjected to the whims and jealousies of local tyrants (Midrash Eicha Petichta 1 on Isaiah 10:30).

Exile accomplishes two goals:

The people of Israel were created to serve God. The nation needs a pure love of God, undiluted by materialistic goals. Clearly, people are more prone to become absorbed in worldly matters when affluence and prosperity are readily attainable. In order that the Jewish people should realize their true spiritual potential, God made sure that the nation would lack material success for long periods of time.

Exile serves to spread the belief in one God throughout the world. As the Sages wrote in Pesachim 87b, "The Holy One exiled Israel so that converts will join them." Similarly, we find that God explained the purpose of exile and redemption in Egypt, "so that Egypt will know that I am God" (Ex. 7:5).

The major difference between these two objectives lies in the conditions of the exile. If the purpose of exile is to avoid significant material success over a long period of time — to prepare the Jewish people for complete dedication to God and His Torah — then such an expulsion by definition must be devoid of prestige and prosperity.

If, on the other hand, the goal is to influence and uplift the nations of the world, then being honored and respected in their land of exile will not contradict the intended purpose. On the contrary, such a state of honor would promote this aim.

Jacob's Exile

Jacob had spiritually perfected himself to the extent that nothing in this world could dampen his burning love for God. His dedication was so great that he could interrupt the emotional reunion with his beloved son Joseph, after an absence of 22 years, and proclaim God's unity with the Shema prayer (Rashi on Gen. 46:29). Certainly, for Jacob himself, only the second goal of exile was applicable.

Jacob's descendants, however, would require the degrading aspects of exile in order to purify them and wean them from the negative influences of a materialistic lifestyle. As their father, it was fitting that Jacob be led to Egypt in iron chains. But since Jacob personally would not be adversely affected by worldly homage and wealth, he was permitted to be exiled in honor, led by his son, viceroy of Egypt.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 233-241)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayigash

פרשת ויגש תשפ"ב

כי למחיה שלחני אלקים לפניכם

For it was to be a provider that Hashem sent me ahead of you. (45:5)

The above *pasuk* should be every Jew's rallying cry upon confronting the various vicissitudes of life. Travail, challenge, obstacles, speed bumps – however one seeks to refer to them – they happen, but we must remember they happen for a reason which only Hashem knows. The mere fact that we accept that everything that takes place is Divinely dispatched and serves a Heavenly purpose, which is inherently good, should be sufficient balm for the pain and anxiety it leaves in its wake. We are, however, only human. As a result, while we are in the midst of the maelstrom of challenge, we often lose sight of its Heavenly Source. This is what Yosef intimated to his brothers: "It was Hashem – not you – Who sent me here. It was His purpose to have me here as a provider to facilitate your eventual arrival. It was destined to happen. We were going to come down to Egypt regardless. Hashem just made it easier for us."

For twenty-two years Yaakov *Avinu* grieved for his precious Yosef. No one should experience the pain of mourning a child. It was all part of Hashem's plan. Yaakov's years mitigated the cumulative pain that his children would have endured had they been subjected to descend to Egypt in iron fetters as slaves. Instead, they went down as honored guests of the viceroy and Pharaoh of Egypt. We simply do not know Hashem's purpose, but the mere fact that we know that it comes from Hashem should in and of itself serve as an agent to ameliorate the pain. Everyone has a story of Divine Providence, in which what he thought was travail was actually the precursor to a happy, joyous ending. The following story reinforces this idea and will, thus, inspire those who think about its message to realize, *Ki l'michyah shlachani Hashem lifneichem*, "For it was to be a provider that Hashem sent me ahead of you."

One evening, *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas Schwimmer, a resident of Monroe, N.Y., noticed a teenager wandering the streets. Clearly, the boy was lost and was finding it difficult to navigate the streets. *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas pulled over and asked, "Can I help you get to your destination?" The boy replied, "I live in Monsey, where I attend *yeshivah*. During the summer, my *yeshivah* moves to a summer camp situated at 441 Sckunemunk Rd. I went to Monsey to see a doctor concerning the pain I have been experiencing in my arms. I took a taxi back to camp. However, the driver could not locate 441, so he dropped me off at the corner of Sckunemunk and Berditchev – assuming that it was a short walk to the camp. I have been walking around looking for 441 and have not been successful."

Reb Shlomo Pinchas said, "I will be happy to drive you there." The problem was that 441 did not appear on his GPS. After a few moments of searching, he came to the conclusion that Sckunemunk is a very long street, and 441 is situated in another village past the Monroe line. They began to drive, but, once again, they could not locate 441. Apparently, as is not uncommon in small, rural villages, the address might be there, but not always in plain sight.

The boy remembered a landmark, "Every morning, we use the *mikvah* on Koritz Street. If you can take me there, I know a shortcut to the camp. They drove to Koritz Street where the boy showed *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas how to get to the camp. This was an area to which he had never been. Indeed, he was impressed by the size of the camp's old, large building and the beautiful private lake in the background. He now knew how to get to 441 Sckunemunk. The two parted, with the boy thanking *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas for the time he spent accompanying him to his destination. It was the type of *chesed*, act of kindness, in its complete, unvarnished form. Accompanying someone who is lost is much more beneficial than giving him directions and expecting him to find his destination on his own.

The next day, the *yeshivah* boys went boating on the lake. One of the boats, carrying four students, turned over. Three students swam to shore. One boy was unable to make it to shore. *Hatzalah* of Monroe, which was closest to the area, received the call to come quickly to 441 Sckunemunk. The problem was that the *Hatzalah* volunteers could not locate 441. *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas, who is a member of *Hatzalah*, was fortunately able to direct the volunteers who arrived just in time to save the boy's life. The fact that the previous evening *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas had performed a *chesed* for a lost boy enabled him to help save a life the following day. Did I mention the identity of the boy? He was the same boy whom *Reb* Shlomo Pinchas helped the night before. Since he still had pain in his arms, he was unable to swim ashore. A few minutes later, and *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, *Hatzalah* would have been too late.

We often think that something is bad; the cards are stacked against us. Hashem does only good. We are not able to see the large picture until we retrospect and look through the lens of hindsight. The combination of the taxi driver's mistake, dropping the boy off in the wrong place, and a *Yid's* incredible act of kindness proved to be quite beneficial for the boy. Hashem was setting the stage for the next day's salvation.

ויפל על צוארי בנימין אחיו ויבך ובנימין בכה על צואריו

Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept. And Binyamin wept upon his neck. (45:14)

The *Midrash* comments that Yosef and Binyamin wept over the destruction of the Sanctuaries that would be built in their respective portions of the Land: the two *Batei Mikdash* that would be built in Binyamin's portion, and *Mishkan Shiloh* that stood in the portion of Yosef's son, Efraim. *Horav David Leibowitz, zl*, derives from here the overwhelming pain experienced by our forefathers concerning the *churban*, destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*. During the greatest moment of heightened joy, when all that should have occupied their minds was

the homecoming/reinstatement of Yosef, their long- lost brother, their thoughts were elsewhere. Binyamin was finally able to embrace his brother, the only other child of Rachel *Imeinu*. He named his ten sons for Yosef, with each name serving as an allusion to the pain and suffering he had endured over the loss of Yosef. Yosef had been alone these past twenty-two years – away from his loving father and only maternal brother. Finally, during the moment of joy as these two brothers were reunited, they thought only about the destruction of the Sanctuaries.

Pain and grief overwhelmed the solace and joy that should have permeated this meeting. Why? Because the destruction of the Sanctuaries was a cataclysmic epic tragedy that completely erased their joy. It is not as if their *simchah*, joy, was marred. It was eradicated as if it had never existed. How can one feel joyous when the thought of the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash* looms so strongly in his mind?

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, quotes the *Navi* (*Melachim* II 20:22) following Yoshiahu *Hamelech* dispatching emissaries to Chuldah *HaNeviah*, in which he petitioned her to pray that somehow the Heavenly decree against the *Bais HaMikdash* would be expunged. Chuldah responded that it was too little, too late; the actions of the people had catalyzed events that would bring about the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*. He, the king, who had walked righteously in the path of Hashem, however, *V'neesafta el kivrosecha b'shalom v'lo sirenah einecha b'chol haraah*, "You will be gathered to your grave in peace – and your eyes will not see all the evil that I am bringing upon this place." The *Talmud* (*Moed Kattan* 28:2) wonders how it could be said that Yoshiahu would be gathered in peacefully (that he would die a peaceful death)? The *Navi* (*Divrei HaYamim* 2:35:23) states that the attacking army shot arrows at Yoshiahu. Three hundred arrows pierced his body, making it bleed like a sieve. Is this a peaceful way to leave this world? The pain that he must have endured is beyond imagination! Rabbi Yochanan responds: *She'lo charav Bais Hamikdash b'yamav*; "The *Bais HaMikdash* was not destroyed during his days."

In other words: Despite being told that the *Bais HaMikdash* would ultimately be destroyed, despite suffering a terrible, painful death, nonetheless Yoshiahu died in peace. Why? He did not have to experience the devastation of the *churban Bais HaMikdash*. This gives us a window, an inkling, into the overwhelming pain that he would have suffered, had he witnessed the actual destruction. Only our *gedolei olam*, giants of Torah, forebears of our spiritual heritage, deeply perceived the spiritual perfection evinced by the *Bais HaMikdash*, enabling them to understand the utter devastation of its loss.

ויזבח זבחים לאלקי אביו יצחק

And he slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Yitzchak. (46:1)

Why Yitzchak and not Avraham? Surely, Yaakov *Avinu* remembered his *zayde*, grandfather, the Patriarch of the family. *Rashi* comments that Yaakov underscored the idea that a son owes more to his father than to his grandfather. The other commentators focus on the *middah*, attribute, of Yitzchak, which Yaakov felt would benefit his descendants most as they were about to commence the bitter Egyptian exile – which would lead to the next exiles, until the Final Redemption at the End of Days. *Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl,* explains Yaakov's actions as a lesson to his descendants about how to live a Torah life despite the vicissitudes of the bitter exile.

Chazal question Yaakov's actions. They, too, want to know why the focus was on Yitzchak, when, in fact, the father of our nation was Yaakov's grandfather. Among the explanations that the *Midrash* gives is the notion that: *Ro'im afro shel Yitzchak k'ilu tzavur al gabi ha'Mizbayach*, "We view the ashes of Yitzchak *Avinu* as if they are piled upon the *Mizbayach*, Altar." The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that when we look at the story of *Akeidas Yitzchak*, we do not view the incident through conventional three-dimensional perspective. This would present to us an image of Avraham replacing Yitzchak with the ram, and then slaughtering the ram instead of Yitzchak. *Chazal* teach that we should view this incident through the lens of *nitzchiyus*, eternity, during which Yitzchak was slaughtered, sacrificed, and now his ashes lay piled on the *Mizbayach* to serve as a *z'chus*, merit, for *Klal Yisrael*. While this is inspiring and uplifting, it does not explain the connection between *afro shel Yitzchak* and Yaakov's choice to offer his sacrifices solely to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak.

Rav Freifeld explains this after first distinguishing between the manner in which the nations/peoples of the world react to being exiled and the manner in which *Klal Yisrael* responds to its pressures and challenges – both physical and spiritual. Probably without exception, every nation which has been forced into exile has ceased to exist, as a result of it becoming swallowed up by the surrounding culture. The host nation has absorbed its language, customs and traditions. After a century (more or less), the original nation is no longer extant, almost as if it had never existed. The one exception to this phenomena is *Klal Yisrael*, who has experienced *galus*, exile after exile, and has managed to retain its identity.

Yaakov *Avinu* was acutely aware that he was descending into the bitter Egyptian *galus* – the forerunner of other exiles to follow during our tumultuous history. *Titein emes l'Yaakov*; "Give truth to Yaakov": Our Patriarch's attribute of absolute truth was in danger. How would it survive *galus*? It was in response to this question that Yaakov focused on *afro shel Yitzchak*. He was, by his actions, imparting a powerful lesson to his descendants: *Galus* cannot be confronted by means of a three dimensional perspective on reality. Survival in *galus* is possible only when we look through *nitzchiyus* vision – a vision that penetrates past the three-dimensional world with its ambiguities and illusions. Yaakov knew that only by strengthening his relationship with *emes*, absolute truth, which is *nitzchiyus*, would he survive *galus*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that Torah in America was established by those who adhered to *emes*. They ignored the conditions, they did not listen to the naysayers; they did not worry about their own co-religionists' fear of shaking up the status-quo. They looked with *emes* when everyone else looked through the conventional, three-dimensional prism. People made jest of *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl,* and his plan to establish a *kollel*, learning center for married men. They were wrong, because *Rav* Aharon focused on *emes*, and a world without Torah is *sheker*, false. When one works with *emes*, he has no deterrents, no conditions, and no compromises. It is either absolute truth or it is totally false.

ואת יהודה שלח לפניו אל יוסף להורות לפניו גשנה

He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen. (46:28)

Yaakov *Avinu* sent Yehudah, the leader of the brothers, to make the necessary arrangements for their imminent arrival in Egypt. Yehudah's mission (according to *Rashi*, who cites the *Midrash*) was to establish a *makom Torah*, a *yeshivah* from which Torah and its teachings would emanate and radiate to the family. Traditionally, the *makom Torah* has always been the priority in settling a community. Without Torah as its centerpiece, the community as a spiritually-committed community would be hard-pressed to survive. Upon perusing the *pasuk*, two questions stand out. First, why Yehudah over Yosef? Yosef *HaTzaddik*, despite being the Egyptian viceroy, was a *tzaddik*, righteous man, who was deeply committed to Hashem. He was already in Egypt and had established connections. Why not allow Yosef to build the *yeshivah*? Yehudah might have been the Torah giant, but Yosef certainly was no one to ignore. Second, the Torah uses the word *lefanav*, ahead of him, twice, when, in fact, neither was necessary.

In response to the first question, I think we can say that Yaakov felt that by having Yosef serve as the *Rosh Yeshivah*, he was sending a pejorative message to future Torah establishments. Only someone like Yosef, who maintained a position of secular leadership, who was welcome in halls of power, who enjoyed the acclaim of the wider community for his adroit skills, should be the *Rosh Yeshivah*. While this might apply to Yosef the *tzaddik*, to incorporate his other talents and secular position in his curriculum vitae would mean undermining every *Rosh Yeshivah* and *gadol* whose lack of secular embellishment would not find favor in the minds of those Jews whose priorities are not properly aligned with Torah values. In order to

circumvent the wrong impression, Yaakov sent Yehudah, the *melech*, king of the brothers. His monarchy was based solely on character and Torah refinement – not on secular accoutrements. This does not, however, explain why the word *lefanav* is used twice.

Horav Moshe Bick, zl, offers an insightful explanation as to why Yehudah – not Yosef – was chosen to be the *Rosh Yeshivah* and why *lefanav* is mentioned twice for what appears to be no textual reason. *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 3:17) state: "If there is no wisdom (Torah), there can be no fear (of Heaven); if there is no fear (of Heaven), there can be no (Torah) wisdom." Torah and *yiraas Shomayim* go hand-in-hand with each one incomplete without the other. David *Hamelech* says (*Sefer Tehillim* (111:10): *Reishis chochmah yiraas Hashem*, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d." *Rav* Bick explains that this does not mean sequentially – with fear preceding wisdom; rather, we are being told that the fear of Hashem that one receives as a result of his wisdom/Torah learning is the most prized and chosen of *yiraas Shomayim*. Fear without Torah is definitely significant, but lacking. Torah that engenders fear of Hashem is the apex of Torah study.

To create a successful Torah institution, it is critical that both qualities – Torah and *yiraah* – work in tandem. While both Yehudah and Yosef possessed exemplary fear of Hashem and were erudite in Torah, it was Yehudah who was the greater *gaon*, Torah giant, while Yosef excelled in *yiraas Shomayim*. With his choice of prioritizing Yehudah over Yosef (as *Rosh Yeshivah*), Yaakov sought to impart a vital lesson: Torah is a priority over *yiraas Shomayim*, because fear of Hashem in a person who is lacking in Torah (or not willing to receive guidance and direction from someone who is erudite) is flawed. This is why the Torah underscores the word *lefanav*, ahead of him; Yehudah, who is the symbol of Torah, was ahead, dominated. The word *lefanav* is mentioned twice to teach that when one studies Torah (Yehudah), he must stay focused on it being the precursor to greater *yiraah* (Yosef). When the question arises concerning which one is to be prioritized, the Torah (Yehudah) is *lefanav*, ahead of *yiraah* (Yosef). I must add that the success of that first *yeshivah* in Goshen was due to the fact that Yehudah and Yosef worked together, with each one acknowledging the other's strength.

Va'ani Tefillah

פתח לבי בתורתך ובמצותיך תרדוף נפשי – *P'sach leebee b'Sorasecha u'b'Mitzvosecha tirdof nafshi*

May my heart be wide open to Your Torah; may my soul pursue Your *mitzvos*.

We ask Hashem to open our hearts in His Torah. Simply, this follows our earlier requests that Hashem guard our mouth and distance us from acting deceitfully, because, when one possesses a flawed character, his learning is not learning. It is similar to running sewage through a clean vessel. Sewage is sewage; the vessel does not purify it. On the contrary, it will tarnish the vessel. Furthermore, as the *Sefer Chareidim* observes, the sin of *bitul* Torah, nullifying/wasting time from Torah study, is *k'neged kulam*, overrides all other *aveiros*, sins. Without Torah, nothing is the same. Every positive activity – *mitzvah*, act of lovingkindness – derives its integrity from the Torah. When one performs a *mitzvah*, he requires the Torah's guidance concerning how, when and to whom he should perform the *mitzvah*. Otherwise, he might actually be acting inappropriately. We, therefore, ask Hashem for His guidance and support in performing His *mitzvos*. We do this after our request for an open heart to study Torah, because, without Torah, there is no *mitzvah*. To perform *mitzvos* on an optimum level, one must be proficient in – or, at least, attempt to study – Torah, if he wants to succeed in properly carrying out Hashem's will.

The *Sefer Chareidim* concludes that just as one prays for himself, likewise, he should pray that his progeny all be *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing Jews. This coincides with the *Midrash* which relates that Eliyahu *HaNavi* foresaw concerning a certain *Kohen*, who prayed, prostrated himself and wept profusely to Hashem, that his children be righteous and G-d-fearing Jews. Hashem blessed him that every one of his sons became a *Kohen Gadol* and not one preceded him in death.

Sponsored in memory of our dear father and grandfather
Harry Weiss צבי בן יואל ז"ל
By: Morry & Judy Weiss, Erwin & Myra Weiss and Grandchildren, Gary & Hildee Weiss, Jeff & Karen Weiss, Zev & Rachel Weiss, Elie & Sara Weiss, & Brian "Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy"

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Vayigash
Listening To Kerias Ha-Torah Part 1
Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

There are two basic opinions among the early poskim concerning the nature of the obligation of Kerias ha-Torah on Shabbos morning. One opinion[1] holds that every adult male is obligated to listen to the weekly portion read every Shabbos morning from a kosher Sefer Torah. He must pay attention to every word being read, or he will not fulfill his obligation. The second opinion[2] maintains that the obligation of Kerias ha-Torah devolves upon the congregation as a whole. In other words, if ten or more men are together on Shabbos morning, they must read from the weekly portion. While each member of the congregation is included in this congregational obligation, it is not a specific obligation upon each individual, provided that there are ten men who are paying attention.

There are some basic questions concerning Kerias ha-Torah whose answers will differ depending on which of these two opinions one follows:

Is one actually required to follow each word recited by the Reader, the koreh, without missing even one letter [and, according to some opinions, even read along with him to make sure nothing is missed[3]], or is one permitted – even l'chatchilah – to be lax about this requirement?

Is it permitted to learn or to recite Shnayim mikra v'echad targum during Kerias ha-Torah?

If an individual missed a word or two of the Torah reading, must he hear the Torah reading again?

If ten or more men missed one word or more from the reading, should they take out the Sefer Torah after davening and read the portion they missed?

If one came late to shul but arrived in time for Kerias ha-Torah, should he listen to the Torah reading first and then daven?

If a situation arises where tefillah b'tzibur and Kerias ha-Torah conflict, which takes precedence?

If a situation arises where, by listening to Kerias ha-Torah, one would not be able to daven altogether, which takes precedence?

Should one interrupt his private Shemoneh Esrei to listen to Kerias ha-Torah?

The answer to these and other such questions depends, for the most part, on which of the two views one is following. Clearly, according to the first opinion, one must give undivided attention to each and every word being read. Davening, learning or reciting Shnayim mikra v'echad targum during Kerias ha-Torah would be prohibited, and even b'diavad one would have to make up any missed words. But according to the second opinion, the answers to all these questions would be more lenient, for as long as the congregation fulfilled its obligation to read the Torah correctly, and as long as ten men paid attention to the reading, the individual's obligation is no longer a matter of concern.

Shulchan Aruch does not give a clear, definitive ruling concerning this dispute. Indeed, while discussing the laws regarding the permissibility of learning during Kerias ha-Torah, he quotes both opinions without rendering a decision. Instead, he concludes that "it is proper for a meticulous person to focus on and pay attention to the words of the reader." This indicates that Shulchan Aruch and many other prominent poskim[4] hold that while it is commendable to be stringent, it is not absolutely essential. Mishnah Berurah[5], though, quotes several poskim who maintain that the halachah requires that each individual listen to every word of Kerias ha-Torah[6]. Rav M. Feinstein rules that even b'diavad one does not fulfill his obligation if he misses a word, and he must find a way to make up what he missed[7]. There are, however, a host of poskim who maintain that Kerias ha-Torah is a congregational and not an individual obligation[8].

Several contemporary poskim suggest what appears to be a compromise. Clearly, l'chatchilah we follow the view of the poskim that each individual is obligated to listen to Kerias ha-Torah, and it is standard practice for each individual to pay undivided attention to each word that is recited. Indeed, in the situation described above where Kerias ha-Torah conflicts with tefillah b'tzibur, some poskim rule that the obligation to hear Kerias ha-Torah takes precedence, in deference to the authorities who consider it an individual obligation[9].

But, b'diavad, if it were to happen that a word or two was missed, one is not obligated to go to another shul to listen to the part of the reading that was missed. Rather, we rely on the second opinion which maintains that so long as the congregation has fulfilled its obligation, the individual is covered[10]. Accordingly, if listening to Kerias ha-Torah will result in missing davening altogether, davening takes priority, since we rely on the poskim who maintain that Kerias ha-Torah is a congregational obligation[11]. Similarly, one should not interrupt his private Shemoneh Esrei to listen to Kerias ha-Torah[12].

But regardless of the above dispute and compromise, the poskim are in agreement about the following rules:

There must be at least ten men listening to the entire Kerias ha-Torah. If there are fewer than ten, then the entire congregation has not fulfilled its obligation according to all views[13].

Conversing during Kerias ha-Torah is strictly prohibited even when there are ten men paying attention. According to most poskim, it is prohibited to converse even between aliyos (bein gavra l'gavra[14]). One who converses during Kerias ha-Torah is called "a sinner whose sin is too great to be forgien[15]."

Even those who permit learning during Kerias ha-Torah stipulate that it may only be done quietly, so that it does not interfere with the Torah reading[16].

"Talking in learning" bein gavra l'gavra is permitted by some poskim and prohibited by others. An individual, however, may learn by himself or answer a halachic question bein gavra l'gavra[17].

1. Shibbolei ha-Leket 39, quoted in Beis Yosef, O.C. 146. This also seems to be the view of the Magen Avraham 146:5, quoting Shelah and Mateh Moshe. See also Ma'asei Rav 131. See, however, Peulas Sachir on Ma'asei Rav 175.

2. Among the Rishonim see Ramban and Ran, Megillah 5a. Among the poskim see Ginas Veradim 2:21; Imrei Yosher 2:171; Binyan Shlomo 35; Levushei Mordechai 2:99 and others. See also Yabia Omer 4:31-3 and 7:9.

3. Mishnah Berurah 146:15.

4. Sha'arei Efrayim 4:12 and Siddur Derech ha-Chayim (4-5) clearly rule in accordance with this view. This may also be the ruling of Chayei Adam 31:2 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 23:8.

5. 146:15. Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:6 and Kaf ha-Chayim 146:10,14 concur with this view.

6. There are conflicting indications as to what, exactly, is the view of the Mishnah Berurah on this issue; see Beiur Halachah 135:14, s.v. ein, and 146:2, s.v. v'yeish.

7. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:23; 4:40-4-5. If ten or more men missed a section of the Torah reading, then they should take out the sefer after davening and read that section over; ibid.

8. See also Eimek Berachah (Kerias ha-Torah 3).

9. Rav S.Z. Auerbach and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140). See dissenting opinion in Minchas Yitzchak 7:6.

10. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Siach Halachah 6:8 and Halichos Shlomo 1:12-1; see also Minchas Shlomo 2:4-15); Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140).

11. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling, quoted in Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 140).

12. Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo 1:12-4). [A Diaspora Jew who may have missed an entire parashah when traveling to Eretz Yisrael after a Yom Tov, does not need to make up what he missed (ibid. 6). See Ishei Yisrael 38:29 for a dissenting opinion.

13. Aruch ha-Shulchan 146:5.

14. Bach, as understood by Mishnah Berurah 146:6 and many poskim. There are poskim, however, who maintain that the Bach permits even idle talk bein gavra l'gavra; see Machatzis ha-Shekel, Aruch ha-Shulchan, and Shulchan ha-Tahor. See also Peri Chadash, who allows conversing bein gavra l'gavra. Obviously, they refer to the type of talk which is permitted in shul and/or on Shabbos.

15. Beiur Halachah 146:2, s.v. v'hanachon, who uses strong language in condemning these people.

16. Mishnah Berurah 146:11.

17. Mishnah Berurah 146:6.

Rav Doniel Neustadt is the rov of the Pine River Village shul in Lakewood. Rav Neustadt has served as the yoshev rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and as the mara d'asra of Bnai Israel-Beth Yehudah in Oak Park, Michigan and Young Israel of Cleveland Heights. He was also the principal of Yavne Teachers College in Cleveland, OH. He is also the editor of the works of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l, such as Emes L'Yaakov.

A Haftarah from Yechezkel

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

We will soon see why I chose this topic for this week's article.

Question #1: Which Haftarah?

Who chose which haftaros we read?

Question #2: Why is Yechezkel different?

In what ways is the book of Yechezkel unusual?

Question #3: Rarely Yechezkel?

Why is the haftarah on Shabbos seldom from Yechezkel?

Introduction

On certain Shabbosos and most Yomim Tovim, Chazal established specific haftaros to be read (Megillah 29b-31b). On other Shabbosos, no specific haftarah was instituted, but an appropriate section of the prophets is read. When no specific section of Navi was indicated by Chazal, each community would choose a selection of Navi suggestive of the parsha. Indeed, if one looks at old Chumashim, books of community minhagim and seforim that discuss these topics, one finds many variant practices.

Today, which haftaros are read on specific Shabbosos has become standardized, and our Chumashim mention only the selections that are commonly used. There are still many weeks when Sephardic and Ashkenazic practices differ, especially regarding minor variances, such as exactly where to begin or end the haftarah, whether to skip certain verses, and whether and where to skip to a more pleasant ending.

Almost unique Vayigash

Parshas Vayigash is almost unique, in that it is one of only two regular Shabbosos during the entire year in which the haftarah is always from the prophet Yechezkel. In Ashkenazic practice, we have relatively few haftaros on regular Shabbosos that are from Yechezkel. In addition to parshas Vayigash, the customary haftaros of Ashkenazim for Va'eira (28:55), Tetzaveh (43:27), Kedoshim (22:1) and Emor (44:15) are also from Yechezkel, but, of these, only on Emor do we always read from Yechezkel. Shabbos Va'eira occasionally falls on Rosh Chodesh, in which case we read a special haftarah, Hashamayim Kis'i from the book of Yeshayahu; Tetzaveh sometimes falls on Shabbos Shekalim, in which case the haftarah is from the book of Melachim (Megillah 29b; 30a). And, in practice, Ashkenazim rarely read the haftarah printed in the chumashim for Kedoshim. When Acharei and Kedoshim are combined, as they are in all common years, the haftarah is from Amos, which is printed in the chumashim as the haftarah for Acharei. (We should note that the Levush, Orach Chayim 493:4, disagrees with this practice. However, the other authorities, both before him and after, accept that we read on that Shabbos from Amos.)

Even in leap years, when the parshi'os of Acharei and Kedoshim are read on separate weeks, if Shabbos Acharei falls on erev Rosh Chodesh, most Ashkenazim read Mochor Chodesh on parshas Acharei and the haftarah from Amos on Kedoshim. And, even when Acharei and Kedoshim are read on separate weeks and Acharei is not erev Rosh Chodesh, there are years in which Kedoshim falls on Rosh Chodesh, and we read Hashamayim Kis'i.

Thus, the only time we read a haftarah for Kedoshim from Yechezkel is in a leap year in which neither parshas Acharei nor parshas Kedoshim falls on either erev Rosh Chodesh or on Rosh Chodesh. The next time this will happen under our current calendar is in 5784, although we hope that Moshiach will come soon and that our calendar will once again be established by the Sanhedrin, in which case the pattern may be different.

Special haftaros

Although Yechezkel is the source for the haftarah on relatively few regular Shabbosos, there are five special haftaros during the year from the book of Yechezkel. The haftaros for parshas Parah (36:16) and parshas Hachodesh (48:18) are both from Yechezkel, as are the haftaros for Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach (37:1), for Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos (38:18) and for Shavuos (1:1).

Reading these haftaros on these special Shabbosos is already recorded by the Gemara (Megillah 30a; 31a). The haftarah read on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Pesach, referred to as the haftarah of the atzamos hayeveishos (literally, the dry bones), is about the bones of the Bnei Efrayim, who were annihilated when they attempted to escape from Egypt, many years before the time of yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

The haftarah read on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos discusses the wars of Gog and Magog. According to Rashi (Megillah 31a), this haftarah is read then because it continues the theme of the haftarah of the first day of Sukkos, which is the passage discussing the wars of Gog and Magog in the book of Zecharyah.

The Tur (Orach Chayim 490), quoting Rav Hai Gaon, cites the following reason for reciting these two special haftaros on Chol Hamoed: "I heard from wise men that techiyas hameisim will occur in Nissan and the victory of Gog and Magog will transpire in Tishrei, and, for this reason, we recite the haftarah of the dry bones (that, in the haftarah, come back to life) in Nissan and the haftarah beginning with the words Beyom ba Gog in Tishrei."

So, indeed, we do read haftaros from Yechezkel about eight times a year, but relatively rarely on a "regular" Shabbos.

Background

Before addressing the rest of our opening questions, let us spend some time appreciating the book of Yechezkel and its author. Of the three major prophets of Nevi'im Acharonim, Yechezkel is the latest, although his lifetime and era of prophecy overlap that of Yirmiyahu. Yechezkel began prophesying shortly before the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash. Yeshayahu had been assassinated a century before; the elderly Yirmiyahu was in Eretz Yisroel, admonishing the people; and the much younger Yechezkel had been exiled to Bavel as a member of the young leadership of the Jewish people, including such great future leaders as Mordechai, Ezra and Daniel, during the expulsion of King Yehoyachin (Yechonyah).

Yechezkel, the Torah scholar

We are aware that, among the many attributes necessary for someone to attain prophecy, Torah scholarship and meticulousness in halacha are included (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 7:1). And yet, even among this very elite group of halachically-concerned individuals, the Gemara demonstrates that Yechezkel stood out as one who was exceptionally careful, particularly in areas of kashrus and tzeniyus (Chullin 44b). He did not eat any food on which a shaylah had been raised, even when a posek subsequently ruled it to be kosher, a meticulousness that the Gemara views as worthy of emulation.

Yechezkel was a qualified member of the Sanhedrin and perhaps its head. The Gemara mentions that, not only was he authorized to create a leap year, a power reserved for the special beis din appointed by the nasi of the Sanhedrin, but he once did so, when he was in chutz la'aretz (Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 1:2). This is unusual, since ruling and declaring the new month must be performed in Eretz Yisroel, and can only be performed in chutz la'aretz when there is no equal in stature in Eretz Yisroel to those leaders in chutz la'aretz (Brachos 63a). This implies that Yechezkel was, at least at this point in his life, the greatest Torah scholar among the Jewish people.

We also know that Yechezkel had received from his teachers the ongoing tradition of specific halachos that had been related to Moshe at Har Sinai as a mesorah, called halacha leMoshe miSinai. Yechezkel took care to record these rulings, so that they would not be lost to the Jewish people (Taanis 17b).

Yechezkel, the man

"Rava said: 'Whatever Yechezkel saw, Yeshayahu had seen. To whom can Yechezkel be compared? To a villager who saw the king. And to whom can Yeshayahu be compared? To a city dweller who saw the king'" (Chagigah 13b).

The question the Gemara is bothered by is that both Yeshayahu and Yechezkel describe their visions of the Heavenly array of angels, yet Yechezkel's descriptions are much more vivid and detailed than those of Yeshayahu.

Rashi explains that Yechezkel shares with us all the details he saw in the angels, because he was unfamiliar with seeing "royalty." Yeshayahu, on the other hand, was of the royal family and was not as astounded by what he saw. For this reason, he did not record as much specific detail when he saw Hashem's royal retinue.

Yechezkel, the persecuted

Being a prophet was often not a pleasant occupation, perhaps as bad as being a congregational rabbi. Yechezkel underwent intense suffering as part of his role. In addition, the midrash reports that people said very nasty and untrue things about his yichus (Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 771).

Yechezkel, the book

Who wrote the Book of Yechezkel? The Gemara (Bava Basra 15a) reports that it was written by the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, who also wrote Trei Asar, Daniel and Esther. Why did Yechezkel, himself, not write it? Rashi explains that since he was in chutz la'aretz, he was not permitted to write down the prophecies. Therefore, writing it down required awaiting the return of the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah to Eretz Yisroel. Rashi notes that this also explains why Daniel and Esther, both of whom lived in chutz la'aretz, did not write their own books.

Nevi'im Acharonim

Although we are all familiar with the division of the works of the nevi'im into Nevi'im Rishonim (Yehoshua, Shoftim, Shmuel, Melachim) and Nevi'im Acharonim (Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, Trei Asar), this distinction does not show up anywhere in the Gemara or in the early commentaries. The earliest source that I know who mentions this distinction is the Abarbanel, but all he writes is that Nevi'im Rishonim are predominantly historical in style, whereas Nevi'im Acharonim are closer to what we usually think of when we talk about prophecy. This does not tell us anything about why these two terms, Nevi'im Rishonim and Nevi'im Acharonim, are used to describe the two subdivisions, since many of the events of the Nevi'im Acharonim predate those of the Nevi'im Rishonim.

Rav Tzadok Hakohein points out that the Nevi'im Rishonim are written in third person, similar to the way the Torah is written, whereas Nevi'im Acharonim are written in first person. For example, the opening words of Yechezkel read: And it was in the thirtieth year in the fourth (month) on the fifth of the month, and I was in the midst of the exile on the River Kefar. As Rashi notes, this is an interesting literary device whereby the prophet does not identify who is speaking, and requires that his words be interrupted two pesukim later to tell us who this prophet is. Presumably, the interceding pasuk that identifies Yechezkel was supplied by the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, when they edited his prophecies into a written work, as the Gemara explains (Bava Basra 15a).

Again, this approach of Rav Tzadok Hakohein does not teach us why the terms Nevi'im Rishonim and Nevi'im Acharonim are used to describe them.

I found an answer to this question in a relatively recent work, Ohel Rivkah by Rabbi Isaac Sender (page 140), who quotes a novel insight from Nevi'ei Emes by Rabbi Avraham Wolf (page 173), a work with which I am unfamiliar. The earlier prophets, such as Eliyahu, warn of difficulties that will befall the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael, but never warn them that their misdeeds may lead to their being exiled. The first prophet to do this is Hoshea, who, according to the Gemara (Bava Basra 14b), was an older contemporary of Yeshayahu. Thus, Hoshea, who is the first of the twelve prophets of Trei Asar, was chronologically the earliest of the prophets to admonish the Jewish people that their misdeeds may lead to their being exiled from the Holy Land, and is the earliest prophet whose works are included in Nevi'im Acharonim. This may provide an explanation as to why the works dating before Hoshea are called Nevi'im Rishonim, and he begins an era called Nevi'im Acharonim.

Yechezkel in chutz la'aretz

At this point, we can address one of our opening questions:

In what ways is the book of Yechezkel unusual?

Well, for one important aspect, the entire book transpired in chutz la'aretz. Although this is true, also, of the books of Esther and Daniel, and possibly Iyov, they are in Kesuvim, rather than being books of prophecy. To quote the midrash (Yalkut Shemoni 336:1), "Until Eretz Yisroel was chosen, all lands were appropriate for prophecy. Once Eretz Yisroel was chosen, the other lands were excluded."

So, how can the book of Yechezkel open with a statement that he received prophecy while in chutz la'aretz? The answer is that, prior to being exiled to Bavel, Yechezkel had received a prophecy in Eretz Yisroel (Moed Katan 25a, according to the second approach cited by Rashi). This enabled Yechezkel to become a prophet and continue prophesying after he was exiled.

An interesting aspect about Yechezkel is that it is the only book of the prophets of which we are told not to read parts of it as haftarah. This requires clarification.

The Mishnah (Megillah 25a) states: "We do not read, as haftarah, from the passage of Yechezkel called the merkavah, in which he describes the appearance of the Heavenly 'Chariots' (Yechezkel 1). However, Rabbi Yehudah permits doing so. Rabbi Eliezer rules that we do not read as haftarah the passage of Yechezkel that begins with the words, Hoda es Yerushalayim" (Yechezkel 16:1).

Let us explain these two disputes among the tanna'im. First the Mishnah records a dispute between the tanna kamma and Rabbi Yehudah. The Rambam explains that the tanna kamma objects to reading the merkavah as a haftarah because people will attempt to understand it in depth, and its subject matter is beyond the ken of mortal man. Rabbi Yehudah is not concerned about this.

How do we rule?

The rishonim note that the Gemara rules that this haftarah should be read on Shavuos. Obviously, the Gemara accepted Rabbi Yehudah's approach, although we usually follow the tanna kamma (Tosafos; Rambam), and this is the accepted halacha.

Hoda es Yerushalayim

The Mishnah also cited a dispute in which the tanna, Rabbi Eliezer, ruled that the passage in Yechezkel 16 should not be read as a haftarah. Rabbi Eliezer's reason is either because the passage speaks extremely negatively about the populace of Yerushalayim (Rashi) or because, in the course of its rebuke of Klal Yisroel, it also makes pejorative comments about our forebears (Levush, Orach Chayim 493:4). The halachic authorities all conclude that we rule according to the tanna kamma against Rabbi Eliezer, and that one may recite the haftarah of Hoda es Yerushalayim.

In practice, however, Ashkenazim do not read this haftarah, and the Levush (note to Orach Chayim 493:4) contends that this decision is deliberate. However, there are edot hamizrah communities that do read this passage as the haftarah for Shemos, a practice mentioned by both the Rambam and the Avudraham. Reading these words of Yechezkel, one can readily see why this was chosen for that week's haftarah, since it describes the bleak origins of the Jewish people. Some of its verses have found their way into the Hagadah that we recite at the Seder on Pesach night, for the same reason.

In conclusion:

Two passages of the Book of Yechezkel are "controversial;" in both of those instances we rule that one may use them for the haftarah.

Although Yechezkel is not a frequent choice for haftarahs on regular Shabbosos, there are several readings from it that we use during the year, each one with a powerful message.

Parchas Vayigash haftarah

This week's haftarah begins exactly where the haftarah of chol hamoed Pesach ends, and discusses how Yechezkel sees two pieces of wood, one marked "for Judah and his associates," and the other marked "for Yosef, the tree of Efrayim, and his associates." Yechezkel describes how Hashem told him to bring the two sticks together and that they would become one in his hands. As Dr. Mendel Hirsch notes, when Yechezkel had this prophecy, the ten tribes, symbolized by Yosef and Efrayim, had long been exiled, and the southern kingdom of Judea was about to fall. Yet, the disunion among the descendents of Yaakov had continued long after the dissolution of their two competing monarchies and long after their feud should have ended. Judea and Efrayim continue their separate ways into the exile, and require the involvement of Yechezkel to bring them together again. Yechezkel is called upon to rebuke the Jewish people for this misbehavior – there is no place for internal divisions within Hashem's people!

לע"נ

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PARSHAT VAYIGASH

When Yaakov and family depart for Egypt, they appear to be planning just a short visit, i.e. to see Yosef and to survive the famine. Yet, for some reason, they never return to Eretz Canaan (not at least for the next several hundred years)!

Was life in Egypt simply too good?

Could it be that the 'Promised Land' was not important to them? Could it be that Yaakov's family did not care about God's covenant with Avraham & Yitzchak? [See for example Breishit 26:1-4!]

While answering these questions, this week's shiur will also lay the groundwork for our study of the thematic transition from Sefer Breishit to Sefer Shmot.

INTRODUCTION

In Parshat Va'yigash, God appears to Yaakov Avinu - one last time - prior to his departure to see Yosef. In our study of Sefer Breishit thus far, we have shown how each "hitgalut" [revelation] to the Avot has been thematically significant. Therefore, we should expect for this final "hitgalut" to be no less significant.

We begin our shiur with a study of the events that lead of to this "hitgalut", in an attempt to uncover its message and importance.

EVERYONE HAS A PLAN

As soon as Yaakov hears that Yosef is still alive, he immediately decides to go visit him:
"And Yisrael said... my son Yosef is still alive; I must go and see him before I die" (see 45:28).

Does Yaakov plan to return immediately to Eretz Canaan after this visit? Was there any reason why he shouldn't?

Even though it is not quite clear what Yaakov's original intentions may have been, Yosef had already informed his brothers concerning the framework of his original 'invitation':
"... Quickly go up to my father and tell him, thus says your son Yosef: God has made me master over all of Egypt. Come down to me, do not stay [in Canaan], for you should dwell in the land of Goshen to be near me; you and your children...
And I will provide for you there, for ANOTHER FIVE YEARS OF FAMINE still remain, lest you PERISH, you and your entire household..." (45:9-11).

Clearly, Yosef intends for his family to stay for more than just a 'long weekend'. However, he makes no mention that he intends that they make Egypt their permanent home. It seems more likely that his invitation is for five years, as he states specifically "because FIVE years of famine still remain, lest the family perish"!

What will be once the famine is over and economic conditions in Canaan improve? Most likely, Yaakov and his family plan to (& should) return to their homeland.

Even though Yaakov, Yosef, and the brothers may not have been quite sure how long this visit would last, God had a very different plan - a plan that He reveals to Yaakov in a ":hitgalut" before his departure from Eretz Canaan.

To better appreciate God's plan, let's take a careful look at the opening psukim of chapter 46:
"And Yisrael traveled with all that was his, and came to BEER SHEVA, and he offered 'ZEVACHIM' (sacrifices, peace offerings) to the God of his father YITZCHAK" (46:1).

When studying this pasuk, several questions arise:

- Why does Yaakov stop specifically at BEER SHEVA? In fact, we could ask, why does he stop at all?
- Why does he offer these sacrifices specifically to the "God of his father YITZCHAK"? [Is He not the God of Avraham, as well? / See 32:10 where Yaakov prayed to the God of both Avraham AND Yitzchak!]
- Why does he find it necessary at this time to offer korbanot?
- Why does he offer specifically ZEVACHIM?
- Why is Yaakov's new name - Yisrael - used in this pasuk?

To answer these questions, we must first consider Yaakov's predicament at this point in time.

First of all, it should be clear that Yaakov is quite worried. To prove this, simply note the opening words of God's response to Yaakov's offering: "Don't worry..." (see 46:1-3)

Most probably, Yaakov is worried first and foremost because he is leaving Eretz Canaan. Recall that his father Yitzchak, even in times of famine, was not permitted to leave the land:
"And there was a famine in the Land... and God appeared to him (Yitzchak) and said to him: Do not go down to Egypt, stay in the Land that I show you..." (see 26:1-3).

In that very same 'hitgalut' to Yitzchak, God even explained the reason why he could not leave - because he was the 'chosen' son of Avraham Avinu:
"... reside in this Land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and your offspring I have given these Lands, and I will fulfill the OATH which I have sworn to Avraham..." (26:3-4).

Although Avraham himself was permitted to leave the Land during a famine, Yitzchak, his CHOSEN son, was required to stay in the Land. Understandably, then, Yaakov had reason for concern prior to his settlement in Egypt.

Even though Yaakov himself had once received permission to leave Eretz Canaan (in Parshat Vayetze, see 28:10-20), his situation then was quite different, as he faced immediate, life-threatening danger (see 27:41-43). And even then, Yaakov still required divine reassurance that ALTHOUGH he was leaving Eretz Canaan, God would continue to look after him and BRING HIM BACK:
"And behold I will be with you and take care of you on your journey, and I WILL BRING YOU BACK TO THIS LAND..." (28:15). [Note that on that first journey from Eretz Canaan, Yaakov also left specifically from BEER SHEVA (see 28:10)!]

Now (in Parshat Vayigash), Yaakov's situation is quite different. Survival in Eretz Canaan, however difficult, is still possible, as food could be imported from Egypt. Furthermore, if it was so important for Yosef to see his father, why couldn't Yosef come to visit Yaakov in Eretz Canaan? Was it absolutely necessary for Yaakov to resettle his entire family in Egypt at this time? On the other hand, he and his entire family had received an open invitation from his 'long lost son'. How could he say no?

Unquestionably, Yaakov has what to worry about.

APPLYING FOR AN EXIT VISA

This analysis provides us with a simple explanation for why Yaakov first stops in Beer Sheva before departing to Egypt. As he fears his departure may be against God's will (or possibly even threaten his 'bechira'), Yaakov stops to pray to God, 'asking permission' to leave Eretz Canaan.

Now we must explain why Yaakov stops specifically at Beer Sheva. The commentators offer several explanations:

* Rashbam (46:1) explains that Beer Sheva was the site of Yitzchak's place of prayer. [See 26:25, where Yitzchak builds a mizbeiach in Beer Sheva. Note also that God offers him reassurance at that site - see 26:24!]
* Ramban (46:1) adds to Rashbam's explanation that Yaakov chooses Beer Sheva to parallel his first excursion outside Eretz Canaan (from Beer Sheva to Charan /see 28:10).
* Radak considers Beer Sheva the 'official' southern border of Eretz Canaan, thus the appropriate place for Yaakov to 'apply for an exit visa'.

[See also Seforno 46:1 (like Radak) and Chizkuni.]

Although each commentator quotes different sources to explain why specifically Beer Sheva is chosen, they all concur that Yaakov's primary worry is indeed his departure from Eretz Canaan.

This background also explains why Yaakov prays at this time specifically 'to the God of YITZCHAK'. Considering that Yitzchak had not received permission (when he faced a very similar situation), Yaakov now prays to 'the God of Yitzchak [i.e. who did not allow Yitzchak to leave]. [See Radak & Seforno.]
[Note that Ramban offers a different approach (based on what he calls 'sod'), that Yaakov recognizes that his departure to Egypt marks the beginning of the long historical process of 'brit bein ha-btarim' and hence their future enslavement by the Egyptians. Realizing that this process may entail terrible suffering (including God's 'midat ha-din'), Yaakov prays specifically to 'pachad Yitzchak', the manifestation of God's providence through 'midat ha-din', in hope that his children will suffer as little as possible.]

THE FIRST 'ZEVACH'

Similarly, this backdrop can also help us understand why Yaakov may have offered specifically 'zevachim'.

Significantly, this is the FIRST instance in Chumash where we find the offering of a 'zevach' to God. As Ramban (on 46:1) points out, until this time the children of Noach (and Avraham as well) offered only 'olot'.
[The technical difference between an 'olah' and 'zevach' is quite simple. In Sefer Vayikra we learn that an 'olah' is totally consumed on the mizbeiach (chapter 1). In contrast, the meat of a 'zevach' - alternately referred to as 'shlamim' (see Vayikra 3:1, 7:11) - can be eaten by the owner, while only a small portion is offered on the mizbeiach. Conceptually, its name -'shlamim' implies a certain 'shleimut' - fullness or completeness, that this voluntary offering can express a feeling of 'completeness' in one's relationship with God. Although it is unclear if at this time Yaakov actually ate these 'zevachim', it is significant that the Torah refers to them with the term 'zevach'.]

There are three other seminal events in Chumash where specifically 'zevachim' are offered:
1) The KORBAN PESACH (at Yetziat Mitzrayim)
2) Brit NA'ASEH VE-NISHMA (at Ma'amad Har Sinai)
3) YOM ha-SHMINI (the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan).

At first glance, these three examples appear to involve joyous and festive occasions, quite the opposite of Yaakov's current situation (worrying about leaving Eretz Canaan). However, if we look a bit more closely, all three examples share a 'common denominator', which can help us appreciate Yaakov's offering of 'zevachim' at this time. Note how each event marks the COMPLETION of an important process:

1) The KORBAN PESACH, called a "ZEVACH pesach l-Hashem" (see Shmot 12:27), marks the COMPLETION of the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim. [See Shmot 11:1->12:14. Note also that Chazal include Korban Pesach under the general category of 'shlamim'.]

2) At Ma'amad Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael offer special 'zevachim' as part of the ceremony where they accept the mitzvot:
"Moshe wrote down God's commandments, and then, early in the morning, he set up a mizbeiach... and they offered ZEVACHIM, SHLAMIM to God..." (Shmot 24:4-5).

Here we find the COMPLETION and fulfillment of the ultimate purpose of Yetziat Mitzrayim - Bnei Yisrael's readiness to accept God's commandments.

3) On YOM ha-SHMINI, upon the COMPLETION of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael offer a special korban 'shlamim':
"And behold on the 8th day, God commanded Moshe [to offer special korbanot] ... and an ox and a ram for a SHLAMIM - liZVOACH - to offer..." (see Vayikra 9:1-4)

As the name 'shlamim' implies ['shaleim' = complete], a ZEVACH SHLAMIM usually implies the completion of an important process. But if we return to Yaakov, what 'process' is being completed with his descent to Egypt? Why does Yaakov offer 'davka' [specifically] ZEVACHIM?!

One could suggest that Yaakov's offering of 'zevachim' relates to an entirely different perspective. However anxious (and fearful) Yaakov might have been prior to his journey to Egypt, he was also very THANKFUL that Yosef is alive (and that he even has the opportunity to visit him). In this regard, these 'zevachim' could be understood as a 'korban TODAH' - a THANKSGIVING offering. [Note that the 'korban TODAH' is a subcategory of 'shlamim' (see Vayikra 7:11-12).]

By offering 'zevachim' at this time, Yaakov may actually be thanking God for re-uniting his family.

Furthermore, considering that the purpose of Yaakov's descent to Egypt was not only to visit Yosef, but also to RE-UNITE his twelve sons, this journey could also be considered the COMPLETION of the 'bechira' process. Without Yosef, the 'bechira' process was incomplete, as a very important 'shevet' (tribe) was missing. Now, by offering 'zevachim', Yaakov thanks God for re-uniting the family and hence COMPLETING the 'bechira' process.

Finally, this interpretation can also explain why the Torah refers to Yaakov as YISRAEL in this pasuk.

As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Vayishlach, the name YISRAEL reflects God's choice of Yaakov as the FINAL stage of the 'bechira' process. In contrast to the previous generations where only one son was chosen, ALL of Yaakov's children have been chosen to become God's special nation. Now, as Yaakov descends to Egypt to re-unite his twelve sons, it is only appropriate that the Torah uses the name YISRAEL.

THE END, AND THE BEGINNING...

Even if we consider these 'zevachim' as a thanksgiving offering (for the completion of the 'bechira' process), we must still explain why Yaakov is fearful at this time. Let's take another look at God's response to Yaakov's korbanot:
"Then God spoke to YISRAEL... Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there a GREAT NATION. I Myself will go down with you and I Myself will also BRING YOU BACK..."(46:2-4)

God's response adds an entirely new dimension to his departure, a dimension that most likely catches Yaakov totally by surprise: Let's explain:

Yaakov, we explained earlier, may have been planning only a 'short visit' to reunite the family. Yosef was planning for the family to stay for several years to survive the famine. Now, God reveals a totally new plan. Yaakov and family are departing on a journey of several HUNDRED years. They will not return until they have first become a great NATION in the land of Egypt. God Himself brings them down, and there the family is now commanded to remain in Egypt until they emerge as a populous nation. Then, when the proper time comes, God Himself will bring them back.

Hence, when Yaakov goes down to Egypt, not only will the prophetic dreams of Yosef be fulfilled, but so too God's promise to Avraham Avinu at Brit Bein Ha-btarim (see Breishit 15:13-18). The long and difficult process of Yetziat Mitzrayim has begun.

In this manner, God informs Yaakov that although his descent to Egypt involves leaving Eretz Canaan, it does not constitute a breach of the Divine covenant with his family. Rather, it forms a critical stage

in His master plan of transforming Yaakov's family of 'seventy souls' into God's special Nation.
[The fuller meaning of this final 'hitgalut' of Sefer Breishit will be discussed in our introductory shiur to Sefer Shmot.]

FROM "TOLDOT" TO "SHMOT"

To support understanding, we conclude our shiur by noting the 'parshia' that immediately follows this final 'hitgalut' to Yaakov.

After its brief description of the family journey down to Egypt (see 46:5-7), the Torah then devotes a special 'parshia' to the enumeration of the seventy members of Yaakov's family:
"These are the names ["ve-eileh shmot"] of Bnei Yisrael who were coming to Egypt..." (see 46:8)

The header of this special 'parshia' - "ve-eileh SHMOT..." - may be reflective of this conclusion of the 'bechira' process, for it will be from these seventy 'nefesh' (souls) that the Jewish nation will emerge.

Recall that at each stage of the 'bechira' process thus far, Sefer Breishit has always introduced each list of children with the phrase: "ve-eileh toldot". Now, for some reason, the Torah prefers to introduce this list with "ve-eileh shmot". This new phrase may mark the fact that the 'bechira' process is now complete. As such, the Torah presents the chosen family with the word "SHMOT" instead of "TOLADOT"."

This observation can also explain why Sefer Shmot begins with this very same phrase "ve-eileh shmot". Note how the opening psukim of Sefer Shmot (see 1:1-4) actually summarize this 'parshia' (i.e. 46:8-27). Furthermore, the first primary topic of Sefer Shmot will be how God' fulfills His promise of Brit Bein Ha-btarim. We will be told of how these seventy 'nefesh' multiply, become a multitude, are enslaved and then how they are finally redeemed.

Even though there remain a few more 'loose ends' in Sefer Breishit (i.e. 46:28->50:26 /e.g. the relationship between the brothers, Yosef and Egypt, etc.), it is from this point in Sefer Breishit that Sefer Shmot will begin. From these seventy souls, God's special Nation will emerge.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. There are several instances in Sefer Breishit where korbanot are offered, most notably the 'olot' offered by Noach (8:20) and Avraham (at the Akeida /see 22:13). We also find many examples of the building of a mizbeiach and calling out in God's Name. Yet, we never find 'zvachim'. Note that in 31:54, 'zevach' refers to a joint feast between Yaakov and Lavan, not a sacrifice to God.

B. HINEINI...

The final 'hitgalut' to Yaakov in Sefer Breishit begins as follows:
"Then God spoke to Yisrael in a vision by night saying:
YAAKOV YAAKOV, and he answered "HINEINI" (here I am)... Fear not to go down to Egypt..." (see 46:2-3).
The unique style of God's opening statement to Yaakov creates a linguistic parallel pointing us both (A) backward - to the Akeida, and (B) forward - to the burning bush.

(A) "HINEINI" - BACK TO THE AKEIDA

God's response is reminiscent of His opening statement at the Akeida:
"... and God tested Avraham, and called out 'AVRAHAM,' and he answered, 'HINEINI.'" (see 22:1).
Besides symbolizing the ultimate devotion to God, the Akeida narrative also concludes with a Divine oath naming Yitzchak as heir to the earlier covenants and promises God had made with Avraham Avinu. This may explain why in God's reply to Yaakov's korbanot to the 'God of YITZCHAK,' He affirms the deeper purpose for Yaakov's descent to Egypt - the fulfillment of that earlier oath to Avraham Avinu.

(B) HINEINI - FORWARD TO THE BURNING BUSH

Just as we find a linguistic parallel to God's call to Avraham at the Akeida, we find a similar parallel to God's call to Moshe Rabeinu at the burning bush:
"... and God called him from the bush saying: 'MOSHE, MOSHE,' and he answered 'hineini.'" (Shmot 3:4).

However, the significance of God's 'hitgalut' to Moshe at the burning bush extends beyond this linguistic parallel. It is God's FIRST revelation to man since Yaakov's departure from Eretz Canaan! In other words, prophecy 'picks up right where it left off'!

Note the comparison between these two revelations, clearly suggesting a conceptual relationship between them:

YAAKOV (leaving Canaan)	MOSHE (at the burning bush)
(Breishit 46:2-4)	(Shmot 3:4-8)
God called to Yisrael in a vision:	God called out to Moshe:
YAAKOV, YAAKOV,	MOSHE, MOSHE,
va-yomer hineini	va-yomer hineini
And he said:	And he said:
I am the God of your father...	I am the God of your father...
Do not fear going down to Egypt for I will make you there a great Nation….	I have seen the suffering of My People in Egypt and I have heard their crying...
I will go DOWN with you to Egypt and I will surely GO UP with you..	I have come DOWN to rescue them from Egypt in order to BRING YOU UP from that Land to the Land flowing with...

[It is recommended that you compare these psukim in the original Hebrew.]

Just as the linguistic parallel is obvious, so is the thematic parallel. At God's 'hitgalut' to Moshe (at the burning bush), He instructs Moshe to inform Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill the covenant of Brit Bein Ha-Btarim, to bring them out of bondage, establish them as a sovereign Nation and bring them to the Promised Land.

C. The emotional confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef at the beginning of this week's Parsha is symbolic of future struggles between shevet Yehuda and shevet Yosef.
1. Note that in this week's parsha they fight over Binyamin. How do the 'nachalot' of the shvatim represent this struggle?
2. Relate this to the location of the Mikdash in the "nachala" of Binyamin, as well as to Yehoshua 18:11.
3. Relate this to the civil war waged against Binyamin, as described in chapter 20 of Sefer Shoftim.

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

Yosef's plan:

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his commentary, "Oznayim La-Torah", explains Yosef's selection of Goshen as his family's home in Egypt as further evidence of his intention that they would come to Egypt only temporarily. He cited earlier sources to the effect that Goshen sat on the border between Egypt and Eretz Canaan, such that his family would easily return home after the famine.

Additionally, Yosef may have ideally preferred to send food packages to his family in Canaan rather than having them relocate in Egypt. Rav Chayim Dov Rabinowitz, in his "Da'at Sofrim", suggests that for political reasons, Pharaoh adamantly insisted that Yosef's family join him in Egypt rather than shipping food. Quite reasonably, the king feared Yosef's allegiance to another country; to retain his position as viceroy, Yosef had to sever any ties with his former country and direct all his loyalty to his kingdom. Therefore, Pharaoh ordered Yosef to bring his family to Egypt, rather than sending them food. This explains the

king's somewhat suspicious enthusiasm and generosity upon hearing of the arrival of Yosef's brothers (45:16-20).

Yaakov's plan:

Rav Sorotzkin claims, as we did in the shiur, that Yaakov's stopover in Be'er Sheva reflects his ambivalence towards his move to Egypt. Only he takes this ambivalence one step further: in his heart-of-hearts, Yaakov hoped that God would forbid his descent to Egypt just as he had ordered Yitzchak not to continue to Egypt to escape the famine. Though this speculation appears to have little basis in the text, the fact that we find such a suggestion by a prominent commentator underscores Yaakov's fear of moving to Egypt.

[See also Abarbanel, who claims that Yaakov planned simply to see Yosef and return home immediately.]

An even more extreme view is posited by the Netziv (in his "Ha-amek Davar"). He suggests that Yaakov had no intention of going to Egypt at this point. This is how the Netziv understands Yaakov's comment, "It is great - my son Yosef is alive; I will go and see him before I die" (45:28). Yaakov here declares that he is satisfied with the knowledge that Yosef is still alive; he will therefore not go to Egypt immediately, but rather at some point before his death. The news regarding Yosef gives Yaakov a renewed revitalization ("and the spirit of their father Yaakov lived" - 45:27), which prompted him to move and settle in Be'er Sheva, the place where his father, Yitzchak, had managed to survive harsh famine conditions with prosperity. He thus offers sacrifices to "the God of Yitzchak", asking for assistance in braving the drought. That night, however, Hashem appears to Yaakov and informs him of the Divine plan, by which Yaakov must continue on to Egypt. The Da'at Sofrim suggests such a notion, as well, building on the pasuk, "Va-yakam Yaakov mi-Be'er Sheva" - Yaakov 'picked himself up' from Be'er Sheva. Like the Netziv, the Da'at Sofrim claims that Yaakov had originally planned to settle in Be'er Sheva, and only after Hashem told him to continue on to Egypt did he 'pick himself up' and go.

Startling as this theory may sound, a Midrash familiar to all of us seems to state this explicitly. We recite from the Haggadah, "He [Yaakov] descended to Egypt - [he was] forced [to do so], by the Divine word" ("Va-yered Mitzrayim - annus al pi ha-dibbur"). Apparently, Yaakov did not want to move to Egypt; he did so only to obey Hashem's commandment. [The conventional understanding, that Yaakov decided to move to Egypt on his own, would presumably read this Midrash to mean that Yaakov would not have decided to relocate in Egypt if Hashem hadn't placed him in a situation warranting this move. By bringing famine and arranging that Yosef could provide food for Yaakov and his family in Egypt, Hashem indirectly 'forced' Yaakov to move there.]

On the opposite end of the spectrum, we find several mefarshim who claim that Yaakov in fact knew that his move to Egypt marked the beginning of the exile. Most prominently, the Ramban claims that Yaakov here appeals to the 'midat ha-din' (Hashem's attribute of justice), knowing that the exile has now begun. The Chizkuni concurs, explaining this as the source of Yaakov's fear.

Yaakov's Fear

The Abarbanel lists several reasons as to why Yaakov experienced fear at this point, and his list encompasses most of the explanations offered by other commentators (including that which we mentioned in the shiur):

a) Ever since Avraham's brit mila and akeidat Yitzchak, Avraham's descendants were guaranteed special "hashgacha elyona" (supreme Divine protection) only in Eretz Canaan. Yaakov thus feared the loss of this 'hashgacha' as he descended to Egypt.

b) Yaakov also worried about maintaining his 'nevu'a' in Egypt. Hashem therefore guarantees him, "I will go down with you to Egypt… ".

c) The relationship between his family and the Egyptians also concerned Yaakov. He feared that the Egyptians would kill his descendants in an effort to keep their numbers low - which is precisely what happens in Parshat Shemot.

d) As Rashi, the Akeidat Yitzchak and others commentators, Yaakov very much wanted to be buried in his family plot in Chevron.

e) Surprisingly, the Abarbanel claims that Yaakov was also concerned about Yosef; if Yosef would die in his lifetime, Yaakov's immense joy would suddenly turn to anguish.

f) Finally, Yaakov worried about his descendants' eventual return to Eretz Canaan. He feared that they may assimilate permanently within Egyptian society and remain there forever. The possibility that Yaakov feared his descendants' assimilation appears in several other sources, including the Akeidat Yitzchak and the Netziv's Ha-amek Davar.

One source of fear not mentioned by the Abarbanel, but to which we alluded in the shiur, is raised by the Alshich: that the special brachot promised to the avot would perhaps be fulfilled only in Eretz Canaan. This is why Yaakov needed reassurance prior to his first departure from Canaan, and this is why he is afraid in Parshat Vayigash.

The Stopover in Be'er Sheva:

Bereishit Rabba 68 and Rabbenu Bachye state that when Yaakov Avinu left Eretz Yisrael the first time, when fleeing from his brother Esav, he went to Be'er Sheva to ask Hashem permission. It stands to reason that they would explain Yaakov's stopover in our parsha in the same vein, especially in light of the association drawn by the Ramban between these two journeys. Sure enough, the Midrash Hagadol writes this explicitly in our context, an approach taken as well by Rabbeinu Yosef Bechor Shor and the Abarbanel.

Returning to the Ramban's parallel between Yaakov's trip to Egypt here and his escape from Canaan to Charan in Parshat Vayetze, both the Meshech Chochma and the Netziv note an additional point of comparison. In both instances, Hashem appears to Yaakov specifically in a nighttime dream, symbolizing His Providence even in the darkness of exile.

The 'zevachim':

The various explanations given in the shiur as to the purpose of Yaakov's 'zevachim' appear in Midrashim and the works of the mefarshim. Two sources identify this sacrifice as a korban todah - a thanksgiving offering. The Torah Sheleimah quotes a Midrash that explains these 'zevachim' as a thanksgiving offering expressing gratitude over the fact that Yosef is still alive. The Tur, in his "Peirush Ha-aroch" (as opposed to his brief "Ba'al Haturim" printed in the Mikra'ot Gedolot) explains this sacrifice as a thanksgiving offering over his having arrived safely in Be'er Sheva.

Our explanation, that this sacrifice marks the end of the 'bechira' process, may be what Reish Lakish meant in Bereishit Rabbah 94 when he said, "al berit ha-shvatim hikriv" - "He offered sacrifices for the covenant of the tribes". Having discovered that Hashem had, in fact, fulfilled the promise that all of Yaakov's children will form His special nation, Yaakov offers a thanksgiving offering.

Parshat Vayigash: The Unmasking

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION FOR PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

Before we dig into Parashat Va-Yigash, let us just take a moment to review the narrative units of Sefer Bereishit as we have understood the Sefer in these shiurim. If you would like to receive shiurim you missed, please drop me a line at emayer@ymail.yu.edu (not at one of my other email addresses!).

1) The nature of humanity and its relationship with Hashem:

a) Parashat Bereishit: the human as image of Hashem (Tzelem Elokim)
b) Parashat No'ah: Humanity's failures and Uncreation (Flood)

2) The selection and development of Avraham:

a) Parashat Lekh Lekha: Developing faith (Berit bein HaBetarim and Berit Mila)
b) Parashat VaYera: Ultimate sacrifice (Akeida, rejection of Yishmael)
c) Hayyei Sara: A personal foothold in Cana'an (Cave of Mahpela)

3) The selection and development of Ya'akov:

a) Parashat Toledot: Deception and flight (Theft of blessings)
b) Parashat VaYeitzei: Measure for Measure (Lavan's deceptions)
c) Parashat VaYishlah: Regeneration (returning the berakhot)

4) Selection and development of Yosef and Yehuda (& rejection of Re'uvein):

a) Parashat VaYeshev: Yosef's development
b) Parashat Mikketz: Yehuda's development
c) Parashat VaYigash: see below!

Although we devoted VaYeshev to Yosef and Mikketz to Yehuda, it should be noted that both of these parshiot are about both Yehuda and Yosef. I found it easier to develop each figure separately, but the stories are deeply intertwined.

PREP FOR PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

VaYigash is where Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, whom he has been manipulating since Parashat Mikketz. The (many) questions below are in response to requests from subscribers for more guidance in preparing for the shiur. Hopefully, the questions will help bring out the meaning of the events in the parasha, although we may not have time to deal with all of the questions. Ideally, questions should occur to us naturally as we read the Torah. Attempting to respond to questions and draw themes from them will acclimate us to formulating questions on our own.

1) Once Yosef rises to power, why doesn't he send a messenger to Ya'akov with the news that he is alive and well? What could possibly justify letting his father suffer a moment longer than necessary?

2) Why does Yosef play all of these games with his brothers? What is the point of treating them harshly, accusing them of spying, demanding that they produce Binyamin, repeatedly returning the money they have paid him for Egyptian grain, imprisoning them, and planting his chalice on Binyamin so he can accuse him of theft? What does Yosef hope to accomplish?

3) Look closely at every single interaction between Yosef and his brothers. What is Yosef trying to accomplish in each case?

a) Why does he accuse his brothers of being *spies,* in particular?

b) What does he hope to accomplish by throwing his brothers into jail?

c) Why does he then release them all -- except Shimon -- and why does he give the brothers the reason he does?

d) What seems ridiculous about Yosef's first plan -- to send one brother home to Cana'an to get Binyamin while the rest remain in jail -- and his second plan -- letting all the brothers (except one) go home to get Binyamin in order to prove that they are not spies?

e) Why does Yosef secretly return the brothers' money to them?

f) When the brothers return to Egypt with Binyamin, why does Yosef entertain them at his house?

g) Why does Yosef's servant bother to tell the brothers that the money they found in their sacks was a gift from Hashem? Why not just inform them that he received their payment for the grain, and leave it to them to wonder about the source of the mystery money?

h) Why does Yosef bless only Binyamin and give him more gifts than he gives the others?

i) Why does Yosef seat the brothers by age order?

j) Why does Yosef *again* arrange to have the brothers' money returned to them secretly?

k) Why does Yosef plant his chalice in specifically Binyamin's sack?

4) What seems to be the disagreement between the brothers and Yosef's servant over the fate of the one whose sack contains the chalice, and the fate of the rest of the brothers? Why are they arguing? Where have we seen such an incident before? What other parallels are there between this incident and the previous one?

5) [Parenthetically: what hint is there in Yehuda's speech to Yosef that Ya'akov still maintains the hope that Yosef is alive somewhere?]

6) [Again, parenthetically: what linguistic parallels are there between this story and Megillat Esther?]

7) Once Yosef has revealed himself, why does he again ask if Ya'akov is alive -- didn't he ask this question to the brothers during the feast at his house?

8) If Yosef really believes that the brothers were only doing Hashem's work in selling him to Egypt (see 45:5 + 7-8), why has he been manipulating them? Why not just reveal his identity immediately?

9) What ironic reversal is there in this story in the use of the word "yarad" ("to do down")?

10) What meanings are hinted to -- besides the obvious -- in the use of the word "mihyah" in 45:5 and "le-ha-hayot" in 45:7?

11) What exactly does Ya'akov mean in 46:30?

12) [Parenthetically: what hints are there of cultural/ethnic/etc. friction between Ya'akov's family and the Egyptians (with an eye toward Sefer Shemot)?]

13) [What is funny (humorous) about the interaction between the brothers and Paro about their occupation of shepherding?]

PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

Two basic questions challenge us as we read the story of Yosef's manipulation of his brothers (no negative connotation intended): Why he does not send word ASAP to his suffering father that he is alive? What does he aim to accomplish by this process of manipulation? The answer to both questions may be the same. Hopefully, analyzing the story will yield answers.

In the course of the story, Yosef accuses his brothers of particular crimes, arranges situations which will make them appear guilty of certain other crimes, and threatens or executes particular punishments. The brothers react in particular ways to these situations. In this shiur, we will summarize these events and "unpack" them.

A) THE SPYING ACCUSATION:

Yosef first accuses his brothers of spying on Egypt, an accusation they deny. Later, we learn that Yosef asks them at this time about their family. The brothers respond by mentioning Yosef, Binyamin, and Ya'akov. Yosef rejects their explanations, insisting that the brothers are spies; he imprisons all of them, but then allows one to go home to bring Binyamin in order to prove that their story is true. After three more days, Yosef decides to allow all of them to go home, and holds back only Shimon as "collateral."

Why does Yosef accuse the brothers of spying, in particular? What purpose does this serve in his plan? This accusation allows him the opportunity to ask about their family, which he wants to do for the following reasons:

a) In order to find out if his father is still alive.
b) In order to demand that Binyamin be brought to him, so that he can carry out the rest of his plan.

In our discussion of Parashat VaYeshev, we mentioned that Yosef might accuse the brothers of spying as a mida ke-neged mida ("measure for measure") reaction to their having hated him for "spying" on them and reporting to Ya'akov about their misdeeds (see Abravanel). This should start us looking for other signs of mida ke-neged mida patterns in what Yosef does to the brothers as the story continues.

Let us now look closely at this spying accusation and the question of what Yosef wants the brothers to think: imagine you are a counterintelligence agent and you think you have caught a ring of agents spying on your country. Can you imagine letting one of the spies go home to get proof that he and the other suspects are not spies? If he really *is* a spy, what would prevent him from returning home, reporting to his CIA (Cana'anite Intelligence Agency) superiors what he has seen in Egypt, and then returning to Egypt to try to prove that he is not a spy!

Imagine if, when Moshe Rabbeinu sent spies to scout out Eretz Yisrael, the spies had been caught -- can you imagine that their captors would have let one of them go home under any circumstances? If the people of Yeriho (Jericho) had caught the spies Yehoshua had sent to scout the city, would they have let one return to Yehoshua for any reason?

If Yosef really wants the brothers to take him seriously in this accusation of spying, how can he agree to send one of them home to get Binyamin? And how can he then decide to let *all* of them (except one) go back home? Does Yosef really want the brothers to believe that he thinks they are spies? If not, what does he want them to think?

Perhaps he wants them to know that even he *himself* does not take the accusation of spying seriously. He wants them to see how transparent the accusation is, that he is not really giving them all this trouble because he truly believes they are spies.

YOU FEAR *WHO*?!

This fits well with what happens next: when Yosef changes his mind and decides to allow almost all of the brothers to go home, he gives the brothers a reason: "Because I fear Hashem." Now, remember that Egypt is a thoroughly pagan society; when the brothers hear from Yosef, the vice-king of the thoroughly pagan country, that he fears not the sun-god, or the river-god, or the harvest-god, but Hashem ("Ha-Elokim," the One God), it must sound to the brothers as strange as it would have been to hear Yosef say, "You know, I really think Egypt stinks. I'd much rather be king of Cana'an any day." It also makes this situation even stranger than before: not only is the Egyptian vice-king willing to let all of the accused spies (besides Shimon) go home, he says he is doing so because he fears and worships the same God they fear and worship!

What impression is Yosef trying to encourage in the brothers' minds?

THE KEY TO YOSEF'S STRATEGY:

Yosef is trying to do something he has done before: to portray himself as merely a conduit for Hashem. In our discussion of Parashat VaYeshev, we traced Yosef's development as a leader and moral figure. One of the high points we identified was when Yosef stood before Paro and gave Hashem all the credit for his dream-interpreting abilities. We also noted that Yosef's giving Hashem all the credit is not only humble, it is *smart.* Paro cannot take advice from a foreigner/slave/prisoner, but he can certainly take advice from a Deity (*The* Deity), so Yosef couches his fourteen-year famine survival plan as part of the Hashem-given interpretation of the dream. Throughout his interaction with Paro, Yosef is but a vehicle for Hashem's communication with Paro. Paro recognizes this and stresses Yosef's connection with Hashem as crucial in selecting him to execute Egyptian agro-economic policy and save Egypt from starvation.

Yosef now employs the same strategy of trying to convey the impression that he is only Hashem's emissary. But this time, he is trying to convince his own brothers. He accuses them of spying (which may start them searching their own past for mida ke-neged mida triggers of this accusation), but then behaves in a manner which reveals that he himself does not believe this accusation! When he mercifully decides to let them all (but one) go home, his rationale is his fear of Hashem! The improbability of monotheistic faith in the ruler of pagan, polytheistic Egypt is more than the brothers can be expected to take as simply coincidence. Yosef means for them to believe that Hashem is using him, the "Egyptian ruler," as a puppet, that He is manipulating the vice-king in order to punish them.

This becomes even clearer to them when the Egyptian ruler allows all of them to go home *except one.* They then realize that Hashem is punishing them, mida ke-neged mida, for their cruelty to Yosef: just as when they sold him, they returned home with one less brother and had to face their father with the news, so they now return home with one less brother and must face their father once again. But this time, the missing brother is missing because he helped make Yosef "missing." All of the brothers are jailed for three days to demonstrate what Yosef felt when he was thrown by them into the "bor," the pit (we have seen earlier that the Egyptian jail is referred to as a "bor," a pit); and Shimon is kept in jail to parallel the sale of Yosef.

The brothers clearly see the "hand of Hashem" raised against them for what they did to Yosef. Yosef's strategy is smashingly successful, as Re'uvein now turns to the others and castigates them for ignoring his warnings not to harm Yosef. Yosef himself confirms what the brothers suspect -- that Hashem is behind all of this -- by saying that he is releasing them because he fears Hashem.

B) RETURN OF THE MONEY:

Yosef now commands that the brothers' grain money be secretly returned to them and placed in their luggage. On the road back to Cana'an, one brother discovers his returned money; the others discover their money once they have returned

home. They fear that when they return to Egypt, they will be accused of having stolen the money. Indeed, when the brothers eventually do return to Egypt with Binyamin and are led to Yosef's house, they fear that they have been brought there in order to be enslaved, in punishment for stealing the money they found in their luggage. But Yosef's servant assures them that their money has been received by Yosef.

How does planting the brothers' money in their sacks serve Yosef's plan?

When they find the money, the brothers ascribe its appearance in their sacks to Hashem: "What has Hashem done to us?!" (42:28). Clearly, they believe that Hashem is using the "Egyptian ruler" to wreak vengeance on them. But what do they believe is Hashem's purpose in putting the money in their sacks?

When they return to Egypt for the second time, they reveal their concern: they are afraid that Yosef has invited them to his house in order to capture and enslave them for stealing their grain-money from him. Hashem, the brothers believe, has returned their money so that the Egyptian ruler will believe that they have stolen it from him. They fear that they will become slaves through these ill-gotten gains -- exactly the fate to which they sent Yosef in return for ill-gotten gains (the money they made from his sale)! They see Yosef as Hashem's tool in executing a mida ke-neged mida punishment on them for selling Yosef. They probably suspect that Yosef planted the money in their sacks (Abravanel supports this idea), but they see him as a tool of Hashem -- which is exactly what he wants them to think.

The brothers are nervous about entering Yosef's house, afraid that bad things are in store for them; before they enter, they confess to Yosef's servant that as they journeyed toward Cana'an, they found their money returned to them, hidden in their sacks. They insist that they do not know who put their money back in their sacks. Yosef's servant, who has been told to expect precisely this admission from them, assures them that he has received their money, that the money they found in their sacks could only be a "treasure" planted there by . . . "Hashem!"

But the servant is laughing at them on the inside as he reassures them: he sees how his master, Yosef, has woven a web around the brothers, nudging them into concluding that Hashem is punishing them for their mistreatment of their brother. As he assures them that the returned money they found was a gift for them from Hashem, he knows that they are drawing a different conclusion: Hashem can hardly be "in the mood" (so to speak) to reward them. Recent strange events have convinced them that they are enmeshed in a divine process aimed at paying them back for selling Yosef. Perhaps the servant dispels their fear that the money is being used by Hashem to land them in slavery, but he confirms their suspicion that Hashem is somehow behind the whole matter. Perhaps, they conclude, Hashem only wanted to make them nervous.

C) THE FEAST:

Yosef then entertains the brothers at his house with a feast and presents them with gifts.

[Side point: when Yosef greets the brothers at his house, he greets them with the word "Shalom," and then asks after the "shalom" of their father; they respond that their father has "shalom," he is in peace. It is ironic, of course, that Yosef, the brother about whom the Torah told us long ago, "lo yakhlu dabero le-**shalom**" -- "they could not speak to him peaceably" -- has a whole conversation with them about "shalom"!]

Yosef's gifts to the brothers create an opportunity to see how the brothers will deal with his favoring Binyamin by giving him five times as much as he gives to each of them. Once again, a child of Rahel is receiving special treatment: how will the other brothers deal with it this time?

But the test is not a subtle one, meant only for Yosef's private purposes, to see if the brothers will react with their old jealousy; it is clearly meant for them to *know* it is a test. Yosef wants the brothers to believe that he is the tool of God, the puppet of Hashem, sent to test them. That this is Yosef's goal is is suggested also by the next point: Yosef seats the brothers in age order, to their amazement; he wants them to see that he has access to information he would have no way of knowing besides having a secret link to Hashem. This contributes to their impression that this Egyptian ruler is a tool of

Hashem; either he is in direct communication with Hashem, or Hashem has taken some sort of subtle control of him and is acting through him.

These strategies -- seating his brothers in age order and lavishing more gifts on Binyamin than on the other brothers -- are so transparent, so obvious to the brothers, that it seems clear that Yosef wants them to understand that Hashem is "present" in this entire affair, addressing their old sin, their sale of Yosef.

D) THE CHALICE:

Yosef then commands that his own chalice be hidden in Binyamin's sack. And once again, he instructs that all of the brothers' money be hidden in their sacks. He loads the brothers with grain and sends them home, off to Cana'an, but then sends a servant to pursue them and accuse them of having stolen the chalice. The brothers deny the theft, condemn the "theoretical" thief to death, and bind themselves to slavery in the event the chalice is found (to express their certainty that none of them are involved in the theft). When the chalice is found in Binyamin's sack, the brothers contritely return to Egypt to face Yosef; in his presence, they condemn themselves to slavery. Yosef, however, offers to release them all except for the "thief." It is here that Yehuda steps in with his impassioned plea to Yosef to free Binyamin. Yosef can no longer hold back; he reveals his identity to his brothers.

Why does Yosef hide the brothers' money in their sacks once again?

By now, it is "clear" to the brothers that the Egyptian ruler has been "posessed" by Hashem; he has become Hashem's puppet to punish them for their sin. They see the pattern this ruler has set, a pattern of accusing them of crimes he does not really believe they have committed: first accusing them of spying (and then allowing them to go home!), then planting their money in their sacks (and, shockingly, explaining that Hashem has given them a gift!). They also note his repeated mention of Hashem, his inexplicable faith in the same God they worship. They gape at his unexplainable access to knowledge of their family (from out of the blue, he asks them if they have a brother and a father, as they report to Ya'akov; and he also seems to know in what order they were born!). They also notice that he performs actions which remind them of their sin (accusing them of spying, imprisoning one brother and sending the others home without him, providing them with ill-gotten gains which they believe will result in their own enslavement, testing them by openly favoring Binyamin).

Now, as they leave Egypt for the second time, he plants their money on them again. But they seem to have no fear this time that they will be punished for the theft. This makes sense: they know that Yosef planted the money on them the first time as well, and he did not accuse them of theft that time. So why does he plant the money at all?

Yosef wants them to know that he has put the money there now because he wants them to understand that just as he put the money in their sacks, he put the chalice in Binyamin's sack as well. And just as they know that Yosef knows they have not stolen the money, Yosef wants them to know that he does not truly believe that Binyamin has actually stolen anything. He wants them to see that the accusation against Binyamin is a fabrication, an entrapment sprung by him, just as he filled the sack of every brother with the money he brought. Yosef wants them to know that Binyamin is being used in order to pressure them: will they sacrifice themselves in order to free him?

Binyamin is the obvious choice for Yosef because he is Rahel's son, as Yosef is. Will they protect their younger, favored brother? Yosef also assumes (correctly) that Binyamin has replaced him in his father's affections. Will the brothers protect their father this time from the pain of losing his most beloved son?

The hiding of specifically the chalice, as opposed to something else of Yosef's, adds a nice touch to the picture: Yosef's servant tells the brothers that this is the cup his master uses to perform "nihush," divination. He uses this very cup to to discover secret knowledge and see the future. The cup is valuable not because it is silver or because Yosef is sentimental about it, but because it is his divining-tool. Not only have the brothers stolen his cup, they have stolen his special "nihush" cup! [Scholars point to the Ancient Near Eastern practice of using a cup to divine: the diviner would examine the configuration of drops of water, wine, or oil, and judge the future from them. Another practice was to put precious metal

pieces into the cup and judge by their positions.] The divination cup adds one more piece to the picture they have of Yosef as possessing supernatural knowledge: he is a confidant of Hashem's, a diviner.

Before the chalice is found, the brothers deny the theft and condemn the thief to death and themselves to slavery if the chalice is found. But Yosef's servant seems not to accept their self- condemnation. The servant says, "Yes, it shall be exactly as you say," but then proceeds to change the verdict: no one is to die, not even the thief, and the innocent brothers are not to be enslaved. Why?

It is interesting that the brothers' suggestion for punishment -- death and enslavement -- parallels in some way the fate they had in mind for Yosef long ago: first they planned to kill him, then they decided to sell him into slavery. The brothers pronounce this sentence on themselves to show how sure they are of their innocence, but Yosef's servant, who knows of their guilt, knows that the sentence must be modified for Yosef's plan to unfold properly.
There is also an echo here of Ya'akov's death sentence on whoever among his camp has stolen Lavan's "terafim," his household gods. Lavan, we know, practices "nihush" (he says so himself); Yosef does as well. Yosef practices "nihush" with his chalice, which is what is stolen here; some mefarshim suggest that Lavan practiced "nihush" with his "terafim," which are stolen by Rahel. In both cases, the accused (Ya'akov, his sons) pronounce a death sentence on the thief (Rahel, Binyamin); in the first case, Rahel appears to suffer an early death as a result, so it is no shock that Yosef wants to avoid getting anywhere near repeating that tragic event -- after all, it was his own mother who was the casualty of Ya'akov's unwitting curse!

A similar "disagreement" over the fate of the guilty takes place between Yehuda and Yosef once the chalice has been found and the brothers have returned to Egypt: the brothers (represented by Yehuda) volunteer to suffer enslavement along with Binyamin, but Yosef insists that only Binyamin will be enslaved. What is this disagreement really about?

While before, the brothers' willingness to be enslaved for the theft is a rhetorical device to express their certainty of their innocence, here it is a sincere offer, motivated by the overpowering sense of guilt which has taken hold of the brothers as a result of all of Yosef's efforts to make them believe that Hashem is punishing them. Yehuda, who speaks for the brothers, does not admit that Binyamin actually stole the chalice -- they all know that just as Yosef placed the money in their sacks last time and this time, he also placed the chalice in Binyamin's sack. But the brothers believe that Hashem has created circumstances which have brought them to justice: they are being punished for a theft they did *not* commit in retribution for a theft they *did* commit. Yehuda's words ("*God* has found the sin of your servants") confirm that he recognizes the hand of Hashem in the story: Hashem has found their sin and is punishing them. Yosef's accusations are transparent; he has successfully convinced them that he is a tool of Hashem.

But Yosef refuses Yehuda's offer. Why? Is it not enough that the brothers -- especially Yehuda, whose advice it was to sell Yosef in the first place -- feel remorse for their action and are willing to suffer for it? What more does he want? As we have discussed in previous weeks, Yosef wants to see the brothers take responsibility for two things: 1) Binyamin and 2) Ya'akov. It is only once Yehuda mounts a powerfully emotional assault on Yosef, expressing concern for his father's feelings, that Yosef recognizes the depth of the brothers' teshuva and decides the time has come to end the charade.

ADDED POINTS:

1) There are many situational and linguistic parallels between the Yosef story and Megilat Ester. Find them and explain the relationship between the stories.

2) The story of Avraham's servant's search for a wife for Yitzhak is an excellent example of someone's trying to increase the likelihood of the success of his mission by making it appear as if Hashem is really behind the whole mission. Comparing a) Avraham's command to the servant and the story of the servant's encounter with Rivka to b) the servant's retelling (to Rivka's family) of Avraham's command and his encounter with Rivka, shows that the servant greatly emphasizes the role of Hashem in guiding him to select Rivka. Once he has done this, the family can only respond "me-Hashem yatza ha-davar" -- "The matter has been decreed by Hashem!", and they have no choice but to agree to the

proposed marriage to Yitzhak. (One other example is discussed in the shiur on Parashat Mattot regarding the Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein.)

3) It is quite ironic, after reading through this story in which Yosef more or less "plays Hashem," punishing his brothers with mida ke-neged mida punishments, guiding them to teshuva, etc., to hear him say in Parashat VaYhi, "Ha-tahat Elokim Anokhi?", "Am I in Hashem's stead?" How would you explain this apparent inconsistency?

Shabbat shalom

R. Yoel Bin-Nun'S Article On Yoseph And His Brothers: Why Didn't Joseph Contact His Father?

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Adapted by Zvi Shimon

The following is an abridgement of articles written by Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, a teacher in the Herzog Teachers' College affiliated with Yeshivat Har Etzion, and Rabbi Yaakov Medan, a teacher in the yeshiva, which originally appeared in Hebrew in Megadim 1.
Ramban poses a difficult question, one which continues to puzzle whoever studies the book of Genesis:

"How is it that Joseph, after living many years in Egypt, having attained a high and influential position in the house of an important Egyptian official, did not send his father even one message to inform him (that he was alive) and comfort him? Egypt is only six days' travel from Hebron, and respect for his father would have justified even a year's journey! (It would) have been a grave sin to torment his father by leaving him in mourning and bereavement for himself and for Shim'on; even if he wanted to hurt his brothers a little, how could he not feel pity for his aged father (Ramban to Gen. 42:9)?"

Abarbanel poses the same question, but more bluntly:

"Why did Joseph hide his identity from his brothers and speak harshly to them? It is criminal to be as vengeful and recriminating as a serpent!… How is it that as his brothers were starving and far from home, having left their families and small children and, above all, his aged, worried and suffering father waiting for them, did he not show compassion, but rather intensified the anguish by arresting Shim'on?" (chap. 4, question 4)

1) RAV YOEL BIN-NUN'S SOLUTION:

The usual solution, advanced by the Ramban that Yosef was trying to fulfill the dreams, is rejected by R. Bin-Nun, chiefly because it doesn't address, in his opinion, the moral question. How could Yosef have left his father in torment, only to bring his dreams to fruition?

Our entire outlook on this story changes, however, if we accept the fact that Joseph did not know that his brothers had fooled his father with the coat, the blood, and the lie that Joseph had been devoured by wild animals. Such thoughts never occurred to him! Hence it was Joseph who spent thirteen years of slavery in Egypt and, the following years of greatness wondering: "Where is my father? Why has no one come to look for me?" All the factors are now reversed, when seen from Joseph's point of view. Egypt is, after all, close to Canaan, and Jacob was a rich, important and influential man, with international familial and political connections. The Midianites or Ishmaelites who brought Joseph to Egypt were his cousins; is it possible that no one from that caravan could be located in all those years? We know that Jacob does not search for his son, as he thinks Joseph is dead, but Joseph has no way of knowing this.

Joseph's wonder at his father's silence is joined by a terrible sense of anxiety which grows stronger over the years, as seasons and years pass by and no one comes. Joseph's anguish centers on his father: the voice inside him asking where is my father? is joined by another harsh voice: Why did my father send me to my brothers that day? He concludes that his brothers must have succeeded in convincing Jacob, and he has been disowned. Years later, when Joseph rides in the viceroy's chariot, when he shaves his beard and stands before Pharaoh, it is clear to him that God must have decreed that his life would be lived separately from his family's. He gives expression to this feeling in the name he gives his eldest son, born of an Egyptian wife:

…he called him Menashe, because God has made me forget (nashani) all my labor and my father's house (41:51).

To forget his father's house!

Joseph's entire world is built on the misconception that his father has renounced him, while Jacob's world is destroyed by the misconception that Joseph is dead. Joseph's world is shaken when his brothers stand before him, not knowing who he is, and bow down to him. At that moment, he must question this new reality –

("he remembers the dreams he dreamt about them")

and is thrown back into the past. Stalling for time, he begins a line of inquiry – and action – which is geared to one end: to find out why his father had rejected him, if at all. He plots to keep Benjamin, so that his maternal brother can tell him all that has transpired. This was Joseph's plan to find out what had happened and how to deal with it.

Judah's response was an attempt to obtain Benjamin's release by appealing for mercy for his aged father. In so doing, he tells Joseph – totally unintentionally – exactly what he wanted so desperately to hear, thereby freeing him and eventually Jacob, from their mutual errors.

"Your servant our father said to us: 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One has left me; I said he was devoured and I have not seen him since. (If) you take this son too and tragedy befalls him you will bring my old age down to She'ol in agony' " (44:24-30).

Joseph needs to hear no more. He finally realizes the naked truth: No one has cut him off at all! He has not been forgotten!

Joseph could no longer restrain himself before all who were standing before him, and cried: 'Have every one leave me!'…and he cried out loud…and he told his brothers: I am Joseph: Is my father still alive? (45:1-3)

Does he live? Is he yet my father, who loves me and has not forgotten me? Is it possible?

Each of the players in our scene had a plan, and pursued that plan. But the plan which was finally revealed was a higher plan, geared at bringing Jacob's family to Egypt and creating the Jewish people.

2) RAV YAAKOV MEDAN'S CRITIQUE OF RAV BIN-NUN'S SOLUTION

This thesis of Joseph's suspicion towards his father is untenable. Joseph knew that he was, after all, his father's favorite son and that his father had made him the striped coat. He also knew that his father had loved Rachel most of all his wives. Above all, would a man like Jacob behave deceitfully, sending Joseph to his brothers on the false pretext of ascertaining their well-being, intending in fact that they sell him as a slave? Is there a son who would suspect his father of such a deed? This assumption is totally unrealistic.

It also remains unclear why Joseph, surprised that his father did not seek him out, came to harbor the kind of suspicions attributed to him by R. Bin-Nun. How could he be certain that his father knew of the sale, but refrained from searching for him? Why did it not occur to him that his father regarded him as dead? To this day, a person who disappears without a trace is presumed dead. Why should we assume that Joseph did not believe that the brothers were lying to his father? It was precisely because the brothers did not habitually report their actions to their father that Joseph found it necessary to tell his father all their misdeeds (37:2).

In addition, R. Bin-Nun claims that Joseph's stubborn silence was broken upon hearing Judah say he was surely devoured and I have not seen him since (44:28). Joseph realized at this point that his father had not deserted him. However according to the simplest reading of the text, Joseph's resistance broke down when Judah offered himself as a slave instead of Benjamin:

Therefore please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not see to the sorrow that would overcome my father! …Joseph could no longer control himself (44:32- 45:1).

R. Bin-Nun claims that Joseph's feelings of rejection by his family are the foundation for the naming of his first born Menashe, meaning God has made me forget my hardship and my father's home (nashani – made me forget).

In my opinion, the meaning of the verse is different. My hardship (amali) is to be understood as follows (see Ibn Ezra – Genesis 6:13): God has made me forget completely my hardship and the HARDSHIP of my parental home. Joseph does not offer thanks to God for having made him forget his parental home, but rather offers thanks for enabling him to forget his tribulations (his labors) in his father's house. It is only after Joseph rises to the throne that he is able to make sense of his suffering in the two previous episodes, in prison ("amali") and in his father's house (beit avi).

3) RAV MEDAN'S SOLUTION: "THE PATH OF REPENTANCE"

Abarbanel offers the following explanation for Joseph's not contacting his father while in Egypt:

"Even after Joseph tested his brothers by accusing them of espionage, he was still not certain whether they loved Benjamin or whether they still hated Rachel's children, so he focused on Benjamin to see whether they would try to save him." (chap. 42, quests. 4, 6)

Joseph's behavior is part of an overall scheme to test the brothers and provide them with an opportunity to fully repent for selling him into slavery. The sin of Joseph's brothers is one of the more serious sins related in the book of Genesis. Both the Torah (Exodus 21:17, 20:13; see Rashi ibid; Deut. 24:7) and the Prophets (Joel 4, Amos 2:6-10 and many others) equate this sin of selling a free man into bondage with the gravest of sins. The penitence of Joseph's brothers is not an incidental event appearing as part of another story, but a major theme of the narrative.

Reuven and Judah were vying for the family leadership, Jacob having effectively ceased playing the leadership role (see for example 34:5, 34:13-14, 35:22, 43:5). After Shim'on and Levi are excluded from the race for leadership, the struggle continues between Reuven and Judah. It finds expression in their argument as to Joseph's fate (37:22,26- 27), in the recognition of the sin of his sale (42:22 contra 44:16), in the assumption of responsibility for Benjamin in Egypt (42:37 contra 43:8-9) and in additional verses in the Torah.

Reuven and Judah were each engaged in a process of penitence for similar sins, Reuven for having slept with his father's wife (as appears from the simple textual reading), Judah for having lain, albeit unknowingly, with his son's wife. It would seem clear that their individual repentance is also part of the leadership struggle.

At first glance there seems to be no connection between Reuven's sin with his father's wife or Judah's sin with his son's wife and the selling of Joseph. This, however is misleading. According to the simple reading of the text, Reuven's intention was to inherit his father's leadership in his lifetime, like Absalom who slept with David's concubine. His attempt to rescue Joseph and his dreams of royalty (37:20) is part of his repentance for his sin with Bilhah.

The proximity of the story of Judah and Tamar to the selling of Joseph indicates a connection as well. The chain of disasters that strike Judah, the loss of his wife and two sons, is apparently a punishment for selling Joseph. Reuven later advances the strange suggestion that Jacob kill his two sons, should he fail to return Benjamin from Egypt (42:37). It would seem that he was influenced by the punishment Judah had received for selling Joseph – the death of his two sons. This terrible punishment for a terrible sin is branded into Reuven's consciousness. Reuven is ready to receive the same punishment if he deserts Benjamin in Egypt.

Initially, Judah did not imagine that his sons died due to his sin, saying Tamar's fate is that her husbands will die (Yevamot 34 and Genesis 38:11). Finally, Judah realizes that Tamar was in the right and he admits she is more righteous than I.(38:26). Only at this stage did he realize that she was not destined to have her husbands die but rather that it was his destiny to lose his sons. The sin was his. From this recognition he rebuilds his shattered home.

The process of repentance accompanies the brothers wherever they go. When the Egyptian viceroy commands them to bring Benjamin, the second son of Rachel's, the brothers are immediately reminded of the sale of Joseph. The two contenders – Reuven and Judah – respond in character. Reuven sees only the punishment for the crime, and he does not suggest any means of rectification.

And Reuven answered them: 'Did I not tell you, do not sin against the child, and you did not listen; now his blood is being avenged.' (Gen. 42:22)

Judah acknowledges his sin, but also suggests a positive path of repentance for the evil done. He is not satisfied with sackcloth and fasting, which are merely expressions of mourning and acceptance of the verdict.

And they tore their clothes ….And Judah said, 'What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has divulged the sin of your servants; we have become my lord's slaves' (44:13- 17).

And further on,

Let your servant stay instead of the boy as a slave to my lord and let the boy go up with his brothers (44:33).
From Judah's speech it is apparent that he did not confess to stealing the cup. He considered the whole episode of the stolen goblet as a fabrication. Otherwise there is no sense in telling us of Benjamin's journey to Egypt, or his suggesting that he replace Benjamin. This is how Rashi and other commentators interpret Judah's words. His words, God has revealed the SIN of your servants, undoubtedly relate to the selling of Joseph.

Similarly, Judah's words to his father, If I bring him not to you and set him before you, then I shall have SINNED to you forever (43:9), indicate his understanding of the connection between Joseph's being brought down to Egypt and Benjamin being brought down to Egypt. Benjamin's abandonment in Egypt would be a continuation of his grievous sin of selling Joseph. What sin is there and why should he be punished if Benjamin is forcibly taken? We must therefore see the necessity of bringing Benjamin down to Egypt as a consequence of the sin. For Judah, protecting Benjamin at all cost is the atonement demanded for the selling of Joseph. In offering their respective propositions, Reuven and Judah remain faithful to their personalities: Reuven through acceptance of the punishment, and Judah through confrontation with the sin itself.

Our assumption is that Joseph too was plagued by his brother's sin and, consequently, with the future of the house of Israel, no less than with his own fate. From the time he was sold, he had begun to rebuild not only his own life, but his family's unity. This unification was not to be forced upon his brothers, but rather achieved by willingness and love. Joseph desired a unification born of his brother's regretting their sin, a product of wholehearted repentance. Joseph believed in his own ability to initiate such a process or at least to test its existence.

Joseph had commanded his brothers to bring Benjamin to Egypt. When the brothers actually brought Benjamin to Egypt, despite the danger, in order to redeem Shim'on and to buy food (in a way similar to how Joseph was sold for shoes), Joseph, who was unaware of Judah's assumption of guardianship and its importance, presumably saw the brothers' action as yet another failure to meet the test and challenge that he had set before them.

Joseph cries three times. The first two times are inner, bound by self-restraint. The third time he breaks down totally and cries, openly and without control. R. Bin-Nun ignores the obvious connection between three instances.

A) The brothers are subjected to an intensive interrogation during three days of imprisonment, inducing them to repent for their sin and accept the punishment and suffering, with Reuven in the lead (42:21,22). We have previously defined this kind of repentance as Reuven's repentance, a repentance which involves submission and acceptance of the verdict, but lacks a program for improvement and change. Joseph is prepared to accept his brothers' confession and their submission. He witnesses the newly reestablished connection of the ten brothers to the sons of Rachel, and he cries (42:24). But this is not sufficient for him. He requires a fuller, deeper repentance.

B) Joseph expected that the brothers would return to him empty-handed, placing themselves in danger by explaining to him that they had decided not to endanger Benjamin for the sake of Shim'on and were willing to suffer the shame of hunger. This is what would have happened, had Jacob had his way. Thus Joseph was disappointed when it became clear to him that the brothers had brought Benjamin in order to redeem Shim'on, despite the danger to their youngest brother. Joseph is unaware of Judah's assumption of responsibility for Benjamin. His mercy is aroused when he realizes that his younger brother's fate is to be no better than his – Joseph views Benjamin's being brought to Egypt as a reoccurrence of his own sale. True, in this case it is brought on by hunger and circumstances and is not the outcome of jealousy or hatred. Nonetheless, this was not the total repentance that was expected in the wake of the confessions he had heard from the brothers and Reuven in Egypt.

The verse tells us that Joseph feels compassion towards Benjamin, and weeps in private. Joseph believes that Judah, the man who proposed his sale, had prevailed over Reuven, the man who tried to save him. This is the only possible explanation of Joseph's crying over Benjamin, his tears being tears of mercy for him and not tears of happiness at the event of their meeting. Why else, should the exiled, beloved brother, who had spent a third of his life in prison, have pitied his thirty-year old brother, who had remained with his father and raised a large family?

C) Joseph decided to test his brothers once more. This time, however, the test would be more difficult. He makes his brothers jealous of Benjamin in the same way as they had once been jealous of him. He displays more outward affection for Benjamin than for them and increases his portion five times over as well as giving him a striped coat (and five other garments, 43:34). He also attempts to arouse the brothers' hatred towards Benjamin, for having stolen his goblet, an act which re-implicated them for the crime of espionage. Joseph's aim is to test their reaction to the prospect of Benjamin's

permanent enslavement in Egypt.

The brothers rent their garments (parallel to Joseph's coat 37:23). Judah says, God has found the iniquity of your servants, and then offers himself into permanent slavery as atonement for his lifelong sin towards his father. At this point, Joseph is convinced of their total repentance. Judah's act combines two kinds of repentance. The first form of repentance is that required by the early mystics, (foremost, Rabbi Eliezer of Worms, author of the Sefer Rokeach), whereby penance must counterbalance the crime. Judah, in a torn garment as a permanent slave in Egypt, is in the exact position he had placed Joseph. Secondly, we have the repentance as defined by the Rambam (Law of Repentance 2:1):

….what is complete repentance? When a person is confronted with the opportunity to repeat his sin but restrains himself because of repentance, and not because of fear or weakness.

Judah now is prepared to give his life to save Benjamin. Joseph comes to realize his mistake in crying for pity over Benjamin. He understands that Benjamin's being brought down to Egypt was not the result of the brother's disdain for Benjamin but rather the result of Judah's becoming Benjamin's guarantor. Judah's repentance, including his attempt to amend the past, is a continuation and completion of Reuven's atonement. His weeping for the third time is a continuation of his weeping the first time, when Reuven submitted. When the repentance is complete Joseph is no longer capable of restraining himself, and he weeps openly. At this stage the brother's repentance for selling Joseph into slavery is complete and Joseph can reveal himself to them.

4) RAV BIN-NUN RESPONDS

After carefully reading Rabbi Medan's detailed arguments, I nevertheless maintain that my presentation of the events is the correct one. There is clearly a process of repentance and rectification on the part of Joseph's brothers, and this is our guide to understanding the affair. But all this is God's plan. All Medan's evidence proving a process of teshuva and restoration is correct; but there is no reason to credit Joseph with this. The challenge of repentance offered the brothers regarding Benjamin is a challenge issuing from God. Joseph was forever acting according to natural, human considerations. It should be noted that Rabbi Medan gives an extremely contrived interpretation of the verse for God has forced me to forget all my tribulations and my father's house. The verse seemingly coheres with my explanation. He also totally ignores Judah's words, You have know that my wife bore me two, one departed from me and I said he was surely devoured.