

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

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Fast of 10 Tevet is Tuesday, January 3

**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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Most commentaries on Vayigash seem to focus on why Yosef, second most powerful person in Egypt for nine years, never attempts to contact his beloved father despite being away for twenty-three years. Rabbi Yitz Etshalom shares a debate in the literature between Rabbis Yoel Bin-Nun and Yaakov Medan, both from Gush Etzion, on this subject, and anyone interested in understanding the family dynamics should read this exchange (attached to the E-mail version of my posting or available at PotomacTorah.org).

This year I decided to delve into the family dynamics that run through Jewish history from Yaakov through at least the Babylonian exile. Lavan frustrates Yaakov by switching Leah for Rachel at Yaakov's wedding (and sells it as payback for Yaakov stealing Yitzhak's bracha for Esav before leaving Canaan). Yaakov openly favors Rachel over Leah and favors Yosef and Benyamin (Rachel's two sons) over the children of Leah and the handmaids.

Yaakov's favoritism interferes with relations among the sons throughout the Torah. Yaakov gives Yosef a special coat that designates royalty or tribal relationship – something that later in Devarim becomes a prohibition: A man may not pass over the first born son of a hated (less favored) wife in favor of the first born son of a favored wife, if the man's first born son comes from the hated wife. When a prince of Shechem rapes Dinah (a daughter of Leah), Yaakov does nothing. Shimon and Levi (sons of Leah) therefore seek revenge (using dirty tricks). Leah's sons suspect that Yaakov would have intervened if a daughter of Rachel's had been raped. Later, when a famine requires that Yaakov send family to purchase food from Egypt, he sends all of Leah's sons to make the purchase (and search for any news of Yosef) – but he refuses to send Benyamin. The viceroy of Egypt keeps Shimon as a prisoner unless the brothers bring the remaining son of Rachel. Yaakov delays and delays permitting Benyamin to leave his side – thus leaving a son of Leah in prison for an extended period of time.

When the brothers (including Benyamin, under Yehuda's protection) return, Yosef openly favors Benyamin (giving him much more lavish gifts and food than he gives to Leah's sons). When Yosef's guards finds his special cup in Benyamin's bag, Yosef says that all the brothers may leave – except that he will keep Benyamin as his slave. The sons of Leah and the handmaids have the opportunity to return home and leave Benyamin in Egypt – as they left Yosef twenty-three years earlier. Vayigash opens at this point.

Yehuda, who had lost two sons earlier (chapter 38), now understands the pain of a father losing a son. He approaches the viceroy of Egypt and makes a moving appeal – offering himself as a slave if the leader will permit Benyamin to return to his father. Yehuda's focus is on his elderly father and how he would suffer if his favorite son could not return. Yehuda, who had first suggested selling Yosef as a slave twenty-three years earlier, has performed true teshuvah (Rambam). Faced with the same circumstances, and open favoritism for the Rachel side of the family, Yehuda acts properly and avoids repeating his earlier sin. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, states, what makes a leader is the ability to admit mistakes (see his Devar Torah below). Yehuda is the first person in the Torah to admit a mistake and show concretely that he has performed teshuvah.

Yehuda and Yosef have very different personalities. Yehuda acts as a leader. When younger, he is the first to propose to his brothers that they sell Yosef as a slave rather than killing him. He is apparently the first son to move north to graze his flocks and establish property rights in new territory in Canaan. He is the one to convince Yaakov to permit him to guarantee Benyamin's safety, and he is the family leader dealing with the viceroy of Egypt. Yosef, in contrast, sees Hashem's hand in everything that happens. (We do not see Yehuda referring to God in his discussions or speeches.) As Rabbi Sacks observes, Yosef's descendants later disappear from B'Nai Yisrael while Yehuda's descendants include the kings and the Jews who survive to be sent into the diaspora. (When Israel split into the northern and southern kingdoms after the time of King Solomon, the northern kingdom was primarily Ephraim (Rachel) while the southern kingdom was primarily Yehuda (Leah) with some of Benyamin (Rachel)).

Rabbi David Fohrman follows the story of the conflict between the Rachel and Leah sides of the family. Yosef saves the sons of Leah from the famine and saves them until his death. Do the children of Leah ever repay this debt? Rabbi Fohrman points to Navi. Shaul's son Yonatan (from Benyamin) protects David (from Yehuda) when Shaul threatens the future king. Mordechai and Esther (Benyamin) protect the Jews in Persia and its territories from Haman – and most of the Jews they saved were from Yehuda.

These examples, from Yosef to Yonatan and then to Mordechai, show examples of tikkun for the hatred that existed (at least among some or all of Leah's sons) against Rachel's sons. Now with the mixing of most of the tribes (except Levi), we can no longer tell who is from Leah or Rachel for most Jews. The message for today is Am Yisrael Chai – Jews should work together as an extended family so we can survive for eternity.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always stressed our obligation to help our Jewish fellows everywhere. He led a protest of Rabbis before the Soviet Union (and spent two weeks in jail rather than pay a \$50 fine for protesting in front of the embassy). He traveled to Israel at least a couple of times a year. His love for fellow Jews was a frequent message, one that will remain with us and hopefully continue for our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

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**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](http://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.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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### **Dvar Torah: Vayigash: Is My Father Still Thinking About Me**

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2017

A Rebbe in Israel asked his class a question from this week's Torah portion and received a surprising answer from an unlikely source. Why was Yosef compelled to ask his brothers, "Is my father still alive?" Yehuda was pleading "mercy" for Benyamin on the basis of their father's health risk, if anything happened to the boy. Yosef could not have been told more directly about his father's status.

The class was perplexedly silent. Nobody could conjure a reasonable explanation. Then Shimon in the back of the class raised his hand. He was usually quiet and despondent. He never participated. His grandparents had deposited him there. His father had abandoned home and his mother was unable to care for him. No wonder little Shimon was usually mentally absent while others were actively participating. This time was different though. To the amazement of all, Shimon was waving his hand enthusiastically. The Rebbe called on him and he answered, "Maybe what Yosef meant to ask was not if Yaakov was alive but rather is my father still alive? Does my father still think about me?" Those who knew his situation were touched. He had a novel and valid approach to the meaning of a verse in Torah based on the peculiarity of his experience.

When I heard this story the first time I too was very moved and when I began to think about more and more I realized that his insight was not unique to his circumstance. For many years I have been involved with seminars demonstrating with lockdown logic the veracity of Torah. Many people have walked away with a conviction that the Torah is true and there really is a G-d! They may have adopted Shabbos and Kashrus based on their new understanding of things. However, I know that deep inside there lurks a gnawing question, "Sure I know there's a G-d, but does He think about me?" We all certainly feel it to a greater and lesser degree!

Almost 30 years ago I heard something stunning directly from the mouth of the Tzadik of Monsey, Rabbi Mordechai Schwab ztl. Quoting Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, it is written in Adon Olam, "Master of the Universe before any creature was created ... He was, He is, and He will be in glory. He is One and there is no second to compare to Him to associate (with Him). Without beginning, without end, Power and dominion are His. He is my G-d and my living Redeemer!" Rabbi Schwab emphasized that last line and etched into my psyche! "He is My G-d" he said touching his own chest. That is how one relates to HASHEM, not as a distant entity but as a great and personal G-d who is deeply interested in the details of your life. So how do we know?

9 years ago we went to my mother's house for Shabbos, honoring my step father's Sheloshim. After Shabbos we all sat down to watch our wedding video from, at that time, 22 years earlier. As we watched the parade of people comments flowed on how young or different this one looked and how many are not in this world. By the Chupah one after another of our Rabbis could be seen with much darker beards making those seven blessings.

One person my mother did not recognize. She asked. "Who is that?" I told her that that was Reb Getzel my Rebbe at that time. My wife asked, "Whatever happened to him? I haven't heard anything from him or about him since then." I think he went to Cleveland and I also have not heard from him or about him for 22 years."

Later that night, back home in Monsey, my cell phone rings. "Hello Reb Label, Getzel ....here!" I was in shock. It was that Rebbe. He told me in his usually excited tone that he was on his way back to Cleveland after an inspiring Shabbos in Philadelphia. After one of his lectures a young man approached him to ask a pointed question and a follow up question. He asked the fellow what his name was. He said, "Eli Lam." He asked where he came from. The young man told him, "Monsey". He said, "I taught a Lam in Monsey 22 years ago -- a Label Lam!" "That's my father!" he said. He was so impressed by and so excited to meet my son that he asked him for my number and amazingly he actually made the call that very night.

It was a huge dose of Hashgacha Pratis-Divine Providence! It felt like a confirmation of something, a kiss from heaven, a reminder that the Master of the Universe, in His supernal glory and endlessness **is my father still thinking about me.**

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5777-vayigash/>

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### **A Thought on the Parsha (Vayigash): The Buck Stops Here**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevi Torah © 2012

The Yosef narrative of the last few parshiyot – the longest narrative of Breishit – has been focusing, not surprisingly, on the character of Yosef. But also central to this story is the person of Yehudah, and his growing into the role of a leader. Although he failed to stop the selling of Yosef, and although he almost sent Tamar to a fiery death, he learned from these experiences. He understood that as a person, and as a leader, his bond must be his word. He must be guided by a strict moral code, and he must be prepared to live up to his commitments regardless of the cost.

It was by exhibiting this trait that he secured Yaakov's agreement to send Binyamin down with the brothers, and as our parasha opens, it will be this trait that is put to the test. Does he have the courage to take on a stronger, more powerful adversary? Can he live up to his promise to his father even at the possible cost of his life or his freedom?

VaYigash – and he stepped forward. The opening word of our parasha is an answer to these questions. Yehudah is prepared to move, to confront, to do what it will take to ensure that Binyamin will return home safely. His impassioned plea to Yosef is both the climax and the turning point of the Yosef story, and results in Yosef revealing himself to his brother, and ultimately in the entire family leaving Canaan and settling in Mitzrayim.

Yosef demonstrates a different approach to engaging the world. Not personal responsibility, but belief in God's guiding hand. After revealing himself to his brothers, attempts to put their minds at ease:

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here; for God did send me before you to preserve life... And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (Breishit 45:4, 6)

His belief in God, and in God's hand in history and in his life and the life of his family, allowed him to see what had happened as part of a Divine plan, and to absolve his brothers of blame. This approach stands in stark contrast to that of Yehudah, who does not talk about God, and who embodies personal responsibility. How does one approach life, its good and bad fortunes, and his or her role in the world? Is it "God working through us" or is it "the buck stops here"? Is it "It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (Breishit 41:16) or is it "I will be a surety, from my hand you may demand him?" (Breishit 43:8). To take the former approach absolves one, and others, of responsibility for their actions, to take the latter is to remove God from one's world.

One answer is that both are correct, we are responsible, and we need to strive to see God in the world. The key to resolve this contradiction is humility – we need to strive to see God in the world, not to presume to know how God works. If we believe that we know what God's plan is, then we can do great evil. We can go on holy wars, killing innocent people, because we know that it is God's will. We can ignore the needs of others, our interpersonal responsibilities, even our ethical responsibilities, because we know what God's plan is.

Even if not by acts of commission, we can fail to take the initiative to respond to real world events, because we will see all that happens as God's will. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Yehudah is much more of an active character, and Yosef is much more passive and reactive. Yosef is content to let events unfold, to not even tell his father for 22 years that he is in Mitzrayim, because he is content to wait for God's plan to reveal itself. This is taking religiosity too far. One's belief in God's hand in history may never compromise one's ethical responsibilities.

However, if we fully embrace our personal responsibility, and we are open, with humility, to the possibility of God acting in the world, we will live our lives both connected to God, and being proactive in addressing what is wrong in the world, in taking responsibility, in living up to it, and in never compromising our ethical obligations.

Yosef and Yehudah, then, represent the two components that are sadly often missing from an observant Jewish life – religiosity and strong and proactive sense of moral responsibility. As Modern Orthodox Jews, we often are very wary of an approach that is "too religious." We see how people can act when they believe they know God's will or that God works through them. How people can wreak violence and murder, and justify the most heinous acts. The answer, however, is not to remove God from the world. The answer is to embrace a humble religiosity. To strive to see God in our lives, to look for those moments of connection, and at the same time to know that we are just human, and that – especially in a post-Holocaust world – that we can never truly know God's plan. And when we allow ourselves to think that living a halakhic life is the beginning and end of our responsibility, we lose sight of the fundamental Torah mandate to do "what is right and just in the eyes of God." Technical observance is not enough. We must fully embrace a sense of moral responsibility – to take full responsibility for our actions or our failures to act, to see what must be done in the world, what rights must be wronged, and to act on it.

These issues are of particular moment when tragedies and atrocities occur in the world. Many people may ask where is God in all of this? How can God allow such a tragedy to take place? These are legitimate questions, and they have a place. But to overly focus on the question of Divine justice, is being religious at the expense of our obligation to do something about it. **Rav Soloveitchik, zt"l, has said that the reason that Judaism does not overly focus on the**

**question of theodicy, is because to come up with answers as to why God allows bad things to happen to good people is to make our peace with suffering and injustice. As responsible Jews, as responsible human beings, our mandate is always to be sensitive to the suffering of others and do all that is in our power to give succor and to prevent such suffering and tragedies from ever happening again.**

This dialectic is powerfully summed up in the following dialogue, the author is anonymous:

"Sometimes I would like to ask God why He allows poverty, suffering, and injustice when He could do something about it."  
"Well, why don't you ask Him?"

"Because I'm afraid He would ask me the same question."

To see God in the world is to live the life of Yosef. To never compromise our obligation to act, to do, is to live as Yehudah, to be an embodiment of vayigash eilav Yehudah. To be able to do both, to embrace full faith and full personal responsibility, is the challenge and the goal of our as religious moral agents in this world.

Shabbat Shalom!

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## **Communicating Without Words -- Thoughts for Parashat Vayiggash**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

When Joseph said to Jacob's sons that he would keep Benjamin as his slave, Judah came forward to plea for his brother's safe return home. Judah's speech to Joseph is marked by keen logic, eloquence, and strength. It is one of the oratorical masterpieces of the Bible.

But how did Judah know that Joseph understood a word he was saying? After all, the brothers knew Joseph only as an Egyptian official, someone who would not likely understand Hebrew. Normally, a translator would be present...but in Judah's emotional plea to Joseph there is no evidence of a translator. Moreover, Judah's eloquence would not have been properly conveyed by a neutral translator.

The 19th century Italian Torah commentator, Rabbi Yitzhak Shemuel Reggio, suggests that the brothers somehow picked up clues that Joseph understood their private conversations. Thus, when Judah came forward with his plea, he had a suspicion that Joseph would understand his words.

Joseph was obviously moved to tears by Judah's plea so that he revealed his identity to his brothers and began a family reconciliation. But perhaps Joseph was so powerfully moved not merely by Judah's words — which Joseph in fact did understand — but by the non-verbal power of Judah's presentation.

We can imagine Judah's tone of voice, his facial expressions, and his body movements as he made his case to Joseph. The presentation began with a calm review of previous conversations between Joseph and the brothers. It became more emotional as Judah described how his father Jacob would suffer and die if Benjamin did not return home. It rose to a crescendo when Judah offered himself as slave in place of Benjamin. And at this point Joseph broke down.

It was not merely Judah's words that reached Joseph's heart; it was the manner of Judah's presentation. Joseph sensed Judah's intense emotion, his sincerity, his strength of character. If Judah's words had been sent to Joseph as a letter, they would not likely have made such a dramatic impression.

**When people speak honestly and authentically, their non-verbal communication validates their words. When people speak deceptively and falsely, their non-verbal communication conveys their dishonesty. [emphasis added]**

Dr. Oliver Sacks reports on an incident in the aphasia ward of the institution in which he was working. (Aphasia is a condition that blocks patients from understanding words. They can pick up the sounds, but do not grasp the meaning of words they hear. But they are very attuned to non-verbal communication.) While watching a televised address by the President of the United States, the aphasics were laughing. They did not understand the words of the President...but

they understood the tone of his voice and his facial and hand gestures. "It was the grimaces, the histrionisms, the false gestures, and above all, the false tones and cadences of the voice, which rang false for these wordless but immensely sensitive patients....That is why they laughed at the President's speech." (*The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, p. 87). They could distinguish between communication that was authentic or not authentic.

Although the President's speech may have convinced some in his television audience, he failed miserably among those in the aphasia ward. They paid close attention to his manner of presentation, to his gestures and facial expressions. They found his communication to be laughable, deceptive, and insincere.

When Judah communicated with Joseph, the communication was total, sincere, authentic...and Joseph knew it and responded accordingly. Verbal and non-verbal communication were at work.

When we deal with others, it is essential to understand their verbal and non-verbal communication. Likewise, we need to be sure that our own non-verbal communication is in sync with our words. The line between authenticity and hypocrisy is easily blurred.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/communicating-without-words-thoughts-parashat-vayiggash>

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### **Book Review: Sephardim, Sephardism and Jewish Peoplehood**

by Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

Rabbi Dr. Marc D. Angel, *Sephardim Sephardism and Jewish Peoplehood* (Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals: 2022), 266 pages.

Imagine an authentic vision of Judaism fully rooted in tradition. A vision that properly represents the particularistic covenant between God and Israel through the Torah and halakhah. A vision that properly represents the universalistic aspect of God as Creator of the entire cosmos, where Israel has a role to play in the community of nations. A vision that learns from the best of traditional Jewish thinkers — Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and beyond, so that we may broaden our discourse in discussing complex contemporary issues. A vision that learns from the best of human wisdom. A vision that embraces the classical Jewish values of questioning, critical-mindedness, and diversity. A vision that demands that Jewish communal institutions be faithful to halakhah, while incorporating all Jews, regardless of background or level of observance. A vision entirely true to the axioms of Judaism, while being humble enough to recognize that the rest of humanity may pursue its own religious worldviews.

For over half of a century, Rabbi Marc D. Angel has taught that we can realize this vision. After a long and distinguished career as Rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, he founded the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals in 2007 to promote his religious worldview to a much wider audience.

All but one of the essays in this volume have been published previously in various books and journals. This collection reflects many of Rabbi Angel's "greatest hits" in representing his grand religious worldview, his Sephardic role models, and the central tenets of the ideology that animate us at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Jewish diversity is celebrated by Jewish tradition, which mandates the blessing Barukh Hakham HaRazim, the one who understands the root and inner thoughts of each individual, upon seeing throngs of Jews (Berakhot 58a). In contrast, the Talmud ascribes forced societal tyranny and conformity to the wicked City of Sodom, which used the notorious Procrustean bed on its visitors to ensure conformity (Sanhedrin 109b).

Teaching Sephardic thinkers, customs, and history to all Jews is vital on many levels. Halakhic decisors must consider the learned opinions of both Sephardic and Ashkenazic responsa before reaching conclusions on today's complex halakhic questions. Educators must be informed of Sephardic traditions and convey them as part of the wholeness of the Jewish people. Rabbis and teachers cannot be expected to know every custom or legal opinion throughout Jewish tradition, but certainly can be held to the standard of teaching an openness to diversity and willingness to learn new ideas and customs. On the negative side, Rabbi Angel cites several painful personal experiences from when he was a student, where several rabbis and teachers negated the validity of long-standing Sephardic practices and traditions.

When people shut down other valid opinions, Judaism itself is harmed and the Jewish community suffers. Overly dogmatic, authoritarian, or superstitious worldviews likewise compromise the grand religious tradition of the Torah which instills a pursuit of truth, embraces debate, teaches openness, critical-mindedness, and humility, and grows closer to God through arguments for the sake of Heaven.

Many of Rabbi Angel's articles were previously published in our own journal, *Conversations*, or in other publications largely of the Orthodox world. However, his reach extends far beyond that. One essay, entitled "Sephardim, Sephardism, and Jewish Peoplehood," was published in a collection of essays by the Central Conference of American Rabbis of the Reform Movement. Rabbi Angel expresses the need for all Jews to highlight the strengths of their respective communities and come together under the Sephardic communal model where institutions are committed to halakhah while people represent the range of observances. He even dares to dream that

*The day will surely come when all Jews — of whatever background — will come to view each other as "us" — as one people with a shared history and shared destiny...I think that not only will ethnic divisions become increasingly irrelevant, but the division of Jews into religious "streams" will also decline. A century from now, I don't think it will be important for Jews to identify as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal or any other subdivision (16).*

Another essay, entitled "Theological Unity," is based on the remarks of Rabbi Angel at a conference at the United Nations on "Religious Pluralism and Tolerance" under the sponsorship of the Kingdom of Bahrain. We are part of one humanity, all created in God's Image, who have much to learn and appreciate from one another.

Through over 53 years in the rabbinate, Rabbi Angel has consistently advocated these principles and has articulated models of how the entire Jewish community can benefit from this worldview. This new collection of essays is a wonderful entry point into Rabbi Angel's vision — and with that an entry point into several of the great luminaries and ideas that Judaism ever has produced.

We thank all of our members and supporters at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, for helping us promote and realize this vision in schools and communities worldwide.

\* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, Professor at Yeshiva University, and son of Rabbi Marc D. Angel.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/book-review-sephardim-sephardism-and-jewish-peoplehood>

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### **Memoirs of a Sephardic Rabbi**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

*Memoirs of a Sephardic Rabbi: A Book Review by Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

*A Rocky Road*, by Rabbi Abraham Levy (with Simon Rocker), Halban Publishers, London, 2017.

Rabbi Abraham Levy has been associated with the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of London for nearly six decades. Those of us who have known him over the years have been impressed with his energy, optimism, single-mindedness, devotion, British elegance...and more.

And now, he has written a volume of memoirs in which he offers candid reflections on his long service as a Sephardic rabbi. Rabbi Levy highlights his many achievements, especially in the area of Jewish education for children and adults. He writes warmly of those congregants who supported his work, who shared his ideals, and who were genuine friends to him and his family.

But he does not shy away from the less pleasant aspects of his rabbinic life. He openly discusses conflicts between himself and others of the synagogue religious and lay leadership. Indeed, the book seems to jump from one crisis to the next, some within the congregation itself and some involving other factions in the Jewish community.

He entitled his book "A Rocky Road," as an allusion to his upbringing in Gibraltar with its famous rock; and also to the fact that his years in the rabbinate were "rocky," with plenty of ups and downs. Throughout his long rabbinic tenure, he stayed focused on his mission to provide religious leadership to his people. His Sephardic upbringing and worldview served him well.

Growing up in the warm Sephardic Jewish community of Gibraltar, he learned to love his Judaism and its many mitzvoth. "The Judaism we experienced was never a burden nor driven by anxiety or fear. It was part of our natural habitat." (p. 11) The happiness and naturalness of his childhood Judaism has imbued his religious life ever since.

He also learned that a religious leader must identify with his community and must strive to create a sense of family among the various members. In a sermon he delivered in 1977, Rabbi Levy "reflected that a rabbi can only be effective in his work if he is prepared to identify with congregants in their times both of joy and festivity and of sorrow and calamity. A rabbi could not be a detached spectator." (p. 42)

In a sermon he gave on Rosh Hashana in 1987, marking his 25th anniversary with his congregation, he stated that "while there had been quiet and productive years, a few had been tempestuous and unhappy. I compared the role of the rabbi to that of a shofar. The protracted single blast of tekiah was a wake up call, urging people to think what more they should do to improve the religious lives of themselves and their children. It didn't always make the rabbi popular...The broken three-note sequence of shevarim, the sound of lament, represented the rabbi's sharing in the troubles of his congregants and holding their hand in times of need. The staccato burst of teruah — blown in biblical days as a rally to war — was a summons to action. For if I believe that something needs doing I will continue to blow the notes of teruah into everybody's ears until hopefully it gets done." (p. 62)

Rabbi Levy, like most (all?) rabbis, had to deal with various synagogue leaders who were less than ideal. "When it came to lay leaders, I always made a basic distinction: there were those who brought honour to the office and those who sought honour from the office...I prayed for honorary officers who were successful in their careers and happy at home because if they were frustrated or unfulfilled, they tended to make the rabbi's job more difficult." (p. 116) How difficult it is for a rabbi — and for the congregation as a whole — if synagogue leaders are rude, egotistical, control-freaks. Improper leaders, bent on seeking honor for themselves, end up causing vast damage to the spiritual and material health of the congregation.

Rabbi Levy's Sephardic ideology shines through his book of memoirs. He expressed pride in the fact that Sephardim "can present a religious interpretation of Judaism which does not have an ideological adjective such as Orthodox or Reform attached to it...We Sephardim, with a little give and take, have always managed to have only one Jewish community." (p. 143)

In looking back on his rabbinic career, he confessed: "I have tried not to deviate from the values I inherited from my parents and their family before them. We all remain sentimentally attached to the traditions we grew up with, but I continue to espouse the classical Sephardi outlook out of conviction that it remains important in a polarized Jewish world...I remain a defiant centrist." (p. 235) As the religious ground has shifted to the right, "I came to occupy a lonelier position in the middle of the road." (p. 233)

Rabbi Levy broods over the growing dissension within the Orthodox community, and within the larger Jewish community. Factionalism is rife. Extremism increases. Harold Levy, the former warden of Jews' College, once remarked: "We are

becoming a dumb-bell religion." He meant, we are becoming thin in the middle and heavy on the extremes. (p. 111) Rabbi Levy takes genuine pride in the school he established and which has provided strong Jewish and general education to its students. Many families have become more religiously observant thanks to the influence of the school. Yet, some of the graduates have gone on to become more "right wing" Orthodox, and have turned away from the classic Sephardic religious moderation.

In reading Rabbi Levy's *A Rocky Road*, we call to mind another road mentioned in a poem by Robert Frost, *The Road not Taken*. "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--/ I took the one less traveled by,/ And that has made all the difference." Rabbi Abraham Levy, as a young man, could have chosen many roads to live a happy and fulfilling life. He chose the rabbinate, a road less traveled by — and that has made all the difference to him, his family, and his community.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Rabbi Angel is reprinting this book review from 2017 in memory of his distinguished friend, Rabbi Abraham Levy, z"l, for many years rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation in London, who passed away recently.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/memoirs-sephardic-rabbi>

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### **Dreaming of Mitzvos**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

The news was wonderfully awesome. Yosef was alive. But how would they tell their elderly father?

The commentaries explain that there was a genuine fear that Yakov would not be able to handle the good news (see Ramban). There was concern that for him to go from the perpetual state of mourning for Yosef to the good news that Yosef had been found, would cause Yakov to go into shock. So, a strategy to notify Yakov was implemented.

Serach, a beloved granddaughter, played a hopeful tune to Yakov that Yosef was alive. Her tune was probably similar to our songs of yearning for Geula (redemption) and the coming of Moshiach. These songs create yearning and a deep awareness of a reality for which we yearn. Once she had Yakov in a place of song, in a place of hope, Serach was able to share the news that the song had come true, and relay the news that Yosef truly was alive.

Yearning is a powerful step in mitzvah observance because our emotional state plays a great role. The Medrash describes a person who does not yet have the opportunity to do a certain mitzvah, but yearns for it. "Who has preceded me?" Hashem asks. "Who yearns to do the mitzva of mezuza even before he has a house?" Hashem declares, "I will enable him to do the mitzva for which he yearns!"

Mitzvos come in all kinds of forms. Some mitzvos are clearly listed in the Torah and are part of the 613. Other mitzvos are less codified but may be quite critical to the needs of a generation.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer (1921-1998), was Chairman of Agudath Israel of America for over 30 years. During that time, he built the relatively small organization into the role it plays today in the United States, one of successful leadership and advocacy. In his youthful years, Rabbi Sherer shared his personal dream with his family. He dreamed of a time when observant Jews wearing yarmulkas would be a normal sight in Washington advocating for Federal recognition of private schools and for workplace protection of Shabbos observance. His dream was so out-of-the-box for his times that some dear relatives took him to the Ponevezher Rav to set him straight.

The Ponevezher Rav listened carefully to Rabbi Sherer's friends and then replied. "There is nothing wrong with dreaming great mitzva dreams, as long as you don't sleep through the dream." Yearning for mitzvos and good news that seem way out of reach is not wrong, so long as we endeavor towards their fulfillment. Indeed, Rabbi Sherer's dream became his lifelong pursuit, and his dream was fulfilled.

In our time what often holds us back from great dreams is that we are just so busy. The Talmud (Brachos 43b) tells us that rushing can diminish one's vision. This was the strategy that Paroh imposed on the Jewish people. He increased their workload so that they should not be able to envision a free and exalted future.

Interestingly, the Talmud advises that the vision lost in a week's rushing can be restored by the kiddush of Friday night. As we enter the day of rest, we slow down and elevate ourselves from Chol (mundane) to Kodesh (holiness). In the style of Perek Shira (which attributes symbolism to inanimate items) we might suggest that the kiddush wine represents this sense of freedom to dream. Wine has the potential (in a bad way) to intoxicate and make a person dream-like. Although we are intensely careful not to use wine in that way, wine does symbolize the ability to dream aspirations that are distant from our current reality. This quality is valuable. As one entrepreneur stated, "If you dream it, you can build it." Friday night kiddush enables us to restore our vision by slowing down from the rush of the week. It enables us to dream the dream of the great people we have the potential to be.

There are times when a particular mitzva or aspiration might seem too hard to do. We may have dreams of learning or teaching more Torah, or stepping forward with a kindness or mitzva project. Yearning and dreaming for the opportunity to do mitzvos is powerful. It releases us from the limitations of the reality in which we are and readies us emotionally and spiritually to be uplifted. It was Serach's song of hope that readied Yakov for a new, blessed chapter of his life. It is the songs and dreams in our hearts that ready us for the blessings and the beauty of mitzvos that seem beyond our reach.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

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## Parshas Vayigash – Word Power

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

After Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, word quickly spreads throughout Egypt that Yosef's family has come to Egypt. Pharaoh and the entire country celebrate Yosef's reunion with his family, and they roll out the red carpet for them. Pharaoh sends them back to Canaan to collect their father and their families saying, "*Don't be concerned over your possessions, for the best of all of the land of Egypt is yours.*" (Bereishis 45:20)

When Yosef's brothers return, he arranges for them to settle in Goshen, where they can be close to him without being entrenched in Egyptian society. He brings a delegation of his brothers to meet with Pharaoh, and then brings his illustrious father, Yaakov, to stand before Pharaoh. Upon meeting Pharaoh, Yaakov immediately blesses him. Pharaoh responds by asking Yaakov a surprising question – "*How old are you?*" Yaakov then seems to kvetch and complain to Pharaoh saying, "*the days of my life were few and bad and did not reach the years of my fathers' lives.*" (Bereishis 47:7-10) What is the meaning of this strange exchange?

The Chizkuni (Bereishis 47:8) explains that Yaakov was clearly a very old man, and Pharaoh was shocked to see such an old man. Pharaoh was aware that Yaakov's experience was unique and was asking just how unique Yaakov's life was, how long had he in fact lived? Yaakov was responding in kind that he was not actually as old as he looked. His years were fewer than his appearance suggested. His life had been difficult, and the years had taken their toll on him making him look older than he was. His true age, though, was not as unique as Pharaoh had thought, for his fathers had lived several decades more.

The Chizkuni adds that the Medrash teaches us that although Yaakov was responding properly to Pharaoh's question, he nevertheless erred in his response. When Yaakov said that his years were few and bad, G-d responded saying, "*I saved you from Lavan and from Eisav and I returned Dinah and Yosef to you, and you said the days of your life were few and bad?!*" As a result of this statement, Yaakov's life was shortened and he did not merit to live as long as his father Yitzchak did.

This Medrash is rather difficult. Yaakov was not complaining when he said his years were few and bad. He was simply saying that his years were fewer than his appearance suggested. In truth, Yaakov did live through many difficult years which did take their toll on him. While those difficulties had passed, as the Medrash notes, he had still been aged by those years. Why was Yaakov wrong for answering Pharaoh truthfully?

In Ohr Yisroel letter 6, Rav Yisroel Salanter explains that every time we focus on a concept it makes a slight impression in our mind. Over time and with repetition these impressions deepen and become part of our psyche, but only because each thought makes its own small impression. Each of those small impressions is a start on the path of changing our psyche.

Whenever we speak, our words direct our thoughts and create a moment of focus. When Yaakov chose to use the words "few and bad" he momentarily caused himself to see his life in that light. This was Yaakov's error. Yaakov had a very real and very deep relationship with G-d. He was keenly aware of G-d's great kindness in carrying him through all those difficult times, bringing him to the peace and tranquility that he now knew, safe from Lavan and Eisav and reunited with his entire family. With this awareness, Yaakov should never have allowed himself to focus on his life negatively. He should never have allowed that impression to enter his mind.

While we do not experience Yaakov's lofty, sublime relationship with G-d, there is a valuable lesson we can learn from this Medrash. The words we choose create moments of directed focus. Even when we aren't complaining, a negative word still has its impact. That focus leaves its imprint in our minds, impacting ourselves and those around us. Every time we choose a positive description it's an investment in ourselves and the world.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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## **Torn Between Father and God**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

In his royal chambers, covered in fine Egyptian linen sheets, Zaphenat Pa'aneah, aka Joseph the Hebrew, wakes up screaming, awash in cold sweat. His wife, the delicate noblewoman Asenath, finds his shaking hand and holds it, whispering "you had that nightmare again, honey?" Her husband is too startled to talk, taking a deep breath before answering, "Yes, the same old nightmare, my father died before I had a chance to see him and tell him the good news." He suddenly turns to her, half asking, half accusing, "What if I'm wrong? What if God wants me to reunite with him? And what if he dies before we meet again? I cannot bear that thought!"

Asenath, sighing, sits up next to him and says in a soothing voice, "I understand how you feel, dear, maybe you should go visit him. He will be very glad to see you, I'm sure."

"But I can't. I must know that my brothers have fully regretted their actions and that I will be accepted in the family, not becoming a target again. I need to wait for the famine to arrive because as long as they are comfortable, they will never express regret. There is also a little voice that tells me to wait for the full realization of my dreams. But you know that the most important thing is that God put me here for a reason. I am on a mission from God, and that mission is to prepare the infrastructure for my family to arrive, survive, and thrive in Egypt. God promised my great grandfather Abraham long years of exile, and he put me here to guarantee that my nation does not perish. It is not about me and my love for my father! It is about the future of the nation!"

"I guess this is a sacrifice you must make," his wife concludes. "Obviously you want to run back to your dad, sing the good news, and live with him happily ever after, but you put all this aside for the greater good. God demands this from you, and no one said it is easy to assume such great responsibility..."

The tormented viceroy, somewhat relaxed by expressing his anxiety and hearing Asenath's voice of compassion and reason, tries to fall asleep, while torn images float in his mind's eye. He is sitting on his father's knees, laughing; The brothers walk away from the pit, laughing; Jacob, sobbing, wearing sackcloth, sitting on the ground; Joseph with his son Ephraim on his knees, laughing. He then drifts away into few hours of blissful sleep, only to wake up to another day of conflicting emotions, hidden behind the rigid mask of an efficient administrator.

Years later, after Joseph has reunited with his father, brought him to Goshen, and settled him and his family in the choicest land in Egypt, there is still one question which bothers him, and yes, wakes him up at night.

That question is: did my father ever forgive me?

At this point my [imagine] editor intervenes: Jacob? Forgive Joseph? I thought that Joseph had to forgive Jacob for sending him on a dangerous mission, or for favoring him over his brothers and making him a target for their anger and jealousy. I thought the brothers had to apologize to Joseph and to their father, but I do not see a reason why Joseph would have to appease his father. After all, he had done nothing wrong. He was abducted, kidnapped, betrayed, sold to slavery, and thrown to prison. He clawed his way to glory and success and was eventually able to reunite with his family and provide for all their needs during the harsh years of famine. What does he have to apologize for?

I will have to answer that I believe that Jacob had a very good reason to be angry with Joseph. It is a reason I was not able to fully comprehend until I became a father myself, until I saw a mother's anxiety and grief when she mistakenly thought that her child had gone missing, and until I had to comfort and talk to bereaved parents.

We can say, without doubt, that of all the losses one might experience, the loss of a child is the hardest of all. A child is expected to be present in the parents' life until their end, and so the loss of a child is in essence the loss of the future and of all hope, causing the parents to sink into depression and despair. [Recently] America was shocked by the death of Debbie Reynolds only one day after her daughter, Carrie Fisher. Todd Fisher, Reynolds' surviving son, said that his sister's untimely death seriously affected his mother and was partially responsible for her stroke. He added that her last words were: "I want to be with Carrie!" Bereaved parents are overcome by feelings of guilt or a sense of failure in their role as their child's protectors, and the forced severance of their ties to the child can put them in an existential vacuum. A study conducted in Israel found that even ten years after the tragedy, it continues to be the focus of the parents' life.

In light of all this, let us remember that when Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, he tells them that the famine started two years previously (Gen. 45:6), meaning that he has already served as the viceroy for at least nine years, seven years of abundance and two years of famine. It is highly probable that when the brothers returned to their father and told him that Joseph is alive and that for the last nine years he was a powerful figure in Egypt, Jacob reacted, at least inwardly, with anger at and contempt for Joseph, who did not bother to inform Jacob that he is well and alive.

If we could have read Jacob's mind at the moment, he is told by his sons that Joseph is alive, what would we find? Maybe this:

*"Joseph is alive! Joseph is alive! This is incredible. It is unbelievable. I should feel happy and joyous, but I am not. How could he do this to me? Alive, for nine years a king, or second in command, and not even a word? I was dead! Dead for decades. He could have saved me the pain of at least nine years. 4,730,400 minutes of unbearable pain and agony! And what was he doing meanwhile? Taking a walk with his wife and children, while I am mourning here, deprived of my beloved wife and her firstborn son? No. This cannot happen."*

Jacob indeed reacts with disbelief (45:26), because he cannot believe that Joseph has been alive and never notified him. When he finally digests the news, he reacts with a death-wish: Enough [of] this life of misery. My son Joseph is still alive, let me go and see him before I die (45:28).

After decades of mourning for his son, Jacob is an empty shell. No joy can bring him back to life and all he wants now is to die without further suffering. He makes no effort to mask his feelings when he meets Joseph, his lost son, for the first time, and there could be no greater contrast between Joseph's giddy excitement and Jacob's rigid, frozen posture. As Jacob approached the land of Goshen, Joseph harnessed his horses to his chariot by himself, without seeking his servants' help. He traveled up to Goshen to meet his father and he presented himself to him. At that moment, Joseph's great sensitivity, which we have witnessed several times in his encounters with his brothers, overwhelms him. He embraces his father and cries uncontrollably. But his father, amidst all this commotion, remains unmoved. He repeats, like a mantra, the statement he made when he first heard that Joseph was alive, and tells his son, I can die now, after I saw your face, because I know you are alive. Jacob refuses or is unable to cry. His tears have dried up years ago. He rebukes Joseph, maybe subconsciously – why didn't you call me? You could have sent a servant, a messenger, or come yourself. Why did you torture me?

Joseph tries to explain. He tells his father, as he has already told his brothers, that this was all a divine plan. God wanted

me in Egypt to secure your future, dad. I could not risk the mission by sending a message to you. I am a Hebrew slave, a prisoner, who rose to power and bypassed all the seasoned politicians in Pharaoh's court. They were waiting for me to make a mistake, and sending messengers to Canaan or going there myself, would be just the mistake they were looking for, because of the great tension between the two countries. They would have executed me and that would have been the end of my mission. Who would have provided for you then, dad? Joseph pleads with his father. He wants him to understand how much he ached and yearned for this reunion. How else can one explain his constant concern with his father's well-being and the fact that the first question he had for his brothers after revealing his identity was: is my father still alive?

He had to bide his time until all the gears aligned to permit Jacob to come to Egypt safe and sound, and he did care about his father, but he had to suppress his love and emotions and be practical. Jacob does not make it easy for him. He tells him that it was not his concern to provide for the family as a preparation for the future exile in Egypt. Let God see to that, he exclaims. Who knows, maybe if you would have come back to me and we all prayed together things would have changed, or you would inform us of the upcoming famine and we would store grains, just as you did in Egypt.

They keep arguing on their way to see Pharaoh, who is very curious and excited to finally meet the long-lost patriarch of his viceroy's clan. Joseph presents Jacob to Pharaoh, and the monarch politely asks him, as was probably customary in Egypt, how old he was. The question is delivered to Jacob by his son, Joseph, who serves as a translator. Jacob looks at his son, expressionless, and whispers through tight lips, tell him that my life was short and miserable, I had a bitter life, devoid of joy, my wife dead, my kidnapped son rising to power but never thinking of me and my grief.

Joseph politely thanks his dad, and turns to the king to translate:

*"My father says that he is a hundred and thirty-seven years old, he loves this country and the place you have designated for the family, and he thanks Your Highness for your generosity."*

And we, the readers, remain with the question whether Jacob ever forgave Joseph and with our own dilemmas: when we feel that we have a religious duty, when we think that we are on a mission from God, do we pay attention to the feelings and needs of those who may be affected by our commitment to that mission, especially those we are trying to help? How does one evaluate the immediate benefit or relief versus the future greater good?

Do we side with Jacob, who believes that Joseph should have redeemed him from his agony as soon as possible, or with Joseph, who lived a tormented life, torn between his desire to see his father and his sense of deep obligation to carry on with his mission from God?

Shabbat Shalom

\* Torah VeAhava )now SephardicU.com(. Rabbi, Beth Shalom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD( and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Rabbi Ovadia's father's yahrzeit is this coming Tuesday, the fast day of 10 Tevet. May Eliyahu Ovadia's neshama have an aliyah in Shemayim.

**NOTE: Because of issues switching software, unfortunately the endnotes for Rabbi Ovadia's Dvar Torah appear at the end of this attachment rather than at the end of his Dvar Torah.**

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## Selfishness vs Selflessness

By Rabbi Joel Dinin \*

Let us step back for a moment to a previous parsha, Vayeshev. After losing two sons who were meant to have children with Tamar, Yehuda was concerned about losing a third. The fates of his eldest sons, Er and Onan, were brought on by their own wickedness, yet Tamar was the one who was punished — Yehuda's selfishness, founded on self preservation, led to Tamar being denied children and a family, just as Yehuda's actions nearly denied children and a family to Yosef

and in many ways denied Yaakov his most beloved son.

Again and again, Yehuda's focus on protecting what he has leaves others bereft.

The story of Yehuda and Tamar was a turning point. It forced Yehuda, through Tamar's cleverness, to recognize how his selfish self preservation was hurting others. He realizes his failings and the greatness of Tamar, who used her wits to force him to do the right thing in Breishit 38:26:

Judah recognized them, and said, *“She is more in the right than I”*

That was his transformative moment, just as Yosef was going through his.

But did it work? Did Yehuda really change? In this week's parsha, Vayigash, he is put to the test.

When Yehuda faced Yosef again, not knowing it was his brother, he was faced with the prospect of losing Binyamin, Yosef's full brother, the only beloved of Yaakov. Binyamin stood accused of stealing a goblet. Old, or younger, Yehuda would have taken any opportunity to get away to protect himself and his family.

In a powerful speech to Yosef, Yehuda, pleading to his brother, uses the word “Avi” — father — 7 times )Breishit 44:18-34(. Strange, because, as the Israeli Rabbi Amnon Bazak points out, Yaakov never once refers to Yehuda or any of the sons other than Binyamin or Yosef, as “Beni” — my son.

Despite this, Yehuda, who once sent Yosef into slavery, now offers himself as a slave to take Binyamin's place! Why on earth would Mr. Self Preservation do this? Why would he willingly sacrifice himself?

Because he realized, for all he would lose, the others around him, the innocents, whether he loves them or not, would lose so much more — his father would lose another son, his family would lose another brother, a tribal leader — this is when selfishness turns to selflessness.

Israeli Rabbi David Silverberg, influenced by Rav Amnon Bazak, says about Yehuda:

*“Yehuda was mature enough to recognize that he must treat Yaakov as his father even if Yaakov did not, at least in his mind, treat him like a son. We should not make our treatment of others dependent upon what we feel they deserve or do not deserve. Instead, we must decide upon the wise and appropriate course of action, and leave the judgment to the one true Judge over the world.”*

When we focus only on our own needs, we all lose in the end, but when we put others first, with everyone looking to protect the person next to them, deserving or not, whether from a place of love, loyalty or, for Yehuda, having respect and knowing what is right to do, then everyone will thrive and have what they need.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Rabbi, Lake Park Synagogue, Milwaukee, Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah )2015(.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2022/12/selfishness-vs-selflessness/>

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### **Shavuon: Summer Edition**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

]Rabbi Rube is on summer vacation, and the Auckland Hebrew Congregation is moving. Rabbi Rube will resume his column soon.[

\* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation

]Note: It is summer now in the Southern Hemisphere. [ Auckland Hebrew Congregation is moving to a new building and will be closed for the move. I anticipate that Rabbi Rube will resume his Devrei Torah on January 23, 2023.

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## Rav Kook Torah

### Vayigash: The Shepherd-Philosopher

Fourth-century scholar Rabbi Zeira once found his teacher Rabbi Yehudah in an unusually good mood. Realizing that it was a propitious time to ask whatever he wanted, Rabbi Zeira posed the following question:

*“Why is it that the goats always stride in front of the herd, to be followed by the sheep?”*

Perhaps the last thing we would expect Rabbi Zeira to ask would be a mundane fact of animal husbandry. Rabbi Yehudah, however, was not fazed. Good-humoredly, he explained that this phenomenon reflects the order of creation.

*“It is like the creation of the universe: first there was darkness [the goats, who are usually black], and afterward light [the white sheep]”* (Shabbat 77b).

A treasure-trove of wisdom had opened up for Rabbi Zeira — he had the opportunity to inquire into the deepest secrets of the universe! — and instead, he quizzed his master about goats and sheep?

#### The Shepherd-Philosopher

In fact, Rabbi Zeira's query was not so out of line. The great leaders of the Jewish people in ancient times were shepherds. As Joseph's brothers informed Pharaoh, *“Like our fathers before us, we are shepherds”* (Gen. 47:3). Moses and David also worked in this profession. There must be a reason that our ancestors chose to herd goats and sheep.

Shepherding is a lifestyle that allows for reflection and inner contemplation. The labor is not intensive. Unlike farming, one does not need to immerse all of one's energies in physical matters. At the same time, the shepherd remains in constant contact with the real world. His reflections are sound, based on life experiences. He does not delve in artificial philosophies detached from reality. For this reason, our forefathers, the great thinkers of their time, worked as shepherds.

#### Development of Thought

Rabbi Zeira's observation about flocks makes a connection between the external focus of the shepherd — his goats and sheep — and his internal focus — his thoughts and ideas.

Ideas first come to us as vague thoughts, obscured by the blurry mist of our imagination. Hidden in the murky fog, however, lies a great treasure. Over time, we refine and clarify our thoughts, and from the shrouded darkness comes forth light and wisdom.

The pattern of traveling animals corresponds to the development of thought in the shepherd's mind. The image of dark goats breaking out in front of the white sheep is an apt metaphor for the inspired but hazy notions that surge forth in our thoughts. These streaks of insight are followed by a flock of clarified ideas that have been examined by our faculties of reason. In this way, we develop the reasoned concepts that form the basis for our intellectual and spiritual life.

#### The Need for Opacity

As Rabbi Yehudah pointed out, this order is inherent to the nature of the world. The light in the universe was created out of the darkness. This phenomenon is also true on a personal level. We cannot completely dismiss the illusory aspects of our minds, for they inspire us to originality of thought. Our imagination dominates our thought processes; it is only through its fuzzy insights that we can arrive at the path of enlightened wisdom.

*)Gold from the Land of Israel.* Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, pp. 144-145.

[https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYIGASH\\_65.htm](https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYIGASH_65.htm)

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## The Unexpected Leader )Vayigash 5774, 5781(

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

I was once present when the great historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, was asked to predict the course of events in the Middle East. He replied, *"I'm a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a retired historian, so even my past is passé."* Predictions are impossible in the affairs of living, breathing human beings because we are free and there is no way of knowing in advance how an individual will react to the great challenges of their life.

If one thing has seemed clear throughout the last third of Genesis, it is that Joseph will emerge as the archetypal leader. He is the central character of the story, and his dreams and the shifting circumstances of his fate all point in that direction. Least likely as a candidate for leadership is Judah, the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave )Gen. 37:26-27(, whom we next see separated from his brothers, living among the Canaanites, intermarried with them, losing two of his sons because of sin, and having sexual relations with a woman he takes to be a prostitute. The chapter in which this is described begins with the phrase, *"At that time Judah went down from among his brothers"* )Gen. 38:1(. The commentators take this to indicate Judah's moral decline. At this point in the story, we may have no doubt who will lead and who will follow.

Yet history turned out otherwise. Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Menashe, disappeared from the pages of history after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE, while Judah's descendants, starting with David, became kings. The tribe of Judah survived the Babylonian conquest, and it is Judah whose name we bear as a people. We are Yehudim, "Jews." This week's parsha of Vayigash explains why.

Already in last week's parsha we began to see Judah's leadership qualities. The family had reached deadlock. They desperately needed food, but they knew that the Egyptian viceroy had insisted that they bring their brother Benjamin with them, and Jacob refused to let this happen. His beloved wife Rachel's first son )Joseph( was already lost to him, and he was not about to let the other, Benjamin, be taken on a hazardous journey. Reuben, in keeping with his unstable character, made an absurd suggestion: *"Kill my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back safely."* )Gen. 42:37( In the end it was Judah, with his quiet authority – *"I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him"* )Gen. 43:9( – who persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them.

Now, as the brothers attempt to leave Egypt, and return home, the nightmare scenario has unfolded. Benjamin has been found with the viceroy's silver cup in his possession. The official delivers his verdict. Benjamin is to be held as a slave. The other brothers can go free. This is the moment when Judah steps forward and makes a speech that changes history. He speaks eloquently about their father's grief at the loss of one of Rachel's sons. If he loses the other, he will die of grief. I, says Judah, personally guaranteed his safe return. He concludes:

*"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 it would bring my father."* Gen. 44:33-34

No sooner has he said these words than Joseph, overcome with emotion, reveals his identity and the whole elaborate drama reaches closure. What is happening here and how does it have a bearing on leadership?

The Sages articulated a principle: *"Where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand."* )Brachot 34b( The Talmud brings a prooftext from Isaiah: *"Peace, peace, to those far and near"* )Is. 57:19( placing the far )the penitent sinner( before the near )the perfectly righteous(. However, almost certainly the real source is here in the story of Joseph and Judah. Joseph is known to tradition as ha-tzaddik, the righteous one.]1[ Judah, as we will see, is a penitent. Joseph became "second to the king." Judah, however, became the ancestor of kings. Hence, **where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.** ]Emphasis added[

Judah is the first person in the Torah to achieve perfect repentance )teshuva(, defined by the Sages as when you find yourself in a situation where it is likely you will be tempted to repeat an earlier sin, but you are able to resist because you are now a changed person.]2[

Many years before Judah was responsible for Joseph being sold as a slave:

*Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.* Gen. 37:26-27

Now, faced with the similar prospect of leaving Benjamin as a slave, he has a very different response. He says, *“Let me stay as a slave and let my brother go free.”* )Gen. 44:33( That is perfect repentance, and it is what prompts Joseph to reveal his identity and forgive his brothers.

The Torah had already hinted at the change in Judah’s character in an earlier chapter. Having accused his daughter-in-law Tamar of becoming pregnant by a forbidden sexual relationship, he is confronted by her with evidence that he himself is the father of the child, and his response is to immediately declare: *“She is more righteous than I”* )Gen. 38:26(. **This is the first time in the Torah we see a character admit that he is wrong.** If Judah was the first penitent, it was Tamar – mother of Perez from whom King David was descended – who was ultimately responsible. ]Emphasis added[

Perhaps Judah’s future was already implicit in his name, for though the verb le-hodot from which it is derived means “to thank” )Leah called her fourth son Judah saying, *“This time I will thank the Lord,”* Gen. 29:35(, it is also related to the verb le-hitvadot, which means “to admit or “to confess” – and confession is, according to the Rambam, the core of the command to repent.

Leaders make mistakes. That is an occupational hazard of the role. Managers follow the rules, but leaders find themselves in situations for which there are no rules. Do you declare a war in which people will die, or do you refrain from doing so at the risk of letting your enemy grow stronger with the result that more will die later? That was the dilemma faced by Chamberlain in 1939, and it was only some time later that it became clear that he was wrong and Churchill right.

But leaders are also human, and their mistakes often have nothing to do with leadership and everything to do with human weakness and temptation. The sexual misconduct of John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton and many other leaders has undoubtedly been less than perfect. Does this affect our judgment of them as leaders or not? Judaism suggests it should. The prophet Nathan was unsparing of King David for consorting with another man’s wife. But Judaism also takes note of what happens next.

**What matters, suggests the Torah, is that you repent – you recognise and admit your wrongdoings, and you change as a result.** As Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, both Saul and David, Israel’s first two kings, sinned. Both were reprimanded by a Prophet. Both said chattati, “I have sinned”.<sup>3</sup> But their fates were radically different. Saul lost the throne, David did not. The reason, said the Rav, was that **David confessed immediately. Saul prevaricated** and made excuses before admitting his sin.<sup>4</sup> ]Emphasis added[

The stories of Judah, and of his descendant David, tell us that what marks a leader is not necessarily perfect righteousness. It is the ability to admit mistakes, to learn from them and grow from them. The Judah we see at the beginning of the story is not the man we see at the end, just as the Moses we see at the Burning Bush – stammering, hesitant – is not the mighty hero we see at the end, *“his sight undimmed, his natural energy unabated.”*

A leader is one who, though they may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble and courageous than they were before.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

]1[ See Tanchuma )Buber(, *Noach*, 4, s.v. eleh, on the basis of Amos 2:6, *“They sold the righteous for silver.”*

]2[ Mishneh Torah, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:1.

]3[ I Sam. 15:24 and II Sam. 12:13.

]4[ Joseph Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek: Listen – My Beloved Knocks* )Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav, 2006(, 26..

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How does Judaism's view of a leader differ from the secular understanding of leadership in your country?
2. Do you gauge people by their mistakes or by their responses to these mistakes?
3. How can we apply these ideas about teshuvah to our lives today?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayigash/the-unexpected-leader/> 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.

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## When Things Cannot Get Any Worse

By Aharon Loschak\* © Chabad 2022

A friend of mine runs a Chabad center with a Hebrew School in a fairly Jewish community in the Northeastern United States. As the beginning of the academic year came closer this past summer, he and his wife were still looking for one last teacher for one of the Hebrew school classes. They looked high and low, from Brooklyn to Monsey to outlying communities in New Jersey — with no luck. This went on for months, to no avail. They were at their wits' end, and there didn't seem to be any solution in sight.

Days before school was slated to begin, on a Shabbat afternoon, my friend's wife was speaking with a community member in shul. She mentioned the struggle to find that last teacher, and unexpectedly the community member offered, "I can do it!"

The Rebbetzin was taken aback, but the lady assured her that she was capable of the job, and just like that, she was hired.

"I can tell you now, she's our best teacher!" my friend told me. "Never in a million years would my wife and I have thought that she was even an option, but here we are, and she's been a dream."

An inextricable problem turned out to be eminently solvable, for the solution was always there, right under their noses.

### Joseph's Noble Reaction

After a harrowing three weeks, the saga of Joseph and his brothers comes to a dramatic head in our parshah. Judah defiantly and passionately stands up to the Egyptian ruler, pleading, begging, and threatening that he will never let his younger brother languish in prison.

After multiple attempts to hold back his tears, Joseph cries out, "*I am Joseph, your brother!*" The brothers are stunned, rendered completely speechless. Out of intense shame and fear of retaliation, they retreat and brace themselves for the worst.

Instead, Joseph delivers perhaps one of the most edifying monologues in the Torah, placating his brothers:

*But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that God sent me before you.*<sup>1</sup>

Joseph proceeds to convince them that his odyssey was, in fact, a positive thing, for it was only because he was sold into slavery in Egypt that he was now able to provide sustenance to his entire family. Instead of vengeful, Joseph is gracious and forgiving.

### Just When It Can't Get Any Worse

Much attention is given to Joseph and his remarkable character, and rightfully so. In a stirring commentary, Rabbi Mordechai Leiner of Izhbitz (1800-1854) points out that this entire chronicle is remarkably encouraging for anyone undergoing any sort of challenge or hardship. His cue is surprisingly not from Joseph's perspective, but from the brothers' viewpoint.

Think about the moment just before Joseph pulled the curtain back and revealed his true identity. Things were looking very bleak for Jacob's 11 sons. They had been accused of spying; their strongest member, Shimon, was already in prison; and now, the viceroy's personal goblet had been found in the youngest brothers' sack.

This cruel and evil Egyptian dictator was making them crazy, and now, the nail in the coffin: he was demanding to take Benjamin hostage. This family who had a painful and tortuous relationship with slavery was terrified at the prospect of losing Rachel's other son to bondage. They knew this would be a fatal blow to their father.

It couldn't have really been any worse.

And then, in the blink of an eye, everything dissipated. With one revelation, all of those challenges disappeared like a distant memory, for it had turned out that the Egyptian tyrant wasn't a tyrant after all, but their brother who loved them and wished them no harm.

### **The Solution is Right in Front of You**

In hindsight, the solution to their problem was right there in front of their eyes the entire time. You see, nothing actually changed in their situation. It's not as if they were suddenly endowed with superpowers and decimated the Egyptian opposition. No outside force swept in to deliver them, nor was there an earthquake that shook the rafters, allowing them to escape.

Nothing like that at all. Rather, the truth simply came to the fore: everything was a ruse, and their next of kin was right there in front of them waiting for their embrace.

### **A Lot Closer Than You Think**

And so it is in our lives. Who doesn't have their share of challenges? From health to finances to issues with parents, children, and friends, there's no lack of struggle in this world. At times, it can all feel so crippling, so crushing, that it seems like there's no way out.

To make matters worse, the solution you can think of seems so outlandish, so remote, and so far-fetched. It's one thing not to have enough money to cover the monthly expenses, but when it's compounded with outstanding debt that's collecting interest by the minute and incidental health issues that rack up bills, the solution just seems to be out of reach. "I know what I need to get back on my feet — but no one's raining a million dollars on my head!" you think to yourself.

If you mess up with your partner or scuffle with your children, that's one thing. You make up, you have a heart-to-heart talk, and with enough good will, you move on. But what about those times in life when issues have compounded and accumulated over years of dysfunction? What if it's like the roller coaster Joseph's brothers endured, and it now seems so complex and multi-layered so as to be inextricable?

"Solutions?" you scoff, "this is way out of anyone's league, it's simply hopeless."

You're forgiven for thinking so. The brothers would have been, too. But they didn't. They maintained hope. And you know what happened? Poof! Just like that, it became something to laugh and cry about, for the solution was literally in front of their faces the entire time.

G d is big. Very big. He holds your challenge, and as impossible and out-of-reach the solution to your problem may seem, it could very well be that the solution is, in fact, right under your nose, tantalizingly close.

Hang in there for just a bit more, maintain your trust in G d, and you may just get your "Poof!" moment sooner than you think.<sup>2</sup>

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Genesis 45:5.
2. This essay is based on *Mei Hashiloach*, vol. 2, Vayigash #2.

\* Writer, editor, and rabbi from Brooklyn, NY.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5329596/jewish/When-Things-Cannot-Get-Any-Worse.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5329596/jewish/When-Things-Cannot-Get-Any-Worse.htm)

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## **Vayishlach: Come Face to Face With Your Divine Providence**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

### **Realizing Divine Providence**

*Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves for having sold me here, since it was in order to provide for your needs that G-d sent me ahead of you. )Gen.45:5(*

Joseph's and Pharaoh's dreams constitute a study in contrasts. Joseph dreamed about inheriting the leadership of Jacob's family so he could further G-d's purpose to sanctify the world by transforming it into His true home. Pharaoh, in contrast, dreamed about the material welfare of the pagan empire of Egypt. Furthermore, Joseph dreamed first about earthly sheaves and then about the heavenly hosts, a progression from the earthly to the heavenly. Pharaoh dreamed first about cows and then about sheaves, a regression from a higher form of life to a lower one.

It was Divine providence that Joseph, of all his brothers, was the one who was the first of his family to reach Egypt. Joseph was uniquely suited to prepare the way for the family: He alone possessed the spiritual fortitude to remain true to his ideals even while rising to become viceroy of the materialistic empire of Egypt. By combining spiritual integrity with materialistic acumen, he was able to provide for his family both spiritually and materially when they finally arrived. Ultimately, the setting he orchestrated for them is what enabled the family to both survive their subsequent slavery and develop into a people fit to accept G-d's mission by receiving the Torah.

We can all learn from Joseph, recognizing how Divine providence has placed us in whatever position of influence we occupy, and realizing that the purpose of this providence is "to provide for the needs" – spiritual and physical – of those whom the same Divine providence has entrusted to our care.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3

A joyous Hei Teves and Gut Shabbos, \*\*

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

\* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

\*\* The fifth Day of the month of Tevet is celebrated in communities all over as a day dedicated to Jewish books, marking the historic victory of the Chabad Lubavitch Library and its position as a communal treasure for all who value the teachings and ideals of Chabad Chassidism. We celebrate by purchasing, restoring, and studying books from all across the spectrum of Jewish scholarship. For more on this special day, see:

[https://www.chabad.org/therrebbe/article\\_cdo/aid/3533289/jewish/The-Prevailing-Power-of-Holiness.htm](https://www.chabad.org/therrebbe/article_cdo/aid/3533289/jewish/The-Prevailing-Power-of-Holiness.htm)

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#### Covenant and Conversation

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

#### The Birth of Forgiveness

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

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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.<sup>[4]</sup> 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.<sup>[5]</sup>

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.

[1] There are midrashic suggestions that God partially forgave, or at least mitigated the punishments of Adam, Eve, and Cain. Ishmael was said to have become a penitent, and there are midrashic interpretations that identify Keturah, the woman Abraham married after the death of Sarah, with Hagar, implying that Abraham and Isaac were reunited and reconciled with Sarah’s maid-servant and her son.

[2] David Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[3] Frans de Waal, *Peacemaking Among Primates*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

[4] See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

[5] Hannah Arendt makes this point in *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 241.

#### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

“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.

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

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!

#### **The Person in the Parsha** **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

##### **Reconciliation**

I have known more than my share of families that are torn by discord. I think most of us, perhaps even all of us, are familiar with families in which brothers and sisters have not spoken to each other in years, sometimes even having forgotten the original reason for the destruction of their relationship. My background and experience in the field of family therapy has given me even broader exposure than most to this unfortunate phenomenon.

Colleagues of mine in the practice of psychotherapy will concur that overcoming feelings of hatred and urges toward revenge is one of the most difficult challenges that they face in their practice. Reconciling parents and children, husbands and wives, is a frustrating process for those of us who counsel families. The successful reconciliation of ruined relationships is a rare achievement, especially after the misunderstandings have festered for years.

The great 18th century moralist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, contends that these difficulties are intrinsic to our human nature. Thus, he writes:

"Hatred and revenge. These, the human heart, in its perversity, finds it hard to escape. A man

is very sensitive to disgrace and suffers keenly when subjected to it. Revenge is sweeter to him than honey; he can not rest until he has taken his revenge. If, therefore, he has the power to relinquish that to which his nature impels him; if he can forgive; if he will forbear hating anyone who provokes him to hatred; if he will neither exact vengeance when he has the opportunity to do so, nor bear a grudge against anyone; if he can forget and obliterate from his mind a wrong done to him as though it had never been committed; then he is, indeed, strong and mighty. So to act may be a small matter to angels, who have no evil traits, but not to 'those that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust.'" (Job 4:19) (Mesilat Yesharim [The Path of the Upright], Chapter 11)

Granted that one must approximate the angels in heaven in order to overcome the natural human inclinations to hate and take revenge. How, then, do we explain the astounding reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers, which occurs in this week's Torah portion? (Genesis 44:18-47:27)

Joseph's brothers came to hate him because of what they saw as his malicious arrogance. Joseph certainly had reason to hate his brothers, who cast him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions. We can easily understand that he would attribute his years of imprisonment to their betrayal of him. And yet, in last week's Torah portion, we learned that they came to regret their actions and to feel guilty for what they did to him. "Alas, we are at fault... because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us." (Genesis 42:21)

It is in this week's parsha that we learn of the forgiveness that Joseph demonstrated toward his brothers. We read of a dramatic, reconciliation—a total triumph over hatred and revenge. What inner strengths enabled Joseph and his brothers to attain this rare achievement?

I maintain that quite a few such strengths help Joseph's brothers to rejoin him harmoniously. One was their ability to accept responsibility for their actions. Over time, they reflected introspectively and concluded that they were indeed wrong for what they did. Self-confrontation, and a commitment to accepting the truth when it surfaces allowed them to forget whatever originally prompted them to hate Joseph.

I further maintain that the underlying dynamics of Joseph's ability to forgive were very different. He came to forgive his brothers because of two fundamental aspects of his personality: his emotional sensitivity and his religious ideology.

Joseph's sensitivity becomes apparent to the careful reader of this and last week's Torah portions. The most reliable indication of a

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person's sensitivity is his ability to shed tears of emotion, his capacity to weep. Joseph demonstrates this capacity no less than four times in the course of the biblical narrative:

Subsequent to his initial encounter with his brothers, we read that "he turned away from them and wept..." (Genesis 42:24); when he first sees his younger brother Benjamin, "he was overcome with feeling...He went into a room and wept there..." (ibid. 43:30); unable to contain himself after Judah's confrontational address, "his sobs were so loud that...the news reached Pharaoh's palace..." And finally, as we will read in next week's Torah portion, this is Joseph's response to his brothers' plea for explicit forgiveness: "and Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him." (ibid. 50:17).

No doubt about it. The biblical text gives us conclusive evidence of Joseph's emotional sensitivity. But there is another secret to Joseph's noble treatment of his brothers. It relates to his philosophy, not to his emotional reactivity.

If there is one lesson that Joseph learned from his father Jacob during his disrupted adolescence, it was the belief in a divine being who ultimately controls man's circumstances and man's destiny. When a person wholly has that belief, he is able to dismiss even the most painful insults against him. He is able to attribute them to God's plan and not to blame the perpetrators of that insult. Thus was Joseph able to say, "So, it was not you who sent me here, but God..." (ibid. 45:8)

The power of genuine faith to instill the awareness that even hurtful circumstances are part of the divine plan is, in my opinion, best described in this passage from the anonymous 13th century author of Sefer HaChinuch, in his comments on the commandment to desist from revenge:

"At the root of this commandment is the lesson that one must be aware and take to heart the fact that everything that happens in one's life, whether it seems beneficial or harmful, comes about because of God's intervention... Therefore, when a person is pained or hurt by another, he must know in his soul...that God has decreed this for him. He should not be prompted to take revenge against the perpetrator, who is only indirectly the cause of his pain or hurt. We learn this from King David who would not respond to the traitorous curses of his former ally, Shimi ben Gera."

The author of Sefer HaChinuch sees King David as the exemplar of this profound religious faith. In these final Torah portions of the Book of Genesis, we learn that Joseph was King David's mentor in regard to the capacity to rise above the misdeeds of others and to see them as but part of God's design.

It is not easy for us lesser believers to emulate Joseph and David, but we would be spared

much interpersonal strife if we would at least strive to do so.

### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissacher Frand**

#### **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. VaYimtz'a'y'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."

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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.

#### **Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

#### **Learning In Judaism**

In our Torah Portion of Vayigash, the Torah tells us that Jacob sent his son Judah as an "advance-party" to Goshen before all, the Jews came to Egypt, "Lehorot-to show the way" (Genesis 46:28). But since the Hebrew word "Lehorot" also signifies to teach Torah, Rashi (Rashi commentary to Genesis 46:28), based on the Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma Vayigash 11), gives an alternative explanation. Judah was sent down to Goshen in order to set up a Beit Midrash-House of Learning before the entire family arrived. The implication is that the very first task in a new Jewish community is to have a place to learn and teach Torah (all Jewish subjects). How reflective of normative Judaism is this comment of Rashi? Although we know that education, i.e., Torah learning, has always been important to Jews, just how important is it exactly?

The Importance of Torah Learning - It is important to state at the outset that in Judaism, there is no distinction between learning and Torah learning. Since all concepts are to be

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found within Torah (Avot 5:22), then every "secular" concept of note can also be found in Torah, if one looks hard enough. Therefore, the Jewish approach to learning in general is reflected in its attitude to Torah learning. There are several statements in the sources which demonstrate that the endeavor of Torah learning is more important than almost any other endeavor in Jewish life. The Talmud (Shabbat 127a) equates the learning of Torah with all the other commandments in the Torah combined. One is permitted to destroy a synagogue, used for Jewish prayer, in order to build a Beit Midrash, a house of Torah learning (but not the reverse) (Megillah 27a), indicating that learning supersedes prayer in importance. This corroborates another Talmudic statement (Eruvin 63b) which avows that Torah learning is more important than bringing sacrifices, the forerunners of today's prayers. This concept is later codified as Jewish law (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 153:8 and Mishnah Berurah, no. 1). Torah learning is one of the few commandments whose rewards are received both in this world as well as the next world (Shabbat 127a). According to the Talmud's understanding of King David in the Psalms (Psalms 61:5), Torah learning is one of those things which is guaranteed to perpetuate a person after he or she dies (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 13a) Torah learning will also help keep a person vibrant in old age, even before he or she dies (Bamidbar Rabbah 3), according to the verse in the Psalms (Psalms 92:14-15).

Because of its greater importance, there are certain important Jewish concepts which Torah learning overrides. Learning Torah is more important than even building the Holy Temple, as Ezra held back his Aliyah to Israel from Babylonia (in order to rebuild the Temple) as long as the great scholar Baruch Ben Nerya was alive and teaching (Megillah 16b). The same Talmudic passage also says that learning Torah is more important than respecting one's parents, since Jacob was punished for the years he was away from his parents (for the same 22 years he was away from his parents, Joseph was away from him), but was not punished for the additional fourteen years of Torah study away from home. Torah learning is also one of the few areas in which a child may ignore a parent's wishes if he or she feels he can learn better in a different place than where the parent desires (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 240:25). According to the Talmudic passage (Megillah 16b), Torah learning is even more important than saving lives. This does not mean that one should keep learning Torah while someone's life is in danger, but Mordechai was viewed as greater when he was "only" a Torah scholar than after he saved the Jewish people from destruction at the hand of Haman. Rabbi Akiva (Berachot 61b) felt that learning and teaching Torah was more important than physical life itself. When the Romans issued a decree against learning Torah, and Rabbi Akiva continued to teach, a Rabbi asked him how he could do this at peril to his life (after all, learning Torah is not one of the three cardinal

sins which one violates rather than lose one's life)? Rabbi Akiva answered that Torah is his lifeblood and without it he is like a fish on land that is sure to die. With Torah (compared to water), he is like a fish in the water which may or may not be caught by the fisherman (the Romans). Unfortunately, Rabbi Akiva was later caught and killed by the Romans, but he did feel that learning Torah was more important.

When the second Temple was about to be destroyed, the Talmud records the story (Gittin 56b) of Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai, who was able to secretly escape from the besieged city of Jerusalem. By addressing General Vespasian as Emperor minutes before he was informed that he, Vespasian, was indeed the new Emperor, Rabbi Yochanan was granted any request by Vespasian. Knowing that the city of Jerusalem was soon to be conquered and laid ruin (and the very survival of Judaism itself was in question), he asked that the Yeshiva and scholars of the town of Yavneh be permitted to continue to exist, which was granted. Of all the things he could have asked that would have perpetuated Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Yochanan chose Torah learning. History has proved him correct, as Yavneh and Torah learning did keep Judaism alive after the Temple. Jews today still observe the same traditions as the time of Rabbi Yochanan, because of Torah learning and the passing down of Torah. In addition, throughout the generations, whenever Jewish existence was threatened, it was Torah learning that allowed the Jews and Judaism to survive the worst tragedies. In fact, the enemies of the Jewish people understood this when they banned Torah learning in an effort to destroy Judaism (Taanit 18a). Thus, only Torah learning (and all that this implies) has kept the Jewish people alive. Perhaps this is what it is implied when God tells the people (Vayikra Rabbah 25:1) that if they become completely involved in Torah study, they will never need to fear any nation.

Unlike any other discipline of learning, Torah learning is unique in that the more one learns, the more a person realizes how little he or she knows and how much more there is to learn. A Jewish scholar never feels that he or she has mastered Torah, and a Torah scholar is always called a *Talmid Chacham*, the student of a wise man, never a wise man. Unlike medicine, law, engineering, or any other discipline, where, after studying a few years, a person can feel that he or she has mastered the general subject matter, in Torah, the more one studies, the more one realizes how much is left to learn. In fact, the Talmud says (Eruvin 54a and 54b) that as long as person tries to learn Torah, he or she will find some "taste" or meaning.

**Jewish Learning is More Than Absorbing Facts -** Learning Torah involves more than just assimilating information. The Talmud (Eruvin 54a and 54b) records that if a Jew learned Torah but did not spend time in the service of a

Torah scholar, he is called an ignoramus. This indicates that merely learning information is not enough to make someone a learned Jew. The person must "live" with a scholar and absorb non-classroom ideas. Similarly, the Talmud says (Pesachim 66a) that the entire generation of Jews were punished because they did not spend time in "service" of the scholars Shemaya and Avtalyon. Spending time in service of scholars is extremely crucial to Torah learning because Torah is a way of life and not just the accumulation of knowledge. One cannot learn a way of life by learning only the facts. That is why the Code of Jewish Law states (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 246:8) that a student may not learn Torah from a teacher who is a great scholar but does not behave in an upright fashion. If Torah were merely information, then it should not make any difference if the teacher of that information acts morally or not. However, Judaism believes Torah is also taught through the behavior of the teacher. There is a story in the Talmud (Berachot 62a) of the student who followed his Rabbi-teacher into the bathroom to observe his behavior, and another statement where another student followed his Rabbi-teacher into the bedroom to observe the Rabbi's sexual behavior. When each was asked how he could do such a disgusting thing, both students replied that this too is part of Torah and this must be learned, and their answer was accepted. Thus, Torah is absorbed by watching how others live it and bringing Torah into one's daily existence. Even the "secular conversations" of Torah scholars should be studied (Avoda Zarah 19b). This is also why the blessing in the prayer book, recited before saying words of Torah, is *La-asok Bividvrai Torah*, to be involved with words of Torah and not *Lilmod Torah*, to learn Torah. Torah must be absorbed by all the senses, and not merely learned by the brain as information.

The origin of teaching Torah comes from the Shema, where it says (Deuteronomy 6:7) that "you shall teach your children and speak of them (words of Torah) when you sit in your house, when you walk on your way when you lie down and when you get up." From these words, it is easily seen that the Torah originally was taught from parent to child and was not learned in a classroom but, rather, through the daily actions and routines. And it was taught in all parts of life and at all times. This is true Jewish learning.

**Learning in Judaism Means Teaching and Doing -** The goal of learning in Judaism is not merely to understand the ideas and concepts of the Torah. The purpose of learning is both to teach others and to use the learning to affect Jewish behavior. The Mishna (Avot 4:5) says that if a person learns only for the sake of teaching, will be granted by Heaven only the means to both learn and teach. He who learns in order to practice, he will be granted the opportunity to learn, teach, and, in addition, to practice and perform. The Torah speaks only about teaching (Torah and/or Judaism) to one's

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children (Deuteronomy 6:7 and Deuteronomy 11:9), not to learn Torah oneself (that reference comes much later in Joshua 1:8). Thus, it seems that the real goal is to teach Torah and not only to learn Torah. Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:1 and 3:3) begins his chapters about learning Torah (after stating who is exempt) with the obligation to teach, not to learn. Two paragraphs later, he discusses the obligation and conditions for hiring a teacher. Based on the verse in Proverbs (Proverbs 7:26), the Talmud (Avoda Zarah 19b) deprecates someone who can teach but chooses not to. The Mishna (Avot 1:13) also says someone who refuses to teach deserves death. On the other hand, Rabbi Joshua Ben Gamla is referred to as "remembered for good" (just as Elijah is) because he set up the Jewish school system, guaranteeing education to all children. It also says (Batra 8b) that teachers are the "stars" of the Jewish people who do righteous for the community.

Similarly, anyone who learns Torah without intention to put that learning into practice is looked down upon in Judaism. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 35:7) says that if a person only learns and does not do, it is better that he or she should not have been born. The Mishna says (Avot 1:17) that the main thing in Judaism is the action, not the learning.

**\* 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](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)**

## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

### Reconciliation and the Scars That Remain Rabbanit Dr. Hannah Hashkes

The encounter between Yehuda and Yosef described in the beginning of our portion is perceived as the celebrated moment of reconciliation between Yosef and his brothers. If this is so, why do the brothers express concern of possible retribution by Yosef after their father's death (Bereishit 50, 15-21)? It appears that the mutual suspicion has not dissipated, and despite the reconciliation, the scars are still there and many issues remain unresolved.

And, indeed, when our Sages explain the word "vayigash" ("and he approached"), they go beyond the literal meaning of the word, which denotes a motion of coming closer. They interpret Yehuda's motion towards Yosef as an act of defiance, signaling a pending violent confrontation. One midrash tells us that Yehuda responded with great anger (an anger well-known to his brothers) at Yosef's threatening to take Binyamin as slave, and even tore off his clothing. Yosef, for his part, kicked the stone chair upon which he was sitting, turning it to rubble. It was nothing short of a miracle that prevented further escalation, and induced Yehuda to resolve

matters through words. Another midrash suggests that Yehuda threatened to destroy a quarter of all Egyptian markets, and that it was Yosef's fear that Yehuda would ultimately destroy Egypt in its entirety that convinced him to reveal his true identity to his brothers (Bereishit Rabbah, 93, 7-8).

The heads-on confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef, as described by our Sages, is not surprising if one takes into account all the conflicts that would transpire between the descendants of Yosef and the kingdom of Yehuda in the forthcoming generations. Considering the sibling rivalry that had existed in the past, and the rift that would take place much later, maybe what should really surprise us are the times when unity did prevail between all the sons of Yaakov, rather than the omens of continued tension.

When meeting his brothers, Yosef is described as "the ruler of all the land." By its very nature, his status does not permit a relationship of equal standing with his brothers, who are described as "the people of the land". Moreover, Yosef is "the provider of food", the one who feeds the entire country, while the sons of Yaakov have lost the most basic of capabilities – providing for their families. When Yaakov and his sons arrive in Egypt under the auspices of Yosef, the imbalance is further intensified. Yosef becomes the only provider "for his father, his brethren and his father's entire household, and sustained them with bread, according to the want of their little ones" (Bereshit 47, 12). Yosef reassures his brothers, who are still wary he might avenge them after their father's death, by telling them he will go on providing for them and their progeny. At this stage, Yaakov and his sons have already settled down in the Land of Goshen, herding their flocks, and presumably should be able to provide for themselves. However, Yosef maintains his position of power. It follows that the brothers remain subject to the mercy of the brother they had tried to get rid of, all because of his dreams pertaining to their being his subjects!

The chasm which exists between Yosef and his brothers is not merely an internal family affair; it is also an abyss that lies between contradicting lifestyles. Egypt, as is described in the book of Bereishit, is a land of fixed and stable economic infrastructures. Although Yosef introduced some reforms to Egypt's economy and its social hierarchy in wake of the famine, Egypt had always had social statuses and clear divisions between the working farmers, the rulers and the ministers of religion. It goes without saying that Egypt's centralized ruling structure was reinforced when the farmers' lands were sold to the ruler during the famine years, and annexed to the cities; however, Pharaoh's dreams prior to this, and how these were interpreted by Yosef, attest to the fact that Pharaoh had already exercised a centralized economy and felt responsible for sustaining his people.

Unlike the Egyptians, the Israelites in Egypt do not live under any form of centralized governing authority, and Yaakov's family sees itself as an independent economic unit. The sons of Yaakov are shepherds, and, as such, are easily able to take their families and move around from place to place whenever the need arises. Egypt, despite its power and the numerous temptations it had to offer, did not change them. The Israelites remain alienated foreigners, and later on become slaves. The very redemption from Egypt was possible because of the nomadic nature of a shepherd's life: when the time comes, the myriads of Israelites are easily able to pack up their things and leave Egypt, with their numerous offspring and livestock, and head for the land promised to their forefathers by God.

Much has been written about Yosef as the Jewish archetype who provides for his brethren in the Diaspora. But Yosef takes it a step further. As a ruler with a grasp for Egypt's social-economic infrastructure, Yosef is miles apart from his brothers, the sons of Israel, the nomadic shepherds. In this regard, Yosef remained an Egyptian. What is most astonishing is the fact that Yosef still insists on holding onto his identity as an Israelite. Consequently, his own sons do not assimilate into the Egyptian people but become part and parcel of the People of Israel. Perhaps it is this point that reflects the true power of the reconciliation between Yosef and his brothers, irrespective of the tension that continued to prevail.

It is this nomadic nature, or "lightness of movement" if you will, that enabled the Jewish People to keep on surviving throughout time; however, this did come at the expense of recurring travels and voyages into the darkest of exiles. Living in the Land of Israel and instituting an Israeli kingdom present a constant challenge for a nation that is, by nature, not "Egyptian". Shepherds, who are always dependent on the mercy of Heaven, know all too well that the power of the human ruler is limited and that any human is a slave only to his Father in Heaven. Any stability which might be achieved in a place like Egypt is the result of an unwavering balance of power. An unchallenged, centralized governing authority, stringent social structures and exploitation are crucial for the type of stability which Yosef himself promoted and exercised. But these were unfeasible for the sons of Israel. It seems that Yosef, in his wisdom, understood this discrepancy and operated on two separate planes: on the one hand, he ensured that his father's family would not assimilate into the centralized Egyptian society, nor take any part in the governing powers at play. On the other hand, as the continuation of the story proves, there was a high price to pay for this decision: by having Yosef as their sole provider, they did not have to contend with the real world, and this

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ultimately cost them their freedom. When Yosef was no longer there, they became slaves.

The nomadic life of both the Israelites and the Jews throughout the generations is not the ideal situation. Rather, the aspiration is for the Jewish People to live its land in peace and prosperity. However, for this to happen, there must be a true and robust reconciliation between "the providers" and "the people of the land". The power of the providers is contingent upon stability and peace, and in our times – upon an urban society that can boast high technological capabilities and free entrepreneurship. Yet the forces at play are always at risk of losing the fine balance that must exist between the trust we place in people and that which we place in God. Yehuda's courage in confronting Yosef and standing up for his brother Binyamin illustrates that there is always potential for maintaining a healthy equilibrium between different parties. Notwithstanding the above, the realization of such potential is contingent upon mutual trust between the parties, remembering there is a common goal, and placing one's trust in God instead of in man.

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## Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

### Rabbi Daniel Stein

#### When Parents Play Favorites

Our parsha picks up in the midst of the suspenseful drama that is unfolding between Yosef and his brothers regarding the fate and safe return of Binyamin. However, the root of the tension between them is found back in Parshas Vayeishev where the Torah tells us, "And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all of his sons, because he was a son of his old age, and he made him a fine woolen coat. And his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, so they hated him, and they could not speak with him peacefully" (Breishis 37:3 - 4). The other shevatim came to despise and resent Yosef because of the special gifts and affection that he received from Yaakov Avinu. This leads the Gemara (Shabbos 10b) to conclude, "a person should never distinguish one of his sons from among the other sons by giving him preferential treatment. For it was due to the weight of two sela of fine wool that Yaakov gave to Yosef, beyond what he gave the rest of his sons, in making him the striped coat, that his brothers became jealous of him and the matter unfolded and our forefathers descended to Mitzrayim." In fact, the Chasam Sofer quotes in the name of the Arizal that the name "Yosef" itself has the same numerical value as the word "kinah" - "jealousy" to indicate that Yosef's very existence and the preferential manner in which he was treated is what aroused the jealousy and hatred of his brothers. But wasn't the bitter reaction of the shevatim predictable? How could Yaakov Avinu not have foreseen that showering Yosef with special gifts and privileges would create resentment that could potentially lead to infighting amongst his children?

The problem is compounded in light of this week's parsha where the same behavior seems to be repeated by Yosef. When Yosef equipped his brothers for their return trip to Eretz Yisrael he provided each of them with a new set of clothing, but to Binyamin he gave five sets of clothing, as the pasuk states, "He gave ... to each one changes of clothes, and to Binyamin he gave ... five changes of clothes" (Breishis 45:22). The Gemara (Megillah 16b) asks, "is it possible that in the very thing from which Yosef had suffered he himself should stumble by showing favoritism to Binyamin?" Hadn't Yosef gleaned from his own personal experiences that demonstrating preferential treatment towards one of his siblings was ill advised? After becoming reunited with his family following a long and painful hiatus, why would Yosef initiate the same process of alienation all over again by giving Binyamin more than everybody else? The Gemara resolves that "Yosef was not showing favoritism, rather he intimated to Binyamin that a descendant was destined to issue from him who would go out from the presence of the king wearing five royal garments, as it is stated: And Mordechai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of sky blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a wrap of fine linen and purple". How does foreshadowing to the experiences of Mordechai, a descendant of Binyamin, justify or excuse preferential treatment?

Moreover, in Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov Avinu himself seems to sow the seeds of jealousy again this time amongst his grandchildren by elevating two of them above the rest. When he was introduced to Yosef's family he declared, "and now, as for your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Mitzrayim, until I came to you, to the land of Mitzrayim they are mine, Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon" (Breishis 48:5). Didn't Yaakov realize that by singling out only two of grandchildren he was running the risk of making the other grandchildren feel rejected and marginalized? Hadn't he learned from the episode of Yosef and his brothers to treat everyone in the family equally?

It seems that despite being taboo in our society, and particularly amongst children, to display any kind of treatment that is not equal or completely fair, there are certain instances where parental favoritism is acceptable and indeed required. For example, parents routinely give more attention to newborns than they do to their older children. The same goes for children who are unfortunately ill or disabled. Parental favoritism becomes personal and offensive when it is perceived as being arbitrary. It is obvious that parents must mold their parenting to the specific circumstances, needs, and challenges of each individual child, even if it means channeling more time, energy, resources, attention, and affection towards that specific child at the expense of the other siblings. The Chasam Sofer makes this inference from the language of the Gemara

which states, "a person should never distinguish one of his sons, from among the other sons, by giving him preferential treatment." The Gemara is careful to limit its condemnation of favoritism to instances where it is "one of his sons from among the other sons," in other words, where all of the sons are similar. However, if one of the sons is presented with a unique challenge or circumstance then differentiated parenting is advisable and indeed required despite the reaction that it might elicit from the other siblings.

Perhaps Yaakov Avinu foresaw that Yosef would encounter unique challenges, different from those of the other shevatim, and therefore he was required to tailor his parenting accordingly. Rashi (Breishis 37:3) writes that the "kesones pasim" (spelled, peh, samech, yud, mem) - "fine woolen coat", that Yaakov made for Yosef, is actually an acronym for Potiphar, socharim (merchants), Yishmaelim, Midyanim, corresponding to the unique tests that Yosef would face in future. He was tempted by the wife of Potiphar and before that he was sold into slavery first to a group of Midyanim and then to a caravan of Yishmaelim. In order to confront and prevail over these obstacles Yaakov fashioned for Yosef a special cloak that was intended to strengthen him and protect him from harm. Similarly, Rashi writes that "all that Yaakov had learned from Shem and Ever he passed on to Yosef." Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emes Le'Yaakov) explains that Yaakov transmitted to Yosef specifically the Torah Hagalus, those survival skills for the exile that he acquired during his fourteen-year stint in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever (See Rashi Breishis 28:9), because he sensed that Yosef too would be required to spend a prolonged period of time in exile. Yaakov spent extra time with Yosef in order to prepare him for his unique mission because the primary responsibility of every parent is to address the unique circumstances of each individual child even though it runs the risk of provoking feelings of jealousy amongst the other children.

For this same reason Yaakov felt that he was obliged to give special attention to Ephraim and Menashe. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky notes that the pasuk introduces Yaakov's intention to bless Ephraim and Menashe with the words, "and now, as for your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Mitzrayim." Yaakov recognized that since these two grandchildren were born outside of their ancestral home, far away from the support and inspiration of their family, they would require an extra dose of chizuk and warmth. Additionally, Yaakov sensed that Ephraim needed even more encouragement than Menashe for when Yosef named his eldest son Menashe he did so because "Hashem has caused me to forget all my toil and all my father's house" (Breishis 41:51). When Yosef was raising Menashe, he was still pondering his father's household and the experiences of his youth. He had not yet

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become completely immersed in his activities in Mitzrayim. We find that Yosef even taught Menashe to speak Hebrew, a skill he later put to use when serving as the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers (see Rashi, Breishis 42:23). However, when Yosef gave his younger son the name Ephraim he did so for "Hashem has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Breishis 41:52). His focus was no longer on his father's household but rather on Mitzrayim. Indeed, the name Ephraim was arguably an Egyptian name for it contained the letters peh and reish also found in the names Pharaoh, Potiphar, and Shifrah. Therefore, Yaakov did not hesitate to break with tradition and give precedence to Ephraim by blessing him with his right hand while reserving his weaker hand for Menashe even though this could have been construed as a slight of Menashe who was older and deserving of greater honor.

Children may think that they want to be treated equally, but in truth everyone wants to be recognized for the ways in which they are special and one of a kind. No one wants to be seen as a carbon copy of their sister or brother. To that end, the objective of parents is to recognize the unique identity of each child and structure their parenting to help each child maximize their individual potential. When Yosef presented his two children to Yaakov he placed Menashe on the right and Ephraim on the left in anticipation of the manner in which they would be blessed. "But Yisrael stretched out his right hand and placed it on Ephraim's head, although he was the younger, and his left hand he placed on Manasseh's head. He guided his hands deliberately, for Manasseh was the firstborn" (Breishis 48:14). Yaakov crossed his arms in order to bless Ephraim with the right hand and Menashe with left hand. Why did Yaakov awkwardly cross his arms when administering the blessings to his grandchildren instead of simply repositioning the boys by asking them to swap places with each other? The Chizkuni explains that in educating children we can not ask a child to move from here to there or to change their unique nature and identity. Our objective is to meet the child where they are and to cater to their specific needs and challenges even if it requires us to awkwardly adjust our initial plan.

In a recent podcast, Rav Daniel Kalish of the Mesivta of Waterbury, related that he was once asked whether a certain yeshiva is lechatchilah - ideal, or bedieved - only in response to a given reality. He responded cleverly by saying that "in chinuch lechatchilah is pasul bedieved" - "in education the ideal is disqualified absolutely." Every parent has hopes and dreams for their children and should encourage them to maximize their potential. But ultimately, every parent should also recognize that their style of chinuch must always be in response to the individual identity of each particular child. It would be wrong and unwise to attempt to impose a theoretical

"ideal" institution on a child who is unsuited for that approach or method.

Of course, parents are likely to form personal bonds with each one of their children in different ways depending upon their personality, preferences, and general compatibility, but any kind of arbitrary preferential treatment directed towards one child over the others should be avoided. Nonetheless, parents must also be sensitive to the shifting circumstances and challenges of each child and allocate their resources accordingly regardless of the reaction it might provoke amongst the other siblings. If so, some form of parental favoritism is unavoidable and actually is an indispensable ingredient of good parenting. When this is the case, what can be done to offset the negative and harmful impact that any kind of favoritism can inevitably have on the other siblings?

In these kinds of situations, it is critical that parents communicate, explicitly or implicitly, to their other children that the circumstances of each child are different and it is unhealthy and unproductive to draw comparisons and demand absolute equality. According to the Radak, the cloak that Yaakov Avinu made for Yosef contained many colors. The Tolna Rebbe (Heimah Yenachamuni) suggests that the different colors were meant to indicate to the other children that each child has their own unique personality and mission and therefore demands a different style of parenting. Similarly, the additional sets of clothing that were given to Binyamin were designed to fortify Mordechai, who was "accepted by most of his brethren" (Esther 10:3) but "not all of his brethren" (Megillah 16b), to pursue his own unique assignment of synthesizing his duties on the Sanhedrin with his efforts in political affairs over the objections of his peers. In addition, the variety of these sets of clothing served to remind Yosef's brothers that each one of them wore a different hat and had a different mission. Parents who discuss these differences with their children can go a long way towards minimizing and mitigating the negative consequences of perceived parental favoritism.

We should bear in mind something else as well. The pasuk states, "the deeds of the Mighty Rock are perfect" (Devarim 32:4). In what way are the actions of Hashem "perfect"? Rav Elchanan Wasserman (Koveitz Maamarim) explains that when a human judge issues a verdict it does not take into account the collateral damage that ensues, only the defendant and their specific actions. However, when Hashem dispenses justice all aspects and consequences of the ruling are considered and measured and included in the original decision. Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa interprets in this fashion the pasuk, "the judgments of Hashem are true, altogether just" (Tehillim 19:10). Not only are the judgements themselves true and correct, but its effect on

the rest of the family is just as well. Siblings are not random individuals that happen to have been born to the same parents but rather they all are part of same family unit which constitutes its own entity. The same way that parents are uniquely suited to address the specific needs of their children, so too siblings must accept that it is their responsibility to support each other and sometimes be flexible for the sake of the greater good. Parents should not necessarily strive to treat all of their children equally but to make each child in the family feel special and unique so that they can each fulfill their individual mission.

### Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

#### He Could No Longer

Now Yoseph could not bear all those standing beside him, and he called out, "Take everyone away from me!" So, no one stood with him when Yoseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept out loud, so the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Yoseph said to his brothers, "I am Yoseph. Is my father still alive?" but his brothers could not answer him because they were startled by his presence.

Now Yoseph could not bear all those standing. He could not bear that Egyptians would stand beside him and hear his brothers being embarrassed when he would make himself known to them. – Rashi

This scene is the height of human drama. What could be more-rich with intrigue and emotion than that moment when Yoseph felt compelled to let his brothers know his true identity. There is one point, though, that has been troubling me for many years.

Yoseph, no doubt, is a steely character! He has weathered a lot in his lifetime. He has been sold into slavery, done jail time, and become the ruler of a powerful country. He's met with criminals and heads of state, and he was successful in out-maneuvering his older and powerful brothers in a complex game of chess.

He is proven to be a man of great wisdom and strength. How is it possible then that at this point in the plot, he can no longer hold himself back? Emotions seem to take over and he must rush out the Egyptians standing nearby before revealing his true identity to his brothers. What exactly triggered him? What broke him at that moment?

Yoseph wanted more than anything else to reveal his identity to his brothers. His biggest desire was to be united with his family. The time was not yet right though. He was cast away from his family because his brother perceived him to be and tried him as a false prophet.

His dreams seemed to be more of the imagination of a narcissist with political ambitions than a promise of the future. He would not be safe until the dream proved prophetic. For that to happen it needed to be 100% true and 99%.

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Almost is good enough with horseshoes and hand grenades but not with prophecy. When 10 brothers came to Egypt for food he remembered the dream.

Miraculously HASHEM had unsettled the economy of the whole world so that most of his brothers were coming to him for food. He needed to engineer the last piece of the puzzle to be brought to Egypt, brother Binyamin. Like the 11 bundles in the dream, 11 brothers are depending on him for sustenance. This is the proof he is not a false prophet.

One more ingredient was needed. When he heard Yehuda's emotional appeal and how his father's life was tied up with Binyamin the remaining child of Rochel, he realized that his presence was sorely missed in the family and he felt secure enough to reveal himself. Up until that moment it was not safe. He was waiting with all his being for that signal, that green light! He held himself back and hid his identity as long as he could and not a moment longer.

There are many situations in life when a person keeps a social filter on that curbs overpowering emotions, holding back tears and/or biting their tongue but as long as it is not deemed appropriate to act out they are able to keep a stiff upper lip, a poker face. However, once the external inhibitors are removed then the person can no longer control that emotion. The dam breaks and feelings flow like flood waters.

As great genius as Yoseph was and as disciplined as he managed to be, he could not calculate enough to determine that moment of reunification. He longed for his brothers with all his heart for too many years and carried out the charade as long as he could until he could no longer!

### Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

#### How Did the Brothers Not Recognize Yosef? Rav Meir Shpiegelman

Yosef's behavior toward his brothers in Egypt raises many questions, and as numerous as the difficulties are, so are the resolutions offered to answer them. Two of the major problems that troubled the biblical commentators are: (1) Why did Yosef not send word back to his father that he was still alive? And (2) What was the purpose of making himself strange to his brothers; did Yosef want to punish them? Was he trying to fulfill his dreams? Or is it something completely different?

From studying the *parasha*, there seems to be an additional problem, that the commentators generally did not address: How did the brothers not recognize Yosef?<sup>1</sup> Of course, Yosef had changed over the years, but it is difficult to assume that he changed so much that it was impossible to recognize him. Yosef was almost an adult when they last saw him, so how can it be that none of his brothers knew who he was? Even Binyamin, who grew up with him from childhood, failed to recognize him!

If that is not enough, Yosef gives his brothers very thick hints that he is their lost brother. He seats them in the order of their birth (and the Torah notes that the brothers wondered about this), and he generally behaves strangely toward them: he returns their money and refuses to take it back, and he seems not to miss an opportunity to abuse them. It is likely that

<sup>1</sup> Owing to this difficulty, *Chazal* suggest that when Yosef had left them, he had no beard.

the story of the slave who rose to greatness was known throughout Egypt, and if only the brothers had tried to find out about this leader upon whom they were so dependent, they would have discovered that he was Yosef.<sup>1</sup>

**Yosef's Strange Behavior** - Before we answer the question of how the brothers did not recognize Yosef, let us first address the second question that we raised: Why does Yosef behave so strangely, as if he wants his brothers to recognize him? If he wants to reveal himself to the brothers, he can do that; if he wants to conceal his identity, why does he work so hard to arouse their suspicion, such as by seating them in birth order and refusing to accept the money they tried to return to him?

Yosef's strangest step is his request to see Binyamin. The Torah says that he ordered the brothers to bring Binyamin to him to prove that they were not spies, but what is the connection? How will bringing Binyamin prove they are not spies?

**The Attempt to Fulfill the Dreams** - It is possible that the two questions answer each other. The previous *shiur* discussed Yosef's understanding that the purpose of dreams is not only to reveal what will happen in the future, but also to spur people into action. At this point, Yosef has already tried three times to follow the guidelines he understood from the dreams. The first time, he reported his dreams to his brothers, and as a result he was sold into slavery. Later, he asked the chief butler to save him from the pit, but his efforts were to no avail.<sup>2</sup> Only the third time, when he acted in accordance with the instructions in Pharaoh's dream, did Yosef succeed; he advanced his own position and saved Egypt. Yosef has seen that acting in accordance with the guidelines of a dream is sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

Now, Yosef finds himself in a perplexing situation: should he try to fulfill the dreams of his youth? Should he reveal himself to his brothers, or should he alienate himself from them and try to fulfill the dreams? Yosef does not know how to decide, and so he returns the ball to God's court. On the one hand, he does not tell the brothers outright that he is Yosef; but, on the other hand, he gives strong hints about his identity. If God wants Yosef to reveal himself to his brothers, they will identify him; if God does not want this to happen, the brothers will not recognize him.

Indeed, even though Yosef continues to dispense hints, the brothers still do not recognize him. Even though they wonder at his seating them in the order of their birth, they do not even begin to suspect that he may be Yosef. He gives Binyamin special gifts, but even this step is not helpful, and they still do not recognize him. He sets the story of the goblet into motion, concealing the goblet in Binyamin's sack and then declaring he will take him as his slave. It is hard to think of a thicker hint of Yosef's identity: Binyamin becomes a slave alongside Yosef, who had been sold into slavery; both are sons of Rachel and both are their father's favorites. Now, Yosef stops to think: Will the brothers recognize him? Does God want him to continue to act to fulfill his dreams, or is he perhaps supposed to reveal himself to his brothers?

**The Actions of the Brothers** - The brothers' behavior can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, if they did not recognize Yosef, then their behavior is understandable. On the other hand, if they did recognize him or at least suspect that he might be Yosef, then they find themselves in a difficult dilemma. Should they identify Yosef publicly? Does Yosef wish to continue concealing his true identity, or does he want them to recognize him, fall on his neck, and seek his forgiveness?

After Yosef demands to keep Binyamin as his slave, Yehuda proposes that they all become his slaves. When Yosef refuses this offer, Yehuda becomes suspicious: How is it possible that the only brother who did not participate in the sale of Yosef will now become a slave? Yehuda begins to suspect that his lost brother stands before him, and to test this hypothesis, he formulates his oration with care and cunning.

**Yehuda's Oration** - Then Yehuda came near to him, and said: Oh my lord, let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are even as Pharaoh. (*Bereishit* 44:18)

At the beginning of his speech, Yehuda describes what happened to them from the day they set foot in Egypt. However, when we examine the speech, it is clear that there are several notable differences between the actual events and Yehuda's description of them.<sup>3</sup>

My lord asked his servants, saying: Have you a father, or a brother? And we said to my lord: We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him. (*Bereishit* 44:19-20)

Yosef never asked the brothers if they had a father or a brother. Moreover, Yehuda never told him that Binyamin was the only son left to his mother. If we flip through the previous *parasha*, we see that the brothers only told Yosef that one brother had died and one brother stayed with his father, but they never told him that the two brothers were from the same mother.

And you said to your servants: Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes upon him. (*Bereishit* 44:21)

Unsurprisingly, this detail as well is inaccurate. Yosef did not ask to set his eyes upon Binyamin, and in fact this detail seems very puzzling: Why should the ruler of Egypt watch over Binyamin and set his eyes upon him?<sup>4</sup>

It seems that Yehuda's oration was carefully composed of two parallel layers. If the officer who is abusing him is in fact just the ruler of Egypt, the minor changes in Yehuda's words will not arouse any suspicion. But if this ruler is Yosef, he could understand these changes as implying that Yehuda suspects him, which might even cause him to reveal himself to them. Yehuda reminds Yosef that he and Binyamin are the only children of their mother, and now that Binyamin has been taken, Yosef is left with no son from his beloved wife. At the same time, he hints to him that he has noticed his strange interest in the young son, and that he suspects him of being Yosef.

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Finally, Yehuda adds one more crucial hint: And your servant my father said to us: You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said: Surely he is torn in pieces; and I have not seen him since; and if you take this one also from me, and harm befall him, you will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. (*Bereishit* 44:27-29)

Yosef does not know what Yaakov thinks about his disappearance. Yehuda adds, as if it is an aside, information that would only interest Yosef: Yaakov does not know where you are, but he has not lost hope of seeing you again.

Now therefore, let your servant, I pray you, abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father, if the lad be not with me? lest I look upon the evil that shall come on my father. (*Bereishit* 44:33-34)

Both Yehuda's proposal and the proposal of the brothers at the end of the previous *parasha* are puzzling. The viceroy proposes taking Binyamin; the brothers suggest that he take all of them, and when he refuses, Yehuda makes his speech and proposes that Yosef take him as a slave instead of Binyamin. What is the meaning of this strange counteroffer? The purpose of turning Binyamin into a slave would be to punish him for stealing the goblet, not simply to acquire another slave for Yosef. How would turning Yehuda, who had not sinned, into a slave solve that problem? And if enslaving Binyamin has no special value, Yehuda could instead suggest paying him several times Binyamin's worth or his own worth in order to free Binyamin or himself.

It seems the brothers realize, or at least suspect, that the Egyptian ruler is Yosef, and their proposal is meant to hint to Yosef that they understand that they must bear punishment.

Yehuda's proposal continues this line of reasoning. As punishment for having participated in the sale of Yosef, Yehuda suggests that he become a slave – and he will thus free Binyamin, who had no part in the sale.

Once Yehuda completes his oration, Yosef can no longer restrain himself. First, he hears that Yehuda regrets his sale and is ready to bear punishment for his part in it. Second, he hears that Yaakov has not lost hope of seeing him again, and that he is still grieving his disappearance. Third, he understands that Yehuda recognizes him, and there is no longer any reason to hide. At this point, he can no longer restrain himself. Then Yosef could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried: Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Yosef made himself known to his brothers. (*Bereishit* 45:1) (Translated by David Strauss)

<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians may not have known Yosef's true identity, but they certainly knew that he was a former slave who had risen to high office, and the brothers could have concluded on their own that he might be Yosef. The Torah indicates that Yosef did not eat bread with the Egyptians, because it was an abomination to the Egyptians to eat bread with the Hebrews (*Bereishit* 43:32). If this verse indeed relates to Yosef, the Egyptians knew that he was a Hebrew and they were not permitted to eat with him.

<sup>2</sup> Chazal criticize Yosef for relying on the good graces of the chief butler. Furthermore, it is likely that the chief butler acted in the end for his personal benefit, and not for the benefit of Yosef, as the Torah testifies: "The chief butler did not remember Yosef, but forgot him" (*Bereishit* 40:23).

<sup>3</sup> The commentators had difficulty with these changes (see, for example, the Ramban). In general, the commentators explain that one verse is terse, while the other is expansive; however, sometimes there are real contradictions, and not only a matter of additions mentioned in only one place.

<sup>4</sup> Owing to this difficulty, the Ibn Ezra explains that the phrase means "to see him." Rav Saadya Gaon explains that the plain meaning of the phrase is "to watch over him," and thus writes also the Ramban, who adduces proofs in support of this understanding. The Ramban explains that Yehuda's intention was to remind Yosef of his promise.

# Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Vayigash 5783

## Home Weekly Parsha VAYIGASH Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The statement of our father Jacob to the Pharaoh of Egypt that “my years of life have been few and most unpleasant” is most perplexing. We all know the well-known anecdote that one of the most disappointing things in life is to ask someone how he or she is and they actually tell you. One would’ve expected that Jacob would have answered the Pharaoh in a general, positive fashion.

Rashi interprets the answer of Jacob in the light of his deteriorated physical condition that he presented to the Pharaoh. He wanted Pharaoh to realize that the lines in his face were well-earned. He also wanted him to realize that the lives of even the most righteous of people and the holiest of families can also be troubled and difficult.

He was teaching the Pharaoh the great lesson that in this world good is its own reward and that it does not necessarily carry with it physical comfort and emotional serenity. He was telling the Pharaoh not to judge him or his family by the shortsighted yardstick of material success and lifelong leisure.

This was his explanation of the great Jewish lesson, ‘that the race is neither to the swift nor success to those who deem themselves to be wise.’ The Pharaoh is accustomed to immediate reward and benefit, to royal garments and gilded chariots. Jacob informs him that that this is a false measure of life and achievement. Though Jacob lived a stormy and often tragic life, it is he who blesses the Pharaoh for he, Jacob, possesses the gift of the future and of immortality.

How sad it is if a person has to look back at one’s lifetime and feel that somehow life cheated him or that he deserved better! The ability to deal with the vicissitudes of life, its downs as well as its ups, in the strength of belief that everything is from the hand of our Creator, has always been the great characteristic of the Jewish people.

Jacob can look back upon the life of turbulence, disappointments and sadness and yet see for himself and his progeny greatness and immortal memory. The Pharaoh must have realized that a blessing from this old broken Jewish stranger was of enormous value to him in Egypt. Often times in history it is the unlikely and seemingly downtrodden individual who holds the key to future developments and to the correct worldview of situations and conditions.

As long as Jacob lives there will no longer be a famine that will affect Egypt. The Pharaoh must have undoubtedly realized the gift of this blessing to Egypt. But like many people who will receive blessings in this world, he seems not to be impressed sufficiently by the matter to change policies, attitudes or behavior.

But Jacob and his descendants will haunt Egyptian society for centuries until it finally will overwhelm it. This has been the lot and mission of Israel over its very long, troublesome but great history.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

## Reframing VAYIGASH Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Maimonides called his ideal type of human being – the sage – a *rofeh nefashot*, a “healer of souls”.<sup>[1]</sup> Today we call such a person a psychotherapist, a word coined relatively recently from the Greek word *psyche*, meaning “soul”, and *therapeia*, “healing”. It is astonishing how many of the pioneering soul-healers in modern times have been Jewish. Almost all the early psychoanalysts were, among them Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank and Melanie Klein. So overwhelming was this, that psychoanalysis was known in Nazi Germany as the “Jewish science”. More recent Jewish contributions include Solomon Asch on conformity, Lawrence Kohlberg on developmental psychology and Bruno Bettelheim on child psychology. From Leon Festinger came the concept of cognitive dissonance, from Howard Gardner the idea of multiple intelligences and from Peter Salovey and Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence. Abraham Maslow gave us new insight into motivation, as did Walter Mischel into self-control via the famous “marshmallow test”. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky gave us

prospect theory and behavioural economics. Most recently, Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Green have pioneered empirical study of the moral emotions. The list goes on and on.

To my mind, though, one of the most important Jewish contributions came from three outstanding figures: Viktor Frankl, Aaron T. Beck, and Martin Seligman. Frankl created the method known as Logotherapy, based on the search for meaning. Beck was the joint creator of the most successful form of treatment, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Seligman gave us Positive Psychology, that is, psychology not just as a cure for depression but as a means of achieving happiness or flourishing through acquired optimism.

These are very different approaches but they have one thing in common. They are based on the belief – set out much earlier in Chabad Hassidim in R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi’s *Tanya* – that if we change the way we think, we will change the way we feel. This was, at the outset, a revolutionary proposition in sharp contrast to other theories of the human psyche. There were those who believed that our characters are determined by genetic factors. Others thought our emotional life was governed by early childhood experiences and unconscious drives. Others again, most famously Ivan Pavlov, believed that human behaviour is determined by conditioning. On all of these theories our inner freedom is severely circumscribed. Who we are, and how we feel, are largely dictated by factors other than the conscious mind.

It was Viktor Frankl who showed there is another way – and he did so under some of the worst conditions ever endured by human beings: in Auschwitz. As a prisoner there Frankl discovered that the Nazis took away almost everything that made people human: their possessions, their clothes, their hair, their very names. Before being sent to Auschwitz, Frankl had been a therapist specialising in curing people who had suicidal tendencies. In the camp, he devoted himself as far as he could to giving his fellow prisoners the will to live, knowing that if they lost it, they would soon die.

There he made the fundamental discovery for which he later became famous:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.<sup>[2]</sup>

What made the difference, what gave people the will to live, was the belief that there was a task for them to perform, a mission for them to accomplish, that they had not yet completed and that was waiting for them to do in the future. Frankl discovered that “it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.”<sup>[3]</sup> There were people in the camp who had so lost hope that they had nothing more to expect from life. Frankl was able to get them to see that “life was still expecting something from them.” One, for example, had a child still alive, in a foreign country, who was waiting for him. Another came to see that he had books to produce that no one else could write. Through this sense of a future calling to them, Frankl was able to help them to discover their purpose in life, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

The mental shift this involved came to be known, especially in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, as reframing. Just as a painting can look different when placed in a different frame, so can a life. The facts don’t change, but the way we perceive them does. Frankl writes that he was able to survive Auschwitz by daily seeing himself as if he were in a university, giving a lecture on the psychology of the concentration camp. Everything that was happening to him was transformed, by this one act of the mind, into a series of illustrations of the points he was making in the lecture.

"By this method, I succeeded somehow in rising above the situation, above the sufferings of the moment, and I observed them as if they were already of the past."<sup>[4]</sup>

Reframing tells us that though we cannot always change the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can change the way we see them, and this itself changes the way we feel.

Yet this modern discovery is really a re-discovery, because the first great re-framer in history was Joseph, as described in this week's and next's parshiyot. Recall the facts. He had been sold into slavery by his brothers. He had lost his freedom for thirteen years, and been separated from his family for twenty-two years. It would be understandable if he felt toward his brothers resentment and a desire for revenge. Yet he rose above such feelings, and did so precisely by shifting his experiences into a different frame. Here is what he says to his brothers when he first discloses his identity to them:

"I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Gen. 45:4-8 And this is what he says years later, after their father Jacob has died and the brothers fear that he may now take revenge:

"Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as He is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones."

Gen. 50:19-21 Joseph had reframed his entire past. He no longer saw himself as a man wronged by his brothers. He had come to see himself as a man charged with a life-saving mission by God. Everything that had happened to him was necessary so that he could achieve his purpose in life: to save an entire region from starvation during a famine, and to provide a safe haven for his family.

This single act of reframing allowed Joseph to live without a burning sense of anger and injustice. It enabled him to forgive his brothers and be reconciled with them. It transformed the negative energies of feelings about the past into focused attention to the future. Joseph, without knowing it, had become the precursor of one of the great movements in psychotherapy in the modern world. He showed the power of reframing. We cannot change the past. But by changing the way we think about the past, we can change the future.

Whatever situation we are in, by reframing it we can change our entire response, giving us the strength to survive, the courage to persist, and the resilience to emerge, on the far side of darkness, into the light of a new and better day.

[1] Rambam, *Shemoneh Perakim*, Ch. 3. [2] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 75. [3] Ibid., 85. [4] Ibid., 82.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayigash (Genesis 44:18 – 47:27) By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – "And Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his [Joseph's] neck" (Genesis 45:14).

This poignant moment when these two brothers are reunited after a separation of twenty-two years is one of the most tender scenes in the Torah.

After a long chronicle of difficult brotherly relationships – Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his other siblings – we finally come across two brothers who truly love each other. The only children of Jacob's beloved Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin shared the same womb, and when their mother died in childbirth, we can feel assured that Joseph drew Benjamin close to him, protected him, and shared with him the precious memories of the mother Benjamin never knew. Their exclusive relationship must have made their eventual separation even more painful and traumatic. After all, Benjamin was the only brother totally uninvolved in the family tension and sibling rivalry against Joseph.

But I'm left wondering: Where is the joy, the elation, the celebration? Why does the Torah only record the weeping of the brothers at this dramatic moment of their reunion?

Rashi cites and explains a midrashic interpretation which suggests that these tears relate to the future destruction of the two Temples allotted to the portion of Benjamin, and to the destruction of the sanctuary in Shilo allotted to the portion of Joseph. Rashi stresses that Joseph's tears are for Benjamin's destruction, and Benjamin's tears are for Joseph's destruction.

But why should Rashi extrapolate such terrible events in the future from the tears of the brothers? I believe that the answer lies in our being mindful of the two archetypal sins in the book of Genesis: The first is the sin of eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which symbolizes rebellion against God, and the second is the sin of the sale of Joseph by his brothers, which epitomizes the sins of enmity between people, internecine strife.

Of the two, the Zohar considers the latter more severe. In the tradition of 'the events of the fathers foreshadow the history of the children,' we can see that all tragedies to befall the Jewish people have their source in the 'DNA' of the sale of Joseph as a slave. This act was the foundation of causeless hatred between Jews.

The Talmud [Gittin 55b], in isolating the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple, reports an instance of brotherly hatred within Israel. A wealthy man had a party and wanted to invite his friend Kamtza. Inadvertently, his avowed enemy Bar-Kamtza was invited instead. Thrown out and shamed, Bar-Kamtza took revenge. He went to the Roman authorities and lied in order to implicate the Jews in crimes against the state. The rest is history. Josephus writes that even as the Romans were destroying the Temple, Jews were still fighting amongst themselves. Down to this very day, we find the Jewish people hopelessly split in enemy camps politically and religiously, with one group cynically and sometimes even hatefully attacking the other.

Thus it is the sin of causeless hatred, the crime of the brothers against Joseph, that can be said to be our 'original sin'. Indeed, during the Yom Kippur additional Amida, the author of the mournful Eileh Ezkera hymn of doxology, links the Temple's destruction and the tragedy of Jewish exile with the sin of the brothers' sale of Joseph.

Now Rashi's interpretation assumes profound significance. In the midst of brotherly hatred, the love between Joseph and Benjamin stands out as a shining example of the potential for unconditional love. Rashi links their tears during their meeting to the destruction of our Sanctuaries – the result of jealousy and enmity between Jew and Jew. Indeed, they each weep for the future tragedies that will befall their descendants. But although each brother will be blessed with a Sanctuary on his allotted land, the brothers weep not for themselves, but each for the other. This act of selfless weeping and unconditional love, becomes the only hope against the tragedies implicit in the sale of Joseph into slavery. The only thing which can repair that sin – and by implication the sins of all the causeless hatred between factions down the long road of Jewish history – is nothing less than a love in which the other comes first, causeless love, when one weeps for the other's tragedy rather than for his own.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook taught that if the Temples were destroyed because of causeless hatred, the Temple will only be rebuilt because of causeless love, exemplified by the tears of Joseph and Benjamin. Rashi is providing a prescient lesson as to know we can achieve true peace and world redemption in this very special period of our return to Zion.

Shabbat

Shalom!

### **Parshat Mikeitz – Mashiach ben Yosef By Rav Yehuda Hakohen**

In Parshat Mikeitz, we see that "Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." (B'reishit 42:8)

On this verse, the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna explains: "This is one of Yosef's attributes. Not just in his generation but in every generation, Mashiach ben Yosef recognizes his brothers and they do not recognize him. It is an act of Satan, which conceals Mashiach ben Yosef's attributes

such that the Jews unfortunately do not recognize his footsteps and in fact even scoff at them... If not for this, our troubles would already be over. If Israel recognized Yosef, Mashiah ben Yosef's footsteps comprising the ingathering of the exiles, etc., we would already be completely redeemed." (Kol HaTor 2:39)

Kol HaTor, the Vilna Gaon's teachings on Israel's redemption process, was compiled by his student Rabbi Hillel Rivlin of Shklov. In it are found deep insights pertaining to some of the most critical questions of recent generations. Foremost among these is the rarely discussed concept of Mashiah ben Yosef – a teaching the Gaon reveals to be deliberately withheld from us due to it possessing the secret of Israel's salvation.

"According to the Gaon, all the work involved in gathering the exiles, building Jerusalem and broadening the settlement of the land of Israel so that the Shkhina will return to it, all the principles of the work and all the major and minor details are connected to the mission and role of the first Mashiah, Mashiah ben Yosef. Mashiah ben Yosef is the miraculous power that will assist every act done when the awakening begins from below, in a natural manner, because he comes from the earth. Mashiah ben David, however, will come from heaven as revealed by the different aspects of Rahel and Leah, and as known regarding the footsteps of the Mashiah and the revealed end. Mashiah ben Yosef himself is a composite of two aspects: on the one hand, he is Yosef the son of Rahel of the land; on the other hand, he is Yosef son of Yaakov from heaven. It is therefore incumbent upon us to learn and to understand all the one hundred and fifty six characteristics, appellations and all aspects and special attributes of Mashiah ben Yosef. These will be a light for our feet and direct us what to do and how, in connection with what lies ahead, with the help of the Redeemer of Israel, may it be speedily in our day." (Kol HaTor 1:2)

Who Or What is Mashiah ben Yosef? The Vilna Gaon describes the process of Mashiah ben Yosef both as the material rebuilding of the Hebrew nation in our land and as the Divine assistance accompanying that process, beginning with an awakened national consciousness within the Jewish people.

Mashiah ben Yosef is the physical rebuilding of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael through practical natural human endeavors. Mashiah ben David will then be the spiritual force that comes to rest on that already constructed vessel. Like Yosef, who spoke seventy languages, served as the viceroy of Egypt and looked like an actual Egyptian (to the extent that his own brothers couldn't recognize him), the force of Mashiah ben Yosef represents that which Israel shares in common with other nations, specifically the dominant world power of any given generation. It focusses on the material wellbeing of the Jewish people, primarily concerning itself with the strengthening of Israel's security, economy, diplomatic standing, etc.

The process of Mashiah ben Yosef is the building of a giant body meant to eventually house the colossal spirit of Mashiah ben David, which will ultimately come to direct and properly guide this ostensibly "secular" Israeli nation. While the Torah remains the source from which we understand our collective mission, both the physical and the spiritual strengthening of Israel are crucial to the Divine plan for mankind's redemption.

As with an individual human body that houses and expresses its soul, the colossal spiritual organism that is Knesset Yisrael requires a giant national body in order to fully reveal itself in the physical world. Just as it is ideal for any person to possess a body developed to its maximum potential with a healthy spirit to refine, guide and direct it in serving HaShem, the same holds true for the nation of Israel.

Neither man's physical or spiritual forces can ultimately negate the other because the stronger the body, the more it enables the spirit driving it to be fully expressed. Israel aims to give material expression to the Torah's deepest mystical concepts by infusing this world with spiritual content that will elevate humanity to greater awareness of our innate connection to our Divine Source.

Knesset Yisrael, the collective soul of the Jewish people, can only fully manifest itself through the vehicle of an earthly people living a national life of kedusha that reveals the Divine Ideal in all spheres of human existence. The force within Israel that wishes to enhance the nation's material status is therefore the basis for HaShem's Ideal in this world, as humanity subconsciously measures the G-D of Israel according to the international standing of His chosen people.

All facets of national life must be revealed to mankind as sanctified and pure. This can only be achieved by Am Yisrael living and uplifting every sphere of existence, as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Sh'mot 19:6) in the physical world. This is the significance of Mashiah ben Yosef. The physical rebuilding of the Hebrew nation in our land – even if ostensibly disconnected from the Torah and devoid of mitzvot – is the first stage of redemption and the revelation of HaShem's Oneness. Parshat Mikeitz Holds a Warning for Today The Vilna Gaon warns that the source of Israel's troubles at the end of days stems from our not recognizing Mashiah ben Yosef. The Torah world must struggle to overcome the confusion caused by the modern State of Israel's outward character.

Rather than detach themselves from the Jewish people's national rebirth, scholars should work to facilitate and guide our state's institutions on the proper path leading to universal redemption. We must realize and be confident that once the body is securely built, the soul will certainly come to infuse it with purpose.

Mashiah ben David will come to properly direct the vehicle of Medinat Yisrael to its true historic function as HaShem's earthly throne that will lead all Creation to see and experience His Divine Oneness.

#### **Dignity To Survive By Rabbi Hanoch Teller**

Before I make my pitch, I believe it is important to establish my creds. The Holocaust is a subject that I have studied assiduously for well over four decades. I still (and currently) attend courses and lectures germane to the period and have read hundreds of volumes on the subject. My most popular and awarded title is *Heroic Children* which chronicles the lives of nine child survivors of the Holocaust. In addition, I am a senior docent in Yad Vashem.

I hope that none of the above sounded boastful, as it was merely recounted to establish my familiarity with Holocaust literature. When I say that I have read hundreds of books, I am including books that even Holocaust scholars are unaware of, for I have visited the archives of Yad Vashem where there are over 169,000 volumes. The overwhelming majority will tragically never be read. Many survivors and witnesses published their tales and then had them sent to Yad Vashem where they are catalogued and then relegated to the crypt, unlikely to ever be discovered again.

When writing about a subject that was so widely covered, indeed the most documented crime in history, for a book to be unique it must be truly remarkable. This is indeed the case with Yona Emanuel's *Dignity to Survive*. To be honest, I knew that this book would be extraordinary before I even opened it. That is because I was privileged to know Yona Emanuel zt"l, a scholar and gentleman of such gilt-edged character that he is, despite already being gone for many years, unforgettable.

I was privileged to attend a weekly shiur delivered by Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, for fourteen years, and the star of the shiur was Yona Emanuel. An optometrist by trade, he devoted serious attention to limud haTorah, and his intellectual gifts made him the very favorite of Reb Shlomo Zalman. Whenever Reb Yona would ask a question, Reb Shlomo Zalman would turn his head in a special way, devoting his fullest attention to what was being posed. Maybe it was not just Reb Yona's piercingly analytical mind, but Reb Shlomo Zalman's keen awareness of Yona's background.

On every Tisha B'Av, when it is forbidden to learn Torah, Reb Shlomo Zalman would read *Dignity to Survive* in its original Hebrew. Thus, I knew what a quality book this translation would be, yet all of my anticipations were surpassed by the actual book, which is both personal and general, educational and enlightening. The book is a searing account

of the ultimate capacity of man to overcome the harshest of obstacles and defeat the most maniacal of adversaries. I shall cite but one.

Yona's family was imprisoned in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. On Tisha B'Av 1944, the entire camp was subjected to the collective punishment of no food ration for an entire day as punishment for someone having burned a lice-infested mattress. For the destruction of (worthless) German property, everyone had to suffer even more acutely.

Yona's mother attempted to prepare some food for her four-year-old daughter to tide her over the day of exquisite starvation, but was caught in the act by the Jewish police. For attempting to violate camp rules she would be tried and punished by a Jewish magistrate, which always provided entertainment to the Germans who relished watching Jews punish their fellow Jews.

The trial, which had all of the components of a proper civilian court, including condemnation by a prosecutor, vindication by a defense attorney, and the calling of witnesses, took place on a Friday night. All of the participants in the legal procedure, including the judges, were Jewish prisoners. Yona's mother refused her right to deny any of the wild accusations lodged against her, rendering the procedure very brief. The woman even refused to allow her attorney to argue that the "crime" was the consequence of her trying to alleviate the hunger of her four-year-old daughter. She would say nothing nor allow anything to be said on her behalf.

Without a word of defense, the verdict was swift and harsh. Mrs. Emanuel was to be deprived of bread rations for two days.

Yona asked his mother why she did not utilize her right to defend herself. She was reluctant to respond, but upon repeated badgering, she finally explained, "Every word I would have said in my defense would have been transcribed by the clerk who jotted down the minutes of the trial. I remained silent, for I'd rather starve even more than to cause another Jew to desecrate the Shabbos." -

### **Letting Go of My Expectations "I Am Who I Am Because You Sold Me" Rabbi YY Jacobson**

#### **Do You Know Who I Am?**

It was the final examination for an introductory Biology course at the university. Like many such freshman courses, it was designed to weed out new students, having over 500 students in the class!

The examination was two hours long, and exam booklets were provided. The professor was extremely strict and told the class that any exam that was not on his desk in exactly two hours would not be accepted and the student would fail. Half an hour into the exam, a student came rushing in and asked the professor for an exam booklet.

"You're not going to have time to finish this," the professor stated sarcastically as he handed the student a booklet.

"Yes, I will," replied the student. He then took a seat and began writing. After two hours, the professor called for the exams, and the students filed up and handed them in. All except the late student, who continued writing. An hour later, the last student came up to the professor who was sitting at his desk preparing for his next class. He attempted to put his exam on the stack of exam booklets already there.

"No, I'm not going to accept that. It's late."

The student looked incredulous and angry.

"Do you know who I am?"

"No," replied the professor with an air of sarcasm in his voice.

"Do you know who I am?" the student asked again in a louder voice.

"No, and I don't care," replied the professor with hubris.

"Good," replied the student, who quickly lifted the stack of completed exams, stuffed his in the middle, and walked out of the room.

#### **A Brother's Identity Disclosed**

The story of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers after decades of bitter separation is one of the most dramatic in the entire Torah. Twenty-two years earlier, when Joseph was seventeen years old, his brothers loathing their younger kin, abducted him, threw him into a pit, and then sold him as a slave to Egyptian merchants. In Egypt, he spent twelve

years in prison, from where he rose to become viceroy of the country that was the superpower at the time. Now, more than two decades later, the moment was finally ripe for reconciliation.

Genesis chapter 45 described the emotional reunion:

Joseph could not hold in his emotions, he dismissed all of his Egyptian assistants from his chamber, thus, no one else was present with Joseph when he revealed himself to his brothers. He began to weep with such loud sobs that the Egyptians outside could hear him.

And Joseph said to his brothers: 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond.

Joseph said to his brothers, 'please come close to me'. When they approached him, he said, "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt.

"Now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourself for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you... G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance."

#### **Analyzing the Encounter**

There is something amiss here. Joseph reveals his identity, saying, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond, the Torah says. Then the narrative continues: "Joseph said to his brothers, 'please come close to me'. When they approached him, he said, "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be distressed..."

Ostensibly, he is trying to bring them solace and offer them comfort. Yet his words to them after they are horrified seem to have the opposite effect: "I am Joseph your brother – the one you sold into Egypt." He now makes it clear that they are the ones who committed this heinous crime. Why would he do this at this point when he's attempting to relax them? (Especially considering that Benjamin perhaps did not know what they did to him; and now for the first time he was shaming them in front of Benjamin!)

Besides, he already said to them, "I am Joseph." Why the need to repeat it: "I am Joseph your brother – the one whom you sold into Egypt."

What is more, did he think that they forgot that they sold them into Egypt? Did they have another brother Joseph?! And even if he felt compelled to share this piece of evidence to prove that he was indeed Joseph, for no one else would know the story, why didn't he say this the first time around when he revealed his identity to them?

#### **Remorse**

It was the second Rebbe of Ger, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Altar (1847-1905), known as the Sefas Emes, who presented a moving explanation.<sup>[1]</sup>

When Joseph revealed his identity, the brothers realized that all this time they were only seeing the external Joseph, not the true one. They thought they were interacting with the gentle Prime Minister of Egypt when in reality he was their brother. Suddenly they realized that their vantage point of reality was external. They were completely deceived by their eyes.

This opened them up to yet a deeper painful truth: They never knew their brother. Even when they saw him, they never really knew him.

"Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him," the Torah states. The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) explains it thus: Joseph easily identified the holiness within his brothers. They lived most of their lives isolated as spiritual shepherds involved in prayer, meditation, and study. Yet these very brothers lacked the ability to discern the moral richness etched in Joseph's heart. Even when Joseph was living with them in Canaan, they saw him as an outsider, as a danger to the integrity of the family of Israel. Certainly, when they encountered him in the form of an Egyptian leader, they failed to observe beyond the mask of a savvy politician the heart of a soul on fire. But when Joseph declared "I am Joseph" it was not merely a revelation of who he was on the outside, but also of who he was on the inside. They suddenly realized how both of his dreams materialized, and how indeed he was destined to influence the world and save so many from famine. For the first time in their entire lives, Joseph's brothers saw the

greatest holiness in the world emerging from the face of an Egyptian vizier.

"His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond," relates the Torah. What perturbed the brothers was not only a sense of fear. What horrified them more than anything else was the inner remorse and brokenness, that they can cause so much pain to such a beautiful soul.

Imagine you were married to the most beautiful, amazing woman in the world. But due to your own traumas, you mistreated her emotionally.

After 22 years of therapy, your brain is cleansed, and you discover what you did to your innocent spouse. How do you feel about it? The pain is far deeper than the punishment and consequences that might come your way; it is more than guilt. The inner devastation you experience when you realize what you have done to such a good person is agonizing.

That is what the brothers felt like at that moment—they discovered what a tragic error they have made. They were locked in their own orbit, deaf to the cries of their brother, oblivious to the horizons that extended beyond theirs, incapable of appreciating his true soul. The sense of a profound crime and an irreplaceable loss tormented them.

They were crushed because of the pain they caused their holy brother; the pain they caused their holy father—and the pain they caused the world: separating Joseph from Jacob for 22 years. Who knows, they thought, how much light they deprived the world of by separating the son from his father? It was at this moment when "Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come close to me'." Joseph wanted them to approach even closer and gaze deeper into the divine light coming forth from his countenance.

"When they approached him," relates the Torah, "He said, 'I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt.'" Joseph was not merely repeating what he had told them earlier ("I am Joseph"), nor was he informing them of a fact they were well aware of ("It is I whom you sold into Egypt"), rather, he was responding to their sense of tormenting pain, guilt and irrevocable loss.

The words "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt" in the original Hebrew can also be translated as "I am Joseph your brother – because you sold me into Egypt." What Joseph was stating was something incredibly powerful. I am the person I am today only because you sold me into Egyptian slavery.

The brothers were trying to harm him, they separated him from his beloved father and family, he endured much torment and pain. Yet at this profound moment of healing Joseph can look at his life and say to his brothers: "Now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourself for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you... G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance."

The powerful trials and adversity he faced in the spiritual jungle of Egypt are precisely what unleashed the atomic glow the brothers were presently taking in. They have made him the person he was now. Their mistakes have allowed him to become an ambassador of light, hope, love, and healing to the world.

Had Joseph spent the two decades voyaging with his father down the paved road of spiritual serenity, he would have certainly reached great intellectual and emotional heights. But it was only through his confrontation with the abyss that gave Joseph that singular majesty, which turned him into one of the greatest leaders of the time, responsible for saving much of humanity.

Joseph was not indifferent to his pain. He cries more times than anyone else in the Tanach. He did not repress or deny his agony and torment. But as he gazed into the pain and sobbed, and as he surrendered his ego, expectations, and dreams of what life must look like, to G-d's will, he discovered profound meaning and purpose in his journey, one that he could have never planned on his own.

שפת אמת ויגש תרמ"ג: בפסוק אשר מכרתם אותי. כמו "שׁ הָזֶל אֲשֶׁר שְׁבָרָת יְשָׁרָךְ".  
כִּנְיָחָם יוֹסֵף אֲוֹתָם כִּי זָכָה לְכָל וְהַלְלֵי המכירה.

(The Sefas Emes movingly interprets the Hebrew phrase used by Joseph "asher mechartem," as "thank you for selling me." "Our sages offered another take on the verse[2] "on the first tablets that you broke (al

haluchot harishonim asher shibarta)," namely, "congratulations for breaking the tablets," yashar koach she'shibarta.[3] So too, here, Joseph comforted his brothers with the words, "that you sold" (asher machartem oti), the deeper meaning of which was "congratulations for selling me (yashar koach asher machartem oti). By doing so, I was sent to restore life, save the world from famine, and save the Jewish family from death.)

If Only...

Just as the brothers, many of us, too, live our lives thinking "If only..." If only my circumstances would have been different; if only I was born into a different type of family; if only I would have a better personality. If only I would have treated my spouse or children differently; if only I would not have been abused; if only I would not have this mental or emotional challenge; if only I would not have this insecurity.

Yes, you may sob. It is painful. Sad. Tough. But then take a deep breath. Surrender your expectations. And allow yourself to entertain the idea that the individual journey of your life, in all of its ups and downs, is what will ultimately allow you to discover your unique mission in this world and impart your singular light to the cosmos. Can you discover deep in your heart that the mistakes you made are somehow part of a plan that will allow more light to come into the world?

A Struggling Boy

It was 1986. There was a young man suffering from homosexual tendencies. In utter despair, he penned a heart-wrenching letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe responded with a three-page correspondence.[4] One point startled me.

The Rebbe told this boy, that he does not know why he needed to endure this profound challenge, it was surely one of the mysteries of Divine providence. But then he added this: Sometimes, a person possesses an incredible inner light that can change the world. There is no way for this person to discover that secret power within themselves and call it his own, without being compelled to overcome a major life challenge.

Some would look at this young man and sadly feel disdain; many more would feel empathy. But it was the Rebbe, the teacher of oneness, who saw his crisis as an opportunity. There was pain here, but no tragedy here. The dark challenge was a catalyst for this person to touch his own infinity. He was not a victim of an unfortunate condition; he was a Divine ambassador sent to places most people are not sent to because his potential was of a different magnitude.

This does not ease the pain or minimize the difficulty. But it allows me to remain present in my life, look at my story in honesty, and grow from my past and my experiences in extraordinary ways.

I can't always figure out how it will work out. That's fine. I need not wrap my brain around my life story. But I must surrender my expectations of what life is supposed to look like; I need to open myself up, with profound humility, to G-d's plan for me and my loved ones.

Dancing at MetLife

Three years ago, on January 1, 2020, a short time before the Corona outbreak, I attended a gathering of 90,000 fellow Jews, at MetLife Stadium, in New Jersey. They all united to celebrate the completion of a seven-year cycle of studying the 2,711 pages of the Talmud, known as Daf Yomi.

At the mass event, I noticed Jews, men, and women, of all ages. But my heart swelled with tears and pride as I noticed one Jew, close to 100, an Auschwitz survivor, who attended the celebration together with four generations of descendants. I noticed some other twenty Holocaust survivors dancing together in MetLife. It was the classic Jewish "revenge" against Nazi Germany.

The chairman of the event, Mr. Sol Werdiger, shared with me an incredible story. Sol is the Founder & CEO of Outerstuff, the leading designer, manufacturer, and marketer of children's sports apparel for the major sports leagues in North America. Sol is a well-known activist and philanthropist in New York, who also serves as chairman of Agudath Israel of America and of the Siyum Hashas.

"I never knew why G-d put me into this type of business, when I have no interest in sports, and can barely name ten players of the major sports leagues.

"But nine years ago, we needed a location to house 90,000 Jews who study Talmud over seven years. And that is when the idea popped into my mind: Let's do it at MetLife.

"MetLife Stadium is an American sports stadium located at the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, New Jersey, 8 miles west of New York City. It is the home stadium of two National Football League (NFL) franchises, the New York Giants and the New York Jets, as well as the New York Guardians of the XFL. At an approximate cost of \$1.6 billion, it was the most expensive stadium ever built at the time that it opened, in 2010.

"My friends thought I was crazy, but I called the owners of Metlife, some of them nice Jewish boys (Mr. Tisch and Mr. Johnson), and they agreed to give it to us for the Siyum Hashas.

"We came to a final meeting, where we would sign the contract and finalize the deal. At the meeting, a man stood up and said he wants to say a few words. He introduced himself as the man who designed and built the stadium for Mr. Tisch and Johnson, a project which cost them 1.6 billion dollars.

This is what he said at the meeting:

"It took me ten years to design and build MetLife. As I got older, I began to become more introspective. And I started to ask myself what the purpose of my life was, what did I achieve in all my years. A sense of emptiness came over me. I dedicated ten full years to building a stadium, for what? What was its ultimate meaning? Is this the reason my soul came down to this world? Was this worth ten years of my life and 1.6 billion dollars?

"For those ten years, I did not do much more. And I was feeling remorse. I am a Jew, and my soul was yearning for real meaning...

"But when I hear today that my stadium will be used to house 90,000 Jews, praying and learning Torah together, dancing, and celebrating their Judaism, uniting together against anti-Semitism and bigotry, committing themselves to bring the light of Torah into the world—I say: Ah, now I know why I spent ten years and 1.6 billion building this gigantic stadium!"

We need to let go of the notion that life must look a certain way. G-d's plans are mysterious, and every step in our arduous journeys is there to help each of us cast our unique infinite light on the world.

[1] The perspective was explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during his address on 5 Teves, 5747 (1987), and a Chassidic discourse presented on Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim, 13 Iyar, 5721 (1961). Likutei Sichos vol. 30 Vayigash. Sefae Haamarim Melukat vol. 5. [2] Exodus 34:9. [3] Shabbos 87. [4] Lubavitcher Rebbe's Letter on Homosexuality & Transgender

### Flavor and Fragrance – The Bracha on Fragrant Fruits Rabbi Kaganoff

At the beginning of our parsha, Yosef is still a prisoner in Egypt. But remember, that when he was first sold into slavery to Egypt, it was to a caravan that carried pleasant smelling products....

This article will explain the halachos of the bracha Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros "He who bestows pleasant fragrances in fruits." Many authorities prefer that one recite the version Asher nasan rei'ach tov ba'peiros, in past tense, "He who bestowed pleasant fragrances in fruits" (Elyah Rabbah 216:5; Mishnah Berurah 216:9).

Here are some curious questions about this bracha that we need to resolve:

1. Do we recite this bracha on a food that is not a fruit? 2. Assuming that we recite this bracha on any food, do we recite this bracha on a seasoning that is not eaten by itself, such as cinnamon or oregano? 3. If I am eating a fragrant fruit, do I recite a bracha when I smell it while I am eating it? 4. Do I recite this bracha when smelling a delicious cup of coffee or a freshly-baked pastry? After all, the coffee bean is a fruit, and

the flour of the pastry is a grain, which is also halachically a fruit. As we will see, the answer to this question is not so obvious.

Origins of the Bracha "Hanosein Rei'ach Tov Ba'peiros"

The Gemara (Berachos 43b) teaches that someone who smells an esrog or a quince should first recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros.

Question: Why did Chazal institute a unique bracha for aromatic fruits?

Answer: Whenever one benefits from this world one must recite a bracha. Thus, Chazal instituted brachos that are appropriate for fragrances. However, all the other brachos on fragrance are not appropriate for smelling fragrant foods, since the other brachos praise Hashem for creating fragrances, whereas esrog and quince are not usually described as fragrances, but as foods that are fragrant. Therefore, Chazal established a special bracha for aromatic fruits (see Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim, end of Chapter 297). It is noteworthy that even though quince is edible only when cooked, it is still considered a fruit for the purpose of this bracha. More on this question later...

Do We Recite This Bracha on Fragrant Foods That Are Not Fruits?

This leads us to a fascinating halachic discussion with a surprising conclusion.

#### A Bracha on Smelling Bread?

Several early poskim contend that one should recite a bracha before smelling hot fresh bread (Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim Chapter 297, quoting Avudraham and Orchos Chayim). However, when discussing what bracha one should recite, these poskim contend that mentioning besamim (such as Borei isvei or minei besamim) is inappropriate since bread is not a fragrance but a food. It is also inappropriate to recite on it Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros, since it is not a fruit. They therefore conclude that one should recite Hanosein rei'ach tov baspas, "He who bestows pleasant fragrance in bread." Indeed, one contemporary posek rules that someone who smells fresh cookies should recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'ugah, "He who bestows pleasant fragrances in cake."

However the Beis Yosef and other poskim disagree, contending that one does not recite a bracha before smelling bread or cake, pointing out that the Gemara and the early halachic sources never mention reciting a bracha before smelling bread. These poskim contend that we do not recite a bracha on smelling bread because its fragrance is not significant enough to warrant a bracha (Beis Yosef, Chapter 297).

This question creates a predicament: according to the "early poskim," one may not smell bread without first reciting a bracha; whereas according to the Beis Yosef, reciting a bracha on its fragrance is a bracha recited in vain! The only way of resolving this predicament is by trying not to smell fresh bread, which is the conclusion reached by the Rama (216:14).

(Incidentally, the Rama's ruling teaches a significant halacha about the rule of safek brachos le'kula, that we do not recite a bracha when in doubt. Although one may not recite a bracha when in doubt, one also may not smell a fragrance or taste a food without reciting the bracha because that would be benefiting from the world without a bracha. This halacha applies in any case when someone has a doubt about reciting a bracha. Although he may not recite the bracha, he may also not benefit without finding some method of resolving the safek.)

The concept, introduced by the Beis Yosef, that one recites a bracha only on a significant fragrance is hard to define. The following is an example in which poskim dispute whether a fragrance is considered significant.

#### Wake Up and Smell the Coffee!

The Mishnah Berurah (216:16) rules that someone who smells fresh-roasted ground coffee should recite a bracha of Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros. However, the Kaf Hachayim (216:86), one of the great Sefardic poskim, rules that it is uncertain whether the fragrance of coffee is significant enough to warrant a bracha. Thus, most Sefardim will not recite a bracha prior to smelling fresh-roasted coffee, whereas those who follow the Mishnah Berurah will.

As we have discussed, although some poskim (Avudraham and Orchos Chayim) limit the bracha of Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros to fruits, other poskim contend that this bracha should be recited before smelling

any fragrant food. This dispute influences the next discussion. Do We Recite Hanosein Rei'ach Tov Ba'peiros on a Fragrant Seasoning?

The question here is what defines an edible fruit for the purposes of this bracha. Do we recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros only on fruit or do we recite it on any edible item? Furthermore, assuming that we recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros on any edible item, is a flavoring or seasoning considered a food for the purposes of this bracha?

Spices that are used to flavor but are themselves never eaten, such as bay leaves, are not considered a food. For this reason, there is no requirement to separate terumos and maasros on bay leaves, even if they grew in Eretz Yisrael (Tosafos, Yoma 81b; Derech Emunah, Terumos 2:3:32). A seasoning that is never eaten by itself, but is eaten when it is used to flavor — such as cinnamon, oregano, or cloves — is questionable whether it is considered a food. Therefore, we separate terumos and maasros on it without a bracha, and, if it is eaten by itself, we do not recite a bracha of borei pri ha'eitz or borei pri ha'adamah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 202:16). What bracha do we recite before smelling a seasoning?

#### Cloves

A clove is the dried flower bud that grows on a tree; the clove is consumed only as a spice, but is not eaten on its own. The poskim dispute what is the correct bracha to recite before smelling cloves, there being a total of four opinions:

**Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros:** The Shulchan Aruch (216:2) rules that this is the correct bracha to say before smelling cloves, despite the fact that cloves are never eaten alone (Taz 216:4). He contends that we recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros on anything that is consumed, even if it is eaten only as a seasoning.

**Borei atzei besamim:** Many poskim rule that we recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros only on items that are eaten on their own, but not if they are eaten solely as a flavoring. Cloves are therefore discounted as a food item and treated exclusively as a fragrance. Since the clove grows on a woody stem, these poskim rule that we should recite Borei atzei besamim before smelling the spice. This approach is followed by some Sefardic poskim (Yalkut Yosef 216:4).

**Borei isvei besamim:** In a different article, I pointed out that some poskim contend that one recites Borei atzei besamim only on a fragrance that grows on what is considered a tree for all other halachos. The stem of the clove is hollow, which according to some opinions precludes it being considered a tree. (In a different article, I pointed out that some poskim contend that the correct bracha before eating papaya is Borei pri ha'adamah because the papaya plant has a hollow trunk [Shu't Rav Pe'alim Vol. 2, Orach Chayim #30].) Because of the above considerations, some rule that the clove is not considered a food or a tree, but a herbaceous (non-woody) plant upon which the correct bracha is Borei isvei besamim. This is the common custom among Yemenite Jews (Ohr Zion Vol. 2 pg. 136; Vezos Haberacha, pg. 174). (It should be noted that some varieties of forsythia also have a hollow or semi-hollow stem. According to the Yemenite custom, the bracha recited before smelling these would be Borei isvei besamim rather than Borei atzei besamim. However, non-Yemenites should recite Borei atzei besamim before smelling forsythia since it is a woody, perennial shrub.)

**Borei minei besamim:** Because of the disputes quoted above, many poskim rule that one should recite Borei minei besamim on cloves (Elyah Rabbah 216:9; Mishnah Berurah 216:16). This is the accepted practice among Ashkenazim and many Sefardic poskim (Birkei Yosef 216:5; Kaf Hachayim 216:34; Ohr Zion Vol. 2 pg. 136).

#### Is It Wood or Food?

Based on this last opinion, we can derive a different halacha. Assuming that there is a dispute whether the bracha on cloves is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros or Borei atzei besamim, why do we recite Borei minei besamim when we are in doubt? Shouldn't the correct bracha be Borei atzei besamim, since it grows on a tree? From this ruling we see that Borei atzei besamim and Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros are mutually exclusive categories. Either an item is a fragrance or it is considered an edible food that is fragrant, but it cannot be both. Thus, if the correct

bracha is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros then it is considered to be a food, not wood, and the bracha Borei atzei besamim is in vain. On the other hand, if the correct bracha is Borei atzei besamim then we have concluded that clove is not food and the bracha Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros would be in vain. For this reason, Ashkenazim and most Sefardic poskim recite the bracha Borei minei besamim whenever there is a question on what bracha to recite (Aruch Hashulchan 216:5; Elyah Rabbah 216:9; Mishnah Berurah 216:16; Birkei Yosef 216:5; Kaf Hachayim 216:39 and Ohr Tzion Vol. 2 pg. 136; compare, however, Yalkut Yosef 216:4).

#### Cinnamon, Spice and Everything Nice

What bracha does one recite before smelling cinnamon?

The Tur quotes a dispute between the Rosh, who contends that the bracha is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros, and the Maharam, who contends that one should recite Borei atzei besamim. In the Rosh's opinion, cinnamon should be treated as a food. Thus, we may assume that he contends that the bracha before smelling all spices is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros, even though they are not eaten by themselves. We can also draw a conclusion from this Rosh that we recite the bracha Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros even on the bark of a tree that is eaten, such as cinnamon. Thus in his opinion, the word ba'peiros in the bracha should be translated as food rather than as fruit. (In truth, the word pri in the bracha Borei pri ha'adamah should also not be translated as fruit, since we recite it on stems, roots, and leaves when we eat celery, carrots, and lettuce.)

On the other hand, the Maharam contends that Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros is inappropriate, presumably because cinnamon is usually not eaten by itself. Alternatively, the Maharam may hold that Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros is inappropriate for cinnamon because it is a bark and not a fruit.

Either way, many Ashkenazi poskim rule it is a safek whether the bracha on cinnamon is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros or Borei atzei besamim and therefore one should recite borei minei besamim (Elyah Rabbah 216:9; Mishnah Berurah 216:16). Many Sefardim recite Borei atzei besamim before smelling cinnamon (Yalkut Yosef 216:4). Everyone agrees that the bracha before smelling cinnamon leaf is Borei atzei besamim.

#### And the Lemon Smells So Sweet!

But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat! Is the bracha before smelling a lemon Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros because it is after all a fruit, or do we recite a different bracha since it is too bitter to eat by itself?

Some poskim rule that one should recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros before smelling lemons (Ginas Veradim 1:42; Yalkut Yosef 216:7), whereas others contend that one should recite Borei minei besamim before smelling a lemon, treating the lemon as a safek as to whether it is considered a fruit or not (Ketzos Hashulchan 62:9 in Badei Hashulchan). However, this latter opinion causes one to wonder why the bracha before smelling a lemon is different from the bracha before smelling an esrog? After all, the Gemara teaches that before smelling an esrog we recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros, although an esrog is also too bitter to eat. Possibly, the esrogim in the days of Chazal were less bitter and were edible. This is implied by the Gemara (Sukkah 36b), which mentions that Rav Chanina took a bite out of his esrog, something difficult to imagine doing to a contemporary esrog.

An alternative approach is that an esrog is a fruit because it can be made edible by adding sugar. However according to this reason, a lemon should also be considered a fruit, since one can eat candied lemon, which I presume would require the bracha of Borei pri ha'eitz (Vezos Ha'beracha pg. 366). Similarly, some people eat the slice of lemon they used to season their tea, and lemon is also eaten as a pudding or pie filling. I presume that the bracha on these items when eaten alone would be Borei pri ha'eitz. The fact that lemon cannot be eaten unsweetened should not affect what bracha we recite before eating or smelling lemon just as the bracha before smelling fresh quince is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros even though it is also not edible raw.

Furthermore, we noted above that Chazal instituted the bracha Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros on fragrant fruits and foods because one cannot recite a bracha on them by calling them fragrances. Few people would describe lemon as a fragrance, but as a fruit.

Because of these reasons, I believe the bracha before smelling a lemon should be Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros, but I leave it for the individual to ask their rav.

Incidentally, the correct bracha to recite before smelling citrus blossoms or flowers is Borei atzei besamim, since the flower is not edible.

As a side point, one should be very cautious about eating esrog today. Esrog is not a food crop and it is legal to spray the trees with highly toxic pesticides. Because of the rule of chamira sakanta mi'isurah (the halachos of danger are stricter than that of kashrus), I would paskin that it is prohibited to eat esrogim today unless the owner of the orchard will vouch for their safety. However, this will get me into a controversial debate with many rabbonim who give hechsherim on esrog orchards, so I am not going to discuss this issue anymore. Simply — although Aunt Zelda may have a great recipe for making esrog jam, I suggest substituting lemon or lime instead.

Incidentally, the bracha on eating lemon jam should be Borei pri ha'eitz, which is additional evidence that the bracha before smelling a lemon is Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros. There is a major shaylah in halacha whether one may smell one's esrog and hadasim during Sukkos. I have written a separate article on this subject.

#### Eating and Smelling a Fruit

If I am eating a fragrant fruit, do I recite a bracha before I smell it even though I am not deliberately trying to?

One does not recite the bracha on fragrance if one is picking up the fruit to eat and happens to smell it at the same time (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 216:2). However, if one intends both to smell the food and also to eat it, then it would seem to be a question of dispute whether one should recites both brachos, Borei pri ha'eitz and Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros. This issue is dependent on a dispute between poskim whether one recites a bracha on a fragrant item that is intended to be used for another purpose. I analyzed this subject in a different article in which I discussed when one should not recite a bracha before smelling a fragrance. Which Bracha Should I Recite First?

The poskim disagree as to whether one should first recite the bracha on eating the fruit because this is considered a greater benefit (Olas Tamid), or whether one should first recite the bracha on smelling it, since the fragrance reaches your nose before you have a chance to take a bite out of it (Elyah Rabbah 216:6). The Mishnah Berurah (216:10) rules that one should recite the bracha on smelling the fruit first, although he also cites another suggestion: have in mind not to benefit from the fragrance until after one has recited the bracha on eating it and has tasted the fruit. Then, recite Hanosein rei'ach tov ba'peiros and benefit from the fragrance.

Many poskim state that the custom today is to not make a bracha on smelling a fruit unless it has a pronounced aroma (see Vezos Haberacha pg. 174). For this reason, some hold that one should not make a bracha when smelling an apple since apples are often not that fragrant, but one could recite a bracha when smelling guava which is usually much more aromatic. (However, note that Rambam and Mishnah Berurah [216:8] mention reciting a bracha before smelling an apple, although it is possible that the apples they had were more fragrant than ours.)

The Gemara (Berachos 43b) teaches "How do we know that one must recite a bracha on a fragrance, because the pasuk (Tehillim 150:6) says, 'Every neshamah praises Hashem,' – What exists in the world that the soul benefits from, but not the body? Only fragrance."

Although the sense of smell provides some physical pleasure, it provides no nutritional benefit. Thus, smell represents an interface of the spiritual with the physical. Similarly, we find that we are to offer korbanos as rei'ach nicho'ach, a fragrance demonstrating one's desire to be close to Hashem. We should always utilize our abilities to smell fragrant items as a stepping stone towards greater mitzvah observance and spirituality.

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**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rav Shmuel Ben Rav Usher Zelig HaLevi z"l, father of Kalman Finkel.

True or False?

Yosef could not endure the presence of all those that stood before him and he commanded; "Remove everyone from before me!" Therefore there was no one with him when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers (45:1).

In this week's parsha, the Torah describes the climactic confrontation between Yosef and his brother Yehuda. This dramatic scene is the conclusion of a three parsha story line; one that leads to the somewhat uneasy reunion of Yosef and his brothers, and later, an emotional reunion with his father who thought him dead for twenty-two years.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Yosef could not bear the thought of Egyptians present when he revealed himself to his brothers because they would be embarrassed by their shame.

Maharal, in the Gur Aryeh (ad loc), is bothered by Rashi's assumption that Yosef was concerned about their embarrassment once he revealed himself to them. The Torah never even introduced the concept of Yosef revealing himself! If Rashi is right, the Torah should first discuss that Yosef intended to reveal himself and was therefore concerned for their shame and embarrassment in front of the Egyptians.

Remarkably, Maharal seems to conclude that Rashi is wrong. Instead, Maharal suggests an alternative reason for their embarrassment, and why Yosef asked all the Egyptians to leave. Looking back on last week's parsha, we see that Binyomin was accused of stealing Yosef's "magic" goblet. Maharal therefore concludes that their embarrassment was rooted in the accusation that they were common thieves. It is for this reason, he explains, they were embarrassed, and therefore Yosef ordered all the Egyptians out of the room.

Still, if possible, it is important to try to understand Rashi's perspective and why he didn't agree with Maharal's conclusion.

When it comes to gossip, stories generally fall into two categories: 1) Stories that are essentially true, if perhaps somewhat embellished and 2) stories that are patently false. In halacha, these two categories are known as 1) lashon hora and 2) motzi shem ra.

One would naturally assume that it is more wicked to spread stories that are patently false than to simply relay stories that are essentially true. In fact, this is exactly what the Chofetz Chaim says; Motzi shem ra is worse than lashon hora (Chofetz Chaim, Hilchos Loshon Hora 1:1).

Still, it is a little puzzling that in the Gemara, and countless Chazal, much more attention is given to the evils of lashon hora. The Gemara actually compares the sin of lashon hora to the three cardinal sins of murder, adultery, and idolatry. How are we to understand this dichotomy?

Perhaps the answer lies in looking at these sins from two different perspectives; that of the perpetrator and that of the victim. To completely make up a terrible story about someone (motzi shem ra) requires malevolence; one has to have a real character flaw to fabricate stories about someone in order to hurt them. From the perspective of the perpetrator, it is a critical failing of one's humanity and is positively evil; this requires a complete overhaul and rehabilitation of one's character.

On the other hand, when it comes to the emotional harm to the victim, lashon hora is a far greater sabotage. In other words, if one is accused of something false, one may feel outraged and wronged, but he can still hold his head up high because he knows the story isn't true. But if one's innermost vulnerabilities and failings are exposed to all, there is simply nowhere to hide; everyone knows exactly what you have done - there is no defense. This is quite devastating; in this sense, lashon hora is far more sinister and damaging.

Perhaps that is why Rashi didn't agree with Maharal's assessment of what happened with Yosef and his brothers. Being accused of stealing the goblet, while terribly unpleasant and outrageous, wouldn't lead to embarrassment. After all, they knew they didn't steal it. However, being faced with their treachery to Yosef when he revealed himself would lead to an incredible shame and they would be very embarrassed if anyone else were present. That's why Yosef asked the Egyptians to leave.

Daddy Duty

It wasn't you who sent me here, rather it was Hashem. He has made me as a father to Pharaoh [...] (45:8).

Yosef, upon revealing his identity to his brothers, seeks to lessen the burden of their betrayal to him. He explains that his coming down to Egypt was really all part of Hashem's plan; and that he had been uniquely placed in a high position in the Egyptian hierarchy.

Yosef asks that they convey his stature in Egypt to his father, along with his request that Yaakov and his entire family come down to Egypt to join him. The initial way that Yaakov describes his position within the hierarchy is that of a father to Pharaoh.

Rashi (ad loc) gives us a remarkable definition of what it means to be a father: "a friend and patron." As Yosef expects his brothers to convey his position to Yaakov – without any elaboration on what he means by "as a father to Pharaoh" – Yosef is obviously using Yaakov's own definition of fatherhood.

Different cultures have very different definitions of what it means to be a proper father. As an example; the mid-20th century European definition of how fathers should relate to their children was very different than the American definition of fatherhood.

Rashi's description of what Yosef understands Yaakov's definition of fatherhood to be is very instructive. According to Rashi, the first role of a father is to treat his child as a colleague, not an indentured servant. Secondly, one has to recognize that a child cannot survive on his own, therefore one has to be a patron to his child – that is, provide unwavering support.

Perhaps most remarkably is that, in the entire Torah, the only father who has absolute success with children is Yaakov. The Torah makes a special note of the fact that all of his sons were equal and righteous (see 35:22 and Rashi ad loc). There is no other model in the Torah for successful fatherhood; not in Adam Harishon, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Moshe, or Aharon. It is therefore crucial that we take special note of what Yaakov's definition of fatherhood was, and try to incorporate those principles into our own families. -

**Rav Kook Torah Joseph Dies First** The text implies that Joseph was the first of Jacob's twelve sons to die:

"Joseph died, and then his brothers and everyone else in that generation" (Exod. 1:6).

Why was Joseph's life shorter than that of his brothers?

The Sages suggested that Joseph's early demise was due to his position of public office. When one assumes a position of authority, "one's days and years are shortened" (Berachot 55a).

Yet this hardly seems fair. Why should those who dedicate their lives to public service be penalized by having a shorter life?

Joseph's Mistake Working for the public good is certainly laudable. However, there are certain hazards inherent in such a path. Precisely because one is busy attending to important communal affairs, one may neglect one's own personal needs. A communal leader may come to view his own needs — whether material, spiritual, or moral — as insignificant.

We may observe this phenomenon in Joseph. As viceroy, Joseph was busy supervising the national and economic affairs of Egypt. He saw his position of public office as the vehicle through which God's covenant of Bein HaBetarim — which foretold the exile of Abraham's descendants in a foreign land — would be realized.

When Joseph heard his father referred to as "your servant," he did not object to this display of disrespect toward his father. Joseph was occupied with the overall objective; he did not want it to be compromised due to his obligation to show his father respect.

Joseph's error is not uncommon. This is a universal lesson for all leaders: they should not allow any goal or aspiration, no matter how lofty, to lead them to disregard lesser obligations.

**The King's Sefer Torah** We find a similar idea in the special laws pertaining to a Jewish king. The Torah instructs the king to write his own sefer Torah and keep it with him at all times. In this way, "his heart will not be raised above his brothers, and he will not stray from the Law to the right or to the left" (Deut. 17:20). The Torah specifically cautions the monarch that, despite his involvement in critical national affairs, his public service should not lead him to neglect his private obligations. He is obligated to observe the law in his personal life, like every other citizen.

The Torah promises that a king who heeds this warning will be blessed with a long reign. Unlike those who fail the tests of public office, such a king will not live a life of "shortened days and years."

Life is not just major goals and aspirations. All of us, even those serving in high public office, must conduct ourselves appropriately in all facets of life. Those who maintain their integrity in their personal lives will be blessed with success in their most important and loftiest goals.

לע"ג

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה בילא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה אנה מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

## 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, qests. 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.*

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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 up 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 mizbeach 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 Sefer 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 & Sefer.]

[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 mizbeiah (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 mizbeiah. 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'amat 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'amat 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 mizbeiah... 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

#### =====

#### 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 mizbeiaħ 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) (Breishit 46:2-4)	MOSHE (at the burning bush) (Shmot 3:4-8)
God called to Yisrael in a vision: YAAKOV, YAAKOV, va-yomer hineini	God called out to Moshe: MOSHE, MOSHE, 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 elyonah" (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-aroach" (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 Canaan 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 Yaakov 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 Yaakov 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 Yaakov mean in 46:30?

12) [Parenthetically: what hints are there of cultural/ethnic/etc. friction between Yaakov'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 Canaan, 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 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 Canaan, 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 "possessed" 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 Yaakov; 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 Rachel'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 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