

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Note: Fast of Asarah B'Tevet is Friday, December 22

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.

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

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Aviv Atzili, his wife, two children, and nephew were among the initial hostages from Kibbutz Nir Oz, abducted on October 7. Earlier this month, Liat (originally feared dead) and the three children have been released, but Aviv ben Telma is still a hostage. We continue to pray for Aviv's speedy release and give thanks for the release of the rest of his family.

What happens when Jews have no other country to welcome them in case of attacks from an Anti-Semitic country? Study the story of Greek Jews under Nazi attack during World War II. Dr, Michael Matsas has spent much of his adult lifetime documenting this story. For the horrifying story, go to <https://illusionofsafetygreece.com/> and read his absorbing story. For a more complete presentation, read *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War*, available from amazon.com. Greece during World War II is one example of why we Jews and the world need a safe Israel.

Vayigash opens with Yehuda's deeply moving appeal to the viceroy of Egypt to permit him to be a slave rather than the youngest brother, Binyamin. Yehuda, who has experienced the pain of losing two of his own sons, describes how losing Binyamin (Yaakov's favorite remaining son) would kill their old father. Yosef, who had manipulated events to see how the brothers would react to having Binyamin remain as a slave in Egypt, now has the evidence he has sought to see whether the brothers have performed teshuvah. Twenty-three years earlier, the brothers were willing to have Yosef sold to become a slave in Egypt. Now, faced with the same opportunity, facing the threat to the remaining son of Yaakov's favorite wife (Rachel), the brothers are willing to sacrifice to save Binyamin. Yehuda, who had suggested 23 years earlier

having Yosef sold into slavery, now pleads for the viceroy of Egypt to take him as a slave and let Binyamin return to their father. (This scenario is Rambam's definition of true teshuvah.)

Rabbi David Fohrman delves deeply into the meaning of the split among Yaakov's brothers. Yosef has been estranged from ten of his brothers for most of his life. When Yehuda describes Binyamin's aloneness and the pain that their father feels, Yosef recognizes that Binyamin is his "other half" – that Yosef is not really complete without his beloved brother. When the family was in Canaan, Yosef's brothers could not talk with him in peace. Yehuda's impassioned speech forces Yosef to realize that his family is not complete if he only reconciles with Binyamin. Yosef realizes that he must also connect positively with all his brothers, that the family cannot be complete unless all the brothers forgive and form positive relations with each other. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, observes, Yosef reinterprets the past to absolve the brothers of any blame for his being sold into slavery. Yosef tells the brothers that his ending up in Egypt was an act of God, necessary to enable him to end up in a position to save Egypt and the world, including his family, from starvation. By removing any blame from the past, Yosef seeks to put all the brothers into a position where they can all move forward with positive feelings.

We Jews are reliving the story of Yosef and his brothers in Egypt now. Hamas still has approximately a hundred of our people as hostages in Gaza. Each hostage is missing connections to his or her family. The families are missing their connections with their beloved family members in Gaza. Every hostage and every family member is incomplete because of not being able to be together. In Israel, all Israelis are family, and in a broader sense, all Jews are our family. We see these connections in the postings on social media, rallies all over the world, and constant reminders of the pain that we feel with the lost connections of the hundred hostages with whom we cannot connect.

Compare the reaction of Jews to that of Hamas. The leaders of Hamas use the citizens of Gaza as human shields, hoping that many of them will be killed to generate sympathy outside Israel. Hamas has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to build tunnels with reinforced concrete under ground throughout Gaza. The tunnels have entrances and escapes under the homes of Hamas leaders as well as under hospitals, schools, senior centers, and day care centers. The tunnels, some large enough to use as highways for military vehicles, have countless interconnections and come almost up to the borders with Israel and Egypt. Hamas has stocked the tunnels, hospitals, schools, and other buildings with weapons.

The evil extends beyond Hamas. No Arab country in the past 75 years has been willing to welcome descendants of the Arabs who voluntarily left Israel in 1948. The Arabs have restricted many of these people to squalid refugee camps in Gaza, a country that is now home to approximately 2.4 million people. When Israel left Gaza fifteen years ago, Israel left a thriving agricultural community with drip irrigation and facilities to export food. The Arabs immediately destroyed every capital improvement that Israel had made in Gaza and turned the area back into a desert.

Jews consider Israelis and fellow Jews to be our family, and we dig deep into our pockets to help our fellows. Arabs use their fellows as human shields, restrict them to ghettos, and refuse to permit them to settle in any of the many wealthy countries surrounding Israel. Hamas and many other Arabs want to take over Israel, destroy everything that Jews have produced over 75 years, and rid the entire Middle East of Jews. When Arab terrorists finish destroying Israel, they plan to build on that exercise by going after the United States and most of Europe.

The Torah is a guide to living in the presence of God and finding a way to come as close as possible to Gan Eden. In showing the path to making a better life, the Torah also contrasts living the way that Hashem leads us with the evil of nations that reject God. Amalek probably represents the worst of this evil in the Torah. There are many examples of this evil in post Biblical times – probably none worse than Hamas.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, a"l, would have found it extremely difficult to cope with the evil of Hamas, 240 hostages taken at the beginning of the massacre, and a hundred hostages remaining two months later. Rabbi Cahan was very familiar with the evils of anti-Semitism in the world, but somehow it seems much worse now than it has been in the past 75 years. I am glad that he did not see what has gone on the past few months, and I wish that I did not have to live through such evil.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Aviv ben Telma (hostage in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Vayigash: Win the War

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5781

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

Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'So said your son, Yosef: "G-d has made me a lord over all the Egyptians. Come down to me, do not delay. (Breishis 45:9)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5781-vayigash/>

At What Time Can One End The Fast When the 10th of Tevet Falls on a Friday?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

QUESTION

Do you have any specific guidelines for Asarah b’Tevet when it is observed on a Friday? How long after Shekiah should we wait to break the fast? If some members of a household remain home, can they break their fast before the whole family sits down for kiddush and Shabbat dinner?

ANSWER

Regarding the end time for minor fasts, the Gemara (Ta’anit 12a), states that any fast that does not include a sunset is not considered a fast. There is a dispute amongst Rishonim how to understand this Gemara – whether the sunset is referring to our Shekiah (the beginning of the sunset) or our Tzeit HaKokhavim (the end of sunset). The majority of Rishonim understand it to mean Tzeit HaKokhavim; however, there are Rishonim, such as the Ramban (Torat Ha’Adam, Aveilut Yeshana), who understand it to refer to Shekiah.

The Shulchan Arukh (OC 562:1) paskens that minor fasts end at Tzeit HaKokhavim. The time of Tzeit HaKokhavim is itself a debate amongst poskim. The general practice in North America is to follow the position that Tzeit occurs 42-45 minutes after sunset. This position, which is largely based on astronomical observation, is somewhat midpoint between

the Gra and Rabbeinu Tam. The Gra, following Ge'onim, rules that Tzeit is 3/4 of a "mil" (the time it takes to walk a kilometer, generally deemed to be 18 minutes), or approximately 14 minutes, after sunset. In Jerusalem, where the Gra's practices are generally followed, Tzeit is usually taken to be 18-25 minutes after sunset (which factors in the possibility that a "mil" might be 24 minutes, or even longer). Rabbeinu Tam, on the other hand, rules that Tzeit takes place 72 minutes after sunset (there are debates as to whether these times need to be adjusted based on the length of the day and the latitude of the location in question).

Personally, I generally follow the Gra regarding minor fasts, ending them 25 minutes after sunset. I should note that I feel justified in doing so only because I adopt the strict position of Rabbeinu Tam for Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and Tisha b'Av (see Yalkut Yosef Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 293:4).

Even those who do not have the same practice as I do for minor fasts (and for Shabbat and Yom Kippur), and who normally end minor fasts 40-45 minutes after sunset, would be on good ground to end their fast earlier this Asarah b'Tevet at 25 minutes after sunset, given that it falls out on Erev Shabbat. First, as mentioned above, Ramban's position is that all the minor fasts end at Shekiah. Further, the Ra'avad (quoted in Beit Yosef OC 249) rules that, at least on Erev Shabbat, minor fasts end at Shekiah so as not to enter into Shabbat fasting. Therefore, I think adopting 25-minute Tzeit in line with the Gra for this Friday ta'anit is a totally reasonable position, considering that ending the fast later would compromise kavod Shabbat.

Hopefully, given these guidelines, you can schedule davening at shul so that your congregants can get home by that time. Those people who did not attend shul and are at home can break the fast before the rest of the family arrives back. They have to make Kiddush first, since they may not eat once it is Shabbat without having heard or recited Kiddush, but they can wait for homtzi with the family (Shulchan Aruch OC 271:4).

FOLLOW UP QUESTION

You stated that those at home can break their fast after making Kiddush, but can wait to do motzi with the family upon their return from shul. I assume that they need to eat something that would render their Kiddush, "bmimakom seudah" – how are they permitted to make kiddush with no bread or mezonot following?

ANSWER

You are correct that we do require kiddush b'makom seudah (Pesachim 101a, SA OH 273: 1). If you make kiddush in your dining room (or really, anywhere in the house) and then eat in the house, that is "makom seudah" (SA OH 273:1).

As to the passage of time between kiddush and HaMotzi that will transpire if they break their fast before the rest of the family returns home – while it is true that the Rema (SA OH 273:3) says that the eating has to be "לאלתר" – immediately following – that is really a chumra and certainly not the practice. We can see this in the time that passes between the Rabbi making kiddush and the time it takes some people to wend their way to the social hall, schmooze, etc before eating at the shul kiddush. Certainly, if there is an oness (circumstance beyond one's control) causing the pause, it is fine (see Piskei Teshuvot OH 273:4 for an extensive treatment of hefseik and kiddush b'makom seudah). If they want to be stringent and have some mezonot before the rest of the family returns and they make HaMotzi, that's fine.

* Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, New York.

[Note: The following three timely essays are important enough to the situation that we Jews face on college campuses and elsewhere in life that I decided to reprint them again this week.]

Fighting antisemitism on our campuses
by Rav Avi Weiss * for NY Daily News

Imagine if the presidents of Harvard, Penn, and MIT were asked in a congressional hearing, “Would you consider a call for genocide against Blacks or Asians or Latinos to run counter to your university’s code of conduct? Would you consider a call for genocide against the LGBTQ community to run counter to your university’s code of conduct?”

The answer, of course, would be an unequivocal yes. If these universities micromanage — police, even — the improper use of students’ preferred pronouns, they will undoubtedly go to all ends, as they should, to forcefully confront calls for violence by such unabashed haters.

Then why, when asked the very same question about Jews during a congressional hearing last week, did they resort to the feeble refrain, ‘It depends’? It was profoundly disappointing to see the presidents of these universities evade directly answering whether calls for genocide against Jews violate their university policies by arguing that it depends on whether it leads to violence, whether the threat is against a specific Jew, or on the context.

While Penn’s president, Liz Magill, has now resigned, the problem remains. Don’t these leaders realize that words make a difference? Words can lead to fatal deeds. Smart and ethical leaders stop hate at its inception rather than wait for it to harm, injure, and kill.

And of course, calling for genocide against any group is a call to kill every person in that group. All Jews are explicitly endangered.

When threats against Jews are not denounced as antisemitic, but threats against others are properly deemed as racist and bigoted — that’s a double standard. Viewing Jews differently than others is antisemitism.

So why did these presidents dismally fail in their responses about Jews? it is critical to trace whether their respective schools are funded or seek to be funded by antisemitic, terror-supporting countries. Qatar, for example, has given at least \$4.7 billion dollars to American universities since 2001.

Another contributing factor relates to the various ideologies and academic frameworks that have permeated campuses in recent decades — intersectionality, “decolonization,” two of the most odious canards.

Whatever the reasons may be, one thing is certain: Presidents of universities are supposed to serve as model leaders, chosen because of their achievements and leadership qualities. A hallmark of any true leader is the ability to stand up for what is right with conviction, and fortitude, especially when the choice is difficult. History has taught us, however, that the intelligentsia can be void of moral conscience and flaccid in standing up against the voices of those who support anti-human rights positions.

It’s easy to accept money, especially massive sums of money, from wherever it comes. But it is the courageous thing, to know when to say no. Just as philanthropists develop an “ethics of giving,” meaning cultivating a sense of when, where, and how much to give, so, too, should there be an “ethics of receiving.” Universities would never accept money from violent thugs, from sexual offenders or murderers; and they should similarly reject contributions from sources that support terror — the murder of Americans and Israelis and innocent people all over the world.

When presidents do not set the correct example for their students, tragically, the forces of evil triumph. The prophet Isaiah states that young people are the ones who lead the way. And so, today, what is vitally necessary are Jewish students and non-Jewish students of moral conscience who are not afraid to speak truth to power — much like the brave Jewish students who spoke on the Hill last week. If students cower to fear and run from the challenge of standing up to antisemitism, they hand victory to the enemy.

Now is the time for all students on campus, not only Jews, to wear skullcaps, to wear Star of David necklaces, to light Chanukah candles and hang Israeli flags in the windows of their dorm rooms for all to see. Now is the time for them to send a powerful message to their university leaders, that racism, bigotry, and antisemitism are two sides of the same coin.

As these people of good will of all faith traditions oppose bigotry and antisemitism they will be educating all Americans — starting with university presidents who have shirked their responsibilities by shamefully condoning antisemitism — that what they are fighting for is, in fact, the ultimate message of American freedom and democracy.

* Founding President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and founding Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale (the Bayit), both in Bronx, New York.

<https://yct Torah.org/2023/12/fighting-antisemitism-on-our-campuses/> Original, published December 12, 2023, available at <https://www.nydailynews.com/2023/12/11/fighting-antisemitism-on-our-campuses/> On line access to the original requires a subscription to the Daily News.

Explaining the First Amendment to University Presidents

by Nathan Lewin *
(December 7, 2023 / JNS)

In the wake of the astounding testimony before Congress by the presidents of Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, three important questions must be asked:

1) Why are the presidents of leading American universities abysmally ignorant of Supreme Court rulings on the limits of protected speech under the First Amendment?

The presidents claimed in their testimony that anti-Israel and antisemitic “protesters” on their campuses are only exercising their constitutionally protected right to free speech when they call for an “intifada” and chant Hamas’s battle cry “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” — both clear calls for violence against Israelis and Jews.

Harvard’s president Claudine Gay repeatedly declared that her university will act only “when speech crosses into conduct.” She might be surprised to learn that not a single Supreme Court justice agrees with her.

Indeed, it is unlikely that the three presidents have bothered to read the most recent definition of First Amendment speech guarantees as expressed by all nine Supreme Court Justices, albeit in various opinions. Not one of the justices believes that threats and incitement have blanket constitutional protection and cannot be punished unless they “cross into conduct.”

On June 27, the Supreme Court decided a case titled *Counterman v. Colorado*, which dealt with harassment on the social media site Facebook. The case generated much discussion precisely because it dealt with the issue of what limits can be placed on speech protections. All of the justices agreed that the Bill of Rights does not guarantee any right to send threats over social media. Nor did they hold that the First Amendment entitles a speaker to say anything so long as it does not “cross into conduct.” The justices differed only over how relevant the speaker’s intention might be to the question of criminal penalties.

A majority of the Court, speaking through Justice Elena Kagan, said that expressing a threat would be a crime if the speaker uttered it with “reckless disregard” for how it would be understood by a listener. Four justices differed only in part. All the justices agreed that freedom of speech does not protect a speaker who makes a threat with reckless disregard for the listener’s fear of violence.

The campus protesters in question are obviously guilty of “reckless disregard” for the fears of their Jewish fellow students. Under the most recent Supreme Court rulings, they can be charged with crimes and punished accordingly. That the presidents of Harvard, MIT and Penn are ignorant of this is shocking.

2) Why are major donors to these universities only terminating future grants rather than demanding that billions of dollars in past donations be refunded?

Benefactors who have given huge donations to Harvard and other universities with enormous endowments have announced publicly that they will not continue to contribute to these institutions because they promote and fail to control antisemitism.

It is possible that this may influence the public declarations of university administrators who are unhappy that the flow of funds has been interrupted. But given the vast resources of these institutions and the contributions likely to come from antisemitic and anti-Israel sources, it will only have a modest impact.

A far more powerful response would be for major donors to file lawsuits seeking to recover the billions of dollars they have donated in the past. They could do so on the grounds that these donations were secured by false representations that claimed the universities were providing proper meaningful education to their students.

For example, Harvard's original charter of 1650 stated that its students will be taught "knowledge and godlynes." Contributors have now discovered that Harvard does not abide by this charter. Instead, it egregiously violates it by nurturing hate and violence against Jews. As such, donors are legally entitled to recover the funds they were convinced by Harvard's false representations to provide.

3) Why are no federal grand juries investigating the probable violations of American anti-terrorist laws committed by the organizers of and participants in pro-Hamas public protests?

In 1996, Congress enacted the "Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act" (18 U.S.C. 2339B), which makes it a criminal offense to provide "material support to foreign terrorist organizations." Violating this law can be punished with a long prison sentence.

The Supreme Court, with Chief Justice John Roberts writing for a six-person majority, upheld the law in 2010 and rejected claims that its restriction of "material support" for terrorism violated First Amendment rights of free speech and free association (*Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, 561 U.S. 1 (2010)).

Advocating for a terrorist organization and supporting its activities, even if they constitute otherwise lawful protest, violates this provision of the Federal Criminal Code. Organized protests supporting Hamas accompanied by costly printed signs, customized uniforms and caps, and Palestinian flags, assuredly qualify as "material support" for Hamas.

Why has the Department of Justice under Attorney General Merrick Garland, a descendant of Holocaust survivors, failed to initiate a federal investigation into these probable violations of America's anti-terrorism laws? Why has no U.S. attorney impaneled a federal grand jury and subpoenaed witnesses?

These are just some of the questions that an American lawyer must ask in these turbulent times.

* Nathan Lewin is a Washington, D.C., attorney with a Supreme Court practice who has taught at leading national law schools including Harvard, Columbia, Georgetown and the University of Chicago.

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<https://www.jns.org/explaining-the-first-amendment-to-university-presidents/>

End DEI

by Bari Weiss * (November 9, 2023)

[Editor's note: While not a Dvar Torah, this opinion piece fits in with material above relating to anti-Semitism during the period when our ancestors lived in Egypt.]

Twenty years ago, when I was a college student, I started writing about a then-nameless, niche ideology that seemed to contradict everything I had been taught since I was a child.

It is possible I would not have perceived the nature of this ideology — or rather I would have been able to avoid seeing its true nature — had I not been a Jew. But I was. I am. And in noticing the way I had been written out of the equation, I started to notice that it wasn't just me, but that the whole system rested on an illusion.

What I saw was a worldview that replaced basic ideas of good and evil with a new rubric: the powerless (good) and the powerful (bad). It replaced lots of things. Color blindness with race obsession. Ideas with identity. Debate with denunciation. Persuasion with public shaming. The rule of law with the fury of the mob.

People were to be given authority in this new order not in recognition of their gifts, hard work, accomplishments, or contributions to society, but in inverse proportion to the disadvantages their group had suffered, as defined by radical ideologues. According to them, as James Kirchick concisely put it: "Muslim > gay, black > female, and everybody > the Jews."

I was an undergraduate back then, but you didn't need a PhD to see where this could go. And so I watched, in horror, sounding alarms as loudly as I could.

I was told by most Jewish leaders that, yes, it wasn't great, but not to be so hysterical. Campuses were always hotbeds of radicalism, they said. This ideology, they promised, would surely dissipate as young people made their way in the world.

It did not.

Over the past two decades I saw this inverted worldview swallow all of the crucial sense-making institutions of American life. It started with the universities. Then it moved on to cultural institutions — including some I knew well, like The New York Times — as well as every major museum, philanthropy, and media company. Then on to our medical schools and our law schools. It's taken root at nearly every major corporation. It's inside our high schools and even our elementary schools. The takeover is so comprehensive that it's now almost hard to notice it — because it is everywhere.

Including in the Jewish community.

Some of the most important Jewish communal organizations transformed themselves in order to prop up this ideology. Or at the very least, they contorted themselves to signal that they could be good allies in the fight for equal rights — even as those rights are no longer presumed inalienable or equal and are handed out rather than protected.

For Jews there are obvious and glaring dangers in a worldview that measures fairness by equality of outcome rather than opportunity. If underrepresentation is the inevitable outcome of systemic bias, then overrepresentation — and Jews are two percent of the American population — suggests not talent or hard work, but unearned privilege. This conspiratorial conclusion is not that far removed from the hateful portrait of a small group of Jews divvying up the ill-gotten spoils of an exploited world.

It isn't only Jews who suffer from the suggestion that merit and excellence are dirty words. It is strivers of every race, ethnicity, and class. That is why Asian American success, for example, is suspicious. The percentages are off. The scores are too high. Who did you steal all that success from?

Of course, this new ideology doesn't come right out and say all that. It doesn't even like to be named. Some call it wokeness or anti-racism or progressivism or safetyism or Critical Social Justice or identity Marxism. But whatever term you use, what's clear is that it has gained power in a conceptual instrument called "diversity, equity, and inclusion," or DEI.

In theory, all three of these words represent noble causes. They are, in fact, all causes to which American Jews in particular have long been devoted, both individually and collectively. But in reality, these words are now metaphors for an ideological movement bent on recategorizing every American not as an individual, but as an avatar of an identity group, his or her behavior prejudged accordingly, setting all of us up in a kind of zero-sum game.

We have been seeing for several years now the damage this ideology has done: DEI, and its cadres of enforcers, undermine the central missions of the institutions that adopt it. But nothing has made the dangers of DEI clearer than what's happening these days on our college campuses — the places where our future leaders are nurtured.

It is there that professors are compelled to pledge fidelity to DEI in order to get hired, promoted, or tenured. (For more on this, please read John Sailer's Free Press piece: *How DEI Is Supplanting Truth as the Mission of American Universities*.) And it is there that the hideousness of this worldview has been on full display over the past few weeks: we see students and professors immersed not in facts, knowledge, and history, but in a dehumanizing ideology that has led them to celebrate or justify terrorism.

Jews, who understand that being made in the image of God bestows inviolate sanctity on every human life, must not stand by as that principle, so central to the promise of this country and its hard-won freedoms, is erased.

What we must do is reverse this.

The answer is not for the Jewish community to plead its cause before the intersectional coalition or beg for a higher ranking in the new ladder of victimhood. That is a losing strategy — not just for Jewish dignity, but for the values we hold as Jews and as Americans.

The Jewish commitment to justice — and the Jewish American community's powerful and historic opposition to racism — is a source of tremendous pride. That should never waver. Nor should our commitment to stand by our friends, especially when they need our support as we now need theirs.

But DEI is not about the words it uses as camouflage. DEI is about arrogating power.

And the movement that is gathering all this power does not like America or liberalism. It does not believe that America is a good country — at least no better than China or Iran. It calls itself progressive, but it does not believe in progress; it is explicitly anti-growth. It claims to promote "equity," but its answer to the challenge of teaching math or reading to disadvantaged children is to eliminate math and reading tests. It demonizes hard work, merit, family, and the dignity of the individual.

An ideology that pathologizes these fundamental human virtues is one that seeks to undermine what makes America exceptional.

It is time to end DEI for good. No more standing by as people are encouraged to segregate themselves. No more forced declarations that you will prioritize identity over excellence. No more compelled speech. No more going along with little lies for the sake of being polite.

The Jewish people have outlived every single regime and ideology that has sought our elimination. We will persist, one way or another. But DEI is undermining America, and that for which it stands—including the principles that have made it a place of unparalleled opportunity, safety, and freedom for so many. Fighting it is the least we owe this country.

* Bari Weiss is the founder and Editor of The Free Press, thefp.com, an on line publication. She is also author of *How to Fight Anti-Semitism* (2019) and was formerly op-ed editor and writer for the Wall Street Journal and an editor and writer for the New York Times.

https://www.thefp.com/p/end-dei-woke-capture?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

Getting Back on the Wagons

By Rabbi Ari Hart *

It couldn't be any worse for Yaakov.

His family, his children, are suffering from famine.

His beloved Rachel is dead.

His second favorite son, Binyamin, faces the threat of being trapped in an Egyptian prison. His other children are on an impossible, maybe even suicidal, mission to rescue him.

And of course, the pain of losing his most favorite son, Yosef, continues to rip him apart.

The epic of Yaakov's life seems to be drawing to a tragic, failed close.

Then, suddenly, his sons return from their mission to Egypt in good spirits and with the craziest, most impossible, totally unbelievable, news: Your son Yosef is alive, and he rules over all of Egypt!

Yaakov's response? *"And Yaakov's heart was weakened, for he did not believe them."*

Not only does he not believe them, and who can blame him, would you believe such a tale? but hearing this news harms his already weakened heart. We can imagine him almost at the the point of death.

His heart failing, Yaakov's sons press on, telling the fantastic story. Nothing. Then, something changes in Yaakov:

"And Yaakov saw the (agalot) that Yosef sent to bring him, and Yaakov's spirit lived."

Rashi asks: Yaakov's life is saved by... the sight of wagons? What about the wagons had such a powerful effect? He cites a midrash (BereishitRabbah 94:3) that suggests that the wagons symbolized something much deeper. The midrash notes the similarity between the word for the agalot – עגלות sent by Yosef and the word eglah – עגלה, or young calf. What's the connection? The midrash says that Yaakov and Yosef used to sit and learn Torah together, they had a chevrusa, and the very last thing they learned together before Yosef's disappearance were the laws of the eglah arufah, the decapitated cow, found in Sefer Devarim. By sending עגלות, wagons, Yosef was sending a coded message to his father that he was still alive, referencing their last time together when they learned the laws of the עגלה eglah. This secret reference to their learning, teaches the midrash, is what actually convinced Yaakov that he was alive.

But there is a deeper level, a deeper message from Yosef to Yaakov.

The eglah arufah isn't a random law. It's a deep, fascinating ritual loaded with meaning for Yosef and Yaakov.

The eglah arufah is a ritual done when the body of someone who has died in the field and the identity of the killer is not known. Familiar?

The leaders of nearby communities, upon learning about the murder, must come and break the neck of a young cow and wash their hands over its neck, reciting: *“Our hands did not spill this blood and our eyes did not see.”*

The Mishna understands this ritual as forcing the elders to take some degree of responsibility to reflect on what they could have done to prevent this murder that they did not directly cause, but might have prevented. Ultimately the eglah arufah seems to be about acknowledging a failure of leadership and protecting the vulnerable.

According to the Zohar on Vayigash, Yaakov was keenly aware that even though he did not kill his son, he was responsible for many of the conditions that led to his death/disappearance. The Zohar claims that Yaakov held himself responsible for not sending Yosef with food and an escort. More broadly, perhaps Yaakov felt that he failed to protect Yosef from his jealous brothers, and his dreamy self.

The agalot, then, become a symbol not just of recognition from Yosef to Yaakov, but of accusation! Father, you and I both know the halachot of the eglah arufa, you know that if someone is sent off into the wilderness and is killed that the responsibility falls upon those who maybe could have done more. You failed to protect me. You could have stopped this. The responsibility falls on you.

But if the agalot-eglah connection reminded Yaakov of his failure, why did it revive his spirit? Why didn't it kill him?

Because there was more riding on that wagon than blame. There was also hope. The eglah arufa ritual is not just about looking backward at mistakes that might have been made.

At the end of the Torah's description of the ritual ends with this charge:

“abolish the shedding of innocent blood and do what is upright in the eyes of God.”

The ritual of elgah arufah allows for the village elders to both acknowledge that they hold responsibility, and to move forward and do what is right.

By sending the agalot, Yosef sent his father a message: you had a part to play in the wrong that happened to me. You screwed up. But you weren't responsible alone, and you have hope. The way for you to take responsibility and move forward (eglah-arufah) is to figuratively (and literally) get back on these wagons (agalot).

And with this message, Yaakov's spirit was revived.

The mistakes of the past are real, but they don't determine the future. Accepting responsibility for ways in which we have failed in the past is the way towards a better future.

Each of us has allowed wrongs to happen, each of us has refrained from speaking up, or spoken too much. Each of us has turned a blind eye and caused pain to those we love. But we are not solely responsible for those wrongs, and being dragged down and paralyzed by them won't help us make change in the future. In order to accomplish what we must accomplish in the world, we need to see the agalot that Yosef sends us – to confront and recognize suffering we've allowed to happen, and then use that confrontation to re-energize and re-inspire us to the work we are here to do. This is the story of Yaakov. This is of course the story of Yehuda and Yosef. This is the story of Bereishit: the story of the formation of the Jewish people. I bless you and me the strength of heart to make it ours.

* Rabbi of Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob, a growing, welcoming Orthodox synagogue in Skokie, Illinois.

Looking Back, Thinking Ahead

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

[Rabbi Marc D. Angel was honored at the dinner of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America, Sunday evening December 17, 2023. These are his comments on that occasion.]

One of my favorite Joha stories has him in his yard searching for his lost keys. His wife asks him: what are you looking for, Joha? He answers: I'm looking for my keys. His wife asks: where did you lose them? Joha answers: I lost them in the house somewhere. His wife asks: If you lost your keys in the house, why are you looking for them outside in the yard? Joha answers: because the light is much better out here in the sunshine!

Like many humorous stories, there is wisdom tucked inside. This Joha story reminds us of an eternal truth: you can't find your keys if you are looking in the wrong place. Extending the lesson, you can't find the keys to a happy and meaningful life if you are looking in all the wrong places. You have to know where to look, what values to choose, what ideals to uphold. You have to be able to distinguish between reality and illusion.

As we celebrate Sephardic tradition tonight, the first place we should search for keys is in our past. Centuries of our ancestors maintained a remarkable faith, persistence, sense of humor, wit and wisdom. I've spent much of my adult life researching and writing about Sephardic civilization, and I have found many keys to a strong, happy life.

Tonight I express my gratitude to parents, grandparents, relatives and friends who peopled the beautiful Sephardic family and community of my youth in Seattle. My grandparents Angel came to Seattle from Rhodes; my grandparents Romey came from Turkey...all in the early years of the 20th century. I was named after my maternal grandfather Marco (Mordechai) Romey.

I find keys to my life in the family and community in which I was raised. My Papoo Romey was a special influence on me. He was a barber, far from affluent, with no formal education. But he was a remarkable man. Every Friday night, after Shabbat dinner, he would sit at a card table near a window overlooking his back yard; and he would study the Torah portion of the week, as he sipped on a piping hot glass of tea with four teaspoons of sugar. He loved Torah; his faith in God was a mainstay of his life.

On many Shabbat afternoons I would walk with him from his home on 15th Avenue between Alder and Spruce Streets to Sephardic Bikur Holim on 20th and Fir. On the way, there was an empty lot on one of the corners with a dirt path running diagonally through it. It was a convenient short cut. But Papoo would never let us take that short cut. *"We don't walk on dirt paths. We walk derekh hamelekh."* Dignity, honor, kavod, self respect. To outsiders, he was an immigrant, a barber, a poor man. In his mind, he was from the aristocracy of the ancient tribe of Judah who had been exiled to Spain. He was a prince of Israel.

The past is a good place to search for keys. But the present is very important if we know where to look. When we see family and friends devoted to Torah and mitzvot, we fill with joy and gratitude. When we see our Jewish faith and traditions live proudly and happily, we know that the keys of Judaism are in good hands. When I left the pulpit rabbinate 16 years ago, after a wonderful tenure in a historic congregation, I established the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Our creed has been to foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism...much in the spirit of the Sephardic tradition. I have found many keys among devoted, idealistic, and faithful Jews trying to build a better future for our people and for society at large. My son, Rabbi Hayyim Angel, is the National Scholar of our Institute.

But when we search for keys, we also need to look into the future. Our Sephardic ancestors have bequeathed to us a tradition of faith, fortitude, optimism and joy. What will this tradition mean to our descendants 100 years from now, a time of post-ethnic Jewish peoplehood? That question is key to how we live our lives today.

We want our future generations to live strong, happy, beautiful Jewish lives. We want the Sephardic component of their lives to bring them inner poise, confidence, wisdom. The keys we bequeath to them are determined by us here and now. This is an awesome privilege and challenge.

Joha taught us not to look for keys in the wrong places. My Papoo taught us not to take short cuts, to live with dignity and ideals. These are foundational ideas for us now and for generations yet to come.

I am an optimist. I believe in a bright Jewish future, in a better future for all humanity. With all the problems we face these days, the words of the biblical prophet Amos are particularly poignant.

"Behold the days are coming, and I (God) will send a famine to the earth, not a famine for bread and not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of God."

Amen, ken yehi ratson!

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its year end fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3190>

Standing Tall: Thoughts on Parashat Vayiggash

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

This week's Torah portion includes an enigmatic little episode:

"And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob: How many are the days of the years of your life? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh: The days of the years of my sojournings are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojournings. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh."

Why did Jacob bless Pharaoh at the beginning and then a second time at the end of this passage? Why did Pharaoh ask how old Jacob was? Why did Jacob say his years were few when he was 130 years old? Why did he complain that his years were evil? Why did he mention the lives of his fathers? Why did Pharaoh remain silent after Jacob's comments?

Let us look more carefully at this passage. When Joseph brought Jacob to Pharaoh, the Torah uses the phrase "*vaya-amideihu lifnei Pharaoh*," and he set (stood) him before Pharaoh. The commentary, R. Ovadia Seforno, notes that Jacob did not bow before Pharaoh, as was the custom of those who came before the monarch. By standing tall, Jacob indicated that he was not subservient to Pharaoh. Moreover, Jacob blessed Pharaoh, an indication that he was of such a rank that he could confer blessings on the ruler. Pharaoh must have been surprised by this behavior, so he asked Jacob how old he was. He wanted to know not merely Jacob's age, but what it was about his life that made him stand so confidently before Pharaoh. After all, Jacob was only a shepherd from a foreign land, who could not even feed his own family without coming to Egypt for help. How dare he stand upright before Pharaoh? How dare he think Pharaoh needed his blessing?

Jacob replied: my years are few; not few in number since I'm 130 years old, but few in seeming accomplishments. You, Pharaoh, see me as a helpless old man. My years are "evil," i.e., I've suffered much. I appear to you as a failure. But I am the patriarch of the people of Israel. My fathers were prophets who have brought dramatic change to the world. Long after the Egyptian empire will disappear, my people will still be flourishing. I haven't achieved yet what my fathers have achieved; but I have deep roots, and a grand destiny.

Pharaoh hears this and remains silent. Then Jacob blesses him again, a reminder that Jacob is not a subservient failure, but a link in the chain of a great nation, the people of Israel.

This passage, then, conveys a vital message for the family of Jacob. The people of Israel may appear to be small, dependent, powerless. Great empires may persecute us. But the people of Israel stands tall, and does not bow before any human being, however powerful. We are part of an eternal nation that has outlived all its enemies and that will outlive all the empires and powers of our time as well. We have faced adversity, and have prevailed. We are strong, courageous, resilient. We remember our ancestors, the prophets and teachers of humanity. We glory in their legacy and know that we have much more to do to fulfill their aspirations and dreams.

We offer blessings to all – even to those who wish us ill. We pray that their souls be healed of their hatred and violence; we pray that their minds will be cleared of ignorance and superstitions. Jacob's meeting with Pharaoh, then, is a very significant event, with a powerful message for us and for the world.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/standing-tall-thoughts-parashat-vayiggash>

Vayigash: The Role of the Yeshiva

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

As Yakov relocated the Jewish family to Mitzrayim there must have been many things to keep track of. But his greatest concern was that the Jewish family stay strong and not assimilate into the local culture. The Parsha)46:28(tells us that, "Yakov sent Yehuda," ahead of the family "to Yosef" to create a Yeshiva — a place that would maintain the integrity of the Jewish tradition and provide guidance for the people.

Throughout the ages, the establishment of a local Yeshiva has been a critical part in creating a successful Jewish community. The Yeshiva system helps the youth by raising them with Torah values. The Yeshiva system continues to remain a vital part of our lives as adults in the form of the Beis Medrash. The Beis Medrash is a place of study where we connect daily with Torah, seeing it as the love note and guidebook of Hashem. Throughout our lives the Yeshiva is a place for study, high level scholarship, and education.

Approximately one hundred years before the story of Chanuka, the southern Greek kingdom, based in Egypt, forced the Sages of Israel to produce a Greek translation of the Torah scroll. The Rabbis obediently did so, but declared it a sad day, one that we commemorate this Friday through the fast of Asara B'Teves)the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Teves(. We wonder, if the scholarship of the Yeshiva is everything to the Jewish people, why do we view it sadly if the Greeks want a translation? Wouldn't this be wonderful, to be celebrated as a day when the Torah light was spread to the nations?

To understand this, I think we need to revisit the story of Chanuka which we just experienced. We need to appreciate what the crisis of the Chanuka story was and why the victory was so meaningful to the Jewish people.

When we consider Greek culture, we may at first wonder what the Jews felt was so awful. The Greeks were very advanced in so many areas including art, science, math, architecture, and music. It is true that a quick check on their lack of personal morality and their worship of many gods may reveal much about what the Jews found so revolting. But there is a greater, attitudinal aspect, as well. The Greeks wanted to replace Torah. They wanted to box up Torah into a nice, neat book and place it in their libraries, alongside other books of scholarship, for reference purposes only. The Jews complied

with the mighty Greeks and supplied the translation as requested. But they recognized the day as one of sadness; they understood the sinister motives behind it. This was not an opportunity of great Harbotzas Torah dissemination of G-d's holy word. This was an attempt of the Greeks to equate Torah with other scholarship, and then move on to embrace the new age that so many nations think they have discovered.

Unfortunately, many Jews fell into the new age thinking of the Greeks, much as so many Jews embraced Communism a hundred years ago. Too many Jews thought that a new age had arrived, in which Torah was no longer relevant. While it is true that workers' benefits and fair distribution of wealth can be noble concepts, there is no place to replace Hashem's Torah for new age thinking. The Torah is not an ancient book of wise suggestions. The Torah is Hashem's word; it is alive and eternal. Disciplines and wisdoms of the world need to pass the test to see if they are compatible with Torah. If they are we can adapt and incorporate them. Never do these advancements have a claim to replace Torah.

The Yeshiva is the place of strength where the integrity of Torah is maintained. Yakov understood that if there is a Yeshiva then the entire nation will be infused with the clarity and strength to maintain the values treasured by the Jewish family. In our time, there are so many types of Chavrusa and Beis Medrash programs nationwide that everyone can have the chance to connect with the strength of the Yeshiva throughout the week.

In Tehillim 27, which we recite during the month of Elul in preparation for the Yomim Noroim, Dovid begs, *"Let me sit in the house of Hashem all my days."* Rav Matisyahu Salomon asked, "Really?! Was Dovid asking to remain in Kollel his entire life?" Dovid was a king, a provider, a judge, and a defender of the Jewish people. Rav Matisyahu answered that Dovid was asking that the Yeshiva should be the place that he would call home forever. The Yeshiva is the place of a Jew's formative years, the place which we frequent daily, and the place that we call home all the days of our lives.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel.

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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Vayigash -- Word Power

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2023

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.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Vayigash

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

]Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Miketz. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Vayigash

By R. Haim Ovadia

I do not have a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia. Watch this space for his insights on most weeks.[]

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom 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 article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Vayigash: Summer and Family Love

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

"What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness."

This quote from John Steinbeck underscores our human brain's tendency to find pleasure in contrast. The colder the winter, the more joy we feel with summer.

I can only imagine the depths of joy which welled up when Joseph was reunited with his father, Jacob, after a 22 year separation. During all that time, Jacob thought Joseph had passed. And then Jacob headed down from Israel to Egypt and saw his son Joseph, not only alive, but as the ruler of all Egypt.

The Torah describes the reunion of father and son as filled with tears of joy. Not only that, but when Joseph identified himself to his brothers, the Torah states that Joseph was so overcome with emotion, he could not contain himself.

These heights of love and joy could only be felt after times of real despair.

With contrast in mind, may you all be able to find time to embrace a summer break filled with family, friends, nature and the warmth of the sun.

Shabbat Shalom and Kayitz)Summer(Sameach!

Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Vayigash: The First Exile

The very first exile of the Jewish people, the exile to Egypt, began as Jacob and his family left the Land of Israel. They intended to spend a short stay in Egypt until the famine passed.

The Midrash)Yalkut Shimoni Hosea 528(makes a startling observation:

"Jacob should have gone down to Egypt in chains. Yet God said, 'Jacob, My first-born, how could I banish him in disgrace? Rather, I will send his son to go down before him.'"

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

Two Purposes to Exile

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

In fact, the Midrash states that the Jewish people are particularly suited for exile. They are called *“the daughter of exiles,”* since the Avot (forefathers) were sojourners and refugees, subjected to the whims and jealousies of local tyrants (Midrash Eicha Petichta 1 on Isaiah 10:30).

Exile accomplishes two goals:

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

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

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

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

Jacob's Exile

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

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

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

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYIGA63.htm>

The Future of the Past)5780(

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

In our parsha, Joseph does something unusual. Revealing himself to his brothers, fully aware that they will suffer shock and then guilt as they remember how it is that their brother is in Egypt, he reinterprets the past:

“I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years

there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.” Gen. 45:4-8

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

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

Joseph does the same in next week's parsha, when the brothers fear that he may take revenge after their father's death:

“Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Gen. 50:19-20

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

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

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

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

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

Professor Mordechai Rotenberg of the Hebrew University has argued that this kind of technique, of reinterpreting the past, could be used as a therapeutic technique in rehabilitating patients suffering from a crippling sense of guilt.^[2] If we cannot change the past, then it is always there holding us back like a ball and chain around our legs. We cannot change the past, but we can reinterpret it by integrating it into a new and larger narrative. That is what Joseph was doing, and having used

this technique to help him survive a personal life of unparalleled ups and downs, he now uses it to help his brothers live without overpowering guilt.

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

It is by telling stories that we make sense of our lives and the life of our people. And it is by allowing the present to reshape our understanding of the past that we redeem history and make it live as a positive force in our lives. I gave one example when I spoke at the Kinus Shluchim of Chabad, the great gathering of some 5000 Chabad emissaries from around the world. I told them of how, in 1978, I visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe to ask his advice on which career I should follow. I did the usual thing: I sent him a note with the options, A, B or C, expecting him to indicate which one I should follow. The options were to become a barrister, or an economist, or an academic philosopher, either as a fellow of my college in Cambridge or as a professor somewhere else.

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

The strange thing is that ultimately I fulfilled all those ambitions despite walking in the opposite direction. I became an honorary barrister (Bencher) of the Inner Temple and delivered a law lecture in front of 600 barristers and the Lord Chief Justice. I delivered Britain’s two leading economics lectures, the Mais Lecture and the Hayek Lecture at the Institute of Economic Affairs. I became a fellow of my Cambridge college and a philosophy professor at several universities. I identified with the biblical Joseph because, so often, what I had dreamed of came to be at the very moment that I had given up hope. Only in retrospect did I discover that the Rebbe was not telling me to give up my career plans. He was simply charting a different route and a more beneficial one.

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

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

Around the Sabbath Table:

[1] Why does Joseph revise the way he presents the events that led to his arrival in Egypt?

[2] How can the future change the way we understand the past?

[3] Can you think of any examples in your life of events that seemed bad at the time but in hindsight were meaningful?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayigash/the-future-of-the-past/>

By Yossi Goldman * © Chabad 2023

What is Yiddishe nachas? Is it “my son the rocket scientist” and “my daughter the neurosurgeon”? Of course, parents have every reason to be proud of their children’s achievements, in whatever field of endeavor, but are these examples of what we would traditionally refer to as Yiddishe nachas?

This week’s Torah reading tells the dramatic tale of Joseph and his brothers’ reunification. Joseph, viceroy of Egypt, finally reveals to his siblings that he is, indeed, their long-lost brother. The brothers return to Canaan and share the wonderful news with their father, Jacob.

Od Yosef chai, “Joseph still lives!” they said.¹

Jacob can’t believe it. Can it really be true? He’d been mourning the loss of his beloved son, Joseph, for over 20 years ... was he really still alive?

The verse continues:

And [when] they told him all of Joseph’s words, and he saw the wagons that Joseph sent to carry him [down to Egypt], the spirit of their father Jacob was revived.²

And Israel said, “It’s too much! Joseph, my son, still lives! Let me go and see him before I die.”³

Did you spot the difference between the words of the brothers and the words of Jacob? They said, “Joseph still lives,” whereas Jacob said, “Joseph, my son, still lives.”

“Od Yosef beni chai.” My son! He has remained faithful to me and my way of life, despite being in the center of government circles and Egyptian high society. It would have been small comfort to Jacob if Joseph was alive but had assimilated into Egyptian culture. How pleased and proud he was to learn that despite being so far removed from his family, Joseph had retained his identity and was raising his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe, as faithful grandchildren of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

But how did Jacob actually know that Joseph had maintained his faith and Jewish identity?

Rashi⁴ explains that when Jacob saw the wagons which Joseph sent it was a siman—a private sign—that he still remembered the last portion of Torah he and his father had been studying before his abduction all those years ago. The Hebrew word for wagon is agalah which has the same root as eglah, a calf. They had been studying the section on eglah arufah, the story of an unsolved murder and the atonement achieved through a ceremony involving a calf. ⁵

Apparently, it was not enough for Jacob to discover that Joseph was still alive physically. He needed to hear that he was also alive spiritually. And when he saw that Joseph still remembered the Torah that they had studied so long ago, he was deeply gratified and joyfully declared, “Joseph, my son, still lives!” He is still my son—faithful to my values, beliefs, traditions, and way of life.

For Joseph to have been the leading political figure of a global superpower and remain faithful to the traditions of his own faith and family was no small achievement. It was a highly principled decision that must have taken tremendous courage and commitment.

It’s not often that we see Jews in high office wearing their Jewishness on their sleeves. Those who manage to achieve impressive positions, especially in government, are usually not that forthcoming about their faith. One notable recent exception that comes to mind is former senator, Joe Lieberman, who openly and proudly kept Shabbat, even on the campaign trail. Clearly, Viceroy Joseph back in Egypt was an excellent role model for Senator Joseph in Washington.

Jacob understood what Yiddishe nachas meant. So should we.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 45:26.
2. Ibid 27.
3. Ibid 28.
4. Ibid 27.
5. Deuteronomy 21:1-9.

* Founding Rabbi of the first Chabad in South Africa)1976(. Now Rabbi Emeritus for life of the Sydenham Shul.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5737350/jewish/Josephs-Message.htm

Vayigash: Tending to the Needs of Others

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(

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 administrative 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 *Daily Wisdom* 3

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Gut Shabbos and a bright and joyous Chanukah,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Reframing

Maimonides called his ideal type of human being – the sage – a *rofeh nefashot*, a “healer of souls”. [1] 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. [2]

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.” [3] 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.” [4]

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

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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: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“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

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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.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Short and Sharp Rebuke

And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" And the brothers could not respond to him, for they shrank from him in shame. (Gen. 45:3)

After a sharp confrontation with Yehudah, who pleads with him to have mercy on his aged father, Yosef can no longer maintain his masquerade. He bursts into tears and reveals his identity to his brothers. "I am Yosef," he cries out. "Is my father still alive?" And the brothers "shrink from him in shame."

The Midrash comments (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10), "Woe is to us on the day of judgment. Woe is to us on the day of rebuke ... If the brothers could not endure Yosef's rebuke [without shrinking away in shame], each individual will certainly not endure it when the Holy One, Blessed is He, rebukes him for what he has done."

What connection is the Midrash making? How does Yosef's rebuke to his brothers foreshadow the rebuke each of us will face on the final day of reckoning?

Let us consider for a moment. What exactly were Yosef's words of rebuke? "I am Yosef." Why are these words considered rebuke?

For 22 years, the brothers lived under the impression that they had acted justly by selling their brother into slavery. They saw their broken-hearted, inconsolable father, but they still thought they were right. They saw that the Shechinah had consequently departed from their home, and still, they were convinced that they had done the right thing.

They suffered through a famine. They went down to Egypt to buy food and found themselves caught in a web of intrigue. They were accused of being spies. Some of them were taken hostage. They were endangered. And now they were falsely accused of robbing the viceroy's cup. They must have wondered why they were being subjected to such trials and tribulations, but they didn't have any answers.

And then Yosef declares, "I am Yosef." And everything is crystal clear! Like a flash of lightning, those words illuminate the landscape of their lives for the previous twenty-two

years. Suddenly, they understand everything. All the mysteries are dispelled, and they understand that they have been living a lie for all these years. There could be no stronger rebuke, and they shrink back in shame.

Each of us goes through life distracted by this, distracted by that, puzzled by this, puzzled by that, confused, deluded, and in the process, we wander off in wrong directions and make mistakes. We lose sight of our priorities and pursue the wrong goals. But when the final day of reckoning arrives, all Hashem will say is, "I am Hashem!"

Like a flash of lightning, these three short words will illuminate our lives for us. Suddenly, we will understand everything that has happened to us, and we identify all our mistakes with perfect clarity. And it will be terribly painful. Those three words are all it will take. "I am Hashem!" When we hear those words, woe is to us of the day of judgment, woe is to us on the day of rebuke.

CONCLUSIVE PROOF

And [Yaakov] saw the wagons Yosef had sent to transport him, and the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived. (Gen. 45:27)

Before Yaakov would allow himself to accept the news that his long-lost son Yosef had been found alive and that he was now the viceroy of Egypt, he wanted to see some solid proof. Perhaps the whole thing was some kind of cruel hoax.

Yosef could easily have sent along all sorts of signs that he was genuine and not an impostor. He could have described his room or any other intimate details that would not be known to a stranger. But he did something altogether different. According to the Midrash, the "wagons Yosef had sent to transport Yaakov to Egypt" were really a hint at the sugya, Talmudic topic, they had discussed in private on the last day they had seen each other - the topic of eglah arufah, the decapitated calf. (The Hebrew word for wagon is agalah, which is reminiscent of the word eglah.) This sign convinced Yaakov that this was not a hoax and revived his spirits.

But why indeed was this such a conclusive proof? Just as an impostor might have somehow learned other intimate details about Yosef, why couldn't he have discovered this information as well?

During the time of the Vilna Gaon, a very strange incident took place in his city. A young couple had gotten married, and shortly afterward, the husband vanished without a trace. The poor wife was left an agunah, a living widow unable to remarry because her husband might still be alive.

Thirty years passed, and then, one fine day, a man appeared on her doorstep and declared, "My dear wife, I'm back!" Then he told her a

long story about what had kept him from returning for so many years.

The woman looked at the man and did not recognize him as her husband. But then again, she couldn't be sure that he wasn't. Thirty years wreak changes on a person. They also fade the memory, especially in those times when there were no photographs. The man was about the same build and coloring as her husband. His features were not really dissimilar. His face was weathered by time and the elements, and it was difficult to imagine what he might have looked like thirty years earlier. It was not impossible that this was her husband. And yet, he did not seem familiar.

She expressed her reservations to the man, and he was very understanding. "Test me," he said. "Ask me any question about our life together. See if I know the answers." So she asked him questions, and he had all the answers. He knew all about their families, their wedding day, their home, including some intimate details that only the two of them could have known.

Still, she remained suspicious, and she decided to seek the advice of the beis din, the Jewish court. The judges of the beis din interrogated the man extensively, but they could not catch him in a mistake. He was very convincing. And yet, his wife was not convinced, which was certainly cause for suspicion. What should they do? They sought the counsel of the Vilna Gaon. "Take the man to the shul," said the Gaon. "Ask him to point out his makom kavua, the place where he normally sat."

They took him to the shul and asked him to point to his seat. The man hemmed and hawed, but he could not do it. Then he broke down and admitted that he had learned all his information from the husband whom he had befriended many years earlier.

The Vilna Gaon had put his finger on the flaw in this man's diabolical plan. Assuming that the man was an impostor seeking to move in with another man's wife, he was obviously far from a righteous person. Such a person would seek out all sorts of important details to "prove" his identity, but it would not occur to him to find out about the husband's seat in shul or any of the other holy matters in Jewish life.

Similarly, Yaakov knew that if the man who claimed to be Yosef was an impostor he might have extracted all sorts of intimate and obscure information from the real Yosef. But he also knew that it would never occur to an impostor to ask which Talmudic topic he and Yaakov were discussing when they last saw each other. When Yosef was able to refer to the topic of eglah arufah, Yaakov was convinced that he had found his long-lost son.

Serious Jews identify themselves by the holy aspects of their lives. The important information is not the make and color of their cars, not the size of their houses, not the last time they went fishing or played baseball. It is

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the mitzvot they have performed, the chessed, kindness, they have done, the place where they sit in shul, the last topic they discussed.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

22 years in 2 words

It took just two words to explain everything that had transpired in 22 years.

In Parshat Vayigash we read about the epic moment when Yosef revealed his true identity to his brothers and he did so by saying two words (Bereishit 45:3): "Ani Yosef." – "I am Joseph."

And the response of his brothers: "Ki nivhalu mipanav." – "They were stunned into silence."

These two words explained everything that had happened since the moment that Joseph had left their presence, the ups and downs, the trials and tribulations, the hardships and the tragedies. Now suddenly, there was an explanation for it all.

The Chofetz Chaim teaches us that at the time of reckoning, when we reach the world of truth, so too in a very simple and powerful way Hashem will suddenly reveal to us the truth of everything that has transpired to us throughout our lives. But that's not the only lesson.

You see, Yosef actually added three more words. He said, "Ani Yosef," – "I am Joseph," and then he said, "Ha'od avi chai?" – "Is my father still alive?"

The Gemarah in Chagigah 4b tells us that Rabbi Elazar taught that from here we realise the power of rebuke. You see, Joseph here was rebuking his brothers by saying, "Is my father still alive?" Really, it was aimed at his brother Yehuda. Yehuda had made these noble protestations about Benjamin. "If you take Benjamin away our father Jacob will die," he said. Joseph was asking where Yehuda's voice had been 22 years before when his other brother Yosef was to be taken from his father, to probably his certain death. Was he concerned about his father then?

"Ha'od avi chai?" – "Is my father still alive?"

Joseph was saying, "Can I really rely on a single word of yours?" What a rebuke to his brothers.

And therefore Rabbi Elazar teaches us that in a time to come when we reach the World of Truth, Hashem will rebuke us, and we will be ashamed of all our misdemeanours in life. So therefore, from these powerful words of Joseph, when he revealed his identity to his brothers, the Chofetz Chaim teaches us that just as Yosef was able to explain everything that had transpired in just two words, so too in the world of Truth Hashem will explain to us, in a very simple fashion, why we have had so many extraordinary and sometimes tragic

experiences on earth.

It will all just be explained in an instant.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

What Makes a Leader?

Rabbi Netanel Aryeh Leib and Rabbanit Avital Kaszowitz

In the previous portions we came across leader figures: Reuven, Yehuda and Yosef. All three display leadership qualities and have characteristics of firstborns. However, when Yaakov blesses his sons in the portion of Vayechi, he bestows kingship upon Yehuda, at a time when he is residing in the castle of Yosef! Surely this is bewildering.

The first question is, why not give Reuven, the firstborn, the kingship, or at least some other form of leadership? Yaakov describes Reuven as doing things on impulse – pachaz kamayim, “unstable as water” – one driven by emotion, unmindful of the possible outcomes of his actions. For instance, the episode with Bilha, which Yaakov describes as “though went up to your father’s bed.” Similarly, when Reuven tries to convince his father to let him take Binyamin to Egypt, he says to him – “...my two sons you shall slay...”. Why would Yaakov want to bury two grandsons as payback for Binyamin not coming home?! These are not the actions of a true leader.

In light of the above, it is obvious why Reuven was not chosen. We are now left with Yehuda and Yosef. So why is Yehuda preferable to Yosef?

Yosef is known as Yosef HaTzaddik, Yosef the Righteous. Yosef is the child most beloved to Yaakov; Yaakov teaches him at every opportunity, and prepares him to be his successor. When Yosef is sold to Egypt and lives with Potiphar, and later withstands the desire to sin with Potiphar’s wife, we learn of his strength of character and his inherent righteousness. We see before us a man who stands firm against all challenges and enticements and does not let these overcome him. It is difficult, if not impossible, to emulate such a magnanimous personality.

But who is Yehuda? Yehuda was not born a leader, nor was he brought up to be one. However, he definitely grew into one.

Immediately following the sale of Yosef in the portion of Vayeshev, the Torah tells us that Yehuda leaves the family – “he descends from his brethren” – marries and fathers three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. After God smites Er and Onan, Yehuda promises his daughter-in-law Tamar that she would marry his son Shelah once he reaches marriageable age, but in the meanwhile she should return to her father’s house. The Torah goes on to tell us that Yehuda goes down to shear his sheep, where he also happens to meet a “prostitute” who is actually his daughter-in-law. These events teach us the point of despair Yehuda has

reached. So much so, that he is willing to give up everything: disconnect from the twelve tribes and have relations with a prostitute – actions which denote lack of continuity.

Tamar, however, knows exactly what she is doing when she deceives Yehuda – she is entitled to yibbum – levirate marriage – and yet Yehuda has refused to give her his son Shelah. After Yehuda has intercourse with her, he gives her a pledge, until such time that he pays her. But when he returns to pay her, she has already disappeared with the pledge he had given her.

Several months later, it becomes known that Tamar is with child. Yehuda proclaims that she has committed adultery and instructs that she be burned. Tamar, who does not wish to humiliate Yehuda publicly, says to him: “Discern, I pray thee, whose are these; the signet, and the cords, and the staff?” Yehuda has the option of keeping silent, and sending her off to die without humiliating himself. However, Yehuda makes no excuses, and his response is short and clear: “She is more righteous than I.”

The story demonstrates what true leadership is all about – being able to say “I have erred.” As a reward for this action, Yehuda merits to have King David as his direct offspring. In the episode with Batsheva, King David sees Batsheva, lusts after her, takes her and then gets her husband killed in order to cover up the deed. When the prophet Nathan comes to the king and tells him the parable of the poor man’s lamb and then says right out – “Thou art the man,” King David does not try to whitewash his actions. Rather, he gives a straightforward reply of few words: “I have sinned to God.” King Shaul, on the other hand, who seemingly committed a far lesser sin, loses his kingdom instantly because unlike King David, he does not know how to take responsibility.

What do the Torah and Yaakov Avinu ultimately wish to teach us about leadership?

Firstly, we need both types of leadership, Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David, in order to reach the Final Redemption. Secondly, a leader does not have to be as perfect as Yosef, the most righteous of his generation. He is allowed to err – this may even be preferable – so long he learns from his mistakes. What is crucial is for a leader to be able to say “I was wrong”, without giving excuses, and simply saying “I have erred.”

Imagine a world in which our leaders admit having erred, make no excuses and blame no other but themselves. What an amazing world that would be!

Surely Yosef would want to assure Yaakov that he is safe and has not suffered during their twenty two year separation. That Yosef wants to close that gnawing and painful uncertainty swiftly is clear as he says to his brothers, "Hasten and go up to my father and report to him, that Yosef your son says Hashem has appointed me the master of Mitzrayim... and tell my father of all of my 'kovod' - wealth - in Mitzrayim..."(45:9).

Nevertheless, for many years I was disturbed by the thought that Yosef's physical survival would bring solace and strength to Yaakov; that he would indeed begin to collect on the much owed nachas from the material accomplishments of his ben zekunim, and from the political position of the envisioned heir of the masora of the Avos. At the very least, would we not expect Yosef to add that "he still puts on tefillin every day", that he married "Jewish", and describe the spiritual promise that the grandchildren showed!? After all, when Yaakov presented himself to Esav after years with Lavan, he chooses his words "עם לבן גרתי" in order to intimate "ג מצות שמרתי" - and I observed the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot. If Yaakov took pride in that accomplishment above all of his material wealth and he thought it important to share with Esav, would we not expect the same of Yosef when speaking to his father? This behavior repeats itself some twenty pesukim later as the brothers announce to their father, "Yosef is still alive and he rules over Mitzrayim" with no apparent mention of where he is "holding" with respect to all that is of value to Yaakov.

Thus I was gratified to find in the writings of Rav Moshe Shternbuch, the ra'avod of Yerushalayim (Ta'am Voda'as 45:26) that he understands the brother's announcement "Yosef is still alive" to mean alive in our terms - fully observant of Hashem's wishes. What else could "alive" mean to a people who frequently recite, "and you who cleave to Hashem are all alive - חיים כולכם היום"?

Following Rav Shternbuch's lead, we can suggest that the brothers were indeed reporting that despite Yosef's position of power, despite rubbing shoulders with pagans, despite his highly acclaimed financial accomplishments, he has absolute clarity that his life is a series of appointments gifted to him by Hashem. Accordingly, the brothers probably related Yosef's narrative (45:4-8) that all of his suffering was part of Hashem's master plan for his benefit and the joyous equanimity with which he accepted that. They may have shared that Yosef presented himself as unflinchingly G-d fearing in the pagan palace of Pharaoh, like Avraham in the palace of Nimrod. That would indeed give Yaakov untold nachas!

Moreover, Yosef was to model for all generations how to rise above the religious challenges presented by both poverty and affluence. As he plunged from aristocracy to slavery and made the climb from prison to palace, he maintained his fealty to Hashem, his appreciation that He was micromanaging his life, and his mindset remained focused on the "דמות דיוקנו" - the image of his father that would guide him at tortuous crossroads.

Our interpretation takes on new life in light of a drosho delivered by Harav Reuven Karelstein, a charismatic disciple of Rav Sholom Schwadron and himself a Yerushalmi magid of note. He interpreted Yakov's interest in "רש"י ריש פ" (לשבת בשלוח) as his wish to be tested by affluence and peacefulness. He could complete his service to Hashem if he would not let comfort and prosperity interfere with his passion for, and dedication to, Hashem and His demands. Yaakov wished to model that for us all. In a most unexpected twist of events, alone and far away from home, Yosef has seized an opportunity that eluded Yaakov.

Could there be a more meaningful way to report home, to give his father profound nachas, and to find his place in the mesora of his father?

And for us, in our time, could there be a more penetrating parsha? We thankfully embrace the privilege of living in times that, from a historical perspective, are enormously kind to the practice of Torah. Studying and personalizing Yosef's tenacious awareness of Hashem should help us develop the necessary tenacity to grow closer to Hashem even amid affluence and acceptance.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Forever Youthful

How can I go up to my father if the (Naar) boy is not with me?... (Breishis 44:34)

Sometimes a verse in the Torah can be learned as a freestanding statement abstract from the context of the narrative. Here Yehuda is desperately pleading to rescue his youngest brother Benyamin and he utters a few words that have deep significance to each and every one of us, "How can I go up to my father and the NAAR- the youth is not with me!?"

We are all children of HASHEM, literally, as the verse explicitly states, "Banim Atem L'HASHEM Elocheichem" – You are children of HASHEM your G-d!" (Devarim 14:1) We are gifted with an inherent and unbreakable bond with HASHEM. A parent -child relationship is forever. The love is unconditional. It can be developed and enhanced but it is not an artificially crafted or abstract construct. It's natural! We come into this world installed with this program. It's part of our spiritual DNA. We have this natural attraction and yearning to come close to

HASHEM, like a child's desire to be near his father, or like a smaller magnet is drawn to a larger magnet.

With all this, it is still possible for barriers to be erected that weaken that magnetic pull. It is relatively easy to put a child's picture or a test on the fridge with a magnet. Only a slim piece of paper stands between the magnet and the metal but if layers and layers of papers are added, it becomes increasingly difficult and even impossible for the magnet and the fridge to detect the attraction. Certainly, if one attempts to place the entire Sunday Times on the fridge, no magnetism can be felt through that thick impediment. The attraction is still there. It always was, and always will be, but there is a blockage.

More than once I have had people tell me, "Rabbi, please talk to my niece. She's an atheist!" My answer is always the same. "Tell your niece there's a guy named Label Lam who does not believe that she is really an atheist!" When I do meet a person who feels this way, it is usually based on some deep emotional component, and they feel anger towards G-d! It's not that they don't believe. They are busy being angry at a G-d they claim does not exist.

If just some layers of antipathy can be melted, healed or peeled away then a powerful pull will immediately be felt again.

Now let's go back to Yehuda's expression, "How can I go up to my father and the youth is not with me!?" Although Shakespeare had said it, "You can't take it with you", and Lord knows the Pharaoh's tried with all their might but were unsuccessful, there is something that we can and we must take with us. How can we go up to our Father in Heaven without that sweet, innocent, playful, and wholesome child!? How did we allow that essential part of our being to become buried in negativity and cynicism!?

What is the nature of this "youth"? The Baal Shem Tov said that we can learn three important things from little children. Number one, that they are constantly curious; their heads are always turning; they're exploring, and they're testing the limits of everything, including their parent's patience. Number two, they're happy with the smallest things. We think they need sophisticated toys, but they're often content to play with the box or the wrapper the toy came in, or to paint the highchair, and their little brother with chocolate yogurt. And number three, when they want something badly enough, they cry out to their father.

And so even we, in our advanced age, we can learn to be curious about the mysteries of HASHEM's universe and His Torah; to be content, and excited, and appreciate even the smallest things; and when we want something badly enough, to cry out to our Father is Heaven, Avinu Sh'B'Shemayim.

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Yehuda's rhetorical question reverberates through the cosmos even still. How can we go up to our father and the youth is not with us?! Curiosity and idealism are the signs of youthfulness along with a child's natural love for his father. It's something that carries us happily through life and we take it with us when we go up to our Father in Heaven. King Dovid wrote, "NAAR Hayisi Gam Zakanti" – "I was youthful – I am also old". It's not a contradiction at all. It may be required, even while old, to be forever youthful.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Seeing the Good

The brief encounter between our great patriarch Ya'akov (Jacob) and the great leader of the ancient world at the time Pharaoh is most remarkable, unexpected, and telling as to what Judaism is all about. It is a brief conversation that we would not have anticipated.

This fascinating encounter with the father of Yosef (Joseph), the viceroy of Egypt, the person who rose from the prison dungeons to greatness in Egypt, brings his father and siblings before the king.

Then Pharaoh asks him a strange question: "How old are you?" – a peculiar thing to ask Ya'akov on this first occasion they are meeting! Even more bewildering is Ya'akov's totally unexpected response: "I am 130 years old – my years have been few and bad."

This is the impression you want to give to the leader of the ancient world? To say how few your days are, that they have been so bad, and that you will not live as long as your father? And why was Pharaoh even asking about his age?

Our Sages say that for each of the 33 words in the two verses describing this brief encounter, 33 years of the life of Ya'akov were taken away. He didn't live to be 180 like his father Yitzchak (Isaac), he passes away (as we see in next week's parasha) at the age of 147, the youngest of all the patriarchs. He was punished – so to speak, on his level – for portraying an image of Judaism of not being grateful, of seeing the cup half empty, of seeing life as few and difficult as opposed to invigorated, hopeful and grateful for all of these years.

It seems that he was also punished for the question of Pharaoh. The reason why he asks this strange question is because he saw Ya'akov who looked so old, far beyond his years, carrying the world on his shoulders.

The Midrash says that, yes, Ya'akov had been subjected to challenges – but ultimately, Hashem saved him from Eisav who wanted to kill him; he had a hard time with Lavan but G-d assisted and saved him then; he had a difficult time with Dina being abducted but she

was returned to him; he had a terrible time with Yosef but has just been reunited with him. So much good and light had been experienced in spite of the difficult times.

Here was an opportunity to exude the light of Judaism, the light of G-d in the world, and he portrayed it in a way that he appeared to be complaining, it was a tremendous missed opportunity and Ya'akov – on his level – was brought to justice for that.

May we all as Jews, as individuals and as a community, recognize that we may face challenges, but ultimately through the light of hope, our belief in G-d and that everything happens for the best, we should always see the cup as half full and be full of gratitude every single day.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot**

History As His Story

The change of the natural seasons often induces a retrospective mood in people.

Therefore, at this time of the year, when we have just ushered Autumn out and Winter in, we tend to look back upon the past and contemplate our own lives. We survey where we are, what has happened to us, and how all this has come to be. And it happens that we wonder: could I have done things differently? And if I had, would it have made a difference?

Sometimes we see ourselves now as a product of all our past decisions. We recognize that both our failures and our successes are the results of specific actions that we have taken--or that we have failed to undertake. As a result, we feel satisfied or dissatisfied, as the case may be, because we recognize that we were ourselves responsible for what we have done and what we have become. At other times, we tend to feel that the facts of life are so unsurmountable, that the direction of events so ineluctable, the tide of life is so irreversible, that we are what we are almost despite ourselves, and that we had and have very little to say about it. No matter what we did or did not do in the past, we would be in approximately the same position today.

In asking such questions, we confront one of the great problems in life, which has been of concern to philosophers, theologians, and ordinary people in all walks of life, from the days of antiquity down to our own times.

Secular thinkers often view this question largely in the course of their interpretations of history. There are many who are determinists, such as Marx, who believe that we are propelled by massive, impersonal forces of history, and that individual men and women have little influence on the course of events. Others, however, believe that individual men play crucial roles at specific points in history. We know, for instance, of the theory of Carlyle who believed that "heroes" or outstanding men and women are the ones who by force of their personalities determine the direction of events. Several years ago, Prof. Oscar Handlin wrote a book (Change and Destiny) in which he

discussed eight turning points in American history: at each of these stations, a different decision could have sent all of American history into a different path. The American lawyer Benjamin Barondess, writing of Abraham Lincoln, maintains that different decisions by Lincoln at certain specific points in his career would have changed the face of American society, civilization, and politics. He writes, "there is no such thing as History. There is only His Story. An act is without significance unless we know the actor." In other words, history is your story and my story and his story; it is the unfolding of events initiated and changed by individual minds and personalities.

To which of these opinions do the Jewish sources subscribe? For one thing, mainstream Judaism does not consider blind fate, impersonal and uncontrolled forces, as dominating events. Judaism objected to Greek Fatalism--and modern determinism as well. The question in Judaism is not between fate and choice, but between destiny, as the unfolding in history of God's will, and human initiative.

Generally, we may trace the two opinions in Judaism to two root theories. One has been called "Quietism," the belief that man attains his fullest spiritual development when he acknowledges that he is fundamentally a nothing in the presence of God, and when he suppresses *אני* to *אין* his desire to impose his will and assert his ego. The highest act of man is to convert his his self or ego to nothing. Therefore, man must not make any attempt to interfere in the historical process, because that is an act of arrogance and presumptuousness against God. And, in effect,

any such effort is doomed to failure. Taken to its extreme, this becomes the ideology of the Neturei Karta.

The second school is that of Activism, the belief that man, created in the image of God, must exercise his freedom, his power, his initiative--and that that is the will of God.

Both schools can point to sources in the Jewish tradition. Quietism can cite support in the fact that Abraham was told in advance that his children would go to exile and that later they would be redeemed--apparently the Divine Will worked independently of what individual humans want or do not want to do. And the Rabbis were even known to make a statement as broad and comprehensive as: *הכל תלוי במזל אפילו ספר תורה שבהיכל*, everything depends upon luck, even the very scroll of the Torah in the Ark.

Activism has an even broader range of support. The whole concept of reward and punishment symbolized and expressed in the *portion*, is based on the idea that man can determine and that he is responsible for his actions. Those who did not return to Zion with Ezra were blamed for their recalcitrance. Rabbi Akiba supported Bar Kokhbab, the revolutionary against Rome. Rabbi Ishmael interpreted the words of the Torah *ורפא ירפא*, that we shall give healing, that מכאן שנתנה רשות לרפאות, one must not feel that interfering medically in the course of a

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disease is an act of presumption against the Divine Will, but that man is permitted to interfere in the natural process. And the Ramban, himself a physician, maintains that this is not only *רשות*, a privilege, but a *מצוה*, a commandment to interfere in the process and impose our *מזל* desire for health upon a naturally deteriorating situation. So too do the Rabbis say that one who did not prepare before the Sabbath does not deserve to eat on the Sabbath *בערב שבת לא יאכל בשבת*. Or, *אדם עושה בידיו והקב"ה מברך מעשה ידיו*, man works with his hands, and the Holy One blesses the work of his hands.

If, then, we have two opposing views within the context of Judaism, how are we today to interpret the events of our history and, even more important, our own individual biographies?

If we turn to our Sidra this morning, we find, paradoxically, that both principles are contained within one narrative, that of the meeting of Joseph with his brothers. In the beginning of the Sidra, Joseph has not yet revealed himself to Judah and the others. We find Judah making his great plea in his confrontation with Joseph, demanding that Benjamin be released. Often we wonder: why did Joseph make his brothers go through all this agony, this traveling back and forth, threatening to take away Simon and then Benjamin--can any sin by the brothers against Joseph justify this apparently calm and premeditated sadism? The answer, of course, is that there is no sadism whatsoever intended by Joseph, whom tradition has called *יוסף הצדיק*, Joseph the Righteous. What Joseph is doing is, simply and logically enough, leading Judah and the brothers through the paces of that process called *תשובה* or repentance. He wants to put them in the position once again where they will have the choice of accepting or abdicating responsibility for a younger brother, in this case, Benjamin. When we find Judah and Joseph opposite each other at the opening of today's Sidra, that is precisely the position Judah is in--and he comes through with flying colors. The same Judah who seemed to be concerned only with the price he could get for Joseph earlier, now declares his life forfeit in favor of Benjamin, he is willing to give everything for a brother. It is therefore at this time that Joseph drops his disguise and reveals himself. But the very fact that Joseph wanted to make Judah atone for his sin, means that he held Judah responsible for the original crime, that of selling Joseph. No matter what subsequent developments were, Judah must be responsible for the original act, or else all of Joseph's actions cannot be explained except as a sadistic satisfaction of a desire for vengeance.

Yet, immediately thereafter, when Joseph reveals himself, and his brothers are aghast and overwhelmed, Joseph at once proceeds to lift from them the burden of responsibility and guilt. *ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם כי מכרתם אותי כי למחיה שלחני אלוקים לפניכם*

"Do not be upset and angry with yourselves that you sold me here, because it is the Lord

who sent me here in order to provide for you” and the entire family.

What Joseph appears to be saying is that both opposite ideas are true--simultaneously! The brothers were responsible, and yet they were not the only actors in this great drama. Joseph in his speech uses two key verbs--twice he uses the word מכר, to sell, and three times the word to send. It is as if he is saying to his brothers: from one point of view you are guilty because שלח you perpetrated the act of selling your brother down the river. You must be held responsible for this act, and you have every reason to feel guilty and contrite. Yet, at the same time, you are only pawns in the larger drama of the destiny of the People of Israel, for it is God who sent me here through you. You were merely performing an act determined by God who is ultimately responsible for our final felicity. So it is both human initiative and divine destiny that converge and act in parallel and simultaneous form.

We find a Midrash giving us a similar insight, in ironical and charming manner, into how the two levels work out together, how history is a combination of our story and His story. The Midrash comments on the verse from Isaiah, כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם, “for My thoughts are not your thoughts.” How so? And the Midrash answers: the sons of Jacob were busy with the selling of Joseph; Jacob our Father was mourning and grieving for his lost son; Judah was busy finding himself a wife (Tamar). ואף הקב”ה עסוק, בורא אורו של המלך המשיח and also the Holy One, as it were, was preoccupied; He was busy creating the light of the Messiah--the descendants of the match between Judah and Tamar--and the Messiah could never have come unless these

individual acts took place separately and in apparently self-contained. Each man acts responsibly; and yet, God stands behind all and weaves all the various strands together and the resulting tapestry presents a picture of totally different dimensions.

We may then assume that Judaism teaches that both these elements are always present, and we never have the right to dismiss either the role of God or the role of man, either the element of destiny or initiative. Of course, it then becomes a matter of emphasis. Some will emphasize reliance on God and faith in His destiny more than human initiative. Thus, Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzatto in his famous work pleads for a minimum of what he calls human initiative, and a greater measure of בטחון, or faith in divine guidance. Others reverse the proportions, and ask for more human initiative and less passivity or quietism. But never do we abandon either role.

We find the same tendency to one extreme or another in Talmudic Literature, but never do we completely abandon either end. Thus, for instance in a famous passage (M.K. 28a) Rava says, in a brooding contemplation of the different fortunes that befell two great teachers, alike in sagacity and saintliness, that life and health, children and how they turn out and whether they give us “nachas”; and sustenance and wealth--these are matters which depend

upon lack rather than upon our initiative or worthiness. And yet one of the great scholars of medieval days, the Meiri, refuses to accept this Talmudic dictum as binding, הוא מאחר יחיד, pay no attention to this opinion, he counsels us, אל יהוש לדבריו, authoritative it is only a minority opinion, and cannot receive the sanction of religion יסבולו דרכי הדת בשום פנים under any circumstances. Rava places more emphasis on divine destiny than on human activity; Meiri declares the un-Jewishness of the “bashert” concept, and prefers to maximize the human role. But whichever opinion we feel more constrained to accept, both elements must be present.

Are there any practical conclusions to this dilemma, or is it a purely theoretical problem? Since we can never know the proportions of significance of our own and divine activity, since we never know where they intersect and where they contradict, and since we can never know which element predominates--does all of this make any practical difference?

I believe it does. Take the matter of effort we put into our daily activities, our ambitions, our careers, or any branch of human life. The affirmation of the human role means that we can never absolve ourselves of responsibility and adopt a theologically sanctioned laziness or passivity, but we must always work and always try our very best. But the element of divine determination and fore-ordination means that we must never overdo, we must never become obsessive or compulsive or overanxious about our efforts in any direction. We must at all times remember that our task is to try to succeed, but that success itself is something that God gives or withholds. Given the circumstances in which I can act, I must act to the best of my ability; but those circumstances are circumscribed, they are limited, and I can never know the ultimate divine plan.

So too, since human initiative does play a role, since there is always some element of therefore I must retain my sense of responsibility. I am guilty if I have failed to try, I deserve credit if I have fulfilled my tasks. But, since the divine will play some role in human events, therefore never must I let my guilt or my anxiety over my failures to crush me and become pathological. Recall the words we cited before, which Joseph used to comfort Judah and the brothers: ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר Don't become overly anxious, do not allow your sense of responsibility to hurt you by crushing you, because unbeknownst to you, you are part of a larger divine scheme.

And so too, since the divine will does play such key role in human affairs, there can be no arrogance if I succeed--because my success, even with all my efforts, is nothing that comes automatically with effort, but may be a divine gift, and for ends which I do not understand. And, because of the same reason, while I may hold those who offend me accountable for their actions, I must always respond, as did Joseph to the brothers, with forgiveness, forbearance, understanding, tolerance--because the responsibility of man for his actions, good or bad, is limited, and who knows to what extent

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another human being had to do what he did because of forces which he is totally unconscious.

Such are the moral and psychological conclusions to be drawn from this philosophical and theological dilemma. We must see man not as a competitor or displacer of God, and not even as a pawn of God. Rather, he is His שליח, His ambassador.

Man must always use מחשבה, creative and original thought, in determining his course of action. And yet he must always remember that verse the Midrash cited, the words of the prophet Isaiah מחשבותי מחשבותיכם, כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם, no matter how deep and profound and original and creative our thinking is, it is not the same as divine thought. We are responsible for what we do to ourselves and to others; and yet, we must always remain conscious of that mysterious, hidden divine destiny that shapes our ends.



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Fasting on Friday

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz
Asarah B'Teves: Not Your Ordinary Fast Day

One of the fascinating characteristics of 5784 is that the Taanis Tzibbur of Asarah B'Teves (the 10th of Teves) will fall out on Friday. Or to be precise, this Friday. This remarkable status of a 'Friday Fast' is actually exclusive to Asarah B'Teves – as it is the only one that Klal Yisrael actually observes as a communal fast on a Friday.[1]

Although to many the only notable aspect of Asarah B'Teves is that it is by far the shortest fast day in the Jewish calendar for anyone in the Northern Hemisphere (my heartfelt sympathies to the South Americans, So'Africans, Aussies, and Kiwis), nonetheless, it turns out that the Fast of Asarah B'Teves is actually quite unique.

Indubitably, to maintain this distinction of being the only Taanis Tzibbur that we actually do observe on Friday, there is much more to the Fast of Asarah B'Teves than meets the eye. Indeed, upon closer examination, Asarah B'Teves has several exceptional characteristics that are not found in any other fast day.

Why This Fast?

The reason given for fasting on Asarah B'Teves is that it is the day that the wicked Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar started his siege of Yerushalayim,[2] foreshadowing the beginning of the end of the first Beis Hamikdash, which culminated with its destruction on Tisha B'Av several years later. Therefore, Chazal declared it a public fast, one of four public fast days that memorialize different aspects of the catastrophes and national tragedies associated with the destruction of both Batei HaMikdash.[3]

A Friday Fast

However, of these four public fast days, as mentioned previously, only Asarah B'Teves is actually observed on a Friday. Proof to Asarah B'Teves' exceptionality can perhaps be gleaned from the words of Yechezkel HaNavi

referring to Asarah B'Teves, that the siege of Yerushalayim leading up to the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash transpired "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh – in the middle of this day,"[4] implying that the fast must always be observed on that exact day, no matter the conflicting occurrence. This would help explain why it is fully observed on Friday, with no dispensation given.[5]

Yet, this uniqueness is fairly interesting, as there is a whole debate in the Gemara about how to conduct fasts on a Friday, when we must also take kavod Shabbos into account,[6] implying that it is a common occurrence. However, according to our calendar, a communal Friday fast is only applicable with Asarah B'Teves, and it actually does occur quasi-frequently. The last few times Asarah B'Teves fell out on a Friday were in 1996, 2001, 2010, 2013 (the latter of which, quite appropriately, coincided with a "Yerushalmi Blizzard"[7]), and 2020.

Asarah B'Teves is actually next expected to occur on a Friday next year – in 2025 (5785; meaning a rare back-to-back occurrence),[8] followed by a nine-year gap, occurring again in 2034 (5795), and then 2037 (5798). In another interesting calendrical twist, but not the Jewish calendar, due to the differences between the Jewish lunar-based year and the Gregorian solar-based year, this fast, curiously (and perhaps quite appropriately) fell out on December 25th[9] the last time it was observed on a Friday, several years ago, back in 5781/2020.

Halachos of a Friday Fast

The halachos of a Friday fast generally parallel those of a regular fast day; including Aneinu, Selichos, and the Kriyas HaTorah of "Vayechal"[10] twice (along with the haftarah of "Dirshu" at Mincha), albeit with no Tachanun or Avinu Malkeinu at Mincha, as it is Erev Shabbos.[11] Another practical difference is that even those who advise not to bathe on a regular fast day, nevertheless maintain that one should do so on a Friday fast L'Kavod Shabbos, with hot water as usual.[12]

Until When?

On the hand, even though there is some debate in the Rishonim as to the Gemara's intent with its conclusion that "Halacha – Mesaneh U'Mashlim, a Friday fast should be completed," even though it means one will enter Shabbos famished (a situation that is normally disfavored), and hence, whether or not one may be mekabel Shabbos early and thereby end the fast before nightfall,[13] nonetheless, the halacha follows the Shulchan Aruch and Rema that since Asarah B'Teves is a public fast (Taanis Tzibbur) and not a Taanis Yachid, one must indeed fast the whole day and complete it at nightfall (Tzeis HaKochavim) before making Kiddush.[14]

Although most fasts can be broken immediately after the Taanis ends, nonetheless, due to a separate halacha – that of any food and drink, even water, being proscribed on any Leil Shabbos until Kiddush is performed,[15] this Tzom actually only concludes with Kiddush.

As fasting into Shabbos is discouraged, many Poskim maintain that it is preferable to daven Maariv somewhat earlier than usual on this Friday night, to enable making Kiddush, and breaking the fast exactly at Tzeis HaKochavim.[16] Even those who maintain that one should wait until Zman Rabbeinu Tam (Shiur Arba Mil, commonly observed as 72 minutes after Shkiya) to break one's fast, are of the opinion that one should still daven Maariv earlier this Erev Shabbos Asarah B'Teves than usual, in order make Kiddush immediately at this Zman.[17] Some advise that it is preferable to begin the Leil Shabbos Seudah directly with Kiddush and only recite Shalom Aleichem and Eishes Chayil after being somewhat satiated and relaxed.[18]

Three Day Fast?

Another fascinating and unique aspect of this fast, is that according to the special Selichos prayers recited on Asarah B'Teves, we are actually fasting for two other days of tragedy as well; the 8th and 9th of Teves.[19] In fact, and although in his Beis Yosef commentary the great Rav Yosef Karo notes that he has never seen nor heard of anyone fasting on these days, nevertheless, both the Tur and in his own later Shulchan Aruch, Rav Karo asserts that it is proper to try to fast on all three days.[20] However, it is important to note that of the three, only Asarah B'Teves was actually

mandated as a public fast day.[21] As we are essentially fasting on Asarah B'Teves for two other fasts as well, this may be another reason why Asarah B'Teves is observed on a Friday as well, as opposed to other fasts.

The 8th of Teves

On the 8th of Teves, King Ptolemy II (285-246 B.C.E.) forced 72 sages separately to translate the Torah into Greek (the Septuagint a.k.a. 'The Targum Shvivim'). Although miracles guided their work and all of the sages made the same slight but necessary amendments, nevertheless this work is described as "darkness descending on the world for three days," as it was now possible for the uneducated to possess a superficial, and frequently flawed understanding of the Torah, as well as providing the masses with a mistaken interpretation of true morality.[22] Hence, a proper day to fast.

The 9th of Teves

Although several decisors, following the Megillas Taanis, write that the reason for fasting on the 9th of Teves is unknown,[23] nonetheless many sources, including the Kol Bo and the Selichos recited on Asarah B'Teves, as well as many later authorities, explain that this is the day on which Ezra HaSofer, as well as possibly his partner in rebuilding the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael after the 70 year Galus Bavel, Nechemiah, died. Ezra, the Gadol HaDor at the beginning of the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash, had a tremendous impact upon the nascent returning Jewish community of Eretz Yisrael. He drastically improved the spiritual state of the Jewish people and established many halachic takanos, many of which still apply today.[24] With his passing, the community started sliding from the great spiritual heights Ezra had led them. Additionally, since Ezra was the last of the prophets,[25] his passing signified the end of prophecy.

Other sources attribute fasting on this day to the passings of other specific Tzaddikim on this day, including the enigmatic Shimon HaKalphus and Rav Yosef HaNaggid, or to the birth of 'Oso HaIsh', the founder of Christianity, in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were R'l murdered.[26] [27] The Sefer HaToda'ah posits that it's possible that Chazal's expression of "darkness descending on the world for three days" alludes to the triple woes of these three days: the 8th, 9th, and 10th of Teves.[28]

A Shabbos Fast?!

The third and possibly most important attribute of Asarah B'Teves is that according to the Abudraham, if Asarah B'Teves would potentially fall out on Shabbos, we would all actually be required to fast on Shabbos![29] (Notwithstanding that with our calendar this is an impossibility.[30]) He cites proof to this from the words of Yechezkel referring to Asarah B'Teves that the siege transpired "B'Etzem HaYom HaZeh," implying that the fast must always be observed on that exact day, no matter the conflicting occurrence – not only Friday, but even on Shabbos.

Yet, the Abudraham's statement is astounding, as the only fast that halachically takes precedence over Shabbos is Yom Kippur, the only Biblically mandated fast. How can one of the Rabbinic minor fasts push off the Biblical Shabbos? Additionally, Asarah B'Teves commemorates merely the start of the siege, and not any actual destruction. How can it be considered a more important fast than Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the actual destruction and loss of both of our Batei HaMikdash, which get pushed off when it falls on Shabbos?[31]

In fact, the Beis Yosef questions this declaration of the Abudraham, stating that he "does not know how the Abudraham could know" such a ruling. As an aside, this does not seem to be the actual halacha, as although we find that many defended this logic, nonetheless other Rishonim, including Rashi and the Rambam, as well as the Tur and Shulchan Aruch and later poskim explicitly rule that if Asarah B'Teves falls out on Shabbos it does indeed get pushed off.[32] [33]

Commencement Is Catastrophic

Several authorities, including Rav Yonason Eibenschutz and the Bnei Yissaschar,[34] understand the Abudraham's enigmatic statement as similar to the famous Gemara in Taanis (29a) regarding Tisha B'Av. It seems that historically the Beis HaMikdash only started to burn toward the end of the 9th of Av (Tisha B'Av) and actually burned down on the 10th. Yet, Chazal

established the fast on the 9th, since "Aschalta D'Paranusah Adifa," meaning that the beginning of a tragedy is considered the worst part. Likewise, they maintain that since the siege on Asarah B'Teves was the harbinger to and commencement of the long chain of tragedies that ended with the Beis HaMikdash in ruins and the Jewish people in exile, its true status belies the common perception of it as a minor fast, and potentially has the ability to push off Shabbos.

Indeed, the Midrash Tanchuma[35] teaches that it was already fitting for the Bais HaMikdash to actually be destroyed on Asarah B'Teves, but Hashem, in His incredible mercy, pushed off the destruction to the summertime, so that Klal Yisrael would not have to be exiled in the cold. Hence, Asarah B'Teves's role as the 'beginning of the end' underlies the severity of this fast day.

The famed Chasam Sofer[36] takes this a step further. He wrote that the reason Chazal established a fast for the siege on Asarah B'Teves, as opposed to every other time Yerushalayim was under siege over the millennia, is that on that day in the Heavenly Courtroom it was decided that the Bais HaMikdash was to be destroyed a few years hence. There is a well known Talmudic dictum that any generation in which the Beis HaMikdash has not been rebuilt is as if it has been destroyed again.[37] Therefore, he explains, every Asarah B'Teves the Heavenly Court convenes and decrees a new Churban. He adds though that, conversely, a proper fast on Asarah B'Teves has the potential to avert future Churbanos.

Accordingly, we are not fasting exclusively due to past calamities, but rather, similar to a Taanis Chalom, a fast for a dream, we are fasting to help prevent a tragedy from occurring. The Chasam Sofer even refers to such a fast as an oneg, a delight, as our fasting will help stave off potential future catastrophes. That is why the fast of Asarah B'Teves, even though it is considered a minor fast, nonetheless has the potential to possibly override Shabbos. These explanations would also certainly elucidate why we would fast on a Friday specifically for Asarah B'Teves, while pushing off other fasts that do.

The Rambam famously exhorts us to remember the real meaning underlying a fast day. It's not just a day when we miss our morning coffee! The purpose of fasting is to focus on the spiritual side of the day and use it as a catalyst for inspiration towards Teshuva.[38]

Perhaps, with the observance of a quasi-rare Friday fast, this may be a bit easier to do than usual. In this merit, may the words of the Navi Zechariah, "The Fast of the Fourth (month, 17th of Tamuz), the Fast of the Fifth (month, Tisha B'Av), the Fast of the Seventh (month, Tzom Gedalyah), and the Fast of the Tenth (month, Asarah B'Teves) shall be (changed over) for celebration and joy for the household of Yehuda"[39] be fulfilled speedily and in our days.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of M'Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Halacha and 'Insights Into Halacha,' serves as the Sho'el U'Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please e-mail the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

Rabbi Spitz's recent English halacha sefer, "Insights Into Halacha - Food: A Halachic Analysis," (Mosaica/Feldheim) contains more than 500 pages and features over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing a myriad of halachic issues relating to food, in an engaging manner. It is now available online and in bookstores everywhere.

[1] See Meiri (Megillah 2a), Abudraham (Hilchos Taanis), Magen Avraham (O.C. 550:4), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 4), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. end 2), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 10). Although the Erev Pesach Taanis Bechotin can also technically fall out and is observed on a Friday (see Mishnah Berurah 470:5), nevertheless, it is not a true communal fast, as it is not incumbent upon all of Klal Yisrael, rather exclusive to firstborns, of whom the vast majority exempt themselves with a siyum - see Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 470:5) and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 10). However, as noted by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 249:3, citing Gemara Ervin 40b and Yerushalmi Taanis Ch. 2, Halacha 12), Anshel Maaseh have had the custom of fasting every Erev Shabbos.

[2] Melachim II (Ch. 25:1), Yirmiyahu (Ch. 52:4), Yechezkel (Ch. 24:1-2). Interestingly, it seems that Yechezkel HaNavi's wife also died on Asarah B'Teves, as the same prophecy on that day continues with his wife's passing (Ch. 24:15-19). See Gemara Moed Kattan (28a) and Ya'aros Devash (vol. 2, Drush 12 s.v. ulei zeh).

[3] See Zecharia (Ch. 8:19), Gemara Rosh Hashana (18b), Rambam (Hilchos Taaniyos Ch. 5:1-5) and Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 549 and 550).

[4] Yechezkel (Ch. 24:2).

[5] See Rambam (Hilchos Taaniyos Ch. 5:5), Abudraham (ibid.), Beis Yosef (O.C. 550 s.v. 'ma'asekasav v'im), Rema (ad loc. 3), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 6), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 4). Although technically speaking, if other fasts with the possible exception of Taanis Esther would fall out on Friday, an impossibility in our calendar, we would also have to fast.

[6] Gemara Eiruvim (41a).

[7] Yes, this author is familiar with the 'Coincidences' involved with that memorable Yerushalayim snowstorm. According to the Targum (Rav Yosef) to Divrei Hayamim, 'Yom Hasheleg,' 'The Day of Snow' that Benayahu ben Yehoyada "smote the lion in the pit" (Shmuel II, Ch. 23:20 and Divrei Hayamim I, Ch. 11:22; see also Gemara Brachos 18a), is none other than Asarah B'Teves! Additionally, since it was a fast, the haftarah read by Mincha included the appropos verse (Yeshaya Ch. 55:10) referring to "Ka'asher Ye'ireid Hageshem V'hasheleg min Hashamayim, when the rain and snow fall from the heavens." Furthermore, that day's Daf Yomi was Yoma 35, which includes the famous account of Hillel almost freezing to death on the roof of Shmaya and Avtalyon's Beis Midrash, while trying to listen to their teaching "Divrei Elokim Chaim," when he could not afford the admission fee. That day was described by the Gemara as an Erev Shabbos in Teves, that a tremendous amount of snow (three amos) fell upon him from the heavens. Moreover, this incident ostensibly occurred in Yerushalayim, as it is well known that Shmaya and Avtalyon, the Gedolei HaDor, lived in Yerushalayim. [See Mishnayos Eidiyus (Ch. 1:3 and Ch. 5:6), Gemara Brachos (19a), Shabbos (15a), and Yoma (71b).] Thanks are due to Rabbi David Alexander for his paper on these 'Coincidences.'

[9]Interestingly, although set to fall out on Friday next year as well, interestingly enough, in 2024 there is no Asarah B'Teves. After this one on December 22, 2023, the following Asarah B'Teves will be on January 10, 2025. This is because our calendar Jewish year 5784, is a leap year with an added Chodesh Adar, hence there are 383 days between the two fasts of Asarah B'Teves – 18 days longer than the solar/Gregorian calendar year. Thanks are due to R' Abraham Schveichwerder for pointing out this calendar quirk.

[10]Well, perhaps not so curious, but possibly rather appropos. You see, according to the Seilicha for Asarah B'Teves that starts with the word Ezerken, generally attributed to Rav Yosef Tov-Alam (Bonfils), a number of Asarah B'Teves is that we are actually fasting on two other days of tragedy as well: the 18th and 9th of Teves. According to the Megillas Taanis, regarding the 9th of Teves, “lo noda bo eizo hi hazana sh'eern bo,” the reason for the fast is unclear. One theory posited over the centuries is that the real reason for fasting is that the 9th of Teves is the true birthday of ‘Oso Hashla', in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were R”l murdered. The origin of this claim seems to be the 12th century Sefer Halbur by Rav Avraham bar Rav Chaiya (pg. 109). In fact, Netzi Gavriel (Hilchos Chanuka, Inyanai Nitel, pg. 416) cites that some say that Nitel, the name used for the Christian December holiday, actually stands for Nolat Y' eshu T' es L' Teves. This is discussed further in the article.

[11]Parashas Ki Sisa (Shemos Ch. 22:11), Hafarata is Yeshaya (Ch. 55:6).

[11]See Abudraham (ibid.), Maharil (Hilchos Taanios 17), Rema (O.C. 550:3 and 566:1), Magen Avraham (O.C. 550:6), Yad Efraim (ad loc.), and Mishnah Berurah (550:11 and 566:5). The halacha is not like the Shabtei Haleket (263, Hagahos; as cited by the Agur, 880, and later the Beis Yosef, ibid.), who maintains that we also do not lein the special Fast Day Kriyas HaTorah at Mincha Erev Shabbos.

[12]See Bach (O.C. 550:3; although cited by both the Ba'e Heitiv and Mishnah Berurah as the source for the fact, nevertheless, this author has been unable to locate where exactly the Bach states an explicit Erev Shabbos exception for bathing), Elyah Rabbia (ad loc. 2), Ba'e Heitiv (ad loc. 3), Shu”t Ksav Sofer (O.C. 100), Shulchan HaTahor (249:4), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. end 6), and Shu”t Siach Yitzchak (247).

[13]Although the Gemara (Eruvin 41a; also in Midrash Tanchuma, Bereshis 2) concludes “Halacha - Mesanech U'Mashlim,” even so, there are many Rishonim, most notably Tosafos (ad loc. 41b s.v. v'hichasu), as well as the Rambam, and Rivra (ad loc.), who cite a story about Rabbeinu Yitzchak, one of the Babeli Tosafos, who ate an egg on an Erev Shabbos Asarah B'Teves, who understand this dictum to mean that one may conclude his Erev Shabbos fast at Tezis HaKochavin, and that not one must conclude his fast on Friday night at Tezis Hakochavim. An additional shitta is that of the Raavad (Sefer HaEshkol, vol. 2, pg. 18; cited by the Rashta ibid. and Beis Yosef, O.C. 550:3), who maintains that “mashlin” in this instance is referring to completing the fast by Shkiya, as otherwise it will infringe upon Tosetfos Shabbos. A further complication is that this also may depend on whether one is fasting for personal reasons (Taanis Yachid) or an obligatory public fast (Taanis Tzibbur). The Rema (O.C. 249:4) concludes that for a Taanis Yachid one may rely upon the lenient opinions and end his fast after he accepted Shabbos, prior to Tezis Hakochavin (especially if he made such a stipulation before commencing his fast), yet for a Taanis Tzibbur, he rules that we follow the Rishonim who mandate strict interpretation of the Gemara, and we must fast until actual nightfall on Friday night. It is debatable whether the Shulchan Aruch is actually fully agreeing with this approach or not. See explanation of the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 21 and Buir Halacha s.v. v'im) at length. This has since become normative halacha. See next footnote.

[14]See Shulchan Aruch (ad loc. 249) and the Rema (Shu”t Ch. 2:4) and Maharil (Shu”t 133; Magen Avraham (ad loc. 8), Bach (ad loc. 8), Ba'e Heitiv (ad loc. 7), Elyah Rabbia (ad loc. 10), Korban Nesanel (Taanis, end Ch. 2:60), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (ad loc. 12), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (121:6), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parashas Lech Lecha 23), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 21 and Buir Halacha s.v. v'im), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 249 and 31), Shu”t Yabae Omer (vol. 6, O.C. 31), Shu”t Yeshavech Daa (vol. 1:80), Netzi Gavriel (Hilchos Chanuka, Shu”t 14), Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 249:7 and 559:25), and Rav Menachem Elyahu's' Derech Hachochavim (Shulchan Aruch (121:5). The Netzi Gavriel adds that B'huas Halacha and U'torech gadol one may be mekabel Shabbos early and rely on the lenient opinions, as long it is after nightfall according to several opinions (meaning, an earlier Zman of Tezis HaKochavin than the faster would usually observe).

[15]Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos Ch. 29:5), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 271:4) and later authorities, based on Gemara Pesachim (106b), see also Bach (ad loc. s.v.v. 'ika), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 249) and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 11). Interestingly, it is not until a Friday Fast of Asarah B'Teves that one is stringent even on a Yom Kippur. Technically speaking, even if Yom Kippur fell out on Shabbos, many hold that one may break their fast on Motzai Shabbos/Yom Kippur with drinking water prior to Havdalah. However, as this Motzai Tzom for a Friday Asarah B'Teves is Leil Shabbos, one may not simply drink water to break their fast, but Kiddush is required. Of course, the level of illness / weakness etc. necessary for a fasting dispensation is quite disparate between the Rabbinic Asarah B'Teves and the Biblical Yom Kippur, but it seems beyond dispute that this is still an interesting stringency exclusive to this uncommon fast that arises. This issue was discussed in a previous article titled “Breaking the Yom Kippur Fast Before Havdalah”.

[16]See Shulchan HaTahor (249:13) who writes that usually it is asure to complete a Friday fast until Tezis HaKochavin, even an obligatory fast, as it is an affront to Kedushas Shabbos; rather, he maintains that one should be mekabel Shabbos early and have his seudah before nightfall. Yet, in his explanations (Zer Zahav ad loc. 4) he maintains that regarding Asarah B'Teves on Friday, since we are beholden to follow the ruling of the Rema, one should still be mekabel Shabbos early, and daven Maariv earlier than usual, to enable us to end the fast with making Kiddush at the exact reman of Tezis Hakochavin. This is also cited by the Netzi Gavriel (Hilchos Chanuka, Ch. 63:6). The Steipler Gaon (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu, new version, vol. 1, pg. 203:7 and vol. 2, pg. 200:8) was noheig this way, that in his shul on Asarah B'Teves on a Friday, they davened Maariv earlier than usual and announced that everyone should repeat Kriyas Shema. It is also mentioned (Orchos Rabbeinu ibid. and vol. 3, pg. 160:5) that this was the Chazon Ish's' shittah as well, regarding any taanis, that Maariv should be davened somewhat earlier than usual, with Kriyas Shma repeated later on (the Chazon Ish held to start from 30 minutes after Shma's' usual time of 40 minutes). This idea is also found in Mateh Efraim (602:29), albeit regarding Tzom Gedaliah, not to tarry extraneously regarding Maariv on a Motzai Taanis. He explains that there is no inyan of tsefas (adding extra time) to a fast day aside from the Biblically mandated Yom Kippur, and therefore it is worthwhile to synchronize the ending of Maariv with the fast ending, and not wait for the full Tezis Hakochavin to start Maariv as is usually preferred. Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Shu”t Shevet Halevi vol. 6:72 and vol. 10:81 and Halichos Shevet Halevi Ch. 21:4, pg. 172) ruled this way as well, that it is proper to daven Maariv earlier than usual, shortly after Shma's' usual time, in the Gemara's' shittah, in Eretz Yisrael approximately 20 minutes after Shkiya. It is known that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Hanagros Rabbeinu pg. 308:133, and in his noted Talmid, Rav Nachum Eisenstein's' Dvar Halacha, #160, Parashas Vayigash 5781) as well, would daven Maariv on Motzai Taanis, even Motzai Tisha B'Av, twenty minutes after Shkiya (instead of his usual thirty minutes). Rav Shmuel Salant, long time Rav of Yerushalaim in the late 1800s, ruled similarly (Toras Rabbeinu Shmuel Salant z”l vol. 1, pg. 102:5 and Aderes Shmuel, Hanagros U'Paskim shel Rav Shmuel Salant z”l, pg. 38:39 and 145, pg. 149), that on a Motzai Taanis, Maariv should be recited earlier than usual, in Yerushalaim from 10 minutes after Shkiya, and making sure Kriyas Shema is repeated afterwards. See also Halichos Even Yisrael (Moadim vol. 1, pg. 370:39 and vol. 2, pg. 145:1) that even on Motzai Yom Kippur (which has a din of tosefes), Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer held to daven Maariv 20 minutes after Shkiya. -

[17]See the Sanzer Dayan, Rav Yitzchak Herschkovitz's' Shu”t Divrei Ohr (vol. 2:47), as well as the Klausenberger Rebbe's' Shu”t Divrei Yatziv (O.C. vol. 2:230; maintaining that those who are makipd on Zman Rabbeinu Tam for Tezis Hakochavin should keep the same for fasting, and certainly not break before 60 minutes after Shkiya).

[18]See Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Fuchs' (author of Halichos Bas Yisrael and other sefarim) recent “Taanis Asarah B'Teves 5781 B'Erev Shabbos Kodesh,” based on the Mishnah Berurah's' comments (271:1 and Shaar Hatziyuz 639:67).

[19]See the Seilicha for Asarah B'Teves that starts with the word Ezerken, generally attributed to Rav Yosef Tov-Alam (Bonfils). As pointed out by Rabbi Moshe Boruch Shuchla, at the end of the Seilicha, the author of the Seilicha is clearly referring to the tzara of Ravel first hearing the news of the Churban Bein Hamikdash, and not the 5th of Teves. This “Yom Hashama” is mentioned in Gemara Rosh Hashana (18b) and Yerushalmi Taanis (Ch. 4, Halacha 5). See Rabbi Yitzchok Weinberg's' recent excellent Lechem Yomayim (on Chodshi Kiselev and Teves, Chodshi Teves 2) at length as to why this shittah of Rabbi Shimon's', so fast on the 5th of Teves, is not the practical halacha.

[20]Tur, Beis Yosef, and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 580).

[21]Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 549 and 550).

[22]As told at length in Gemara Megillah 9a (Tur. For a slightly different version see Maschech Sofrim (Ch. 1:7-8). This quote is found in Megillas Taanis (Ch. 13), and cited by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580). See Sefer HaToda'a (vol. 1, Ch. 8, Chodosh Teves, par. Yom Kashev) at length.

[23]See Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580, quoting theBeHa”G, Hilchos Tisha B'Av” Taanis 18), “lo noda bo eizo hi hazana sh'eern bo,” the reason for the fast is unclear. One theory posited originally by the Megillas Taanis (Ch. 13), and later by the Beis Yosef, is that the 9th of Teves is the true birthday of ‘Oso Hashla', in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were R”l murdered. This idea is also found in Mateh Efraim (602:29), albeit regarding Tzom Gedaliah, not to tarry extraneously regarding Maariv on a Motzai Taanis. He explains that there is no inyan of tsefas (adding extra time) to a fast day aside from the Biblically mandated Yom Kippur, and therefore it is worthwhile to synchronize the ending of Maariv with the fast ending, and not wait for the full Tezis Hakochavin to start Maariv as is usually preferred. Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Shu”t Shevet Halevi vol. 6:72 and vol. 10:81 and Halichos Shevet Halevi Ch. 21:4, pg. 172) ruled this way as well, that it is proper to daven Maariv earlier than usual, shortly after Shma's' usual time, in the Gemara's' shittah, in Eretz Yisrael approximately 20 minutes after Shkiya. It is known that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Hanagros Rabbeinu pg. 308:133, and in his noted Talmid, Rav Nachum Eisenstein's' Dvar Halacha, #160, Parashas Vayigash 5781) as well, would daven Maariv on Motzai Taanis, even Motzai Tisha B'Av, twenty minutes after Shkiya (instead of his usual thirty minutes). Rav Shmuel Salant, long time Rav of Yerushalaim in the late 1800s, ruled similarly (Toras Rabbeinu Shmuel Salant z”l vol. 1, pg. 102:5 and Aderes Shmuel, Hanagros U'Paskim shel Rav Shmuel Salant z”l, pg. 38:39 and 145, pg. 149), that on a Motzai Taanis, Maariv should be recited earlier than usual, in Yerushalaim from 10 minutes after Shkiya, and making sure Kriyas Shema is repeated afterwards. See also Halichos Even Yisrael (Moadim vol. 1, pg. 370:39 and vol. 2, pg. 145:1) that even on Motzai Yom Kippur (which has a din of tosefes), Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer held to daven Maariv 20 minutes after Shkiya. -

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[22]As told at length in Gemara Megillah 9a (Tur. For a slightly different version see Maschech Sofrim (Ch. 1:7-8). This quote is found in Megillas Taanis (Ch. 13), and cited by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 580). See Sefer HaToda'a (vol. 1, Ch. 8, Chodosh Teves, par. Yom Kashev) at length.

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[24]As found throughout Shas – see for example Bava Kama (82a) and Kesuvos (3a).

[25]This follows the consensus that the last of the Nevim, Malachi, was none other than Ezra HaSofer. See Gemara Megillah (15a), Targum Yonasan on Malachi (Ch. 1:1), and Tosafos (Yevamos 86b end s.v. minpeh). It is also implied in Gemara Zevachim (62a) and Sanhedrin (21b), regarding who established the Torah's' script as “Ashuris”. Thanks are due to Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein for pointing out several of these sources.

[26]Rav Baruch Teimuin-Frankel (author of the Imrei Baruch, in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch O.C. 580) cites several other well-known opinion different tradidim's' passages in the 9th of Teves as the reason for the fast, including a fourth opinion that the fast was instituted by Ezra HaSofer. See Gemara Megillah (15a), Targum Yonasan on Malachi (Ch. 1:1), and Tosafos (Yevamos 86b end s.v. minpeh). It is also implied in Gemara Zevachim (62a) and Sanhedrin (21b), regarding who established the Torah's' script as “Ashuris”. Thanks are due to Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein for pointing out several of these sources.

[27]The second tradidim's' passing on that day that Rav Teimuin-Frankel cites was Rav Yosef Halevi, son of Rav Shimon HaNagid, who was assassinated on the 9th of Teves in 1066, thus ending the Golden Age of Jewish culture in Spain. He quotes the Ravavai's' Sefer Hakabbalah that “when Rabbeinu Hakadmon wrote Megillas Taanis and established a fast on the 9th of Teves, they themselves didn't know the reason. Later on, after Rav Yosef HaNagid was assassinated we knew that they foresaw this tragedy with Ruach HaKodesh.” An additional reason for fasting on this day is cited by the Rema in his commentary to Megillas Eitav (Mechir Yavon, Ch. 2:16) that we fast on the 9th of Teves as Efraim was forcibly taken to Achavseveros's' palace in the month of Teves (possibly) on this day. Interestingly, some posit, as be heard in the name of Rav Moshe Shapiro, also found in the Tosefos (Ch. 13, Halacha 5), and in Netzi Gavriel (Hilchos Chanuka, Inyanai Nitel, pg. 416), that the Tosafos Chachamim on Megillas Taanis; also referred to as the “MeFaresh” of the Vilna Edition of Megillas Taanis), that the real reason for fasting is that the 9th of Teves is the true birthday of ‘Oso Hashla', in whose name myriads of Jews over the millennia were R”l murdered. The origin of this claim seems to be the 12th century Sefer Halbur by Rav Avraham bar Chaiya (pg. 109). In fact, the Netzi Gavriel (ibid.) cites that some say that Nitel, the name used for the Christian December holiday, actually stands for Nolat Y' eshu T' es L' Teves. The Tosefos wishes to thank R' Yosef's' well as Rabbi D. E. Heller Brod, for pointing out these of these invaluable sources.

[28]Sefer HaToda'a (vol. 1, Ch. 8, Chodosh Teves, end par. Yom Kashev).

[29]Abudraham (Hilchos Taanis), cited with skepticism by the Beis Yosef (O.C. 550).

[30]According to our calendar Asarah B'Teves cannot fall out on Shabbos. The Abudraham (ibid.) himself mentions this, as does the Magen Avraham (O.C. 550:4 and 5, Ch. 3), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 3), and Shulchan Aruch (ad loc. 2), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 11). Interestingly, it is not until a Friday Fast of Asarah B'Teves that one is stringent even on a Yom Kippur. Technically speaking, even if Yom Kippur fell out on Shabbos, many hold that one may break their fast on Motzai Shabbos/Yom Kippur with drinking water prior to Havdalah. However, as this Motzai Tzom for a Friday Asarah B'Teves is Leil Shabbos, one may not simply drink water to break their fast, but Kiddush is required. Of course, the level of illness / weakness etc. necessary for a fasting dispensation is quite disparate between the Rabbinic Asarah B'Teves and the Biblical Yom Kippur, but it seems beyond dispute that this is still an interesting stringency exclusive to this uncommon fast that arises. This issue was discussed in a previous article titled “Breaking the Yom Kippur Fast Before Havdalah”.

[31]See Mishnah and Gemara (Megillah 5a), Rashi (ad loc. s.v. aval), Rambam (Hilchos Taanios Ch. 5:5), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 550:3 and 552:10). This was discussed in a previous footnote. Rav Asher Weiss (in his Kanturesh Shav'u), Pnhas Yavesh 5778, Year 17, [63:1]: “Tzom Asarah B'Teves V'Shaar Tzomos Shechulu B'Shabbos.” [31] offers a novel approach as a solution to this conundrum. He opines that perhaps the Abudraham's' intent was not that the fast of Asarah B'Teves would push off Shabbos, but rather that as with any regarding this fast it is stated “B'Eitzem HaYom HaZeh,” perhaps he meant that it wouldn't be merely pushed off until after Shabbos, but rather it would not be observed that year at all. Meaning, it is possible that the Abudraham was simply asserting that there would be no reason to fast for Asarah B'Teves if it would not be observed on that actual day. So, if Shabbos would push it off, it would get pushed off in its entirety until the next year. However, Rav Weiss concludes that this approach is incorrect, as the Abudraham seems to learn this way, “bein labalei bein labalei.”

[32]Beis Yosef (O.C. 550), Rashi (Megillah 5a s.v.aval) and the Rambam (Hilchos Taanios Ch. 5:5) both explicitly rule that if Asarah B'Teves falls out on Shabbos then it gets pushed off. Other Rishonim who write this way include the Meiri (Megillah ad loc. and Taanis 30b), Kol Bo (end Hilchos Tisha B'Av), and Maharil (Hilchos Shiva Assar B'Tamuz), that if any of the Arba HaTzomos fall out on Shabbos they get pushed off until after Shabbos. Similarly, the Ibn Ezra, in his famous Shabbos-Zemur “Ki Esmeinu Shabbos” explicitly states that Yom Kippur is the only fast that can override Shabbos(although admittedly, he may have just been referring to the metzuius – that

in our set calendar, it is the only one that can actually fall out on Shabbos – and hence trump its observance). This is how the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 550:3), as well as later poskim rule as well. See for example, Shu”t Shnei U'Meshiv (Mahadura Kama vol. 3:179), Shu”t Maharam Brisk (vol. 3:99), and Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 549: end 2).

[33]However, there are many who do defend the Abudraham's' statement based on the verse “B'Eitzem HaYom HaZeh.” See for example Tikfun Yissachar (pg. 28a, Teves s.v. V'ode; interestingly citing this ruling as precedent from “Teshuvos HaGaonim,” and not mentioning the Abudraham by name; although this might be a bit of honorific) who actually rules that way. The Orchos Chaim (Hilchos Taanios 19) concludes similarly for the same reason [although he questions why we do not observe Taanis Esther on Friday, as the Gemara (ibid.) states that for a Friday fast – “mashlimin.”] In fact, there is even a minority opinion (see Toras Chaim on Shulchan Aruch O.C. 550:4) who is chofesh for the Abudraham's' shittah lemaaseh and extends it, holding that one should not treat Asarah B'Teves as a minor fast, but rather observe it with similar restrictions as the major fasts: meaning keeping the five yimuy, akin to Yom Kippur. The Minchas Chinuch (Parshas Emor, Mitvza 301:7), explaining why nowadays we do not observe fast days for two days (as opposed to other Yomim Tovim, due to the safek yom), writes that the Nevim established fast days in specific months, but did not set the actual day it must be observed, hence the ambiguity in the Gemara on which days to observe them. Since they were never established as being mandated on one specific day, they are unaffected by the safek yom, and nowadays only one day must be observed. [A similar assessment regarding the establishment of fast days was actually expressed by sever

https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5784-vayigash/Parshas Vayigash “No Man” Signifies That It Was All Part of a Divine Plan By Rabbi Yissocher Frand Posted on December 20, 2023 (5784)

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's' Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1274 – Honoring Grandparents Revisited. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Vayigash must be one of the most dramatic parshiyos in the Torah. Yehudah pleads one final time “How can I go back up to my father if the lad is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father!” (Bereshis 44:34). The pasuk then says “And Yosef could not endure in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, ‘Remove everyone from before me!’...” (Bereshis 45:1).

Even though throughout all these parshiyos, Yosef has been giving the impression that he is not Yosef and he had been making his brothers really sweat, he can no longer do that. The viceroy of Mitzrayim certainly always had attendants, staff and servants in his presence. He had not been alone with his brothers. He ordered everyone other than his brothers to leave the room. Then the pasuk concludes: “... Thus no man stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers.” (ibid.)

But this conclusion of pasuk 45:1 is redundant! The beginning of that pasuk already says that Yosef ordered everyone out of the room. Why do we need the end of the pasuk to restate the fact that no man stood with Yosef when he made himself known to his brothers?

I saw a beautiful answer given to this question, written in the name of Rabbi Shmuel Brazil. In order to appreciate this answer, I will give you an analogy:

About a year-and-a-half ago (on the first day of bein hazemanim before Pesach), I was working at my desk, and I had some errands to run. I knew I had to go, but I decided that I wanted to finish something first. I stuck around for a couple of minutes longer. I finished what I had to do. I then drove down Mt. Wilson Lane, making a right turn onto Reisterstown Road, as I must have done thousands of times in my life. I was turning by the green light and suddenly, the next thing I knew a car flew into me. I wound up in the corner of that little shopping strip on the corner of Mt. Wilson and Reisterstown Road. I didn't know what happened. I asked myself “Did I go through a red light? What just happened to me?”

Within several minutes, I found out exactly what had happened: There was a fugitive of justice who was wanted for kidnapping and attempted murder in Washington D.C. He crossed state lines, making it a federal case. The United States Marshall Service was chasing after him. The marshals went up Reisterstown Road and this fugitive went down Reisterstown Road. He must have been going 70 or 80 miles per hour. The cops were in hot pursuit. This fugitive came to the red light on Mt. Wilson Lane and Reisterstown Road. After kidnapping and attempted murder, a red light was not about to stop him. He plowed into one car, plowed into a second car, and then plowed into my car before plowing into a truck which finally stopped him from going any further.

He got out of his car and started running towards the woods. The marshals ran after him and beat him to a pulp. In the meantime, my car was totaled. I am thinking in my mind that I should be suing the United States Government: Frand vs. the United States of America. I was disabused of that notion because a person cannot sue the U.S. Government when they are after somebody. At any rate, Baruch Hashem, I walked away from the incident without a scratch, despite the fact that my car was totaled. The insurance gave me a nice settlement, v'nomar Amen! But my initial thought was that had I gotten up from my desk when I had originally intended (two or three

minutes earlier), this would have never happened to me. It was only because I left my house when I did, and because I was at Reisterstown Road at that specific time, that I was involved in this multiple vehicle traffic incident.

Such a thought is kefir (heresy). For whatever reason, the Ribono shel Olam wanted me to get into that accident. The reason is between me and the Ribono shel Olam. The way to look at what happened is not that because I waited the few extra minutes, I was involved in an accident. Rather, the proper perspective of the matter is that it was decreed in Heaven that I should be involved in that accident, and consequently, I hesitated leaving home for a few extra minutes so that I would be in that place at that time to be involved in that accident. This is the way a person must look at life.

We see this many times with elderly parents. I knew a very elderly gentleman who was living with one of his daughters in New York. He decided to come down to live with his daughter in Baltimore, and not long afterwards, he died. Everyone's reaction is "If he would have stayed in New York, this would not have happened. The schlepping and the effort of the relocation were too much for him. That is why he died." No. That is not true. He died then because when he was born, it was decreed upon him exactly when he would die and where he would die.

That is the way a person needs to look at life. We should never engage in "What if?" scenarios. We believe in Hashgocha Pratis (Personal Divine Providence). We wind up in a certain place at a certain time because the Ribono shel Olam wants us there at that time.

Rav Shmuel Brazil says beautifully: "Yosef ordered all the people out of the room 'v'lo amad ish ito'" (and no man remained with him)." Who was this "v'lo amad ish ito"? Who was this man?

Before answering this question, consider another pasuk all the way back in Parshas Vayeshev. Yaakov tells Yosef to go and check out where his brothers are. Yosef starts wandering and he can't find his brothers. The pasuk says, "And a man found him, and behold he was blundering in the field; the man asked him 'What do you seek?'" (Bereshis 37:15) Rashi there says this man was the Angel Gavriel. The Ribono shel Olam put Gavriel over there in order that he should meet Yosef and direct Yosef to Dosan, where he would meet up with his brothers.

That, says Rav Brazil, is the man the pasuk is referring to here in Parshas Vayigash where it says "And there was no man that stood with him." Yosef did not say "You know what? If I would not have met that man all the way back then, I would have come home to my father and said to him, 'Guess what? I can't find my brothers.'" Yosef did not let the thought enter his head that had he not met that man, he would not have met his brothers, and the brothers would not have sold him as a slave, and he would not have gone down to Mitzrayim, and he would not have been in the dungeon, etc., etc., etc.

The pasuk says "the man was not standing with him" to emphasize that Yosef realized that what happened to him was not at all attributable to the chance appearance of "that man," but rather, it was all part of a Divine plan. The Ribono shel Olam wanted this entire long and difficult story to occur.

A Simple Pshat in the Wagons Rejuvenating Yaakov

I was recently sitting at the same table as Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer at a wedding. Rabbi Hopfer told me the following vort:

After Yosef revealed his true identity to his brothers, Yosef instructs them to bring their father, Yaakov, down to Mitzrayim. The brothers returned to Canaan and told Yaakov the whole story: "Yosef is still alive and he is the ruler over the entire land of Egypt; but he had a turn of heart, for he did not believe them. And they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." (Bereshis 45:26-27) The sight of those wagons rejuvenated Yaakov, causing him to realize that Yosef was still alive.

We spoke in the past of the Medrash quoted by Rashi that the wagons (agalos) were a special sign that Yosef sent to his father, reminding Yaakov that the last Torah section they had studied together before they were

separated for so many years was Eglah Arufah (the decapitated calf). The hint was based on the similarity between the word eglah and the word agala.

However, there can also be a p'shuto shel mikra (simple reading of the text): When Yaakov saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him and his family to Mitzrayim, his spirit returned to him. Why?

This can be understood with an analogy:

There is a fine pious Jew who lives in Brooklyn. He has a son who is "more modern," who does not exactly follow in his father's footsteps. The son goes off to college, which does not do much for his ruchniyus. He is still an Orthodox Jew, but not exactly on the same spiritual level as his father. He meets a girl. The father is not so happy with whom his son married. Then the son and his wife decide to move to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The father in Brooklyn misses his son. He calls him up and says "Son, it has been so long since I have seen you. I want to come visit you in New Mexico." The son says, "You will schlep all the way to Santa Fe?" "Yes. I want to see you." The last thing in the world this son wants is for his father from Brooklyn to come and see how he lives in Santa Fe. The father will see so many things which will displease him: How the house is run, how the wife dresses, how she acts. He will look in the refrigerator and see who knows what.

Seeking any way to avoid his father coming to Santa Fe, the son says to the father, "Dad, it is too big a deal for you to come from Brooklyn to Santa Fe. I will come to see you!" Why does he suggest that? It is because the last thing he wants is for the father to see how he lives in his new location. (I actually was in Santa Fe and saw the Chabad of Santa Fe, but it is far from an established Jewish community.)

Yosef was in Mitzrayim. He was away for so many years. He was cut off from any type of support system. There wasn't even a Chabad of Mitzrayim! Yaakov could have thought "Who knows what could have happened to Yosef? What does he look like? What does his house look like?"

But what does Yosef do? He sends wagons to Yaakov to bring him to Mitzrayim so he can see how Yosef is living there! Yaakov felt, if Yosef is ready for me to see him and how he lives in his home territory, then I know one thing – he is still Yosef, my son. He is still Yosef haTzadik. Once Yaakov perceives that, his spirit is rejuvenated.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Feeling the Joy and Pain of Others

The moment Yosef has been dreaming about for twenty-two years is about to occur. Yosef goes out to greet his father with great anticipation. Rashi comments that he even prepared his own chariot rather than delegating the task to others because of his intense enthusiasm. One can understand the source of these intense feelings. Having been forcibly removed from his father's loving home and not knowing if his father was still alive had caused him such personal suffering for so long. It was only natural for this long-awaited reunion to be a great source of personal joy for Yosef. Yet, when the Torah describes the actual moment they meet, the phrase that is used is, "vayera eilav" - Yosef appeared to Yaakov. Rather than focusing on Yosef seeing his father, the emphasis is on his being seen by Yaakov. At the greatest moment of personal joy Yosef realized how much Yaakov had been dreaming about possibly seeing his beloved son again. Yosef immediately changed the focus of the moment to how he can bring joy to his father rather than focusing on his own personal happiness.

Yosef's ability to focus on others even at times that were meaningful to him is alluded to earlier in the parsha. As he cries tears of joy upon revealing himself to his brothers, and reuniting especially with Binyamin, Chazal saw a deeper meaning in those tears. As he embraced his younger brother Binyamin he shed tears for the Beis Hamikdash that would one day be destroyed. Yosef saw the world as being greater than himself. Even during intense personal moments, he sensed the national suffering that would result from the churban. Yosef felt the joy of others and cried for the pain of others.

Yosef learned this trait of selflessness from his mother. Rochel had waited for seven years to marry Yaakov, but at the moment that would have been her greatest joy she realized that her sister Leah would be subject to suffering tremendous embarrassment. Rather than enjoy her own moment of joy, she sacrificed everything for her sister. Many centuries later Rochel would once again turn her concern toward others. After the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, Rochel approaches Hashem to cry for her children. Actually, most of the exiles at this time were Leah's descendants. Rochel's son Yosef's children had gone into exile long ago. It was primarily the tribe of Yehuda who was suffering at this time. Yet, in Rochel's eyes if any Jew was suffering it was as if her own were in pain.

This Friday, Asara B'Teves, is an opportune time to focus on the pain of others. The Rambam describes one who doesn't feel the suffering and join in the fast days of the community as one who has completely distanced oneself from the Jewish People. During these very difficult times, we must constantly remind ourselves of the pain of our fellow Jews.

Chazal teach us that only those who cry for Yerushalayim will merit to rejoice in its rebuilding. May the time of tears come to an end for the Jewish people and may we very soon rejoice together. We look forward to the day that Asara B' Teves, together with the other days of national tragedy, will be transformed to become days of joy and celebration.

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<https://jewishlink.news/silent-heroes-sacred-callings/>

Silent Heroes, Sacred Callings

By Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Jewish Link | December 21, 2023 Heroes everywhere. During our nation's war against evil, heroes have emerged from every sector of our people.

Soldiers, reservists, first responders of Oct 7, wives of soldiers, volunteers from across the world, and simple people of faith. Among all these brave warriors one quiet group of heroes stands out. Those who attended the slain victims of this massacre endangered their lives as well as their mental well-being in providing honor to those from whom it was so violently taken. As the horrific images so brutally demonstrated, many victims were badly mutilated and, in some cases, burned beyond recognition. The silent and strong heroes who identified and buried the victims afforded one final semblance of dignity to the dehumanized bodies which had once cradled human souls.

The silent courage of these heroes showcased how deeply we value the dignity of a human body even after life has departed from it. Showing final respects and honoring the dead is deeply rooted both in the ethics of Torah and in our life-revering culture.

The mysterious ceremony of "egla arufa" typifies the care and dignity we afford the dead. If a dead and unattended-to body is discovered, it isn't quietly buried. Instead, the public ceremony of egla arufa is conducted which includes confessionals by the leaders of the local towns. Leaders of nearby villages are held "accountable" because a person died on their watch, even though they were not directly culpable for the death. Tragic death cannot simply be ignored.

You would think that an anonymous John Doe discovered in a barren field would not justify a public response. Typically, unidentified bodies belong to people who inhabit the margins of society. When established members of society go missing, family members and neighborhood friends conduct a search. Presumably, the unidentified corpse described in the Torah is a

homeless person without much family, who has long ago fallen off the social radar.

Yet, it is precisely when the dignity of human life is most vulnerable that it must be strongly reinforced. Specifically at this moment, when life can be easily taken for granted, the shared sanctity of every human being must be underscored. The public ceremony of egla arufa demonstrates that every human being is created equal in the eyes of Hashem, and each possesses divine dignity. By burying the unidentified corpse, we honor the imprint of Hashem within each human being.

Surprisingly, the midrash asserts that Yosef, in his first correspondence to his father, alluded to the egla arufa ceremony, reminding Ya'akov that decades earlier, they had jointly studied this topic. Evidently Yosef's referencing of egla arufa delivered an important message to his father. Though initially Yosef was tragically ripped from his family and sold into slavery, he had now emerged as the second most powerful man on earth and was single-handedly steering a hungry world through a nightmarish famine. Joseph's prescient wisdom and tireless dedication saved millions of lives. By preserving life and protecting human dignity, Joseph was, in effect, implementing the doctrines of egla arufa.

The vicious assault of October 7 included numerous acts of horror and barbaric indecency. One of the most repulsive aspects of this massacre was the manner in which human bodies were treated. As if torturing and murdering in cold blood weren't sufficiently nauseating, the terrorists mutilated and dismembered lifeless bodies. Pure and unadulterated evil, destruction and violence for absolutely no purpose. Their grotesque crimes demonstrated how little they regard human dignity and how cheap life is in the eyes of Islamic terrorists.

Their dehumanizing crimes made our own response and our own gentle treatment of dead bodies even more critical. Our silent heroes, including soldiers, Zaka volunteers and countless others who spent weeks identifying and burying victims, solemnly restored dignity to those who had been twice victimized—in life and in death. In providing this honor, many subjected themselves to hideous sights and unforgettable images which will forever mar their inner conscience. These heroes of human dignity paid a steep price in their sacred calling of providing honor to those beyond the veil of life. In many instances they operated under fire, risking their lives to restore dignity to lifeless bodies.

This quiet heroism underscores the clash of ideologies within this military war: a battle is being waged between a culture of death and a culture of human dignity. Between a culture which cheapens human life and one which treasures it. Our war isn't merely a military encounter but a clash of cultures between competing value systems.

Though these murderers speak in the name of religion they are nothing more than brutish atheists masquerading as religious people. They describe a god who doesn't exist. Denying the traits of God is tantamount to denying His presence.

We believe that all powerful Hashem lovingly created Man and endowed him with Divine-like traits of free will, consciousness and creativity. Our respect for every human being acknowledges Man as the masterpiece of creation. We respect this Divine masterpiece even when life has departed from it. Hashem's Divine image isn't limited to our souls but to the bodies which once cradled divine essence.

By defiling human bodies these charlatans scorn any notion of tzelem Elokim, image of God. These violent beasts fictionalize a god of bloodlust and of anger, not one of compassion and mercy. By mutilating dead bodies, they mutilate the image of Hashem in our world. By mocking human dignity these violent murderers haven't just committed a grave theological sin but have also doomed themselves and their cultures to failure and futility. Belief in human dignity isn't just a religious value but powers human achievement and human progress. Through our God-given creativity we believe that we are empowered to improve our world and redeem it for Mankind. If Hashem is compassionate, he desires human prosperity. If Hashem covets well-being, we must be His agents to advance and improve our world. Prolonged human

suffering isn't consistent with a merciful Hashem who crafted human beings in His image. A culture which reveres human dignity is religiously driven to improve and advance the human condition.

A culture with no concern for human dignity provides little incentive for change, growth or progress. When life is cheap, suffering is acceptable. When suffering is acceptable, progress is stunted. By mutilating bodies these barbarians don't just disfigure Hashem. They maim their own society and dismember themselves of any real progress or advancement.

It is tragic but ironic that terrorists spent billions of dollars building machineries of death. Terror tunnels have absolutely no ulterior purpose of function other than havoc and death. Instead of investing in human beings, these bloodthirsty terrorists invested in death. How much potential and how much human capital was completely wasted in the pursuit of blood and revenge? How many lives could have been improved had the monies been spent on life rather than on death.

Our battle continues. They viciously defile life, and we gently protect it. They dehumanize and we revere. They holler over corpses while we honor the stillness of the departed. They will sink into their own tunnels of hatred while we build towers of achievement. There is only one winner in this clash of cultures.

Afterward

On my recent trip to the USA, I was deeply impressed by the profound engagement of Jewish communities in the war in Israel and how deeply sorrowed people are about the ongoing tragedy. I was also often asked how overseas Jewry could better identify with the suffering of Israelis. Perhaps the Shabbat prayers on behalf of IDF soldiers should be prefaced by a brief eulogy of a soldier who fell in battle. Additionally, this brief eulogy could be coupled with one of the many stories of heroism of the fighters valiantly defending our land and people. Personalization of the war may help people more deeply feel the joint pain of our people who have made such selfless sacrifices.

The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has semicha and a bachelor's in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York.

<https://www.ou.org/asara-bteves-us-and-them/>

Asara b'Teves, Us and Them

By Rabbi Moshe Hauer

21 DEC 2023

Fast days such as Asara b'Teves are opportunities to remember the past so that we will not be condemned to repeat it, moving us to recognize that our current challenges come from being stuck in past failures. As Rambam wrote (Hilchos Taanis 5:1):

"There are days when the entire Jewish people fast because of the calamities that occurred to them then, to awaken hearts and initiate the paths of repentance. This will serve as a reminder of our own bad behaviors and of the behavior of our ancestors which resembles our present behavior, bringing calamity upon them and upon us. By reminding ourselves of these matters, we will repent and improve."

This year's commemoration of this tragic anniversary comes during our own profoundly difficult period of darkness, moving us to consider how our own bad behavior resembles that of our ancestors and how we can fix it through a serious teshuva that will spare us from perpetuating our current state of churban.

Elementary, my dear Watson. There is no mystery here.

We are still in mourning over the Bais Hamikdash that was destroyed due to sinas chinam, the spiteful hatred and internal discord that we continue to stubbornly embrace, "the behavior of our ancestors that resembles our present behavior."

The months preceding the attack of Simchas Torah were marked by fracture and division within the Jewish people. The battle over judicial reform in Israel quickly morphed into an existential struggle over the character of the

state, pitting Jew against Jew with a startling level of rancor and bitterness. It was winner-take-all, with precious little in the way of apparent consideration of the needs and sensitivities of the other side. Sinas chinam was so alive and so well that we would have been far less surprised had it been civil war that broke out in Israel on October 7th.

As believing Jews, we respond to tragedy spiritually, trying to hear and to respond to God's voice in current events. Those spiritual responses can assume many forms, all of which are of immeasurable value. There is only benefit to the Jewish people when we turn to God in prayer, say more tehillim, intensify our efforts at Torah study, and engage in charity and good deeds. But this is generic teshuva and it does not address the issue at hand. As the Talmud (Yoma 9b) describes, sinas chinam destroyed the second Bais Hamikdash despite the Jewish people's significant engagement in Torah, mitzvos and gemillus chasadim. If those good deeds were unable to prevent the calamity, they will not fix it either. They are valuable, they must be done, but they alone are not what God is waiting for. And given the shambles we were in before October 7th, it is hard to imagine that all God seeks is for us to recite Psalms 79 and 121.

On October 7th, God grabbed us by the lapels and shook some sense into us, helping us realize who our real enemies are and how much all Jews need each other. Today, two and a half months later, on Asara b'Teves, we must painfully recall that the explosive fracture that destroyed the Bais Hamikdash was well on its way to destroying the State of Israel internally on October 6th, "the behavior of our ancestors which resembles our present behavior, bringing calamity upon them and upon us." The repentance and improvement that this moment demands of us requires us not just to pray more, learn more, and give more, but to address this issue head on, committing to substantive attitudinal and behavioral change that will withstand the curse of sinas chinam and never again separate Klal Yisrael into "us and them."

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net date: Dec 21, 2023, 2:50 PM subject: Letting Go of My Expectations - Essay by Rabbi YY

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 Aryeh Yehudah Leib Altar (1847-1905), known as the Sefas Emes, who presented a moving explanation.[1]

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 gentile 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 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 horrific traumas, you mistreated her emotionally. After years of all forms of healing, 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.

Imagine that due to emotional dissociation caused by your own painful past, you neglected your children. They did not have an emotionally present father, or mother, and then after profound inner work you discover your core, untarnished self, and you discover the pain you caused (even if unintentionally). The sense of remorse is heart-wrenching.

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 שאמרנו חז"ל אשר שברת יישר כחך. כן ניחם יוסף אותם כי זכה לכל זה על ידי 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

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.

Footnotes [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). Likkutei Sichos vol. 30 Vayigash. Sefae Haamarim Melukat vol. 5. [2] Exodus 34:9. [3] Shabbos 87. [4] Lubavitcher Rebbe's Letter on Homosexuality & Transgender

from: **Rabbi Ozer Alport** oalport@optonline.net date: Dec 21, 2023, 2:57 PM subject: Parsha Potpourri - Vayigash

The issues of Parsha Potpourri in 2023 are generously dedicated לו; נ; אסתר ו; ש; נט יצחק מנחם בן ניסים דוד ויהודית יוכבד ז; ל; ולרפ; ל; לו; זבת ניסים יצחק ושמחה ז יהודית יוכבד בת שרה

This week's issue is also dedicated in honor of the marriage of Binyamin Michaels and Rechel Langer

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Parsha Potpourri Parshas Vayigash – Vol. 19, Issue 11

Compiled by Ozer Alport

ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי אדני ידבר נא עבדך דבר באזני אדני ואל יחר אפך בעבדך כי כמוד (44:18) Parshas Mikeitz concludes with Yehuda meekly accepting Yosef's decision to sentence them to slavery for stealing his goblet, acknowledging that Binyomin had been caught red-handed and they deserved to be punished (44:16). It is therefore surprising that just two verses later, Parshas Vayigash begins with Yehuda harshly questioning Yosef's authority and fairness (Rashi 44:18). What happened in the interim that caused Yehuda's attitude to change so drastically? Rav Shimon Schwab explains that Yehuda's initial reaction when Yosef's goblet was found in Binyomin's sack was sincere. He was genuinely troubled that his brother had been caught committing such a terrible crime. However, after Yehuda had a moment to reflect on this development, he remembered that he had personally guaranteed his father that he would bring Binyomin back (43:9), which gave him the courage and conviction to confront Yosef and stand up to him. Along these lines, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel once asked one of his talmidim (students) to become the mashgiach (spiritual guide) in a certain yeshiva. The student was also close to Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam and asked his opinion about taking the job. Rav Pam felt that he was still too young and was not yet ready for so much achrayus (responsibility). When Rav Nosson Tzvi heard about Rav Pam's concern, he called him and said, "With the achrayus comes the kochos (abilities)." Rav Pam was very moved by Rav Nosson Tzvi's perspective and often repeated it to his talmidim, telling them that when a person assumes additional responsibility in life, he will discover within himself the energy and maturity needed to carry out his new obligations. Similarly, in Parshas Behaaloscha, a group of rabble-rousers

complained about the Manna and expressed their desire to eat meat instead. Moshe responded (Bamidbar 11:12-13) by asking Hashem if he had given birth to the nation and lamented his inability to supply them with the tremendous amount of meat required to meet their demands. If Moshe knew that he lacked the means to give them what they wanted, why was it relevant to discuss whether he gave birth to them? The Sfas Emes explains that Moshe's excuse that he could not fulfill their desires was only valid because they were not his biological children. Even though it was seemingly impossible to find enough meat for so many people in the middle of the desert, if Moshe had in fact given birth to them, he would have felt such a strong *achrayus* to provide for them that he would have somehow come up with a way to do so. Applying this concept to our own lives, Rav Yisroel Reisman notes that many people are so busy with their daily responsibilities to their families and jobs that they are left with little time for learning Torah and doing mitzvos. When we say Shema twice each day, we are supposed to accept upon ourselves the yokes of Hashem's kingship and doing mitzvos. If we do so correctly, we will develop within ourselves a sense of *achrayus* for Torah and mitzvos that is no less important than our other feelings of responsibility, at which point we will automatically find the time and energy to fulfill our newfound obligations, just as we learn from Yehuda, Rav Nosson Tzvi, and Moshe Rabbeinu.

ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו (45:3) When Yosef's brothers came to Egypt to purchase food during the years of famine, he was able to recognize them immediately, but after 22 years of separation, they were unable to identify him. As a result, he was able to subject them to a dramatic and frightening series of events. After accusing them of being spies, he incarcerated Shimon to force them to return with his maternal brother Binyomin. After confusing them by inviting them to join him at a banquet, Yosef had his goblet planted in Binyomin's sack to frame him for stealing. Finally, when Yehuda pleaded for mercy, explaining how much their father Yaakov would suffer if they failed to return with his beloved Binyomin, Yosef was unable to hold himself back anymore. He ordered all the Egyptian officers and servants out of the room and revealed his true identity to his brothers, telling them, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" The entire episode and ordeal of the brothers' encounter with Yosef appeared so illogical and nonsensical that it seemed more like a bad dream than reality, yet in one split second, in just two words, *אני יוסף* – I am Yosef – suddenly the entire cacophonous picture became crystal clear. All the seemingly inexplicable events and details fell into place, and everything made perfect sense. The history of the Jewish nation has been fraught with lofty highs and terrible lows. The life of every individual Jew follows a similar pattern. Many happy events seem too good to be true, while countless struggles seem too great to bear. Certainly, there seems to be no rhyme or reason to them, no interconnecting links weaving them together as part of a larger picture and greater plan. The Chofetz Chaim writes that just as with Yosef's brothers, there will come a time when we merit Hashem's revelation in all His glory and splendor. Upon hearing just two words *Ani Hashem* – I am Hashem – everything will immediately fall into place, and all our questions and difficulties will vanish into thin air, may it happen speedily in our days.

ואת יהודה שלח לפניו אל יוסף להורות לפניו גשנה (46:28) After a tumultuous roller-coaster of events, Yaakov's sons returned to Canaan and informed him that his beloved son Yosef, who he had assumed was dead for 22 years, was alive and prospering in Egypt. Astonished by the remarkable turn of events and despite his advanced age, Yaakov prepared himself and his family for the lengthy journey to Egypt to be reunited with Yosef. As they drew near to the section of Egypt called Goshen, our verse tells us that Yaakov sent his son Yehuda ahead of him to prepare for him the way. Rashi explains that "preparing for him the way" refers to Yaakov's instructions that Yehuda establish a house of study where he would be able to learn and teach Torah. Considering Yaakov's age and all that he had recently experienced, did this need to be his highest priority? Shouldn't he have first focused on getting reunited with Yosef and comfortably settling his family into their new

homes? The Shelah HaKadosh derives from Yaakov's actions and priorities that wherever a person goes, he should first ensure that his spiritual needs are in place and afterward attend to his more mundane concerns. Although Yaakov had many important tasks to attend to on his momentous journey, the Torah records his focus on establishing a house of study prior to his arrival to show us his true priorities so that we may learn from them. Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that the biggest mistake made by the early immigrants to America was that they were so focused on trying to make a living that they neglected to make time to set up schools to provide religious education to the next generation. As a result, thousands of Jewish children were not given an opportunity to be properly educated about their religious heritage. Now that we understand the value of taking spiritual considerations into account when making life decisions, we can appreciate the following anecdote. The Stropkover Rebbe was once purchasing an apartment and narrowed the choices down to two. Each of them had various aesthetic and practical pros and cons, and it was difficult to decide which of them was superior. Ultimately, he chose the apartment that had exactly 26 steps (the numerical value of Hashem's Name) ascending to it, as that would allow him to remember Hashem every time he entered or exited his home. Although the level of spiritual sensitivity depicted in this story is clearly beyond us, its lesson is still relevant. We all make daily decisions concerning our families, our homes, and our jobs. As we evaluate our options, we should learn from Yaakov to view the world through a more spiritual lens and take that perspective into account when making our decisions.

From: Rav Immanuel Bernstein <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com> Thu, Dec 21, 6:59 AM (18 hours ago)

MESHECH CHOCHMAH Parshas Vayigash

Yaakov's Prophecies *ויאמר אלקים לישראל במראת הלילה ויאמר יעקב יעקב* God spoke to Yisrael in a night vision and said: "Yaakov, Yaakov". (46:2) Day and Night Receiving Divine communication through the medium of a prophetic vision was something that was experienced by each of the Avos. However, the fact that the vision took place at night is an aspect that is emphasized specifically in the case of Yaakov's visions. His first vision, experienced upon leaving home as described in the beginning of Parshas Vayetzei, took place in a dream during the night.[1] The vision described by our pasuk is likewise introduced as taking place at night. What is behind the timing of these visions? The Meshech Chochmah explains that in both these situations, Yaakov is about to go into galus (exile). Hashem thus appears to him at night prior to these two journeys, in order to reassure him that even as he moves into a state of exile – which is characterized by night – the Shechinah is with him, guiding him and protecting him. This concept is expressed by the Gemara,[2] which states that "In every place to which the Jewish People were exiled, the Shechinah was exiled with them." Thus, we see that the Av who represents this connection during the dark times of exile is Yaakov. This special association is also expressed in a pasuk in Tehillim[3] that we recite regularly, which reads: *יענה ה' ביום צרה ישעך בך* May Hashem answer you on the day of distress, may the Name of the God of Yaakov protect you. When we call out to Hashem on "the day of distress," we are looking to invoke a connection that He first established with Yaakov and hence He is referred to in this situation as "the God of Yaakov".

The Order of Prayer The Meshech Chochmah proceeds to explain that the specific experiences of Yaakov are reflected in the prayer which he instituted. The Gemara[4] cites a tradition that the three daily prayers were originally instituted by the three Avos: Avraham instituted the morning prayer of Shacharis, Yitzchak instituted Mincha for the afternoon and Yaakov instituted Maariv – the evening prayer. Since so much of what Yaakov experienced is represented by night, it is only fitting that the connection with Hashem that he established through the prayer also takes place at night. With this in mind, the Meshech Chochmah refers to a parallel tradition cited by the Gemara[5] regarding the basis of the three daily prayers: Shacharis and Mincha correspond to the daily morning and

afternoon tamid offerings, while Maariv corresponds to the burning of the leftover fats and limbs of the day's korbanos, which took place at night. Although the Gemara cites these two traditions as distinct explanations of the background to the daily prayers, the Meshech Chochmah explains that they are ultimately connected with each other. For there is something about the avodah which took place at night in the Beis HaMikdash which parallels the exile experience of the Jewish People represented by Yaakov. Prophecy Begins at Home The Gemara[6] states that, in principle, prophecy is something which can only be experienced in Eretz Yisrael. The unique and elevated nature of the land provides the conditions necessary for the special connection with Hashem that is expressed through prophecy. Having said that, the Gemara notes that there were certain individuals who experienced prophecy even while in exile. A classic example is the prophet Yechezkel, whose sefer begins with the words: **הָיָה הָיָה דָּבָר ה' אֵל יִתְחַלֵּל בְּעֵינֵי בְנוֹי הַכְּהֵנִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּשָׁדִים עַל גֵּהַר כְּבָר** The word of Hashem came to Yechezkel son of Buzi, the Kohen, in the land of the Kasdim, by the River Kvar.[7] The land of the Kasdim refers to Babylon. How is Yechezkel able to receive prophecy there? Have we not stated that prophecy is something that is restricted to Eretz Yisrael? The Gemara explains that the answer lies on the double expression used by the pasuk: **“הָיָה הָיָה.”** The first terms refers to the prophecy he had already received in Eretz Yisrael prior to being exiled, while the second term refers to his subsequent prophecy in exile. The meaning is that having established a “prophecy connection” in Eretz Yisrael, Yechezkel was able to continue to enjoy that connection even when he was in exile.

From the Prophet to the People This idea, stated with regards to Yechezkel's prophetic connection, is true in a general sense regarding our national connection with Hashem in exile. Exile is not a setting conducive to initiating a connection with the Shechinah. However, a connection established in Eretz Yisrael can be maintained even in exile. This brings us back to the two traditions regarding the basis of the Maariv prayer. On the one hand we are told that it was instituted by Yaakov, while on the other hand, we are told that it corresponds to the burning of the fats and limbs on the Mizbeach. In fact, says the Meshech Chochmah, these two traditions converge over this idea. Korbanos themselves are not offered at night. This means that night-time has no “new” avodah. The only avodah which exists at that time is a continuation of the avodah which began during the day, i.e. burning the fats and limbs of korbanos that had been offered that day. So, too, the connection between the Shechinah and the Jewish People which continues even when they are in exile, represented by the night-time prayer instituted by Yaakov, is a function of continuing the connection which existed when we were in Eretz Yisrael. Foundations upon Which to Build There is a pivotal message to be gleaned from this passage of Meshech Chochmah, and it is expressed by R' Meir Simcha himself: “There is a clear exhortation that emerges from this idea. When Yisrael keep hold of their authentic tradition and go in the ways of their forbears, then Yisrael is a strong nation, rooted in antiquity, to whom Hashem was revealed when the Beis HaMikdash was standing. This can then allow the Shechinah to continue to dwell among them even in the “night” of the exile in the diaspora. However, if they should forget the covenant of their forbears and neglect to follow in their ways, they then become a nation that is by itself, for the Shechinah does not come to reside in Chutz la'Aretz. Under these conditions, the Shechinah will depart from them and they will find themselves susceptible to subjugation and degradation, for they do not view themselves as an ancient nation who had ‘already received’ the word of Hashem.” [1] Bereishis 28:11-12. [2] Megillah 29a [3] 20:2. [4] Berachos 26b. [5] Berachos ibid. [6] Moed Katan 25a. [7] Yechezkel 1:3.

Drasha - Destiny Today

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky <rmk@torah.org>

Wed, Dec 20, 12:15 PM (2 days ago)

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Vayigash

Destiny Today

The plot thickens. At the end of last week's portion, Yoseph accused the brothers of stealing his magic goblet. Yehuda, in charge of the troupe, denies even the remotest possibility that any one of the brothers could be a thief. So confident was Yehuda that he pre-ordained the would-be thief to a death penalty and offered the remaining group of nine brothers as slaves were if the egregious accusations proved correct. Unfortunately, Yehuda was unaware of Yoseph's precontrived ruse of planting the goblet in Benjamin's sack. This week's portion begins as Yoseph wants to keep Binyamin, and only Binyamin, as a slave, something that Yehuda will battle to the very end to prevent. Yoseph and his brothers confront each other. In a mixed array of rage, fury, and emotional pleas, Yehuda bargains with Yoseph. Almost threatening war over the matter, Yehuda explains that “Benjamin cannot be taken as a slave as he has left an old father who awaits his return. If he will not return to his father, the old man will die of grief and aggravation. After all, he already lost one son to a terrible accident.”

After seeing the concern that Yehuda has for his younger brother, Yoseph makes the startling revelation. “I am Joseph Is my father still alive?” (Genesis 45:3) Yoseph then forgives the brothers and tells them that his episode was divinely preordained. It set the path as a lifeline from the ensuing famine. He then sends his brothers back to Canaan to bring his father, but before doing so he presents each of them with a set of clothes. However, Yoseph gives his youngest brother Benjamin five sets of clothing and three hundred pieces of silver (Genesis 45:22). The Talmud (Megillah 16b) asks a very poignant question. How is it that Yoseph, a victim of jealousy, provoked his brothers by favoring Benjamin? Didn't jealousy spur the hatred that led to the original calamity? Why didn't he learn from past experience, not to show favoritism? The Talmud explains that Yoseph was very calculated in his actions. He was alluding to a similar event that would occur in the future. After being saved from the gallows, Mordechai, a descendent of Benjamin, miraculously rose to power and prestige. He was gifted with five changes of clothing as he left the palace of Achashveirosh. Benjamin's five changes of clothing were symbolic of a future sartorial gift that Benjamin's descendent would one day receive. Some commentators ask a powerful question. Obviously, Yoseph did not explain the deep meaning of his actions to his brothers. What then was gained by favoring Benjamin in front of them? Would the symbolic reference negate any ill feeling? Would some mysterious token resolve a problem that may have been simmering? Why does Yoseph, in the midst of the turmoil of his startling revelation, decide to make a ceremonial gift that favors one brother over the rest, in order to foreshadow an event destined to occur in more than 1,000 years in the future? Could he have not saved symbolism for a more complacent setting?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells this beautiful tale in his latest work, *Along the Magid's Journey*:

In 1939, the Nazi Gestapo shut down Rabbi Moshe Schneider's yeshiva in Frankfurt, Germany. With tremendous effort and support from the English community, he was able to relocate the school to England. Survival during that horrific period was both a tremendous spiritual and physical challenge but two boys in the Yeshiva helped meet that challenge. They both were named Moshe. One Moshe would rise in the early hours of the morning and pick up leftover bread from a generous bakery. Carrying the bags of bread and leftover rolls while walking through the bitter cold was not easy, but Moshe never missed his duties. In fact, he often took the place of other boys who were supposed to do the chore.

The other Moshe also woke up early. He led a special learning session before dawn. He encouraged his friends to make the extra effort – which they religiously did.

After years of uninterrupted efforts, one day the boys got public recognition. Rabbi Schneider blessed them in front of the entire school. “Moshe who shleps the bread is not only schlepping today's bread. One day, he will help distribute bread for thousands of people. And the Moshe who is concerned with spirituality of others will continue to do so in years to come,”

announced the Rosh Yeshiva. “Their actions today are only seeds of the future.”

His words proved true. Moshe, the bread-shlepper, became Moshe (Paul) Reichman, one of our generation’s most benevolent philanthropists. Moshe, the young teacher, became Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, Rav in Johannesburg, South Africa and Har Nof, Israel, an author of prestigious books on Jewish Law, and a teacher of thousands.

Perhaps Yoseph is telling us the secret of our people. Moments earlier Benjamin stood in shackles. He was accused of stealing a magic goblet and was humiliatingly sentenced with life-long enslavement to Pharaoh.

Moments later he was not only liberated, but identified with honor and integrity as the blood brother, from both mother and father, of the most powerful man in the world. Yoseph gives the former slave-to-be a special five-fold gift as an announcement to the world. With Benjamin, he declares the destiny of his people. Yoseph declares through Benjamin that today’s events are our manifest destiny. Due to the courageous actions of Yehuda, Benjamin, the slave-to-be, walked away triumphantly, not with one change of clothing but with five. This was not a symbolism for thousands of years to come, but rather a symbolism of the ever-present character of the Jewish people.

The events of Benjamin in Egypt manifested themselves in almost direct comparison and beautiful symmetry with events that occurred centuries later in Persia. Mordechai the Yehudi, a descendant of Benjamin and by many accounts Yehuda, stood his ground under the greatest threats of death and humiliation. He defied the prophets of doom and walked away with glory and splendor.

Yoseph’s message was no riddle, it was no illusion, and it was no mystical prophecy. It was our destiny. Courage in the trying times yields greatness. It was not a message only for the future. It was a message of the future – for today. That was a message all the brothers could appreciate — at that moment. It is a message we too, can appreciate –right now.

Drasha is sponsored this week by David Samet in memory of his grandmother Gittel Bas Yitzchok Dovid Halevyei a”h, whose yahrtzeit is the seventh day of Chanukah. Please study this class in her memory.

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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 Canaan (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'uven):

- 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 Ya'akov still maintains the hope that Yosef is alive somewhere?]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

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

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

A) THE SPYING ACCUSATION:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOU FEAR *WHO*?!

This fits well with what happens next: when Yosef changes his mind and decides to allow almost all of the brothers to go home, he gives the brothers a reason: *"Because I fear Hashem."* Now, remember that Egypt is a thoroughly pagan society; when the brothers hear from Yosef, the vice-king of the thoroughly pagan country, that he fears not the sun-god, or the river-god, or the harvest-god, but Hashem ("Ha-Elokim," the One God), it must sound to the brothers as strange as it would have been to hear Yosef say, "You know, I really think Egypt stinks. I'd much rather be king of Canaan 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'uven 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 Canaan, 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 Ya'akov; and he also seems to know in what order they were born!). They also notice that he performs actions which remind them of their sin (accusing them of spying, imprisoning one brother and sending the others home without him, providing them with ill-gotten gains which they believe will result in their own enslavement, testing them by openly favoring Binyamin).

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

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

Binyamin is the obvious choice for Yosef because he is 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 "nihuš," divination. He uses this very cup to to discover secret knowledge and see the future. The cup is valuable not because it is silver or because Yosef is sentimental about it, but because it is his divining-tool. Not only have the brothers stolen his cup, they have stolen his special "nihuš" cup! [Scholars point to the Ancient Near Eastern practice of using a cup to divine: the diviner would examine the configuration of drops of water, wine, or oil, and judge the future from them. Another practice was to put precious metal pieces into the cup and judge by their positions.] The divination cup adds one more piece to the picture they have of Yosef as possessing supernatural knowledge: he is a confidant of Hashem's, a diviner.

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

It is interesting that the brothers' suggestion for punishment -- death and enslavement -- parallels in some way the fate they had in mind for Yosef long ago: first they planned to kill him, then they decided to sell him into slavery. The brothers pronounce this sentence on themselves to show how sure they are of their innocence, but Yosef's servant, who knows of their guilt, knows that the sentence must be modified for Yosef's plan to unfold properly.

There is also an echo here of Ya'akov's death sentence on whoever among his camp has stolen Lavan's "terafim," his household gods. Lavan, we know, practices "nihush" (he says so himself); Yosef does as well. Yosef practices "nihush" with his chalice, which is what is stolen here; some mefarshim suggest that Lavan practiced "nihush" with his "terafim," which are stolen by Rahel. In both cases, the accused (Ya'akov, his sons) pronounce a death sentence on the thief (Rahel, Binyamin); in the first case, Rahel appears to suffer an early death as a result, so it is no shock that Yosef wants to avoid getting anywhere near repeating that tragic event -- after all, it was his own mother who was the casualty of Ya'akov's unwitting curse!

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

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

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

ADDED POINTS:

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom

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

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Adapted by Zvi Shimon

The following is an abridgement of articles written by Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, a teacher in the Herzog Teachers' College affiliated with Yeshivat Har Etzion, and Rabbi Yaakov Medan, a teacher in the yeshiva, which originally appeared in Hebrew in Megadim 1.

Ramban poses a difficult question, one which continues to puzzle whoever studies the book of Genesis:

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

Abarbanel poses the same question, but more bluntly:

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

1) RAV YOEL BIN-NUN'S SOLUTION:

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

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

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

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

To forget his father's house!

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

(“he remembers the dreams he dreamt about them”)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Therefore please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy

go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not see to the sorrow that would overcome my father! ...Joseph could no longer control himself (44:32- 45:1).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And they tore their clothesAnd 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.*

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

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

Was life in Egypt simply too good?

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

EVERYONE HAS A PLAN

As soon as Yaakov hears that Yosef is still alive, he immediately decides to go visit him:

"And Yisrael said... my son Yosef is still alive; I must go and see him before I die" (see 45:28).

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

Even though it is not quite clear what Yaakov's original intentions may have been, Yosef had already informed his brothers concerning the framework of his original 'invitation':

"... Quickly go up to my father and tell him, thus says your son Yosef: God has made me master over all of Egypt. Come down to me, do not stay [in Canaan], for you should dwell in the land of Goshen to be near me; you and your children...

And I will provide for you there, for ANOTHER FIVE YEARS OF FAMINE still remain, lest you PERISH, you and your entire household..." (45:9-11).

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

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

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

To better appreciate God's plan, let's take a careful look at the opening psukim of chapter 46:

"And Yisrael traveled with all that was his, and came to BEER SHEVA, and he offered 'ZEVACHIM' (sacrifices, peace offerings) to the God of his father YITZCHAK" (46:1).

When studying this pasuk, several questions arise:

- Why does Yaakov stop specifically at BEER SHEVA? In fact, we could ask, why does he stop at all?

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

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

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

Most probably, Yaakov is worried first and foremost because he is leaving Eretz Canaan. Recall that his father Yitzchak, even in times of famine, was not permitted to leave the land:

"And there was a famine in the Land... and God appeared to him (Yitzchak) and said to him: Do not go down to Egypt, stay in the Land that I show you..." (see 26:1-3).

In that very same 'hitgalut' to Yitzchak, God even explained the reason why he could not leave - because he was the 'chosen' son of Avraham Avinu:

"... reside in this Land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and your offspring I have given these Lands, and I will fulfill the OATH which I have sworn to Avraham..." (26:3-4).

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

Even though Yaakov himself had once received permission to leave Eretz Canaan (in Parshat Vayetze, see 28:10-20), his situation then was quite different, as he faced immediate, life-threatening danger (see 27:41-43). And even then, Yaakov still required divine reassurance that ALTHOUGH he was leaving Eretz Canaan, God would continue to look after him and BRING HIM BACK:

"And behold I will be with you and take care of you on your journey, and I WILL BRING YOU BACK TO THIS LAND..." (28:15). [Note that on that first journey from Eretz Canaan, Yaakov also left specifically from BEER SHEVA (see 28:10)!]

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

Unquestionably, Yaakov has what to worry about.

APPLYING FOR AN EXIT VISA

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

Now we must explain why Yaakov stops specifically at Beer Sheva. The commentators offer several explanations: * Rashbam (46:1) explains that Beer Sheva was the site of Yitzchak's place of prayer. [See 26:25, where Yitzchak builds a mizbeiach in Beer Sheva. Note also that God offers him reassurance at that site - see 26:24!]

* Ramban (46:1) adds to Rashbam's explanation that Yaakov chooses Beer Sheva to parallel his first excursion outside Eretz Canaan (from Beer Sheva to Charan /see 28:10).

* Radak considers Beer Sheva the 'official' southern border of Eretz Canaan, thus the appropriate place for Yaakov to 'apply for an exit visa'.

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

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

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

THE FIRST 'ZEVACH'

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

Significantly, this is the FIRST instance in Chumash where we find the offering of a 'zevach' to God. As Ramban (on 46:1) points out, until this time the children of Noach (and Avraham as well) offered only 'olot'.

[The technical difference between an 'olah' and 'zevach' is quite simple. In Sefer Vayikra we learn that an 'olah' is totally consumed on the mizbeich (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 mizbeich. Conceptually, its name - 'shlamim' implies a certain 'shleimut' - fullness or completeness, that this voluntary offering can express a feeling of 'completeness' in one's relationship with God. Although it is unclear if at this time Yaakov actually ate these 'zevachim', it is significant that the Torah refers to them with the term 'zevach'.]

There are three other seminal events in Chumash where specifically 'zevachim' are offered:

- 1) The KORBAN PESACH (at Yetziat Mitzrayim)
- 2) Brit NA'ASEH VE-NISHMA (at Ma'amad Har Sinai)
- 3) YOM ha-SHMINI (the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan).

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

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

2) At Ma'amad Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael offer special 'zevachim' as part of the ceremony where they accept the mitzvot: "Moshe wrote down God's commandments, and then, early in the morning, he set up a mizbeich... and they offered ZEVAHIM, 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 ZEVAH 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] ZEVAHIM?!

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 mizbeiach and calling out in God's Name. Yet, we never find 'zvachim'. Note that in 31:54, 'zevach' refers to a joint feast between Yaakov and Lavan, not a sacrifice to God.

B. HINEINI...

The final 'hitgalut' to Yaakov in Sefer Breishit begins as follows:
"Then God spoke to Yisrael in a vision by night saying: YAAKOV YAAKOV, and he answered "HINEINI" (here I am)... Fear not to go down to Egypt..." (see 46:2-3).

The unique style of God's opening statement to Yaakov creates a linguistic parallel pointing us both (A) backward - to the Akeida, and (B) forward - to the burning bush.

(A) "HINEINI" - BACK TO THE AKEIDA

God's response is reminiscent of His opening statement at the Akeida:

"... and God tested Avraham, and called out 'AVRAHAM,' and he answered, 'HINEINI.'" (see 22:1).

Besides symbolizing the ultimate devotion to God, the Akeida narrative also concludes with a Divine oath naming Yitzchak as heir to the earlier covenants and promises God had made with Avraham Avinu. This may explain why in God's reply to Yaakov's korbanot to the 'God of YITZCHAK,' He affirms the deeper purpose for Yaakov's descent to Egypt - the fulfillment of that earlier oath to Avraham Avinu.

(B) HINEINI - FORWARD TO THE BURNING BUSH

Just as we find a linguistic parallel to God's call to Avraham at the Akeida, we find a similar parallel to God's call to Moshe Rabeinu at the burning bush:

"... and God called him from the bush saying: 'MOSHE, MOSHE,' and he answered 'hineini.'" (Shmot 3:4).

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

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

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

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

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

C. The emotional confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef at the beginning of this week's Parsha is symbolic of future struggles between shevet Yehuda and shevet Yosef.

1. Note that in this week's parsha they fight over Binyamin. How do the 'nachalot' of the shvatim represent this struggle?
2. Relate this to the location of the Mikdash in the "nachala" of Binyamin, as well as to Yehoshua 18:11.
3. Relate this to the civil war waged against Binyamin, as described in chapter 20 of Sefer Shoftim.

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

Yosef's plan:

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

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

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

Yaakov's plan:

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

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

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

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

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

Yaakov's Fear

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

- a) Ever since Avraham's brit mila and akeidat Yitzchak, Avraham's descendants were guaranteed special "hashgacha elyona" (supreme Divine protection) only in Eretz Canaan. Yaakov thus feared the loss of this 'hashgacha' as he descended to Egypt.
- b) Yaakov also worried about maintaining his 'nevu'a' in Egypt. Hashem therefore guarantees him, "I will go down with you to Egypt...".

- c) The relationship between his family and the Egyptians also concerned Yaakov. He feared that the Egyptians would kill his descendants in an effort to keep their numbers low - which is precisely what happens in Parshat Shemot.
- d) As Rashi, the Akeidat Yitzchak and others commentators, Yaakov very much wanted to be buried in his family plot in Chevron.
- e) Surprisingly, the Abarbanel claims that Yaakov was also concerned about Yosef; if Yosef would die in his lifetime, Yaakov's immense joy would suddenly turn to anguish.
- f) Finally, Yaakov worried about his descendants' eventual return to Eretz Canaan. He feared that they may assimilate permanently within Egyptian society and remain there forever. The possibility that Yaakov feared his descendants' assimilation appears in several other sources, including the Akeidat Yitzchak and the Netziv's Ha-amek Davar.

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

The Stopover in Be'er Sheva:

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

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

The 'zevachim':

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

Our explanation, that this sacrifice marks the end of the 'bechira' process, may be what Reish Lakish meant in Bereishit Rabba 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.