

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

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Fast of Asarah B'Tevet is Tuesday, December 30

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

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

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of our living hostages and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

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While reading various Devrei Torah on Vayigash, My mind wanders to wonder how it must have been growing up in a household with four mothers, a dozen children (eleven boys) born during a period of at most fourteen years (and one a few years younger), and a father clearly favoring one son over the others. To add to the confusion, four of the sons come from two servant mothers and live as second class family members, and all of the children struggle for recognition and positive reinforcement from a father whose treatment of the children pits some of the sons against others. Given the family dynamics, I wonder why the fighting among the children is not worse than what comes through in the Torah.

As Miketz opens, Yoseph is nearly forty years old and has been running the Egyptian agricultural policy for nine years – seven years of plenty and the first two years of famine. Yaakov sends ten of his sons to search for Yosef and purchase food, but they find no sign of Yosef. On the sons' second trip to purchase food, they go again to the agricultural commissioner, this time without Shimon (already in prison in Egypt) but with Benjamin (as ordered). Yoseph, now a mature adult, looks nothing like the youth of seventeen who disappeared suddenly after Yehuda placed him into a pit.

An obvious question at this point is why Yehuda is the leader of his generation. Yaakov does not trust Reuven since the older son moved Yaakov's bed into Leah's tent (35:22). Reuven's attempts to recover his father's good graces backfire, so he loses his first-born position. Yaakov also does not trust Shimon or Levi after they trick and massacre the men of Shechem after the prince rapes their sister Dina. Yehuda, Leah's fourth born son, is the oldest of Yaakov's sons whom their father trusts. Yaakov treats Yosef, Rachel's first born son (although eleventh son in order of birth), as if he were first born (giving him double gifts, including a special coat designating his special status. Yaakov also gives him extra attention and teaches Yosef what he learned at the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. As Vayigash opens, Yehuda speaks for the family approaching the Egyptian agricultural commissioner (Yosef in disguise) to plea to release Binyamin.

Yehuda's words to the agricultural minister focus on his father's suffering for more than twenty years since his favorite son disappeared. Yehuda says that the brother the commissioner wants to keep as a slave is now their father's favorite and that he would not survive losing this special son, the only remaining son from father's favorite wife. Yehuda's words make Yosef realize that by hiding his identity, he has made his father suffer for several additional years. When Yehuda also begs to be the one to stay as the official's slave, so Binyamin could return home, Yosef realizes that the brothers have fulfilled the Rambam's conditions for complete teshuvah. He empties the room of everyone but the brothers and tells them who he is. Yosef explains that his ending up in Egypt is Hashem's plan and that God, not the brothers, brought Yosef to

Egypt – to save the family during the famine and to prepare the way for their pre-ordained period of exile before returning to take over the land that He had promised to their ancestors.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer contrasts the two leadership elements of Yehuda and Yosef. Yehuda, who had sinned by putting seventeen-year-old Yosef into a pit and had delayed providing a Levirate husband for Tamar to provide a son to carry on her husband's legacy, performs teshuva for both sins – and thereby shows true leadership qualities. Yehuda learns from his errors, and even Yaakov trusts his judgment and word. Yosef sees Hashem in his daily life. Yosef states that God protects him and sends him a message so he can handle challenges. With Yehuda's integrity and Yosef's deep religious faith, Yaakov's sons develop both political and religious leadership.

The Haftarah, which comes immediately after Yechezkel's prophecy of the dry bones coming to life, predicts that the two trees of Judaism (Yisrael and Yehuda) will be grafted together and become one. Even after apparent destruction, Yechezkel predicts a revival of Judaism. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings this message to our time. After the dry bones that came out of Auschwitz, we have the miracle of Israel. Rabbi Brander reminds us that endurance is insufficient. We must also work toward unity among fellow Jews. Jews from different backgrounds and different countries must regard each other as brothers. Religious and secular Jews must learn to appreciate each other and work together to make us stronger. All Israelis must share the burden of keeping Israel feel and safe. During the past two plus years, we have seen some progress in this direction. May all elements of our community work together and make Israel even more of a miracle than we have so far.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezi Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, 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.

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## **Haftarat Parshat Vayigash: Redemption through Unity**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \*

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Parshat Vayigash focuses on the reconciliation between Yosef and his brothers, orchestrated by Yehuda. The past two parshiyot have chronicled the deep rift within the family. But now, after betrayal, resentment and years of silence, Yehuda and Yosef each assume the necessary responsibility to bring about reunification. Yehuda acknowledges his role in selling Yosef into slavery. Yosef, instead of continuing to play cat and mouse with his brothers, tearfully reveals his identity to his brothers and inquires after their father's fate. This willingness of mutual acceptance of responsibility to restore broken relationships lies at the heart of this week's parsha and is a cornerstone of modern redemption itself.

The same theme is reflected in this week's haftara. Yechezkel's prophecy in chapter 37 describes how two trees, representing the divided biblical kingdoms of Yisrael and Yehuda, will one day be grafted together and become one. The connection to the parsha's call for unity is clear. However, many miss the interesting detail that this prophecy is immediately preceded by Yechezkel's famous vision of the dry bones, the haunting description of a vast army of bones miraculously restored, which we read as the haftara of Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach. That earlier vision is a powerful allegory of national resurrection after apparent destruction.

Paying attention to the juxtaposition of these two prophecies reveals the conceptual connection between them. National revival is not enough. If we are committed to realizing the promise of the Jewish people to be redeemed – as symbolized by the vision of the dry bones – we must also shoulder the responsibility of forging unity from fragmentation. Only by confronting our differences and working together can we move from survival to renewal, from scattered bones to a living, breathing Jewish people animated by spirit.

In our own lifetimes, and in those of our parents and grandparents, we have witnessed the resurrection of the dry bones. We have seen the ashes of Auschwitz giving rise to the miracle that is the State of Israel. Even in the past two years, through trauma, loss, and uncertainty, the Jewish people have survived. But **endurance is not the final goal. What must follow is a renewed sense of unity. The trees of Yehuda and Yosef must mutually accept responsibility, make sacrifices, and choose to come together.** ]emphasis added[

And so, as I read this haftara, I find myself asking difficult questions. Are we capable of this kind of unity? Can we truly achieve this goal of being one, despite our different perspectives and deep disagreements? Can I learn to live alongside my Haredi brothers and sisters, whom I feel have failed us by not fully sharing the collective burden by serving in the army, yet whom I still recognize as family? Can I find a common ground with Jews around the world who do not view the State of Israel with the same centrality that I do? **Redemption demands that I take responsibility for my relationships with my fellow Jews, even when that might require compromise or restraint.** ]emphasis added[

**The final stage of redemption is not just sovereignty or survival. It is a state of shared purpose and mutual acceptance. This is the vision of our haftara, as prefigured in our parsha.** If we are truly invested in achieving this vision, each of us must seek ways to reach across divides, to listen, to forgive, and to build our future together. We may come in a myriad of colors, but we are all threads in the same majestic tapestry. ]emphasis added[

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-vayigash-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

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## Vayigash: A Portrait of Emunah!

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2007

Then Yosef said to his brothers, *"Please come closer to me,"* and they drew closer. And he said, *"I am your brother Yosef whom you sold into Egypt. But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that G-d sent me before you. For already two years of famine I have passed in the midst of the land, and for another five years, there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And G-d sent me before you to make for you a remnant in the land, and to preserve you for a great deliverance."* )Breishis 45:4-7(

This brief monologue must certainly be one of the most remarkable records of personal greatness in the history of human interaction. Yosef addresses his brothers just moments after dramatically revealing his true identity. At the end of a long and lonely personal exile, 22 years isolated from family, in the face his *"oppressors,"* he invites them to draw close to quiet

their fears. How does someone come to such a level of acceptance and forgiveness to actually embrace those who had damaged him the most?!

The Talmud in Makos, of all places, synthesizes and identifies a single phrase by the Prophet Habakuk, as the essence of Torah, *“Tzadik B’Emunaso Yichya – A Tzadik lives by his Emunah-Faith!”* Yosef, who uniquely bears the title Yosef HaTzadik, certainly is the exemplar of this potent notion. What does it mean, though? Does it mean that a Tzadik blindly adheres to beliefs?

The word *Emunah* means to *“raise”* or *“to shape,”* like a craftsman is called an *“uman.”* It loses a lot in the translation to mere *“belief”* or *“faith.”* It expresses a dutiful loyalty, a conscious shaping of the heart to remain true to a determined set of true principles and ideals. The Tzadik is not thrown off his game by short term or long term setbacks and disappointments. He is disciplined, inwardly and outwardly, to remain true and devoted even when the forces of life so brutally and so seductively try to dissuade him other- wise. If he remains so, then he is a Tzadik.

He anticipates the good long in advance of its arrival. That longing for the dawn allows him to endure any darkness and even see good where others may justify surrender. That’s Emunah in motion!

It’s hard to tell this story because it’s real, too real. One of my good friends was shocked and terribly distraught when he heard of his older brother Avrumi’s horrific car accident in Israel a number of years ago. Avrumi was driving someone to the airport in his minivan when a driver in the oncoming direction decided to pass a truck. He glanced off of a police car, spun out of control and struck Avrumi’s van. Boruch HASHEM Avrumi survived but tragically he broke almost every bone in his face and lost both of his legs. He was in the hospital under sedation for a long time. The painful new reality that dawned on him upon awakening was probably the hardest thing to face.

Months after the accident Avrumi, was allowed to leave the hospital temporarily. To ease the pressure of preparation, arrangements were made for him and his family to go to a hotel for Pesach. He realized that the location of the hotel was in the same city where the driver, a secular Israeli, who had precipitated the accident, happened to live. Once there, he phoned the fellow whose driving indiscretion had caused the whole calamity. He told him that he would like to meet him and that he shouldn’t be nervous about it because he had no malice against him. Remarkably he showed up.

There standing before him was a man with a yarmulke and sporting a beard. Avrumi had expected to see a typical secular Israeli. The young fellow told him that because of all the problems the accident has caused he started to think a great deal and that eventually caused him to become a Baal Teshuva! Avrumi asked him to come close. He hugged him and he told him with a full heart, with both now crying, *“It was worth it that I lost my legs so that you should become a Torah Jew.”* Is that not **a portrait of Emunah!**

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5775-vayigash/>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These issues are of particular moment when tragedies and atrocities occur in the world. Many people may ask where is God in all of this? How can God allow such a tragedy to take place? These are legitimate questions, and they have a

place. But to overly focus on the question of Divine justice, is being religious at the expense of our obligation to do something about it. **Rav Soloveitchik, zt”l, has said that the reason that Judaism does not overly focus on the question of theodicy, is because to come up with answers as to why God allows bad things to happen to good people is to make our peace with suffering and injustice. As responsible Jews, as responsible human beings, our mandate is always to be sensitive to the suffering of others and do all that is in our power to give succor and to prevent such suffering and tragedies from ever happening again.**

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

“Sometimes I would like to ask God why He allows poverty, suffering, and injustice when He could do something about it.”

“Well, why don’t you ask Him?”

“Because I’m afraid He would ask me the same question.”

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

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

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## Overcoming Jealousy: Thoughts for Parashat Vayiggash

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

*“Now therefore when I come to your servant my father and the lad is not with us...but his soul is bound up with the lad’s soul”* )Bereishith 34: 30(.

Judah made an impassioned plea for the release of Benjamin. Joseph was so moved that he revealed his true identity to his brothers: he was an Egyptian official but also their brother.

The surface reading of the text implies that Joseph was particularly touched by the sorrow that his father would suffer if Benjamin did not return home. But perhaps Joseph had another thought. The reason Joseph had originally been betrayed by his brothers stemmed from their jealousy. They resented that he was overtly favored by their father. However, **Judah’s plea made a remarkable admission: Jacob obviously showed favoritism to Benjamin, their souls were bound together.** Jacob would not have been equally distressed if any of the other brothers remained as prisoners. ]emphasis added[

Joseph would have noticed: the brothers know of Jacob’s favoritism to Benjamin but don’t seem to resent it. On the contrary, they are ready to stand up on Benjamin’s behalf. Joseph wondered: were the brothers cured of the malady of jealousy? It seemed so, but how could he be sure?

On sending them back to Canaan, Joseph gave each of his brothers a gift of clothing: but to Benjamin he gave five gifts of clothing! *“So he sent his brothers away and they departed; and he said to them, do not quarrel on the way home”* )Bereishith 45:24(. Joseph wanted to determine if the brothers would squawk about the favoritism shown to Benjamin. Apparently they did not. There is no mention in the Torah of any animus against Benjamin due to his favored status.

Joseph then knew for sure: the brothers had overcome the trait of jealousy. The family now truly could be re-united in a spirit of harmony.

How did the brothers overcome their feelings of jealousy? We can speculate that they came to realize that jealousy was a destructive trait; it caused them grief; it dragged down their lives with guilt and feelings of discontent. **They finally understood that they needed to live their own lives as best as possible without concern whether others had more than they did. They realized that life doesn't have to be lived as a competition.** ]emphasis added[

When the brothers overcame jealousy in relation to Benjamin, they also overcame it in relation to Joseph. It no longer mattered to them if Joseph was more powerful or more beloved. What mattered was doing their best to live up to their own potentials.

**When people overcome jealousy, they can be rid of a life-sapping burden. They can be free.** ]emphasis added[

\* <https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3396>

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### **Bridges, Not Walls: A Collection of Articles \***

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

[Ed.: selected portion from a longer essay]

Some years ago, I visited a great Torah luminary in Israel, Rabbi Haim David Halevy. He had given a shiur )Torah lecture( for rabbis and rabbinical judges in which he suggested introducing civil marriage in the State of Israel. He offered cogent arguments in support of this view, and many of those present actually thanked him for having the courage to put this issue on the rabbinic agenda. His suggestion, though, was vehemently opposed by the rabbinic establishment, and he was sharply criticized in the media. Efforts were made to isolate him and limit his influence as much as possible. Students of the rabbi were told not to attend his classes any longer. This rabbi lamented to me: "Have you heard of the mafia? Well, we have a rabbinic mafia here." This, of course, is an indictment of the greatest seriousness. It is not an issue of whether or not one favors civil marriage. The issue is whether a rabbinic scholar has the right and responsibility to explore and discuss unpopular ideas. If his suggestions are valid, they should be accepted. If they are incorrect, they should be refuted. But to apply crude pressure to silence open discussion is dangerous, and inimical to the best interests of the Torah community.

Similar cases abound where pressure has been brought to bear on rabbis and scholars who espouse views not in conformity with the prevailing opinions of an inner circle of Orthodox rabbinic leaders. As one example of this phenomenon, a certain rabbi permitted women to study Talmud in his class at his synagogue. One of the women in his congregation consulted a Rosh Yeshiva who promptly branded the synagogue rabbi as a heretic )apikores( for having allowed women to study Talmud. The Rosh Yeshiva told the woman she was not permitted to pray in the synagogue as long as that rabbi was there. When the synagogue rabbi was informed of this, he wrote a respectful letter to the Rosh Yeshiva and explained the halakhic basis for women studying Talmud. The Rosh Yeshiva refused to answer, and told the woman congregant that he would not enter into a correspondence with a heretic. The woman stopped attending the rabbi's synagogue.



Is this the way of Torah, whose ways are the ways of pleasantness? Does this kind of behavior shed honor on Orthodoxy? Shouldn't learned people be able to speak with each other, argue a point of halakha, disagree with each other? Shouldn't the Torah world be able to deal with controversy without engaging in name-calling and delegitimation?

Over the years, I have been involved in the planning of a number of rabbinic conferences and conventions. Invariably questions are raised concerning who will be invited to speak. Some say: If Rabbi so-and-so is put on the program, then certain other rabbis and speakers will refuse to participate. Some say: If such-and-such a group is among the sponsors of the conference, the other groups will boycott the event. What is happening in such instances is a subtle — and not so subtle — process of coercion. Decisions are being made as to which Orthodox individuals and groups are “acceptable” and which are not.

This process is insidious and is unhealthy for Orthodoxy. It deprives us of meaningful discussion and debate. It intimidates people from taking independent or original positions for fear of being ostracized or isolated. Many times I have heard intelligent people say: I believe thus-and-so but I can't say so openly for fear of being attacked by the “right.” I support such-and-such proposal, but can't put my name in public support for fear of being reviled or discredited by this group or that group.

We must face this problem squarely and candidly: The narrowing of horizons is a reality within contemporary Orthodoxy. The fear to dissent from “acceptable” positions is palpable. But if individuals are not allowed to think independently, if they may not ask questions and raise alternatives — then we as a community suffer a loss of vitality and dynamism. Fear and timidity become our hallmark.

This situation contrasts with the way a vibrant Torah community should function. Rabbi Yehiel Mikhel Epstein, in the introduction to “Hoshen Misphat” of his *Arukh haShulhan*, notes that difference of opinion among our sages constitutes the glory of Torah. *“The entire Torah is called a song )shira(, and the glory of a song is when the voices differ one from the other. This is the essence of its pleasantness.”*

Debates and disagreements have long been an accepted and valued part of the Jewish tradition. The Rama )see *Shulhan Arukh*, Y.D. 242:2,3( notes that it is even permissible for a student to dissent from his rabbi's ruling if he has proofs and arguments to uphold his opinion. Rabbi Hayyim Palachi, the great halakhic authority of nineteenth-century Izmir, wrote that the Torah gave permission to each person to express his opinion according to his understanding. . . . It is not good for a sage to withhold his words out of deference to the sages who preceded him if he finds in their words a clear contradiction. . . . A sage who wishes to write his proofs against the kings and giants of Torah should not withhold his words nor suppress his prophecy, but should give his analysis as he has been guided by Heaven. )Hikekei Lev, O.H. 6; and Y.D. 42(

The great twentieth-century sage, Rabbi Haim David Halevi, ruled: Not only does a judge have the right to rule against his rabbis; he also has an obligation to do so ]if he believes their decision to be incorrect and he has strong proofs to support his own position[. If the decision of those greater than he does not seem right to him, and he is not comfortable following it, and yet he follows that decision ]in deference to their authority[, then it is almost certain that he has rendered a false judgment. )*Aseh Lekha Rav*, 2:61(

\* The complete article appears in issue 20 of *Conversations*. These articles, which span more than 30 years, offer reflections on aspects of the theme, **“Bridges, Not Walls.”** They relate to issues of intellectual openness; interpersonal relationships; and human dignity. Ed: I have selected a sample and urge the reader to read the entire essay.

\*\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. This article by Rabbi Marc D. Angel was first published in the *Jewish Journal* of Los Angeles, December 9, 2025.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/bridges-not-walls-collection-articles>

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**Vayigash: HOPE**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

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

Our father Yakov had fallen into a depression. His beloved son, Yosef, was missing for over two decades. When the brothers finally discovered Yosef, they wanted to report the good news to their father. But the brothers feared that the shock of the good news would be too much for Yakov to bear. After considering the matter thoroughly, they hit upon a solution.

Serach, Yakov's granddaughter, was instructed to enter Yakov's room and play beautiful music on a harp. As she played she was to add the lyrics "*Yosef is alive.*" The strategy proved successful. By the time the brothers shared the good news with their father, he was ready for it and was able to believe it. What was it about Serach's song that effectively bridged Yakov out of his depression?

Picture in your mind the scene as Serach entered her grandfather's room to play music on her harp. Surely, at first, Yakov appreciated the kind gesture of his granddaughter's visit. But then she began to add lyrics to the music. Gently at first, then gaining confidence in her new song. "*Yosef is alive... Yosef is alive.*" Suddenly Yakov becomes agitated. "*Why are you torturing me?*" he might have asked. "*Why are you mentioning the enormous pain that I have from losing my son?*"

I imagine that Serach might have looked up with empathy, and answered, "*Grandfather Yakov, it is just a song. It is a hope, a dream, a yearning. It is a song that we should sing, you and I, together: 'Yosef is still alive... Yosef is alive.' You need only entertain the possibility that maybe Yosef is still alive.*"

Hesitatingly, Yakov becomes engaged in his granddaughter's song of hope. Her youthful perspective catches him like no comfort before was able to. "*Maybe Yosef is still alive,*" Yakov hums gently. Serach was able to lure her grandfather into considering the possibility of success. He begins to entertain the musical possibility of discovering Yosef alive and well. In his new frame of mind, the brothers were able to share the good news with him.

Often in life we confront obstacles. Like Yakov, the challenges placed before us can be heavy. But if we can sing of the possibility of success as Serach did, then success becomes possible.

In times of challenge there are certain words and attitudes that can carry us through. "*Hope*" is such a word. "*Maybe*" is another. Even when things are difficult in a situation or relationship, these words leave us open to resolution. In fact, there is a technique called visioning in which we ask curiously: What could resolution look like? This enables us to gently work towards and be open to a solution.

Serach's harp teaches us how we can guide others and ourselves in a positive way. Serach's harp was able to open Yakov's vista to the possibility of a brighter future. It may be that it is *"only a song."* But by singing the song of hope and optimism, we enhance our lives and the lives of those around us.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

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

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### It's Not My Fight

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2021

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

The Medrash adds another layer to the exchange between Yosef and Yehuda based on a passuk in Tehillim, "The kings gathered they passed *avru* (together)" Tehillim 48:5. The Hebrew word "*avru*" can also mean they angered. The Medrash explains that the Kings are Yehuda and Yosef, and they angered at each other. Yehuda screamed in rage at Yosef and his screams shook all of Egypt and were heard in the land of Canaan. Yosef responded by kicking the pillar of marble he was sitting on, and it crumbled in a pile of stones. The chapter in Tehillim continues and says "trembling gripped them" Tehillim 48:7. The Medrash explains that this refers to the reaction of the other brothers. When the other brothers saw this display of anger between Yehuda and Yosef, they stepped back and said "Kings are fighting one with another, as for us, what does it matter to us? It is fitting for a king to fight a king." The other brothers saw these two kings, Yehuda and Yosef, and felt it would be inappropriate to intercede between two kings. They, therefore, said nothing. This is why the parsha begins, "And Yehuda approached." His brothers had stepped back. )Beriehsis Rabbah 93:2(

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

The Eitz Yosef explains that this Medrash is teaching us a valuable tactic in handling ourselves in challenging situations. The brothers recognized the intensity of the moment and indeed were moved to jump to Yehuda's side. However, they realized that it was not necessary and not appropriate for them to step in yet. Yehuda and Yosef had not actually begun fighting, and they should still wait and let the kings lead. Yet, it was extremely difficult for them to hold themselves back. They therefore stopped and said to each other, "The kings are fighting. It is not our place to step in now. As for us, if it is

not our place, then what does it matter to us how this is handled? It is not our job and it is not our place. It is G-d's world, and he wants us to step back." With this attitude, they were able to hold themselves back and wait until it would be appropriate to step in.

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

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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## **Torn Between Father and God**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

That question is: did my father ever forgive me?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school).

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

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### **A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community**

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz \*

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation \*\*

We are deeply saddened by the horrific events at the Bondi Beach Chanukah celebration and our thoughts are with all *those impacted*. *We extend heartfelt condolences to their bereaved families and to all those injured. Their memory shall remain a blessing and a source of enduring strength to our people.*

We are facing a dramatic and seemingly irreversible standoff: Yosef and his brothers locked in a conflict that appears to be heading toward death. Without going into the full depth here )I'll do that on Shabbat(, this leads us to this week's Shabbat table discussion:

With the renewed ri antisemitism se of- once again and as we have just endured years of a multi-front war and constant threats from countless directions, we are forced to reflect. Throughout our history we have faced Holocausts, pogroms, inquisitions, blood libels, expulsions, exiles, and countless other events that had the potential to end us as a nation.

And yet, we are still here.

This raises a profound question: Were we ever truly in danger of being completely erased as a people? Don't miss the answer to the secret of Jewish survival.

Shabbat Shalom and Chanukah Sameach B'Ahavat Yisrael.

\* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

]Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

**Bridging the Generations: The Holocaust and Its Legacy:** The Holocaust Centre of New Zealand is hosting the annual International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration on January 25, 2026, in Auckland. Created in 2005 by the United Nations, 27 January -the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau - is International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which honours and remembers the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. This year's commemoration is dedicated to strengthening the crucial link between the past and the future, empowering younger generations to carry the torch of remembrance and responsibility.

**B'Nai Akiva:** AHC has an active chapter of B'Nai Akiva and is looking for a venue for this year for its 20 active members.

\*\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

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## Rav Kook Torah VaYigash: The Hazards of Leadership

### Joseph Dies First

The text implies that Joseph was the first of Jacob's twelve sons to die:

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

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

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

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

### **Joseph's Mistake**

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

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

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

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

### **The King's Sefer Torah**

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

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

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

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. II on Berachot IX: 25.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYIGASH-71.htm>



## **Vayigash: The Great Experiment (5771, 5774)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi\*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eventually the food runs out and they have to return. It takes much persuasion on the part of Judah to convince Jacob to let Benjamin come with. This time, Joseph greets them with warmth, inviting them to eat with him. Eventually, having provided them with fresh supplies of grain, he sends them on their way. Now, however, he does more than place money in their sacks. He has his favourite divination cup placed in Benjamin's grain.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why Benjamin? Because he, like Joseph, is a son of Rachel – and therefore envied and despised by the other brothers. There is, of course, one difference. The brothers’ resentment of Joseph was heightened by the jealousy they felt at the sight of the many-coloured robe Jacob had given him. How can he put them into a similar situation now? How can he provoke them into being jealous of Benjamin? This is what he does: when he sits the brothers down for a meal he

arranges that they be seated in order of age )Benjamin is the youngest( and then that *“Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s”* )43:34(. There is only one explanation for this strange detail. Joseph is trying to make them jealous of their youngest brother.

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

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

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

**Not dreams, not revenge, but teshuvah is what has driven Joseph all along.** His brothers once sold him as a slave. He survived – more than survived, he has prospered. He knows )he says so constantly( that everything that has happened to him is somehow part of God’s plan. His concern is not for himself but for his brothers. Have they survived? Do they realise the depth of the crime they committed? Are they capable of remorse? Can they change? The entire sequence of events between the brothers’ first arrival in Egypt and the moment Joseph tells them who he is, is an extended essay in teshuvah, a precise rehearsal of what will later become normative Jewish law. ]emphass added[

Why now? Because – unbeknown to any of the participants – the family of Abraham is about to undergo exile in Egypt, prior to their becoming a nation under the sovereignty of God. That will place more demands on Israel than on any other people in history. God knows that they will often fail – they will sin, complain, worship idols, break His laws. That He accepts, though at times it gives Him great grief. **God does not demand perfection. By giving us freewill He empowers us to make mistakes. All He asks is that we acknowledge our mistakes and commit ourselves not to make them again – in a word, that we are capable of teshuvah.** Judah showed they were. Jewish history, starting with exile and exodus in Egypt, could now begin. ]emphasis added[

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayigash/the-great-experiment/> Footnotes have not been preserved for this Dvar Torah. Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar.

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## Who Were the Daughters of Jacob?

By Mordechai Rubin \* © Chabad

When we read about the children born to Jacob, we are told of 12 sons and a lone daughter, Dinah.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the Torah’s account of Jacob’s family settling in Egypt, we find an interesting verse:

]Jacob’s[ sons and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters and his sons’ daughters and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

But we are not told who these other daughters are. So what does the verse intend here? Did Jacob have more than one daughter?

### 1. Each Son was Born With a Twin

The key is found in another verse where the daughters are mentioned, this one after Jacob learns of Joseph's disappearance:

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to console him, but he refused to be consoled.<sup>3</sup>

Who are these daughters?

Rashi cites the Midrash,<sup>4</sup> which quotes Rabbi Judah, who teaches that each of Jacob's sons was born with a twin sister. The brothers then married these half-sisters (i.e. they each married the twin of one of their brothers from a different mother).<sup>5</sup> Rashi provides this possible explanation for the daughters who consoled Jacob, but he does not apply the same interpretation to the later verse describing Jacob's family entering Egypt. This is because — as Rashi himself notes — these daughters are not listed there, leading him to conclude that according to that interpretation, they must have died before this time.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, according to Rashi, the verse describing the daughters that entered the land of Egypt cannot refer to these twin sisters, so to whom does it refer?

### 2. It Refers to his Daughter and Daughters-in-Law

Rashi cites another explanation from the Midrash, in the name of Rabbi Nehemiah, which interprets the term "daughters" to refer to Jacob's daughters-in-law: *"A person does not hesitate to call his son-in-law his 'son' and his daughter-in-law his 'daughter'."*<sup>7</sup>

Radak understands the verse in the same way.<sup>8</sup>

This interpretation works for both instances where the verse references Jacob's daughters.

The Rebbe extensively analyzes why Rashi in Genesis 37 cites both these explanations, pointing out the shortcomings of each. Regarding the first explanation, that each son was born with a twin, Rashi felt that since we adopt the approach that our forefathers observed the mitzvahs, it is problematic to explain that the sons of Jacob married their half-sisters, which is clearly forbidden.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the phrase "and all his daughters" seems particularly inclusive, perhaps hinting to others who were like daughters, namely his daughters-in-law.

But Rashi is also not completely satisfied with the second explanation, that it refers to Jacob's daughters-in-law, as this is a departure from the plain reading of the verse.

Ultimately the Rebbe determines that this approach is too simplistic and does not fully illustrate Rashi's reasoning. He goes on to develop a complex explanation based on multiple textual nuances to explain why Rashi cites both interpretations.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. It's a Language Thing

Leaving the above discussion aside, we find an interesting marginal note in the authoritative "Leipzig 1" manuscript of Rashi. This manuscript dates to the 13th century, after Rashi's passing, and was written by Rabbi Machir the son of Karshavyah. It was copied from a text that was transcribed and annotated by Rashi's student and scribe, Rabbi

Shemayah. It includes Rashi's commentary and marginal glosses, many of which Rabbi Shemayah attributes directly to Rashi.<sup>11</sup> The relevant note, which the author of the manuscript attributes to Rashi, reads as follows:

*Whoever was "his daughters," this refers to Dinah, who was the only daughter he had — similar to the expression "and the sons of Dan, Hushim,"<sup>12</sup> where "all the sons of Dan" are referred to, but he [Dan] had only Hushim alone."<sup>13</sup>*

According to this understanding, the verse uses a plural form even though, in truth, he only had one daughter. This is similar to other instances where the plural form is used to assist the flow of the verse.

This seems to be the opinion of the majority of the commentators.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. It Refers to his Daughter and Granddaughter**

Some suggest that the plural reference to daughters is a reference to Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and his granddaughter — Yocheved the daughter of Levi.<sup>15</sup>

#### **5. His Daughters-in-law and Granddaughters**

The Bechor Shor suggests that the plural form refers to his daughters-in-law and granddaughters, since he did not have multiple daughters.<sup>16</sup> Rabbi Abraham, the son of Maimonides, proposes that these granddaughters may have passed away before the family's descent into Egypt, as they are notably absent from the listings, unlike the daughters-in-law who are specifically mentioned.<sup>17</sup> )This explanation only works for the daughters who comforted Jacob mentioned earlier in Genesis but not for the daughters who are mentioned as settling in Egypt.(

#### **6. Dinah's Maidservants**

Ibn Ezra suggests a unique explanation:

It is possible that Dinah had young maidservants who grew up with her, and on account of his daughter, the Torah refers to them as "*the daughters of Jacob*," since they were raised in his household.<sup>18</sup>

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Genesis 30:21.
2. Genesis 46:7.
3. Genesis 37:35.
4. Midrash Rabbah 84:21.
5. Rashi, Genesis 37:35.
6. Rashi, Genesis 46:26
7. Rashi Genesis 37:35.
8. Radak Genesis 46:7.

9. Leviticus 18:9.
10. Likkutei Sichot, vol 5 p 261.
11. See Background to MS Leipzig 1on Al Hatorah.
12. Genesis 46:23.
13. Rashi Leipzig 1 Genesis 46:7.
14. See Nachmanides, Chizkuni, Rabbeinu Bachye, Midrash HaGadol, Rabbi Abraham Maimonides, Bechor Shor, and others.
15. Daas Zekenim ibid.
16. Bechor Shor Genesis 37:35.
17. Rabbi Abraham Maimonides ibid.
18. Ibn Ezra Genesis 46:7..

\* Content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/6721264/jewish/Who-Were-the-Daughters-of-Jacob.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6721264/jewish/Who-Were-the-Daughters-of-Jacob.htm)

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## **Vayigash: Creativity and Selflessness**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky \*

*Judah then approached him and said, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ear, and do not become angry at your servant, for you are the equal of Pharaoh." )Gen. 44:18(*

The spiritual conflict between Joseph and Judah centered around the approach that would most effectively serve the cause of disseminating Divine consciousness. Joseph favored engaging the world proactively, utilizing its institutions, culture, technology, and emotional energy for holy purposes. His brothers, led by Judah, preferred to shun the world and its attendant enticements and pitfalls, opting instead to devote themselves to the ongoing task of augmenting their own holiness, thereby inspiring the rest of the world to eventually join them and emulate them.

There is a place for both approaches, and the reunion between Joseph and Judah described in this parsha allegorically teaches us that we must maintain the proper balance between creative engagement with the world and withdrawal from the world in order to focus on self-refinement.

\* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* #3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

\* — from *Daily Wisdom* #3

Gut Shabbos,



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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Shabbat Parashat Vayigash

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Three Steps for Mankind

In his introduction to the Rabbinical Council of America's version of the ArtScroll Siddur, Rabbi Saul Berman has a lovely essay on the opening word of today's Parsha, vayigash, "And he drew close." Because the work is not widely available outside America, I summarise the essay here.

It is our custom to take three steps forward before beginning the Amidah, the "standing prayer." These steps symbolise a formal approach to the Divine presence. It is as if we had been ushered into the innermost chamber of the palace, and we "draw close" to present our petition to the supreme King of kings.

R. Eleazar ben Judah (c.1165-c.1230), author of the Sefer Rokeach, made the fascinating suggestion that these three steps correspond to the three times in the Hebrew Bible where the word vayigash, "and he drew close," is used in connection with prayer.

The first is the moment when Abraham hears of God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gemorah and the cities of the plain.

"Abraham approached [vayigash] and said: Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked? . . . Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" Gen. 18:23-25

The second occurs in today's Parsha. Joseph's silver goblet has been found in Benjamin's sack, just as he intended. Joseph – whose true identity is still unknown to the brothers – says that Benjamin will now be held as his slave. The others may go free. Judah, having given Jacob his personal guarantee of Benjamin's safe return, now pleads for his brother's release.

"Then Judah drew close [vayigash] to him and said: Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord." Gen. 44:18

The third appears in the great confrontation at Mount Carmel between the Prophet Elijah and the 450 false prophets of Baal. Elijah proposes a test. Let each side prepare a sacrifice and call

on the name of their deity. The one that sends fire is the true God. The 450 prophets do so. They prepare the sacrifice and ask Baal to send fire. Nothing happens. They cry all day, shouting, gyrating, lacerating themselves and working themselves into a frenzy but no fire comes. Then "Elijah stepped forward [vayigash] and prayed: O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and have done all these things at Your command." Fire descends, and the people fall to the ground, saying: "The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God" (I Kings 18). We recite this sentence seven times at the climax of Neilah on Yom Kippur.

Three approaches, three prayers, but very different from one another. Abraham prays for justice. Judah prays for mercy. Elijah prays for God to reveal Himself.

Abraham prays on behalf of strangers – the people of the plain. They are, we know, wicked. The Torah told us this long before, when Lot first separated from Abraham to make his home in Sodom (Gen. 13:13). Yet Abraham is concerned with their fate. He pleads in their defence. Abraham speaks out of the covenant of human solidarity.

Judah pleads with Joseph for the sake of his brother Benjamin and his father Jacob who he knows will not be able to bear the loss of yet another beloved son. He speaks on behalf of the family and its integrity, the bonds of emotion that bind those who share a common ancestry.

Elijah speaks to God, as it were, for the sake of God. He wants the people to renounce idolatry and return to their ancestral faith – to the one true God who rescued them from Egypt and took them to Himself in love. His primary concern is for God's sovereignty over the people. Later, when God reveals Himself on Mount Horeb, Elijah says, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." He speaks for the honour of God Himself.

Their respective stances, too, are different. Abraham, in the course of his prayer, calls himself "nothing but dust and ashes." Judah describes himself as a "servant" in the presence of a ruler. Elijah describes himself as a prophet, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left." Abraham represents our sense

of awe in the presence of infinity, Judah our humility in the face of majesty, Elijah the grandeur and dignity of those who are bearers of the Divine word.

There are echoes of these encounters in the first three paragraphs of the Amidah. The first is about the patriarchs. God "remembers the good deeds of the fathers." This reminds us of Abraham's prayer.

The second is about Gevurah, God's governance of the universe, "supporting the fallen, healing the sick, setting free the bound and keeping faith with those who lie in the dust." When we recite it, we are like Judah standing before Joseph, a servant or subject in the presence of sovereignty and power.

The third is about Kedushat Hashem, "the holiness of God's name," meaning the acknowledgement of God by human beings. When an act makes people conscious of God's existence, we call it a Kiddush Hashem. That is precisely what Elijah sought to do, and succeeded in doing, on Mount Carmel.

These three prayers – each an historic moment in the unfolding of the human spirit towards God – together represent the full spectrum of emotions and concerns we bring to the act of prayer. Each is introduced by the word vayigash, "and he approached, drew close, stepped forward." As we take three steps forward at the start of each prayer, we are thereby retracing the footsteps of three giants of the spirit, Abraham, Judah, and Elijah, re-enacting their great encounters with God.

On 21 July 1969 Neil Armstrong, the first human being to set foot on the moon, uttered the famous words: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Our three small steps towards heaven represent three no less historic leaps for mankind.

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## Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

### The True Art of Negotiation

"You are to be acknowledged master by your brothers; the sceptre of rulership shall never depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet...unto him shall be the gathering of the nations." (Genesis 49:8, 10)

Who is really the most important of the brothers, Joseph or Judah? At the outset of the Joseph stories, it is clear that at least Jacob and Joseph believe that it is Joseph. After all, Joseph is the one who receives the coat of many colors from his father – a clear symbol of the birthright – and Joseph is the one who dreams that all the brothers, and indeed all the cosmos – will bow down to him. Yet, by the end of the sequence, at least Jacob has changed his mind. Judah is granted the birthright and not Joseph. Joseph seemingly accepts the situation. What happened and why?

The dramatic change in Judah is clearly delineated in the Bible. We first meet him in depth as a clever salesman, driven more by profit motive than sibling sensitivity when he cleverly suggests selling Joseph as a slave to a caravan of Midianite traders passing in the distance rather than leaving their hapless brother in the pit, waiting for the scorpions to unleash their poison. True, Judah thereby saved his brother from certain death (at least by starvation, if the pit was empty), yet we cannot overlook the fact that the brother who actually initiates Joseph's sale into slavery is none other than Judah. Perhaps Judah should have tried harder to rescue Joseph completely! And from the moment he is sold, Joseph's fate appears likely to be sealed; the likelihood of any of the brothers ever seeing him again is virtually nonexistent. Because of Judah, Joseph the dreamer is as good as dead, certainly to his aged father. More than two decades later, Judah makes a selfless plea to the

Grand Vizier (Joseph) that instead of imprisoning Benjamin as a slave in Egypt because the missing silver goblet was found in his food sack, he – Judah – will stand as a substitute. This reveals a total turnaround in the character of Judah. He emerges as the classic penitent, since true penitence involves correcting one's sin at its core; if in the past he was instrumental in turning Joseph into a slave, then the only possible restoration is for Judah to now make himself a slave instead of Benjamin. The nobility of spirit demonstrated by Judah's willing sacrifice of his own life – a spiritual descendant of Isaac on the Akeda – is enough to thrust him into a position of leadership, to cause Jacob to declare concerning Judah: "from the 'torn' [Joseph], you have arisen..." (Gen. 49:9\_.

But Joseph also changes, and his change involves a newfound humility which enables him to recognize Judah's superiority. But this change is more subtle, and requires our reading between the lines of the text. Joseph first appears as an arrogant youth, his dreams testifying to an exalted sense of self. He sees himself as king over his brothers, their sheaves of wheat bowing down to his, the sun, the moon and the planets all genuflecting before him. And as long as he dreamt dreams of agriculture in Egypt, universal power and domination, far removed from the family shepherding in the land of Israel, Joseph understood that he had constructed an internal grammar alien to his family, a language his brothers and ancestors didn't speak. Joseph seemed a mutation, an alien revolutionary independent of the family traditions. He was apparently gifted, but he dare not be accepted by his brothers. They were not ready to take him for what he was, a man of many colors, of manifold visions and cosmopolitan dreams. And so when his brothers sold him into slavery, they dealt with him more as a stranger than as a brother, an outsider having more in common with Esau than with Jacob. And Joseph accepted his brothers' judgement. He was truly different, a seeker after the novel and dynamic Egyptian occupation of agriculture, a citizen of the world, rather than a lover of Zion. When in Egypt, he easily accepts the Egyptian tongue, answers to an Egyptian name (Tzafanat-Pane'ach), and wears Egyptian garb. He has graduated from the family; not only are they not interested in him, he is not really interested in them!

It is only in the Torah portion of Vayigash that Joseph pulls away the mask and stands revealed before his brothers and sends for his aged father. But to understand why it takes place right now, we first have to understand why our portion Vayigash begins in the midst of one of the most tension-filled encounters in the entire Torah. Is the Torah merely interested in the dramatic effect, presenting the life and death struggle of Benjamin as a cliff-hanger, keeping us in suspense by ending the preceding portion right when it seems that there is no hope left for the wrongly accused Benjamin, whose sack of food turned out to be the hiding place of the Grand Vizier's missing silver goblet?

Judah's defense speech keeps returning to the theme of an old father waiting at home for his youngest son. The word 'father' appears thirteen times (Jacob is a father to thirteen children), an extraordinary emphasis if directed to a stranger with no knowledge of the family. Would it not have been more logical for Judah to have based his defense on the circumstantial nature of the evidence against Benjamin? Indeed, since their payment for all food purchases keeps turning up in each of the

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brothers' sacks, there is a clear indication that a foreign hand has taken the freedom to open their bags. Once a strange hand is moving about freely within the brothers' property, that same hand could have easily planted the evidence in Benjamin's sack. But instead of this defense, Judah sticks to one tale, the story of their family and the sufferings of their aged father. If Benjamin is a thief, why should the age or mental condition of Benjamin's father matter to the Egyptian Grand Vizier? A thief must be punished; Benjamin should have been concerned for his aged father and not have perpetrated a crime against the Grand Vizier.

Why should one expect the Grand Vizier to be concerned about the thief's ancient father?

Admittedly, the situation is extremely tense. After having nearly brought their father to his death with their sale of Joseph, the brothers dare not now contemplate returning home to Israel bereft of Rachel's second son. Judah, who promised his father that he would be responsible for his father's youngest, initially steps forward and speaks up at the end of Parashat Miketz:

"...What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold we shall be my lord's servants, also us, and also the one in whose hand the goblet was found." (Gen. 44:16)

Judah recognizes the 'iniquity' of the brothers, a continuation of a theme first expressed when the Grand Vizier originally confronted them with the charge that they were spies:

"And they said, one to another, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he implored us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.'" (Gen. 42:21)

These words of Judah to the Grand Vizier are the culmination of this theme. Why are the brothers being mistreated to such an extent by this Grand Vizier? It is an act of God, think the brothers, obviously punishing them for their mistreatment of Joseph – measure for measure. The brothers behaved ignominiously toward Joseph, and now they must pay the price. Judah's offer that the brothers become slaves to the Grand Vizier because 'God has found out the iniquity of your servants' is a clear expression of Judah's conviction that they must all now be punished together – all but Benjamin who had nothing to do with the sale of Joseph. They must accept the will of God.

But the Grand Vizier shifts the tables on Judah. He rejects the offer of all the brothers becoming servants. He wants only Benjamin:

"Only the man in whose hand the goblet is found, he shall be my servant. And as for you, go up in peace unto your father." (Gen. 44:17)

This is when Judah grows confused. According to his calculations, God was punishing the brothers as a result of the evil they had perpetrated against their brother. That is how he understood the mishaps which had befallen the family ever since they met this Grand Vizier. The way Judah surmised it, since the brothers had sinned as a collective unit, they must now suffer as a collective unit. But Joseph's singling out of Benjamin as the only brother who would be enslaved challenged Judah's perception. After all, Benjamin had never been part of the conspiracy against Joseph. He was too young; if any of the brothers were innocent, Benjamin was innocent. Why should he be the only one punished?

Now we can understand why the portion of Miketz ends precisely when it does. It has little to do with the desire to create suspense, and largely to do with Judah's new-found awareness as to the identity of the Grand Vizier. Because if it wasn't God who had planned their experiences in Egypt, it could only have been the Grand Vizier. And why would the Grand Vizier have it in for them, unless...

The portion of Vayigash opens with the words, "Then Judah stepped near unto him [Joseph], and said, 'Oh my Lord, let your servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears...' " (Gen. 44:18). Until this point, Judah had believed that the Kafkaesque nightmare they were experiencing was the result of God's punishment. Judah now realizes that this cannot be the case. He now begins to perceive the unfolding of a trail of evidence that casts new light upon the Grand Vizier's true identity. He recalls that Shimon, the brother who instigated casting Joseph into the pit, was singled out to sit in prison as a hostage after their first sojourn to Egypt for food. He now remembers how, upon their second visit, the Grand Vizier arranged their seats according to their ages when he invited them for a celebratory repast (Gen. 43:33). Only two people aside from the family who were present could have known the proper ages of the brothers: father Jacob and brother Joseph. And Jacob was in Israel!

Yes, an Egyptian, a Grand Vizier couldn't care less about an old father – unless it was his old father as well. Every word of Judah's is now calculated – and successfully earns him a bull's eye. Joseph also now recognizes Judah's profound wisdom and the ability of Judah to have pierced through his veil of deception and revealed his true identity. Judah has now emerged as the *tikkun*, i.e., repair – and

thereby the most proper heir – of Jacob. Jacob's tragedy was his sin of deception, perversely continued by Joseph's pose as Egyptian Grand Vizier; Judah's mastery is his gift of cutting through the deception, and in so doing becomes worthy of the Abrahamic birthright.

The moment of Judah's understanding is also the moment of Joseph's understanding – as well as Joseph's repentance. He now sees the master plan, the divine guidance in all that has transpired. The brothers must come to Egypt not to serve him – Joseph – but rather to fulfill the vision of Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces. The family of Abraham must live to spread the message of ethical monotheism throughout the world, but they will first return to the land of Israel which will always be the familial and national homeland. Joseph is ready now to recognize Judah's superiority, and to subjugate his gifts of technology, administration and politics to Judah's Torah and tradition. Joseph is now able to surrender his dream of kingship over the brothers and request that his remains be eventually brought to Israel. Joseph is now ready to reunite the family under the majesty of Judah. And such is the case in Jacob's blessing.

But Jacob does not express forcefully enough the vision of unity, the initial dream of Rebecca when she merged the Esau-like skins with the hands and voice of Jacob. The aged patriarch merely creates a split between the double material portion of land which goes to Joseph, and the spiritual leadership, which goes to Judah (Gen. 49:8–10, 22–26), an understandable replay of the same split his father Isaac had effectuated a generation earlier; apparently, we most often do repeat the mistakes of our parents, especially if we feel guilty toward them and seek their forgiveness. Hence, in First Temple history, Judah-Jerusalem will separate from Ephraim-Northern Israel, and the seeds of a difficult exile were planted, whose bitter fruits would last for close to 2,000 years. And if Ephraim represented material prosperity, technological and administrative know-how, scientific and philosophical expertise, then Judah – bereft and isolated, exiled and violated – could hardly be expected to stand up to a holocaust!

However, the prophet Ezekiel, in this portion's prophetic reading (haftorah), provides an ultimate rapprochement – nay, unity – between all of the tribes; 'Now you, son of man, take yourself one wooden tablet and write upon it, "for Judah and the children of Israel, his companions," and take another wooden tablet and write upon it, "for Joseph, the wooden tablet of Ephraim, and all the children of Israel, his companions." And bring close to yourself one to the other, for you as one tablet,

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and they shall become one' (Ezekiel 37:16, 17). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, felt the footsteps of the Messiah and the nearness of redemption. He saw in Theodor Herzl, architect of the administrative and political characteristics of the Jewish State, the Messiah from the House of Joseph-Ephraim (he eulogized Herzl as such upon his death, in his famous encomium from Jerusalem); he anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah from the House of David-Judah, who would give spiritual meaning and universal redemptive significance to the hands of Esau which so successfully waged wars and forged an advanced nation-state phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Holocaust. Hopefully, the vision of Rebecca will soon be realized...

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### The Person in the Parsha

#### Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

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#### Grief: Remembrance and Growth

October 7, 2023, Shabbat Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, was a horrible day for the thousands of victims, for the State of Israel, and for the Jewish people all over the world. The immediate reaction to that tragic day took many forms, since the events were indescribable even for the most articulate and fair-minded observers.

Given the extent of the horrors of that day, we are at a loss for how to react. The fact that the ensuing battle continues, hostages are still held captive, soldiers continue to be killed, the number of wounded mounts daily, and antisemitism infects the entire planet, words to deal with our emotions fail us, and we grope ineffectively for an adequate language to express our pain, our disillusionment, and, yes, our despair.

I have recently forced myself to read some of the reactions to the catastrophe written by journalists, government leaders, rabbis, and "ordinary" people of diverse persuasions. I've been hoping to find common threads in these reactions, phrases that can at least stimulate constructive thought.

I hope to put several of these common threads into my writing but will focus in this column on just one such phrase that is recurrent, frightening, and full of implications for our future. That one phrase, which appears repeatedly in almost exactly similar words, reads as follows:

"The worst such event since the Holocaust!"

As those of you who are familiar with my lectures, sermons, and writings are aware, I am obsessed with the Holocaust. I have a personal collection of books on the Holocaust which numbers several hundred volumes, and I have read most of them cover to cover. I have interviewed, formally and informally,

numerous survivors of the Holocaust and have led many trips to Eastern Europe, visiting death camps and desecrated cemeteries. I have many questions, and few answers, to what the saintly Slonimer Rebbe, of blessed memory, author of *Netivot Shalom*, termed the greatest tragedy in world history, bar none.

One of those many questions is, “When did the Holocaust begin?”

Was it with the rise of Hitler to power? Was it the Nazis’ decision to systematically eradicate every Jew from the face of the earth? Or was it something much earlier?

Was it World War I, which decimated many Jewish communities, and left the infrastructure of hundred of shtetlach in ruins? Or can it be traced to some of the dark and primitive antecedents of the German culture? Could it have begun with the pogroms in Czarist Russia, or perhaps in the massacres of 1648-1649? Or as far back as the Crusades? Or further still?

Not an easy question to answer. But a more difficult question to answer is this: “When did the Holocaust end?” With the defeat of the Nazis and the end of World War II? But what about the pogrom in the Polish town of Kielce in 1947, two full years after the war, which drove out of Poland a community of Jewish survivors who had hoped to recover and rebuild their pre-war community? I possess a scrap from a Sefer Torah that was recovered from the assault on the synagogue there, which I retain as a graphic reminder of the persistence of the Holocaust. The text of that fragment of parchment begins with the words “Thou shalt not murder,” from the version of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy.

October 7th reformulates my question from “When did the Holocaust end?” to “When will the Holocaust end?” Or even to a much more troubling question, “Will the Holocaust ever end?”

There is another question which is less speculative than the two I just mentioned. It can at least lead to action on our part. That is the question, “What can we do, in practical, do-able terms, in reaction to ‘holocausts’ of the distant and recent past?” For a fascinating and challenging answer, I turn to a passage in the Midrash Tanchuma on a verse in this week’s Torah portion, Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27).

The passage describes the first conversation that Yosef had with his younger brother Binyamin. It reads:

“Yosef asked Binyamin, ‘Are you married?’ Binyamin responds, ‘Yes!’ Yosef: ‘Do you

have children?’ Binyamin: ‘Yes, ten!’ Yosef: ‘What are their names?’ Binyamin: ‘Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Achi, Rosh, Mupim, Chupim, and Ord.’ Yosef: ‘Who ever heard such strange names?!’ Binyamin: ‘I named all of them for my older brother: Bela, for he was swallowed (bala) by aliens; Becher, for he was the first born (bechor) to our mother; Ashbel, for he was held captive (nishbeh); Gera, for he was a stranger (ger) in a foreign land; Naaman, because he was so pleasant (naim); Achi, for he was my brother (ach), son of my mother; Rosh, because he was my superior (rosh); Mupim, for he was so handsome (yafeh); Chupim, for he did not see my wedding canopy (chupah), nor did I see his; and Ord, for he descended (yarad) into exile, and had a rosy (vered) complexion, and from the time he disappeared, our father came down (yarad) from his bed and slept on the floor, and, moreover, when we get together as a family, all my father’s children sit with their brothers while I sit alone with my eyes shedding tears.”

Note Binyamin’s poignant reaction to his own personal “holocaust.” His world was destroyed by Yosef’s unknown fate. He chooses to give his children names that preserve his recollection of his brother and refresh his anguish constantly. Every interaction with his ten sons provokes details of his long-gone brother. Like his father, Yaakov, he refuses to be consoled. He is desperately lonely and weeps copiously in solitude.

And yet, he looks ahead to the future with hope. His ten children represent an assured future, the prospect of a better time. His perspective is on the future, as is the perspective of every parent, and most definitely of every parent of ten children!

Binyamin is a model of appropriate grief. He understands that, however paradoxical, grief must contain two components: sincere and lasting sadness, coupled with personal growth associated with acceptance of reality and the courage to march forward to a better future.

I close with an interaction I was once privileged to have with a true Chassidic sage, now long deceased. I asked him why certain sectors of the Orthodox community do not recognize a Yom HaShoah, a Memorial Day for the Holocaust. He responded that such fixed public memorials stimulate remembrance, which is important and which we Chassidim do daily, especially by naming our children after those lost in the Holocaust. Every newborn helps us remember.

But, he wisely added, our goal must be to retain, recover, and restore as much as possible of what was lost. That can only be done in a growth-oriented atmosphere with optimism

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and hope, confidence and simcha. Such an atmosphere is absent on funereal memorial days.

To return to the moment: we must grieve for the victims of Simchat Torah 5784 and for all the painful losses we have experienced in the wake of that terrible day. But we must change courageously, constructively, confidently, and b’simchah. We must motivate ourselves to grow, as individuals, as a nation, and with the conviction that Grief has two components: Remembrance and Growth.

Binyamin was the youngest of the ten tribes. But I’ve come to believe that the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, was situated in Binyamin’s territory so that just as the Temple is our spiritual center, so do we have a lot to learn from this “baby brother” and the names of his ten children!

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### Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

#### The Sfias Emes Answers Some Old and Pressing Questions About the Story of Yosef

At the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, Yehuda recounts the events that have been transpiring throughout Parshas Miketz. Yehuda does not really say anything new in this review of his arguments to Yosef that would potentially convince Yosef to act differently than he has been acting until now. The only argument that seems to make an impression is when Yehuda says “If I go back up to Canaan and Binyamin will not be with me, then my father will die.”

Many times, as a manner of speaking, people say, “If such and such happens the person won’t be able to take it. He will have a heart attack and will die.” Such loose talk is highly speculative. Maybe yes; maybe no. But if Yehudah makes that statement and the Torah records it, then it is a reality. This is not some kind of an empty threat or a negotiating tactic.

In fact, this argument of Yehudah did carry the day with Yosef. Yosef did not want to be a party to the death of his father. The question is why and how Yehudah knew definitively that “it will be that when he sees the lad is not there then he will die.” (Bereshis 44:31)?

The Sfias Emes explains a principle about the Avos Hakedoshim (the holy Patriarchs) and the Shevatim (Twelve Tribes).

We all have families. We work for our families. We put effort into our families. We support them. We are driven to build them. These are our children. “I see this as my mission in life – to develop this family entity.”

The Sfias Emes says that in the case of the Avos, it was much more than just “building a family.” Each of them had a mission to “build Klal Yisrael.” Their lives were focused on

creating a nation. Just like on a micro level, we are willing to work very hard and to put in long hours because “I need to do this for my family,” so too the Avos were doing this on a macro level. They were willing to do whatever it takes to build Klal Yisrael.

Out of all the Avos, Yaakov Avinu in particular had a very difficult life. He experienced trials and tribulations with his brother Eisav, with his uncle and father-in-law Lavan, with his daughter Dina, and with his son Yosef. He had a very difficult life. How was he able to survive? It was because he understood that what was happening to him was what the Ribono shel Olam wanted to happen to him, because somehow, in one way or another, this was purifying him and purifying, im yirtzeh Hashem, Klal Yisrael. Therefore, Yaakov was able to take and accept whatever came his way, confident that he could somehow get through it, as the price that needed to be paid to build Klal Yisrael.

The Sfas Emes points out that Yaakov used a rather uncommon form of the name of Hashem when he sent his sons back to Mitzraim: “Keil Shakai should grant you mercy before this man...” (Bereshis 43:14). Rashi explains the nuance of the use of Keil Shakai here: The One who said (during the process of creation) to My world dai (enough already) should now say dai (enough already) to my troubles.” The name of Hashem that is spelled Shin-Daled-Yud is an acronym for She’amar l’olamo dai. Yaakov told his sons, “I have had enough already. I can’t take it anymore!”

Yaakov is saying “I can’t take it anymore.” This is the Yaakov who we just said had the attitude “If I need to go through the troubles with Eisav, I’ll take it. If I need to go through the troubles with Lavan, I will take it, etc., etc. – all so that he could build a Klal Yisrael. What suddenly happened that here Yaakov says “I can’t take it anymore?”

Yaakov is not speaking in frustration, like we might say in frustration, “I can’t take it anymore! I can’t take this job! I can’t take this boss! I can’t take this aggravation!” No. That is not Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov knew he had a limit. He knew that he just would not be able to survive another tragedy of the magnitude of the loss of Binyomin. Yehudah knew this because that is what he heard from the mouth of Yaakov himself when he invoked the name Shin Daled Yud and proclaimed that Keil Shadai must say ‘Enough already’ to my troubles.”

The Sfas Emes says that with this understanding, we can answer a question that everyone asks: Yosef is number two in the Egyptian ruling hierarchy. He can do whatever he wants. Why didn’t he send a message to his father, Yaakov, informing him that he is still

alive? Yosef was a compassionate son. He loved his father. Why didn’t he relieve his father’s intense suffering by sending him a courier and letting him know he was alive and well? The answer is that Yosef was also aware that Hashem deemed everything that Yaakov experienced appropriate for him to experience. This was somehow necessary for the creation of Klal Yisrael. Yaakov was the father of the Shevatim. Yaakov needed to experience everything that he experienced. Therefore, Yosef said to himself, “I am not going to intervene. I am not going to try to be smarter than the Ribono shel Olam. If the Ribono shel Olam wants to keep it hidden from Yaakov, that is His business.” Yosef was not going to second guess the plan of the Almighty because that would interfere with the mission of Yaakov Avinu.

Using this idea, the Sfas Emes explains something else that occurs at the end of the parsha. The pasuk says that when Yosef finally revealed himself to his brothers “...he fell on the shoulder of Binyomin his brother and he cried, and Binyomin cried on his shoulder.” (Bereshis 45:14) Rashi explains the reason for the crying. They were not merely tears of joy: “Yosef cried regarding the destruction of the two battei mikdash (temples) that would be built in the territory of the Tribe of Binyomin and would eventually be destroyed.”

Why do those particular historical events hit Yosef so hard specifically at this moment? The Sfas Emes explains an incredible thing. The pasuk says that when they met, Yosef could not take it anymore (v’lo yachol Yosef l’hisapek) and he broke down and started crying. The Sfas Emes says that from the fact that the pasuk says that Yosef could not do it anymore, we can infer that if Yosef could have held back longer, he would have. Were it not for the fact that he couldn’t control himself, he would have made his brothers go through more stress and anguish.

What does that mean? Was Yosef a sadist? Did he enjoy seeing his brothers suffer? The answer, says the Sfas Emes, is the same idea that we just mentioned: Just as Yaakov Avinu needed to endure his very difficult life for the Divinely planned creation of Klal Yisrael, so too, the Shevatim needed to endure this entire parsha of selling Yosef and then feeling guilty about it for all these years. The Shevatim saved us by going through all this suffering. They spared us from tzores (troubles) that could have befallen Klal Yisrael in later years.

Certainly, the Jewish people have suffered immeasurably for the last 3,000+ years, but it would have been much worse had the Shevatim not endured what they needed to endure. Yosef knew this, and he knew that all the suffering his brothers were enduring would

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eventually pay dividends and save Klal Yisrael from future tzores. Therefore, Yosef would in fact have continued this charade longer: Let them go through this suffering even more because it will pay off in the future. Eventually it will save us.

However, “Yosef could not hold back any longer.” He had no other choice but to end the charade right then. However, had he been able to hold out longer and prolong this national suffering at the moment of Klal Yisrael’s creation, the Beis Hamikdash would never have been destroyed. The brothers suffering at that point in time was akin to the goat being pushed off the Azazel cliff on Yom Kippur. The brothers were akin to the Ten Martyrs executed by the Roman Government. Their suffering was an atonement for all of Klal Yisrael. Yosef knew the secret that “the death of the righteous atones for the masses of Klal Yisrael.” He was trying to accomplish that atonement through the prolonged suffering of his brothers, until he could continue no longer.

Imagine that! We would not have needed to experience the destruction of the two battei mikdash! Imagine if we had not needed to experience 2,000 years of exile! That all came about because “Yosef could not hold back any longer.” That, says the Sfas Emes, is why Yosef cried on the shoulder of Binyomin, crying about the destruction of the battei mikdash.

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### Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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How can one enable one’s words to be heard far and wide and well into the future?

The answer is given to us in Parshat Vayigash.

The time comes for Yosef to reveal his true identity to his brothers who have travelled to Egypt. They were together by themselves in a room. And Yosef declares, “Ani Yosef” — I am Yosef.

His brothers were stunned into silence.

Two words explained to them the drama of 22 years.

And immediately the Torah tells us how the voice of Yosef was heard in the palace of Pharaoh and throughout Egypt. And indeed, Yosef’s voice continues to be heard by us to this very day.

So, what was the power in his words?

A hint is given through the fact that the voice of Yosef is not spelled in the Torah ‘Kuf, Vav, Lamed’, but rather ‘Kuf, ‘Lamed’. It is missing the ‘Vav’, indicating that he was actually speaking in soft tones and in a measured way.

From Yosef therefore, we learn that unlike the impression that some people in authority, like parents, teachers, or employers, might give – that in order to get your point across you have to shout – quite the contrary!

To get your point across, you need to speak with sincerity. The Talmud tells us, 'Dvarim hayotzim min halev nichnasim el halev.' Words which come from the heart enter into the heart.

So, if you want your message to reach as many people as possible, far and wide and also well into the future, the most important thing is not how loudly you say them, but rather you need to guarantee that they come from the heart.

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

##### **Rabbi Michael Rosensweig: Keriat Shema and the Reunion of Yisrael - Yosef**

"Va-yare eilav va-yipol al tzavarav va-yeifk al tzavarav od". The Torah's (Bereishit46:29) depiction of the climactic reunion between Yaakov and Yosef (intentionally?) leaves us to wonder and speculate about who took the initiative. While the Ramban insists that logic (and other indications) dictates that the elderly and long-bereaved Yaakov initiated contact, Rashi, citing a remarkable midrash, declares that while Yosef embraced his father, Yaakov refrained from any emotional display until he was able to first recite the passage of keriat shema. Rashi's (and the midrash's) perspective certainly attests to Yaakov's extraordinary self-discipline and admirable religious commitment, but does not explain why it was necessary to display this feat at this unlikely moment.

Yaakov's puzzling behavior assumes greater mystery when one considers that Yaakov was certainly not indifferent to Yosef's absence or unenthusiastic about the prospect of their reconnection once he overcame his disbelief regarding the news of his survival (45:26-28). The Torah emphasizes (37:34,35) that he mourned excessively (yamim rabim), that he was fundamentally committed to being inconsolable (va-yemacin le-hitnachem), further triggering a state of sobbing (va-yeifk oto aviv). Moreover, an analysis of the aftermath of Yosef's absence demonstrates that an emotionally distraught Yaakov withdrew from active leadership of Klal Yisrael. His diminished role is reflected by the near absence (with a single exception - the decision to send Binyamin) of the name Yisrael that signified his singular balance and capacity to integrate the demands and opportunities of both spiritual and material life (ki sarita im ha-Elokim ve-im ha-anashim va-tuchal). Elsewhere[1] I have suggested that while Yosef was willing ultimately to forgive his brothers crime against him, they could not be absolved of the impact of having denied

Klal Yisrael and the world extra years of Yisrael's leadership. Indeed, "vatechi ruach Yaakov avihem"(45:28) is immediately followed by the full return of "Yisrael"- "vayomer Yisrael rav od Yosef beni chai eilchah ve-erenu be-terem amut" (46:1). Why then this demonstrable restraint in embracing the return of the prodigal Yosef? However, perhaps it is precisely this rejuvenation of Yisrael, characterized, as noted, by the harmonious blending of human-material and Divine-spiritual motifs, also symbolized by the quality of tiferet, the integrated product of both "Elokei avichah Avraham"(28:13) and "Pachad avi Yitzchak" (31:53) ["Elokei avi Avraham veilokei avi Yitzchak" (32:10)] that mandated a timely affirmation and articulation of keriat shema. Even as Yaakov experienced the apex of human emotional attachment, he instinctively invoked religious commitment thereby integrating it with and putting it in context of ahavat Hashem and kabalat ol malchut shamayim.

The restored fullness of his unique religious persona did not, chas ve-shalom, detract from or blunt his emotional reunion with Yosef, but sanctified and intensified it by elevating it from being merely an undirected emotional outburst. [Yaakov's capacity and propensity for keriyat shema at a moment of raw, ecstatic emotionality somewhat parallels (though also in reverse) Avraham's akeidahexperience, in which he and Yitzhak bond as father and son(av...beni...vayeilchu sheneihem yadav...) precisely in the yirat Elokim challenge of sacrifice and loss.]

It is perhaps no coincidence that keriyat shema is central to Yaakov-Yisrael's final legacy to his children in Vayechi, as well, as Chazal note (Pesachim 56a, and especially according to Rambam's rendition- Hilchos Keriyat Shema 1:4). Indeed, the very themes of keriyat shema reinforce this analysis. Not only the aforementioned foundation of kabalat ol malchut shamayim as the prism which informs and defines the religious persona of Yisrael in all endeavors (consistent also with Rashi and the midrash view of the importance of the agalot-45:27), but also the very theology of yichud Hashem, which establishes Hashem as the unity of all constructive forces and impulses, no matter how seemingly varied. The idea of a valid dichotomy between human obligation or emotion, and Divine authority or religious demand is absolutely incompatible with Divine Unity, as expressed succinctly yet powerfully in the first line of keriyat shema. Thus, keriat shema constitutes an appropriate expression of thanksgiving to Hashem and especially of acknowledgement of the religious significance of Yosef's return to Yaakov and to Klal Yisrael. The reconstituted shevatim configuration reaffirmed the ambition of

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Yisrael with its sweep and range, as well as its common aspiration. [See, also, Bereishit49:28 and Rashi]

The reunion between Yaakov and Yosef was no less emotionally satisfying because of the Divine pause. On the contrary, a reinvigorated Yaakov-Yisrael once again established a compelling paradigm for the nation that takes his name. Divine Unity and kabalat ol malchut Shamayim must refine, regulate and direct human impulses and interactions no less than more straight forward interactions with Hashem.

It has become fashionable in recent times for non-believers to disparage the role of religion in society, and even to suggest "God-neutral faith" substitutes that might provide some of the social, emotional, and communal benefits of religion without being hampered by obligations and authority claims. [See, for example, T.M. Luhrmann, "Religion Without God"op ed., NYTimes, Thursday December 25, 2014]] Even well-intentioned observant religionists often emphasize the psychological and social credentials of religious affiliation, and even of belief. While these pragmatic benefits are undeniable, they obviously are not and should not be the foundation of authentic and idealistic religious commitment. Moreover, even the pragmatic benefits are extremely tenuous when they are not integrated with authentic belief, responsibility, and commitment to the authority of God and religious law. The Tosefta (Shavuot 3:5) explains that absent religious belief, any crime, even the most heinous, may be justified. The commentators explain that Pirkei Avot begins with a rendition of the mesorahprecisely because it primarily is devoted to moral and ethical issues lest one misconstrue that these values are not contingent upon a system of beliefs and norms that provide guidelines and that embed the sensibilities into objective laws (halachah). History has demonstrated time and again that high cultural attainment, intellectual achievement, and even emotional awareness do not guarantee a moral or even a sane society. The mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh ideal of Judaism is one in which ethical, moral, and emotional sensitivity stems from the principles encapsulated in keriat shema, as our father Yisrael-Yaakov established.

[1] Mitoch HaOhel: Essays on the Weekly Parsha From the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University, 2010, pp. 109-114 Parshas Miketz: Yosef's Complex and Comprehensive Reconciliation With His Brothers

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#### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

##### **Rav Doron Perez - Being Centered on G-d**

One of the greatest character transformations in Tanach takes place in Vayigash. For so much of Yosef's early life, his brothers hated him for being self-centered. Singled out by his



father, he also telling on his brothers, so much so that they couldn't speak congenially to him. He tells his dreams, and we notice that we never hear the name of G-d – only about him.

But in last week's parasha, and completed in this week's parasha, the transformation takes place – when he comes before Pharaoh he says "it is not me, I am only a conduit of G-d." He is no longer self-centered, but centered on G-d.

When he reveals himself to his brothers, they couldn't stand in front of him. They were so embarrassed, and understood the pain that they caused over the many years, and thought there was no way he would have forgiven them. But Yosef mentions several times that they didn't do it, rather G-d sent him to Egypt, that he is there on a mission from G-d.

Are we in life our own shaliach, on a self-appointed mission? Or do we see ourselves living in G-d's world, as a conduit of what G-d wants from us?

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

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#### **Tests Big and Small**

Then Yosef said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me," and they drew closer. And he said, "I am your brother Yosef whom you sold into Egypt. But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that G-d sent me before you. For already two years of famine [have passed] in the midst of the land, and [for] another five years, there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And G-d sent me before you to make for you a remnant in the land, and to preserve [it] for you for a great deliverance. (Breishis 45:4-7)

The life of Yosef is a study in virtuousness! He endures every insult and accusation, and temptation, and abandonment, and even power and success, and he remains a Tzadik. However, in my humble opinion, from where I am sitting, his greatest accomplishment and demonstration of greatness was that he immediately forgave his brothers, and never showed a wrinkle of resentment or anger throughout his entire ordeal. How did he do it?

Another aspect of Yosef's life is his enormous success in all his endeavors. I do believe he is the only person in the Torah called, "a successful man" – "Ish Matzliach". Even Potifar, who put him in jail, the Torah tells us, saw that HASHEM was with him". How did that Egyptian perceive that HASHEM was with him? Rashi explains that Potifar saw him succeeding in everything he did, but he noticed something else about the way he went about his business. He was constantly speaking quietly to himself and when Potifar inquired as to what he was saying he told him that he was

praying to HASHEM for assistance. "Shem Shemayim Shagur B'Piv" – "The Name of Heaven was always in his mouth".

This may explain why he was such an enormous source of blessing – material well-being, for his family, Egypt, and the whole world. All were fed by Yosef. Shlomo HaMelech writes, "Ish Emunos Rab Brochos..." – "A reliable man will abound with blessing". (Mishlei 28:20) The Sefas Emes explains that like any other good father, HASHEM wants to shower his children with all goodness. Yet, He must judge wisely so as not to spoil them.

Yosef was not broken by failure or overly intoxicated with success. He was an "ISH EMUNOS", a steady, reliable, and dutiful person, worthy to be a vehicle for BROCHO! How is this done? The Talmud in Makos boils Torah to one singular principle, as the Navi Habakuk says, "Tzadik B'Emunso Yichiah". "The righteous lives with his faith!" Maybe we can attribute Yosef's enormous success and his generosity of spirit to not be angry with his brothers, to his profound EMUNAH in HASHEM.

A man came to the Divre 'Chaim with a terrible personal problem based on a giant character flaw. He opened up to the Rebbe, "I am an angry person! I cannot control myself! Rebbe, what should I do?" The Rebbe listened and thought for a few moments. He told the man that this is a very difficult situation and he needs time to think about what to do. He asked the man to sit in a waiting room in the meantime.

Immediately, the Rebbe called over his Gabai. He asked him, "Can you devise a scheme to get that fellow in the waiting room upset!?" The Gabai answered affirmatively and the Rebbe told him to go do it now. Minutes later the Gabai was passing through where the man was seated, and he was carrying a tray with tea and creamy cake and then he pretended to trip and he spilled it all over the man. He was covered with messy stuff. The Gabai began to blame him for tripping him. The man accepted the injury and the insult with perfect equanimity.

Then the Rebbe called the man in and when he saw that he was all wet and covered with cream. The Rebbe, acting startled, asked the man what happened!? He told him exactly what transpired and the Rebbe asked him, "And you didn't get angry!?" To which the man confessed, "I heard you telling the Gabai and I knew you were testing me!"

Then the Rebbe told him, "You can control yourself when you know you are being tested. Know that HASHEM is testing you."

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Yosef, the Ish Emunah, lived with HASHEM and he constantly understood that life is dense with many tests big and small.

#### **Unity and Divine Presence Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

Parashat Vayigash teaches us a deep and meaningful message about the power of Jewish unity.

We witness the moving encounter between Yosef and his brothers, in which separation and hatred turn to unity and reconciliation. This meeting serves as a foundation for what will be revealed later – when the Jewish people are united, the Divine Presence dwells among them.

In the Amidah, we pray "Sound the great shofar for our freedom, and raise a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together (yachad) from the four corners of the earth."

We're not just asking for the physical gathering of the people, but yachad, genuine internal unification. The great shofar is Am Yisrael's wake-up call to Redemption, and it echoes throughout the world, gathering the dispersed and uniting them as one people.

What do we mean when we ask Hashem to "Gather us together quickly from the four corners of the earth to our Land"?

The simple meaning is all Jews living abroad will settle in Eretz Yisrael. And what is the purpose of gathering the exiles? To develop the country. After all, there is no State without a people, and the gathering of exiles is a necessary condition for building the State of Israel.

However, it seems to me there is a deeper meaning to this beracha in the Amidah. This is revealed both in Vayigash and its Haftarah (Yechezkel 37:15-28).

Vayigash emphasizes the closeness between the brothers and how they become one unified family. The Haftarah also speaks about healing the wounds and unifying the people. The first stage is gathering the exiles " –and I will gather them from around," but immediately afterwards – and at the end too – this leads to the revelation of the Divine Presence: "And My dwelling place shall be over them, and I will be their G-d."

This is the order of berachot in the Amidah too. At the beginning of the public blessings, we start with "Sound the great shofar," gathering of exiles, and this leads to the dwelling of the Divine Presence, "and to Jerusalem Your city return with mercy," "the offspring of David Your servant quickly cause to flourish."

The Haftarah describes a wonderful vision of the people's unification, symbolized by joining two pieces of wood, of Yehuda and of Yosef. This vision is not just a prophecy for the future but is being fulfilled before our very eyes. We have been privileged to see the gathering of exiles, as Jews from all over the globe return to Eretz Yisrael.

The current war has shown us the power of Jewish unity. Certainly at the start, everyone mobilized for the common goal. When the real moment comes, the Jewish people know how to unite.

However, this unity should not be taken for granted. We must continue to nurture it, overcome disputes and differences, and remember that the Divine Presence can only dwell among us when we're in true unity.

As the parasha teaches, unity is not just a technical state of being together, but requires a constant effort of understanding, listening, and unconditional brotherly and sisterly love.

The Haftarah is written about us!

We are the generation privileged to witness the fulfillment of Yechezkel's prophecy of the gathering of the exiles. Particularly now, we have a precious opportunity to continue strengthening this unity. Let us make it a permanent foundation in our lives. Let us be the "great shofar," awakening and uniting in Eretz Yisrael, working together to be worthy of the Divine Presence, on the way to bringing the complete and Final Redemption.



BS"D

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from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <[riets@substack.com](mailto:riets@substack.com)>

date: Dec 25, 2025, 9:26 AM

subject: **VaYigash: Five Words and the Many Meanings of Mussar Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**

Joseph's self-revelation to his brothers is undoubtedly a moment of great drama and emotion. Five Hebrew words: Ani Yosef; ha'od avi chai? "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" So little said, so much unsaid; and among all the possibilities, the Rabbis detected one dominant theme here: rebuke. The text tells us that his brothers could not answer him, for they were overwhelmed—nivhalu mipanav. Rashi tells us, "because of the bushah, the shame". The Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 93:10) says more: "Woe to us from the day of judgment, woe to us from the day of rebuke." If the brothers, confronted by their youngest sibling, were reduced to speechless paralysis, what will become of us when we face the ultimate reckoning? (See also Chagigah 4b.)

Yet this observation demands explanation. Where, precisely, is the rebuke? Joseph offers no lecture, delivers no sermon. He simply states his identity and asks a question. Wherein lies the devastating tochachah that silenced these formidable men?

The Midrash itself underscores the paradox: "Joseph was the youngest of the tribes, and they could not withstand his rebuke." The implication is clear—if the youngest could produce such an effect with so few words, how much more so when we stand before the Divine. But this only intensifies the question. What was the rebuke?

The interpreters offer a constellation of answers, each illuminating a different dimension of moral confrontation—and each, perhaps, capturing a different face of what it means to be truly called to account.

**The Question That Answered Itself**

At its simplest level, the rebuke inheres in the question itself. The Netziv and the Torah Temimah note that "Is my father still alive?" is not a request for information—Joseph had just heard Judah speak at length about their father. It is, rather, a rhetorical thrust: Considering what you have put him through, could he possibly have survived?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe sharpens this further. Joseph is saying: I know that I am alive, standing before you. And I know that one who mourns a living person cannot achieve comfort, cannot find closure, because the soul senses the truth even when the mind does not. If our father has been unable to be

comforted for twenty-two years—if he has been suffering without respite this entire time—can he still be alive after enduring such unrelenting anguish? The words carry their own accusation, requiring no elaboration.

**The Inverted World**

R. Avraham Pam, in his Atarah LaMelech, brings a different perspective, one that transforms this moment from a personal confrontation into a window onto ultimate reality. He connects Joseph's revelation to the Talmudic account (Bava Batra 10b) of one who glimpsed the World to Come and reported seeing an olam hafuch—an inverted world, where those elevated in this life occupy lowly positions, and the downtrodden rise to prominence.

This vision, R. Pam suggests, constitutes the most profound mussar imaginable. We frequently lament that life is unfair, yet we are often beneficiaries of that very unfairness. Others may deserve our position, our success, our stature—and in a world of true justice, the calculus would look quite different.

The brothers stood before a living demonstration of this principle. They had positioned themselves as Joseph's superiors, dismissing him as an arrogant dreamer unworthy of serious consideration. The "little brat" with grandiose visions, the youngest who needed to be managed, contained, removed. And now? He sat enthroned as viceroy of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. He is not only alive; he is in charge. He holds power, resources, and their very fate in his hands.

That reversal—the world turning over in one instant—is itself a taste of the olam hafuch. And it says, without saying: your hierarchy was wrong. Your sense of who stands where was wrong. Your confidence about "who you are" and "who he is" was wrong.

What greater rebuke can there be than a glimpse of what it would be like if the world would indeed be "fair"?

**The Mirror of "Hypocrisy"**

The Beit HaLevi identifies a different mechanism at work, one that strikes at the architecture of self-deception. Throughout the preceding chapter, Judah has delivered an impassioned plea centered on paternal concern: How can we return without Benjamin? Our father will die of grief. The responsibility will be ours to bear. How can you countenance such cruelty?

Joseph's response exposes the staggering blind spot in this argument.

Throughout Judah's speech, the brothers have positioned themselves as the ones who truly understand what it means for a father to lose a beloved son—and they have cast the Egyptian viceroy as the callous one, indifferent to such suffering. They speak as though the very idea of depriving Jacob of his child is a moral horror that any decent person should recoil from, implicitly condemning anyone who would inflict such pain.

Ani Yosef. I am the son you sold into slavery, the one whose absence has tormented our father for over two decades. Is he even still alive after enduring that loss? You stand here in judgment of someone else's supposed indifference to a father's grief—while you yourselves are the ones who caused it.

This is the power of negiah—the way self-interest distorts perception. We are quick to identify moral failings in others while remaining oblivious to identical patterns in our own conduct. This is not true hypocrisy, which would signify utter falsity; it is simply the reality of human nature. We possess blind spots about our own behavior that can only be shattered when someone holds up the mirror with unflinching clarity.

And this is why it lands so hard. Many rebukes can be debated, deflected, rationalized away. This one cannot. It does not attack from the outside; it reveals from the inside. It turns their own argument back toward them—not as a clever rhetorical move, but as an unavoidable act of truth.

There is something uniquely devastating about discovering that your strongest moral language was built atop a forgotten inconsistency. That is the devastation that comes from the collapse of self-certainty.

**The Flawed Calculation**

The Ohel Moshe, citing Rav Shach, connects this episode to the concept of din v'cheshbon—the judgment and accounting we will all face. What is the significance of this double language? One interpretation, attributed to the

Vilna Gaon, explains that *din* is punishment for one's transgressions, while *cheshbon* is the accounting of all the good one could have accomplished with the same time, talents, and resources squandered on sin.

There is an additional reading: *cheshbon* refers to the calculation itself—the flawed reasoning, the internal logic that produced the sin. People rarely transgress because they love transgression. More often they sin because they have *cheshbonot* that are crooked: premises that are mistaken, assumptions that are untrue, mental arithmetic that was never checked.

Consider the brothers' original plan. They sold Joseph to prevent the realization of his dreams—dreams of dominance, of kingship, of being "over them." Their *cheshbon* was straightforward: remove him, and you remove the future he envisioned.

What happened? He became ruler over them precisely because of that act. The very plan designed to thwart his ascendancy became the mechanism of its fulfillment.

So the rebuke is double: not only did you do wrong, but your entire *cheshbon*—the rationale you relied upon—was fundamentally, catastrophically mistaken. And when a person realizes that his "smart plan" was the engine of his failure, the shame is intensified. It is not just guilt; it is the humiliation of having lived inside a mistake.

That is a terrifying kind of *tochachah*: the moment you discover that the logic you trusted most was the trap that caught you.

Twenty-Two Years of Error

R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, in his *Asufat Maarachot*, draws our attention to a remarkable feature of this narrative: the brothers were not wrong for a moment. They were wrong for twenty-two years.

We must be careful not to imagine the brothers as villains motivated by petty jealousy. These were the *shivtei Kah*, men of towering spiritual stature.

When they judged Joseph, they believed—with complete conviction—that they were rendering righteous judgment. They were confident that the demands of justice obligated them to act as they did.

And then the difficult events in Egypt began. The viceroy accused them of espionage. He demanded they bring Benjamin. He imprisoned Simeon. And through it all, a terrible suspicion began to gnaw at them: "Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we did not listen."

Note carefully: even then, even as guilt stirred, they still believed "the judgment itself was true." They felt remorse for not showing mercy—for ignoring his pleas—but not for the fundamental correctness of their verdict.

Day after day, for twenty-two years, they witnessed their father's insoluble grief and did not waver from their position.

And then: Ani Yosef.

In that instant, reality itself slapped them across the face. Here the truth burst forth and struck them. Here they discovered that twenty-two years of certainty had been twenty-two years of error—and still they had not grasped the depth of their mistake until that very moment.

The Nature of True *Tochachah*

What, then, is the essence of this rebuke that the Sages found so paradigmatic?

R. Goldvicht notes that the Rabbis connected Joseph's *tochachah* to another famous rebuke—that of Bilaam's donkey. "Bilaam, wisest of the nations, could not withstand the rebuke of his donkey." The parallel is illuminating: Joseph was the youngest of the tribes; the donkey was the lowliest of creatures. Both simply presented facts—and those facts were enough to silence.

What is the common thread? *Tochachah*, in its deepest form, is not external criticism. It is the moment when reality itself speaks—when the truth a person has been evading suddenly becomes undeniable.

This is the *tochachah* that awaits us all: not a lecture from without, but a revelation from within. "When the Holy One comes and rebukes each person according to what he is"—not according to some external standard, but according to the very premises that person claimed to live by.

The Depth of *Bushah*

But why does such a revelation produce not merely regret, but paralysis? Why could the brothers not even respond?

R. Simcha Zissel Broide, in his *Sam Derech*, develops this theme from a psychological perspective. *Bushah*—shame—is not merely embarrassment. It stems from the deepest root of the soul. The Talmud (*Yevamot*78b) identifies *bayshanim*—those possessing the capacity for shame—as one of the three defining characteristics of the Jewish people. This capacity is woven into the very fabric of the Jewish *neshamah*.

Moreover, the greater a person's self-awareness and emotional depth, the greater their capacity for *bushah*. As one's perceptions grow and one's emotional sensibilities deepen, the experience of shame becomes correspondingly more profound, more penetrating, more searing.

R. Goldvicht distinguishes between two fundamentally different kinds of shame. The first is external: a person is caught in wrongdoing; his reputation is damaged; he is embarrassed before others. This shame, painful as it is, can be escaped. Change your environment, move to a new place, and the source of shame is left behind.

But there is a second kind of shame—the kind that comes when a person discovers that the entire fabric of falsehood he has woven over a lifetime was indeed false. This shame cannot be escaped, because its source is not external. The shame comes from within—from himself, from his own depths. When a man realizes that the internal edifice of his soul has collapsed, that the ground has shifted beneath his feet, that he no longer knows where he stands or where he is headed—that shame produces *behalah*. That is the paralysis that silenced the brothers.

The Collapse and What Comes After

When the brothers stood before Joseph and heard those two words, it was not merely that they were wrong about one thing. Their entire framework for understanding reality collapsed. Joseph's approach was vindicated; theirs was defeated. The ground shifted beneath them, and they could not speak.

And yet—and here R. Goldvicht offers a teaching of profound hope—even in that moment of collapse, the capacity for return remains.

A person confronted with the light of truth faces a choice. He can grasp stubbornly at the horns of his old system, clinging in arrogance to the ruins of his former certainty. Or he can stand before the truth and change.

The brothers' *behalah* was devastating—but it was also the necessary prelude to *teshuvah*. The human ego, R. Goldvicht notes, is fierce in its resistance. It will persist unto destruction rather than acknowledge error. Only the power of genuine *bushah*—shame that penetrates to the soul's core—can overcome the ego's defenses. And embedded within *bushah* lies the capacity to return, to rebuild, to transform.

Two Words in an Age of Endless Words

There is, perhaps, a contemporary dimension to this teaching that deserves reflection.

We live in an era when words travel farther, faster, and with more permanent consequence than at any point in human history. The brothers stood before Joseph, and their *bushah* was witnessed by a handful of people in a single room. Today, humiliation can be global and instantaneous—and it never fully disappears.

The Midrash marveled that Joseph, the youngest of the tribes, could reduce his brothers to silence with five words. In our age, even the smallest and most anonymous among us can wield that power. A single post, a brief comment, a few keystrokes—and someone's reputation, livelihood, or sense of self can be shattered before an audience of millions.

As Will Storr documents in his book *The Status Game*, "Today, even seemingly innocuous comments on social media can lead to a group coalescing in screeching outrage." He notes further that "those who play in these mobs are a minority of a minority, and yet too often their commanding voice on social media becomes a commanding voice in our democracies... they achieve this outsized status partly by the spreading of dread. Their gossip, accusation, and merciless fury is designed to weave the illusion of consensus... and bully us."

The brothers' *bushah* was proportionate—it emerged from genuine wrongdoing confronted by undeniable truth. But the mechanisms of public

shaming in our era often bear no such proportion. The humiliation inflicted may vastly exceed any actual offense; the mob pronounces judgment without knowledge, without nuance, without the possibility of appeal. And unlike the brothers, who could weep together with Joseph and begin the process of repair, those subjected to online destruction often find no path back. The shame is permanent, searchable, endlessly retrievable.

This places upon us a responsibility to recognize the terrifying power now concentrated in ordinary hands. If five words from Joseph—words grounded in truth, spoken face to face, in a context where reconciliation remained possible—could produce such devastation, how much more cautious must we be with words that reach strangers, that persist forever, that allow no response and offer no path to teshuvah? The capacity to inflict bushah is no longer reserved for the powerful. It belongs to anyone with a keyboard. And with that democratization of destructive capacity comes an awesome weight of responsibility.

And yet, even as this reality prohibits us from wielding these tools recklessly, it also presents us with an extraordinary opportunity. For all of the dimensions of mussar explored above remain true in our age—and may be more readily accessible than ever before. The digital world is itself an *olam hafuch*, where hierarchies are constantly inverted, where the mighty fall and the obscure rise with dizzying speed. The mirror of inconsistency that the Beit HaLevi described—the exposure of our blind spots when our own arguments are turned against us—plays out daily in the public square, as old statements resurface to contradict new postures. The flawed cheshbonot that led the brothers astray find their parallels in the confident calculations that so often collapse before the unfolding of events. And the recognition that we may have misjudged not merely a person but an entire approach to life—that too confronts us regularly, if we have eyes to see.

We can recognize what this reality creates and receive all of these lessons. Every one of the teachings examined here—the inverted world, the power of *negiah*, the danger of flawed reasoning, the possibility of having lived for years inside a mistake, the discovery that our frameworks may be inadequate to reality—can serve as a mirror for self-examination. The digital age has not changed the human condition; it has only accelerated and amplified it. The *tochachah* that once came rarely and privately now arrives constantly and publicly. We can let it harden us, or we can let it teach us.

Joseph's embrace can be our model. He wept with his brothers. He offered a framework for moving forward. He distinguished between the recognition of wrongdoing and the crushing of the human spirit. The goal of rebuke is growth, not devastation, and perspective can come from the most unlikely of places. If we approach the environment of our age with that understanding, we may yet find that even in a world of endless, indelible, inflammatory, unfair words, sparks of truth can be found that shine a light amid the heat; and the wise can use them to find their way back, and a path forward.

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date: Dec 25, 2025, 12:18 AM

subject: Rav Frand - **Two Sets of Wagons Were Sent for Yaakov: One From Pharaoh and One From Yosef**

**By Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

Parshas Vayigash

Two Sets of Wagons Were Sent for Yaakov: One From Pharaoh and One From Yosef

These *divrei Torah* were adapted from the *hashkafa* portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1362 – Flying East to West-West to East on a Fast Day-When Can You Break Your Fast? Good Shabbos!

We are all familiar with the dramatic story of Yosef finally revealing his true identity to his brothers. He then tells Pharaoh that these men are his brothers.

The *pasuk* says, “Pharaoh said to Yosef: Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: Load up your animals and go, enter into the land of Canaan.’” (Bereshis 45:17). Pharaoh promises Yosef's family first class accommodations in Mitzrayim. Pharaoh saw what Yosef had done for the country. Pharaoh saw what a smart man Yosef was. Due to Yosef's wise plan, Pharaoh was now sitting on a boatload of money because everyone had to come to Mitzrayim to buy food during the years of famine. Pharaoh figured that he wanted to keep Yosef happy and he also figured that if Yosef is so smart, he could only imagine what Yosef's father was like: Pharaoh wanted Yosef's father to come to Mitzrayim and be comfortable. “And take your father and your households and come to me. And I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the choicest of the land. And you are commanded to say, ‘Do this: Take for yourselves from the land of Egypt wagons for your small children and for your wives. Transport your father and come. And let your eyes not take pity on your vessels, for the best of the entire land of Egypt – it is yours.’” (Bereshis 45:18-20).

Yosef followed Pharaoh's instructions and gave the brothers wagons to bring their father and the rest of the family down to Mitzrayim. The brothers came back to Canaan and announced to their father “Yosef is still alive and he rules over the entire land of Mitzrayim.” Initially, Yaakov could not believe it. They repeated to him the whole story – “and he saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him.” At that point his spirit was rejuvenated.

Rashi (45:27) famously comments that the wagons were a signal to Yaakov regarding the Torah subject that he and Yosef had been learning immediately before their separation. They were learning the *sugya* of *eglah arufah* (the decapitated calf). The Hebrew word for wagon (*agalah*) is cognate to the word for calf (*eglah*) and Yaakov grasped the message that Yosef was sending.

We can ask three questions about this Rashi.

The first question is: Rashi emphasizes that these were the wagons that Yosef sent, not the wagons that Pharaoh sent. This seems to contradict the straightforward reading of the earlier *pesukim*, which clearly state that these were wagons that Pharaoh sent.

A second question is: What was so special about the wagons that caused Yaakov's spirit to suddenly be rejuvenated?

A third question is: It is quite a stretch to claim that upon seeing the wagons, Yaakov recalled the fact that he and Yosef were learning the *parsha* of *eglah arufah* when they were last together. This is not a *gezeirah shava*. There is no immediate word association between *agalah* and *eglah* that would prompt Yaakov to make a connection with the Torah subject that he had learned many years earlier with his favorite son.

I saw an essay from Rabbi Zev Leff, the Rav of Moshav Matisyahu in Eretz Yisrael, which addresses this Rashi:

As we mentioned, Pharaoh wanted Yaakov to come down to Mitzrayim in the worst way. Pharaoh's method to get Yaakov down to Mitzrayim was to tell him “Don't worry about anything. Let your mind not take pity on the vessels you will have to leave back in Canaan. You need not bring anything with you. We will provide you with all your needs here. You will have the best of everything in Mitzrayim.” That was the enticement – in Pharaoh's mind, to get Yaakov to agree to come.

However, Yosef knew that if Yaakov Avinu felt he could not transport Eretz Canaan with him to Mitzrayim, he would never come. Yaakov was worried about one thing and that was the assimilation of this family. If Yaakov would be coming to Mitzrayim without his clothes, without his *shtreimel*, without his *kapota*, and without his bookcases full of *sefarim* – without all of that, and he would come to a brand-new place in Mitzrayim with an Egyptian wardrobe and everything that was the “best of Egyptian culture” – Yaakov would refuse to come.

Therefore, Pharaoh only sent three or four wagons – just enough to carry the people. Pharaoh's plan was that there was no need to pack suitcases with clothes or furniture or household belongings. We will outfit you with everything you need, with the best that Mitzrayim has to offer. The wise Yosef realized that this was not the way to bring his father down to Mitzrayim. Therefore, Yosef sent many more *agalos* – to carry all the

furniture and possessions that Yaakov had acquired in Canaan. Yaakov needed many wagons to take every stitch of clothing, every sefer, every Chanukah menorah, every Shabbos candlestick, the silver esrog box etc., etc., etc. Yaakov didn't want to start afresh. He wanted to recreate his Eretz Canaan experience in Mitzrayim.

The questions we raised above can be answered by hypothesizing that there were two sets of wagons. There were the wagons that were sent by Pharaoh (to bring the wives and children) and then there was a totally different set of wagons that were sent by Yosef to bring all of Yaakov's possessions. That is why Rashi emphasizes "The wagons that Yosef sent."

Now we understand the Medrash which Rashi brings, that Yaakov sees the wagon and immediately associates them with the sugya of eglah arufah that they had last been learning. Yaakov was rejuvenated by the thought "My son Yosef has been away from me for so long and yet he is still worried about assimilation and that is why he sent those extra wagons." The brothers had told Yaakov that Pharaoh sent wagons for the people and Yosef sent wagons for the possessions. Yaakov immediately understood that Yosef, too, was still concerned about assimilation, and appreciated the importance of bringing down all of the family's precious possessions, representing their life-style in Eretz Canaan.

Finally, we can understand the connection to the parsha of eglah arufah. It was not merely a play on words between agalah and eglah. It is much deeper than that.

What is the yesod (underlying concept) of the parsha of eglah arufah?

Someone finds a dead body. The elders of the closest city need to come and say "Our hands did not spill this blood and our eyes have not seen." In other words, "We are not responsible for this murder." The Gemara (Sota 38b) explains that this means that they gave the person provisions before sending him on his way and they escorted him part of the way.

What is the distance requirement for escorting a departing visitor? The answer is four amos (which is no more than eight feet, at most). How does escorting a person for eight feet grant him any type of security? The Maharal explains how this makes him secure. The fact that they escorted him four amos demonstrates to him that "You are still one of us. You are not on your own. You are still part of our community." In a short while the person will be a mile down the road or even ten miles down the road, but he is still bound to the community who escorted him at the beginning of his travels. That knowledge – that someone can be physically located at point "X" and yet really be connected to point "Y" is all the chizuk that a person needs.

This chizuk gives the person the fortitude to fight off any danger than confronts him on the road because he knows "I am still part of a community."

This is the yesod of eglah arufah and it is the yesod of the mitzvah of levaya (escorting). Yosef was sending the message to Yaakov Avinu: You may be in Mitzrayim but you can still be attached to Eretz Canaan. By bringing your possessions down to Mitzrayim, you can recreate your current experience. Levaya teaches us that geography is not destiny. You can be in a different place and all alone, but still be tied to the original place.

That is what Yaakov grasped that Yosef was trying to tell him: "Daddy, don't be afraid. You will come down to Mitzrayim but we won't get assimilated. Do you know why? It is because you will be able to recreate Canaan in Mitzrayim. You will be able to do that because you will have your sefarim and you will have your clothes." (They did not change their names and they did not change their dress.)

These were the extra wagons that Yosef sent, and that is why Yaakov's spirit was rejuvenated.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem [DavidATwersky@gmail.com](mailto:DavidATwersky@gmail.com)

Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD [dhoffman@torah.org](mailto: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 Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/>

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## Shoulder of Tears

### Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The Torah describes the stirring moment when Ya'akov reunites with his long-lost son Yosef. Few scenes in the Torah evoke such quiet pain. After twenty years of longing and uncertainty, an aging father and the son who has risen to power in Egypt meet again. They draw close, embrace, and rest on one another's shoulders.

When the Torah describes the tears in that embrace, it states that one of them cried—as if the other did not. Chazal address this irregular phrasing: Yosef wept on his father's shoulder, but Ya'akov did not. Overwhelmed by emotion, Ya'akov directed that moment toward Shema, reciting the opening verse and channeling his joy into Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim.

There are moments when emotion gathers—joy, relief, fear, or gratitude—and a religious personality seeks to direct that inner tide toward expression rather than be carried away by it. Ya'akov, overwhelmed by the return of a son he had assumed dead, channels his feelings into worship. Though the formal verse of Shema would only be inscribed later in Torah, Ya'akov sensed its truth centuries earlier.

This scene leaves us with a resonant image: a human being directing emotion toward steady relationship with Hashem. In that moment, Ya'akov places his awareness of Hashem before his feelings for Yosef.

### Torah or Tears

This portrait raises a question. What of Yosef? Are we to imagine that, because he was not reciting Shema but simply weeping on his father's shoulder, he stands on lesser spiritual ground? If the ideal response is embodied in Ya'akov's Shema, does Yosef somehow fall short?

If Yosef did not recite Shema, his response is no less legitimate. Ya'akov turns the moment into ritual, but Yosef simply weeps on his father's shoulder. He has lived for two decades without a father's warm shoulder and without the reassurance that only a father can provide. He allows himself to feel love and longing directly rather than translate them into Shema. The Torah preserves his tears, and his response carries integrity. This scene contains two legitimate layers. It validates two pathways for navigating an emotionally charged encounter. One channels feeling through ritual—in this case, reciting Shema. The other allows emotion to remain human and unfiltered—the love of a son reclaiming a father. Ya'akov recites Shema. Yosef cries. Each response holds integrity.

By presenting these responses side by side, the Torah affirms that healthy relationships and the emotions they awaken are part of religious life. The capacities that animate our relationships were planted in us by Hashem. Bonds between parent and child—longing, reunion, and restored closeness—are fashioned by the divine will. When those emotions surface honestly, they, too, give expression to what Hashem placed within human experience. Standing Alone, Standing Together

This scene raises a religious question. What room do we make for relationships within a life of avodat Hashem? How often do we stand before Hashem as solitary individuals—engaged in ritual, studying Torah, fulfilling obligation—and how much time and energy do we devote to building relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and the people who populate our days?

Religion often asks us to transcend surroundings and stand before Hashem in solitary submission. The gemara in Eiruvim even advances a jarring image: a person seeking mastery in Torah should be as indifferent to spouse and children as a raven to its young. Even if we treat that line as hyperbole—and some did not—it points to a sober truth: moments of ascent may demand a temporary sacrifice of affectionate bonds. Relationships, even with family, do not exhaust religious life. In the end, religion demands those silent moments in which we stand before Hashem alone.

At the same time, we pour energy into human attachment—shaping families and friendships that occupy large parts of our emotional lives. This, too, is not peripheral to avodat Hashem. Our tradition surrounds relationships with safeguards—prohibitions against deceit, humiliation, exploitation, or injury.

But the legal boundaries only hint at something deeper. We cultivate relationships not merely to avoid sin, but because loyalty, love, empathy, and responsibility enlarge the religious self. Standing alone before Hashem is indispensable—but so is the labor of standing with one another.

Why are relationships integral to religious experience? Why should we pour time, attention, and emotional resource into bonds that seem to siphon energy away from ritual, study, and inward ascent? Why should human attachment be counted among the labors of avodat Hashem?

#### The First Classroom

Firstly, because the bonds we build with others become templates for the relationship we hope to cultivate with Hashem. One might expect Sefer Bereishit to unfold as a treatise of theology, yet explicit theology is almost absent. We receive no full account of creation and no systematic defense of monotheism. Instead, the narrative lingers over the strains of family—competing wives, rival siblings, succession anxiety, honor, betrayal, and protection.

The implication is clear: the family is our first school of avodat Hashem. The traits we refine in human attachment—honesty, trust, devotion, loyalty, selflessness—are the traits we later bring to our encounter with Hashem. When we treat relationships as religious labor, we turn human connection into preparation for standing before Hashem.

#### Without Gaps

Secondly, we must frame relationships as part of religion so that our inner world does not become bifurcated. Bifurcation occurs when we act religious in select settings yet feel spiritually neutral across much of life. The result is a choppy interior landscape—brief peaks of piety interrupted by hollowness. Ideally, avodat Hashem is holistic. We stand before Hashem in every setting, though our awareness is expressed differently across the varied frames of experience. The goal is not unending ritual, but steady consciousness. If we cannot breathe avodat Hashem meaning into relationships, then portions of life fall outside our religious horizon. If we treat relationship-building merely as avoiding harm, rather than as investment, we leave countless hours untouched by religious purpose—and for long stretches we are nowhere near avodat Hashem.

#### Emotional Grounding

Finally, relationship-building is crucial to religion because religious meaning rests on emotional stability. If the inner structure of a person is brittle, religious achievement cannot endure; it bends and snaps under pressure. Relationships steady the inner life. They are harder to build in the modern world, yet more necessary than ever in an age of strain and anxiety.

The strain on relationships begins with practical pressures. The pace of contemporary living has become relentless, and screens have become ubiquitous. We once had time for conversation and the dignity of eye contact. Now the glare of devices absorbs attention, and the hurry of our days leaves little space to breathe into relationships.

A second pressure is ideological. The rise of individualism places strain on family life. Families demand compromise rather than constant self-assertion, and that runs against the cultural mood. And the erosion of boundaries compounds the problem. The workplace follows us into our homes and leaks into private spaces. We no longer work nine to five; the thin line between vocation and home makes sustaining relationships difficult.

Yosef's tears remind us that emotional health and human attachment are not distractions from avodat Hashem but part of its hidden architecture. His tears teach that standing before Hashem sometimes begins with standing alongside those we love.

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovaah.org>

date: Dec 25, 2025, 4:06 PM

subject: Tidbits • Parashas Vayigash 5786 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l Parashas Vayigash • December 27th • 7 Teves 5786

This Tuesday, December 30th, is the fast of Asarah B'Teves. Asarah B'Teves was the tragic day on which Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Yerushalayim.

During Chazaras HaShatz of Shacharis, only the Shaliach Tzibbur adds Aneinu. Chazaras HaShatz is followed by Selichos, Avinu Malkeinu, Tachanun, and Krias Hatorah. Mincha includes Krias Hatorah followed by the Haftarah of a fast day (Yeshayah 55:6-56:8). Those fasting add Aneinu in Shemoneh Esrei. Nusach Ashkenaz says Sim Shalom in place of Shalom Rav. The Shaliach Tzibbur adds Aneinu and Bircas Kohanim in Chazaras HaShatz. Avinu Malkeinu is recited.

The Abudraham explains that this fast would be observed even on a Friday because the Pasuk's wording regarding Asarah B'Teves, "B'etzem Hayom Haze" (Yechezkel 24:2): On this very day, indicates it must be observed on this day specifically and is not postponed. He adds that this fast would technically be observed even on Shabbos itself - although this will never occur based on our current calendars.

What is the significance of Asarah B'Teves? The B'nei Yissaschar explains that Aschalta D'Paranusa Adifa, the onset of tragedy, is most significant, and that Asarah B'Teves was the beginning of the siege which led to the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash and so many other subsequent tragedies. The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, vol. 2, Vayikra, Drush 7 Adar) explains that on this date the Beis Din Shel Maalah decreed the destruction. Furthermore, the Chasam Sofer states that any generation that does not merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash is considered as if it was destroyed in its days. If so, each year on this date the Beis Din Shel Maalah reconvenes regarding the status of the generation and their worthiness for the Beis Hamikdash's rebuilding.

After Chanukah, used wicks, cups and oil should be disposed of in a respectful manner (i.e. by placing them in a plastic bag before disposing of them). Some have the minhag to burn the wicks on the last day of Chanukah; others burn them at Bi'ur Chametz before Pesach.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana (in case of necessity) is Friday night, January 2nd.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 104 • Yerushalmi: Succah 8 • Mishnah Yomis: Bechoros 8:5-6. Siyum next Friday, Mazal Tov! Arachin begins next • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 13a-15a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 36:27-37:9

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

The fast day of Asarah B'Teves is this Tuesday, December 30th.

VAYIGASH: Yehudah protests Yosef's persecution of the shevatim • Yosef reveals his identity • Yosef instructs the family to settle in Goshen • Yosef sends wagons with provisions for the brothers' journey to Canaan • Yosef gives the brothers gifts • Yaakov is informed that Yosef is alive • The members of Yaakov's family descending to Egypt are listed; they number 70 altogether • Yehudah travels ahead to open a Yeshivah • Yosef and Yaakov's reunion • Yosef instructs his brothers how to speak with Pharaoh • Yaakov meets with and blesses Pharaoh • At the beginning of the years of hunger, the Egyptians can no longer afford food • Pharaoh supports the priests • The Egyptians seek to sell themselves and their property to Yosef and Pharaoh.

Haftarah: The Parashah relates the episode of the brothers' reunion in Mitzrayim after years of separation. Yechezkel (37:15-28) relates the prophecy that the Shevatim will one day join with true unity under the Melech HaMashiach.

Parashas Vayigash: 106 Pesukim • No Mitzvos Listed

"וַיִּרְא אֶת־הָעֵגְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף"

"And he saw the wagons which Yosef sent" (Bereishis 45:27)

Chazal explain that Yaakov was rejuvenated when he saw the wagons his son Yosef sent, as they symbolized the last Torah topic they had studied together: Eglah Arufah. What was this message which Yosef was sending to his father?

Rav Uren Reich shlit"a answers: Chazal say that when Yosef set out to find his brothers, his father began escorting him out. Yosef protested, "I do not require this escort, as I am not a guest, but rather a member of the household." Yaakov responded that a lone traveler may face dangerous



circumstances along the way. Escorting a departing traveler even just a short distance provides a symbolic accompaniment and a sense that he is not alone, giving him confidence to persevere on his journey. Thus, it was important that he escort Yosef as well.

This discussion of Yaakov and Yosef regarding escorting guests was thus related to the laws of Eglah Arufah, which pertains to properly escorting a departing traveler. By sending the wagons, Yosef hinted to his father that he was, in fact, alive and well, both physically and spiritually. For despite their geographical distance, he constantly felt his father's presence, as indeed this feeling of never being alone enabled him to withstand the spiritual challenges he faced over the many lonely years in a land devoid of spirituality.

Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: [klalgovoa.org](mailto:klalgovoa.org) Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | [iraz@gparency.com](mailto:iraz@gparency.com) | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | [adicker@klalgovoa.org](mailto:adicker@klalgovoa.org) | 732.581.5830 Copyright © 2025 Klal Govoah,

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from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <[chanan@ravkooktorah.org](mailto:chanan@ravkooktorah.org)>

date: Dec 25, 2025, 1:21 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on VaYigash: The Reunion of Joseph and Judah**  
VaYigash: The Reunion of Joseph and Judah

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, the other brothers — and especially Judah, their leader — emphasized the Torah and the special holiness of the Jewish people. They sought to develop and cultivate the unique heritage of Israel. Thus it was Judah whom Jacob picked to establish an academy of Torah study in Goshen.

Furthermore, the Midrash credits Judah with burning the wagons that Pharaoh sent to bring Jacob's family to Egypt. Judah ordered that the wagons be destroyed when he saw that they were engraved with idolatrous symbols (Breishit Rabbah 94:3). This act, introducing the law of destroying idols with fire [later codified in Deut. 7:25], demonstrated Judah's focus on the aspects of purity and innovation in Torah.

The Message of Shema

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

What was the significance of the Shema at that particular time?

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

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

The Scales of the Leviathan

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

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

What do the Leviathan's scales have to do with the reunification of Jacob's family?

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

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

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

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from: **TorahWeb** <[torahweb@torahweb.org](mailto:torahweb@torahweb.org)>

date: Dec 24, 2025, 8:37 PM

subject: Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Hashem's Descent

**Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky**

**Hashem's Descent**

As Yaakov is on the verge of leaving for Egypt, he experiences a prophetic dream. Hashem tells him, "Don't be scared of going down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will descend with you to Egypt, and I will come up with you as well". Rashi explains that the promise to 'come up with him again', refers to the fact that Yaakov's body will return to Eretz Yisrael for burial. We can also understand it to mean that all of Israel will at some point get out of Egypt and come back to Eretz Yisrael. But the first half of the passuk, i.e. that Hashem will 'descend' into Egypt with him, is much less clearly understood.

The medrash (Shemos 15:16; 23:5) teaches us that Hashem "descended with us" into every exile that we have been cast into. Thus, in our parsha it says, "I will go down with you". Similarly, the medrash quotes pessukim telling us that this is true in Babylon, as well as in the so-called Greek exile, and so too when Edom exiled us. The medrash adds that in each one of these exiles we

were found to be “whole”, meaning, dedicated to Hashem and keeping our faith. But in what sense does it mean that Hashem “comes down with us” into exile? The term used to describe Hashem in the medrash is Shechina which means the Divine presence. That is almost by definition contradictory. For the “place” for the Divine presence is in Eretz Yisrael, more specifically, in the Beis Hamikdash. It is there that the presence was felt. Galus, by its very definition, is a period of separation from Hashem, and that of not really being able to sense him. The Hashem’s very description of galus periods is, “on that day [that Klal Yisroel does wrong], I will hide my face from them” (Devarim 31:16). The Torah then states it with a double emphasis (ibid 18), meaning a totality of obfuscation. So how has Hashem “been in exile” with us, when the core definition of exile is almost the exact opposite? The divine presence marks the sense that Hashem is there with us, and it is He who is endowing us with good, for He is pleased with us. We might call it a feedback mechanism, where Hashem lets us know, and reflects back to us, how satisfied he is with our conduct.

The answer lies in a deeper understanding of galus. A person who is shallow may describe the situation of galus as being one that Hashem has abandoned us. This means that I believe we deserve it and therefore Hashem has cast us off. A perspective like that really cuts us off from Hashem.

But there is a second perspective in the same situation. That is the perspective that Hashem has deemed the only way possible for us to rectify what we've done wrong is through suffering, remorse, and coming to the recognition of what is true and right. This means that Hashem has not cast us off but has put us in a situation where we taste the fruits of our wrongdoings, and rethink our actions. This means that we sense Hashem in the darkness and pain and suffering. We may not know exactly what and why, but we sense that we are going through a cleansing process. While it is painful and difficult and many times confusing when we go through a period like that, it is a world of difference than thinking we have been cast off. The first perspective certainly induces pain and remorse, but if we feel we have been abandoned, it breeds terror and despair. It means that there's nothing really to hope for, and the pain and suffering are pointless.

Dovid Hamellech said, “even if I go in the valley of death I fear not, for you are with me” (Tehillim 23:4). This does not mean that Hashem will necessarily save me - He may or may not - but whatever will come I'm not scared of it, because I know that it has meaning and a purpose. It is like the difference between a child in a hospital who is not only in pain, but frightened, bewildered and terrorized by everything around him, for he does not understand it. The adult may be in pain and apprehensive, but he knows and understands that there is a purpose and hope in the treatment at the hospital. That same child when he is holding on to his father's hand in the hospital, is still in pain and frightened, but he's not terrorized. He feels his father holding on to him and that there must be a rhyme and reason for what's happening; some sort of purpose.

Rav Hutner zt”l, in his letters, describes two friends of his: the first one said, “whenever I knock upstairs, there is no one home”. I got to know this bocher better, and he was a superficial person. On the other hand, the second one said, “whenever I knock upstairs, they hide from me”. I got to know this bocher better, and I found him to be a person of great depth.

Thus, Hashem is telling Yaakov that even when there will be times of galus, His Divine presence will be there. The person who has spiritual sensitivity will detect and feel Hashem in the very suffering and pain as well. It is appropriate, most appropriate, to do what we can to better ourselves and be relieved of our suffering. But still, the suffering itself is understood as being there to change us, to move us to do what's good for us.

This is an important understanding as we contemplate the difficulties that Klal Yisrael is enduring. Usually, the focus is on bitachon and hope for the ending of the sufferings. That certainly is worthy, most worthy, to pray for. But the more fundamental understanding is that we have not been cast off by G-d. They are not random acts of meaningless antisemitism or violence. Rather it is Hashem pushing us, prodding us, and awakening us to change into the people we need to be, so that Hashem can once again embrace us

openly. When that happens, iy”H the second half of the passuk will also be fulfilled: Hashem will go up with us again to Eretz Yisrael.

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From: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> Rabbi Kaganoff's Sunday night shiur <rabbi-kaganoffs-sunday-night-shiur@googlegroups.com>, date: Dec 25, 2025, 8:21 AM subject: Bikur Cholim **Bikur Cholim** By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: How many mitzvot? Which mitzvot does one fulfill when performing bikur cholim?

Question #2: Only visiting? Is the mitzvah fulfilled simply by visiting the sick?

Question #3: How often? How many times a day can I perform bikur cholim?

Question #4: Focus! Do I need to focus on the fact that I am performing a mitzvah in order to fulfill it?

Forwarded

The Gemara (Nedarim 39b) cites a reference to the mitzvah of bikur cholim in parshas Korach. After realizing the gravity of Korach's rebellion against belief in Hashem, Moshe Rabbeinu declared to the Benei Yisrael: “If these (Korach and his cohorts) will die like all men do, and what happens to all other men will happen to them, then Hashem did not send me. However, if Hashem will produce a new creation and the earth will open its mouth, swallowing them and all that is theirs, such that they plummet alive into the grave, you will know for certain that these men have angered Hashem” (Bamidbar 16:29- 30). Rava explains: “Most men take ill and are bedridden; they are then visited by people who check to see what needs to be attended to. If this happens to Korach and his party, people can say that Hashem did not send me.” The Gemara concludes that this is a Biblical hint to the mitzvah of bikur cholim. Another allusion to bikur cholim is at the beginning of parshas Vayeira (Bereishis 18:1), where it says that Hashem visited AvrahamAvinu. Rashi points out that this occurred on the third day after his bris milah was performed, and Hashem was fulfilling bikur cholim, visiting and providing care for the ill. Yet another reference to the mitzvah of bikur cholim is in parshas Tazria (Vayikra 13:45) where the Torah tells us that the metzora calls out to whoever can hear him that he is tamei. Chazal explain that this is so that they should daven for his swift and complete recovery (Shabbos 67a; Mo'ed Katan 5a; Sotah 32b; Chullin 78a; Niddah 66a). We will soon see the important role of prayer in the mitzvah of bikur cholim.

Praying for good health The Gemara (Shabbos 32a) notes, “A person should always pray that he not become ill, because once he gets ill, he is told, ‘find merits on the basis of which you will be healed.’” Other Biblical sources are quoted to demonstrate the mitzvah of bikur cholim, although it is disputed among the rishonim whether the specific mitzvah of bikur cholim is min 2 haTorah or not. It is important to note that all halachic authorities agree that observing bikur cholim properly fulfills several mitzvot min haTorah, including ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha, love your fellowman as yourself (Vayikra 19:18) and vahalachta bi'derachav, acting in the ways of Hashem (Devarim 28:9). It could also easily fit within the heading of other mitzvot (Shu”t Sho’el Umeishiv 3:244), such as lo sa'amod al dam rei'echa, do not stand by idly when someone is endangered. The dispute among the rishonim and ge'onim is whether there is a specific mitzvah of bikur cholim among the count of the 613 mitzvot (opinion of the Behag), or whether it is an aspect of performing chesed and developing our character (Rambam, Hilchos Aveil 14:1). The Gemara (Sotah 14a) teaches that we have a mitzvah to follow in Hashem's ways, and that this mitzvah includes the requirement to take care of the needs of the ill. “Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said, ‘How are we to understand the words of the Torah: “You should follow Hashem, your G-d (Devarim 13:5).” How is it possible for a human being to follow the Holy One, blessed is He, when the verse states that “Hashem, your G-d, is a consuming fire?” (Devarim 4:24; 9:3) Rather, it means that we are to emulate Hashem's attributes – just as he dresses the unclothed... takes care of the sick... consoles the mourners and buries the dead, so should we.”

Similarly, the Torah teaches “You must clarify to them [your children] the laws and the teachings, and make known to them the pathways in which they are to walk and the deeds that they are to perform” (Shemos 18:20), which the Gemara (Bava Kama 100a) explains includes gemillas chesed, bikur cholim and other, similar, acts of kindness.

What does the word bikur mean? Although the word “bikur” means “visit” in modern Hebrew, the original meaning of “bikur” is “examine” or “check.” Chazal refer to bikur korban, which does not mean to see how the animal awaiting hakravah is feeling or to check its blood pressure, but to check to see that it has no blemish (Pesachim 96a). The primary responsibility of the mitzvah of bikur cholim is to check and see what the ill person needs and to do whatever one can to meet those needs (Toras Ha'adam). Since we rule that mitzvos tzerichos kavanah, i.e., to fulfill a mitzvah requires being cognizant of that fact, any medical professional gains much merit by being aware of this every day and all day. Thus, a physician, nurse, nurse's aide, or medical clown performs the mitzvah of bikur cholim all day long. If they regularly have in mind that they are fulfilling what Hashem wants us to do, they are rewarded for each and every time that they inquire about the ill and assist in their care. However, one who performs the same activities while looking at it exclusively as a job, but not as an opportunity to imitate Hashem's wondrous ways, misses the opportunity to receive all this reward. In addition, constantly recognizing that I am acting like Hashem and fulfilling His mitzvos makes a tremendous impression on one's neshamah. A pharmacist, who may not see the patients, should still begin the day by remembering that he is performing two mitzvos, one of emulating Hashem, and the other of bikur cholim, by making sure that the patients receive their proper pharmaceutical care. It would seem to me that, should a medical professional think they might forget to have this in mind all day, should express before beginning their day's work, “I am declaring that all the acts of chesed I do today should fulfill the Torah's mitzvos.”

Ramban The earliest, most authoritative, and most extensive work we have on the topic of bikur cholim, pikuach nefesh, aveilus and related topics is the Toras Ha'adam, authored by the Ramban. When the Tur (Yoreh Deah Chapter 335) introduces the laws of bikur cholim, he goes out of his way to laud the Ramban's work as his primary source. It is also important to note that the Ramban quotes frequently from halachic sources of Chazal that we no longer have, particularly from texts of Meseches Semachos that are now missing in our versions of this early work. (This fact is noted by the Gra and the Chiddushei Hagahos.) There is also a fascinating bibliographic detail about the Toras Ha'adam. It was published twice in the sixteenth century (1519 in Constantinople and 1595 in Venice) and then not again until the mid-nineteenth century!

Praying for the ill and attending to their needs Many people err to think that the mitzvah of bikur cholim is simply to visit the ill and cheer them up, but do not realize that the mitzvah includes attending to the ill person's needs and praying on their behalf. The Toras Ha'adam writes, “It is a great mitzvah to visit the ill, since this causes the visitor to pray on the sick person's behalf, which revitalizes him. Furthermore, since the visitor sees the ill person, the visitor checks to see what the ill person needs” (also see Beis Yosef, Yoreh Deah 335). We see that praying for the ill is an even greater part of the mitzvah than attending to his needs, since he first mentions praying and then refers to attending to the other needs as “furthermore.” When praying for someone ill, always include a request that he get well together with the rest of the Jewish ill (Shabbos 12b). This helps the prayer be accepted, since the merit of the public is rallied (Rashi). The many tefillah and tehillim groups that daven for lists of ill people to get better are thereby fulfilling some of the aspects of bikur cholim, while still being able to attend to the needs of their own household. The authorities note that someone who visits a sick person without praying for his recovery has not fulfilled all the requirements of the mitzvah (Toras Ha'adam, based on Nedarim 40a; Rema, Yoreh Deah 335:4). Therefore, medical professionals should accustom themselves to pray for their sick patients in order to fulfill the complete mitzvah of bikur cholim. A simple method of accomplishing this is to discreetly recite a quick prayer, such as “Hashem, please heal this person among the other ill Jewish people, besoch she'ar cholei Yisroel,” as one leaves the person's room. A doctor in his office can recite the same quick prayer. I know a physician who makes lists of his patients' names and includes them in his daily davening. When wishing

someone refuah sheleimah, what one is doing is offering a short prayer on behalf of the sick person. 4 When praying in the presence of the ill person, one can daven in any language, although when praying not in his presence, it is advisable to pray in loshon hakodesh (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 335:5 and Taz ibid.). Among several other lessons that the amora, Rav Pinchas ben Chama, derived from various passages in Tanach, we find the following: Whoever has an ill person in his household should go to a wise man (a Torah scholar) to ask that he pray for the ill person. Rav Pinchas derives this from a posuk in Mishlei (16:14), The anger of the King brings the angels of death, but the man who is wise can atone for this (Bava Basra 116a). This is the basis for asking tzaddikim to daven for the ill. The Rema quotes this in Yoreh Deah (335:10), mentioning that one should ask a great Torah scholar in the city to daven on behalf of the ill. Small illness The Gemara (Yerushalmi, Brochos 4:4) implies that one should pray for the healing of even a relatively minor illness. To quote: “Every illness has the potential to become life threatening.”

Rasha The Sefer Chassidim discusses whether we should pray for a sick person who has separated himself from the Jewish community. He cites pesukim from which we see that one should not.

Aspects of visiting a choleh The visit is to benefit the choleh. In most circumstances, a visit should be short and not tiresome or uncomfortable for the ill person. Sometimes the sick person wants to rest, but feels obligated to converse with a visitor (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 335:4). In such cases, visitors think they are performing a mitzvah, while, unfortunately, they are actually doing the opposite. It is important to remember that the entire focus of bikur cholim is on the sick person's needs and not on the visitor's desire to feel noble or important. I remember my mother, a”h, having such guests during one of her hospital stays; although she kept hinting that she wanted to rest, they didn't catch on and stayed. They thought they were performing a kind deed, while, in reality, they were harming a sick person who desperately needed to rest. Always cheer up the choleh (Gesher Hachayim). This is included in attending to his emotional needs. The Ramban states that one of the aspects of bikur cholim is that the ill person appreciates spending time with his friends (Toras Ha'adam, page 17 in the Chavel edition). First three days The Gemara teaches that when a person becomes ill, for the first three days he should be visited only by family and close friends. After these days pass, others (the beraisa quoted states, “the more distant ones”) should also come to visit. (The Ramban understands that the “distant ones” come on the third day, and apparently explains the passage I will cite 5 shortly in the same way.) However, if it is clear that he is seriously ill, others may come in the first three days. In this context, the Gemara (Yerushalmi, Peah 3:7) tells us a somewhat amusing anecdote. Rabbi Yosi, one of the most frequently quoted amora'im in the Talmud Yerushalmi (some have the text that it was either Rabbi Asi or Rabbi Yonah), had fallen ill. On the fourth day of his being bedridden, Rabbi Chuna (some say it was Rav Huna [Penei Moshe; Chavel]), Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Chizkiyah came to visit him. Rabbi Yosi teased them for following the words of the beraisa too literally when it states that non-family members should wait until the fourth day to visit. Since you are my friends, you should have come right away (Toras Ha'adam; Penei Moshe) – friends are as good, sometimes far better than, family. The Reshas (the earliest commentary that we have on the Yerushalmi) understands the passage slightly differently: Rabbi Chuna, Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Chizkiyah were his disciples and should never consider themselves “the more distant ones,” regardless of whether or not they are close biological family. Thus, he was upset at their tarrying to come, notwithstanding that they were well intentioned.

Two visitors Many people have the custom to go with another person when they fulfill the mitzvah of bikur cholim. This practice is based on a statement of the She'iltos of Rav Acha'i Gaon (#93), one of the few full-length halachic works that has been passed down to us from the era of the ge'onim. Rav Acha'i simply states that when going to fulfill bikur cholim, he should not go alone but with someone else. In his commentary, Ha'amek She'eilah, to the She'iltos, the Netziv suggests a source for this ruling, and then comments that he has not found this opinion mentioned in any other work, from the earliest to the latest.

Don't visit The Gemara (Nedarim 41a) teaches that certain sick people should not be visited. Specifically, it says not to visit someone with: (1) A stomach ailment, because it is embarrassing for the patient who may need to excuse himself to the restroom for long periods of time. (2) Headaches, for whom talking to others or even a small amount of noise is disturbing. (3) Eye ailments (some say that those with eye ailments are also very sensitive to noise; others mention other reasons why they should not be visited). Obviously, the Gemara is teaching that one

should use common sense not to visit someone who would prefer to be left alone. In all of these cases where the ill person should not be disturbed, one fulfills bikur cholim by coming to the hospital or wherever the ill person is and inquiring and observing from outside the ill person's room what is needed (Toras Ha'adam). When a patient has visitors, the staff is more likely to provide better care since they see that other people care for the sick person. 6 Similarly, the Rema (Yoreh Deah 335:2) rules that one should not visit someone who thinks that you despise him, since the visit will have the opposite effect of what bikur cholim is meant to accomplish. In this, the Rema overrules an earlier authority who contended that such a person could visit a choleh.

**Substandard care** What should one do if he realizes that the ill person is receiving substandard care? In this instance, one should try to upgrade the choleh's care without agitating him in the process (Gesher Hachayim). However, the Gesher Hachayim points out that discussing directly with the sick person that he needs better care could easily be an aveirah, not a mitzvah, because this causes the sick person to become agitated and perhaps to lose hope, which is the opposite of what they need in order to get better. Since it is more likely that a poor person is receiving inadequate care or has no one to care for his needs, it is usually a greater mitzvah to visit a poor choleh than a wealthy one (Sefer Chassidim #361). Additionally, the poor person is more likely to be in financial distress because of his inability to work due to his illness (Ahavas Chesed 3:3). If two people need the same amount of care and one of them is a talmid chacham, it is preferable to attend to the talmid chacham first. If the talmid chacham is being attended to adequately and the other person is not, first take care of the other person (Sefer Chassidim). We have not yet finished the topic of bikur cholim, and we will return to it in next week. **Conclusion** People who fulfill the mitzvah of bikur cholim are promised tremendous reward in Olam Haba, in addition to many rewards in this world (Shabbos 127a). In addition to all the obvious reasons for the mitzvah of bikur cholim, the Kli Yakar, in his commentary to Bamidbar (16:29), offers an additional reason for fulfilling bikur cholim: to benefit the visitor -- because it can serve him as a wakeup call. Seeing someone ill influences the visitor to think about the importance of doing teshuvah. This provides extra merit for the sick person, since he caused someone else to do teshuvah, even if it was unintentional. May Hashem send a speedy recovery to all the ill!

<https://en.yhb.org.il/revivim1175/>

#### **Rabbi Eliezer Melamed Revivim**

The primary role of the members of the Tribe of Levi is to lead the army spiritually, and disciplinarily \* In addition to strengthening the spirit of the fighters before battle, the anointed priest for war was a partner in the decisions of the General Staff \* In addition, the priests would carry the Ark that accompanied Israel in its wars \* The role of the officers was to encourage the fighters, and punish deserters \* The Hasmonians continued Moshe Rabbeinu, who, after the sin of the Golden Calf, when Israel was in grave danger, called out: "Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!"

**The Roles of Levi in the Army** In the previous column we learned that members of the Tribe of Levi participated in Israel's wars to defend the people and the Land, as explained in Scripture, the words of our Sages, and the writings of early and later authorities. Therefore, when the soldiers from the Tribe of Levi were counted in the days of David, their number was no less than that of the soldiers from the other tribes (I Chronicles 12:24–39), and some of them even served as commanders of the army, such as Benaiah son of Yehoiada.

In this column we will continue to learn that according to the guidance of the Torah, the first role of the members of the Tribe of Levi was to lead the army spiritually, and disciplinarily. That is, initially they would select from the Levites all those suited for these roles, and afterward, the remaining Levites would enlist in the army like all of Israel. And as we learned last week, according to most halakhic authorities, in a mandatory war to save Israel ('milchemet mitzvah'), they were obligated to enlist, and according to some authorities, it was a mitzvah for them to enlist, but not an obligation.

**The Anointed Priest for War** In addition to the High Priest (Kohen Ha-Gadol) who was responsible for the service in the Temple, another priest was anointed with the anointing oil, who was called the 'Kohen Mashuach Milchama' ("Anointed Priest for War"). His role was to encourage the warriors of Israel with words of faith, such as: "Hear, O Israel, today you are approaching battle against your enemies—let not your heart grow faint; do not fear, do not panic, and do not be terrified of them. For the Lord your God goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deuteronomy 20:2–4; Maimonides, Laws of Kings 7:1–3).

It stands to reason that just as the High Priest stood at the head of the system of priests who served in the Temple, so too the 'Anointed Priest for War' stood at the head of a framework of priests who supported the fighters in their various units.

In addition to strengthening the spirit of the fighters before battle, the 'Anointed Priest for War' was a partner in the decisions of the General Staff, to the extent that our Sages said (Nazir 47b) that many depend on him, for "the entire battle formation is arranged according to him" (Rosh ad loc.; and likewise, Rashi and Tosafot there). Sounding the Trumpets Another role of the priests in war—and this too is a commandment from the Torah—was to sound the trumpets in order to encourage the fighters to bravery and trust in God, and to bring Israel to remembrance before God for good (Numbers 10:8–9). Thus, they did in the war against Midian, when Phinehas the priest sounded the trumpets (Numbers 31:6).

And likewise in the war of Jericho, the priests blew the shofars before the Ark of the Lord during the seven days in which the warriors of Israel encircled the city, and thereby, led the war spiritually (Joshua 6:4). The Bearers of the Ark That Went Out with the Fighters In addition, the priests would carry the Ark, which accompanied Israel in its wars, and through this the Divine Presence rested in the camp of Israel and they merited help from Heaven, as it is stated: "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to save you and to deliver your enemies before you" (Deuteronomy 23:15). It stands to reason that the guard of priests who carried the Ark consisted of courageous fighters who were able to protect the Ark from the enemy, who would strive to capture it, and thereby decide the battle. As was customary in all armies, elite soldiers were stationed to guard the standard that stood near the commanders of the campaign. So, we find that in the war that the Philistines waged against Israel at Ebenezer, the priestly guard failed, and the Philistines killed Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli the High Priest, who guarded the Ark, and captured the Ark of the Lord that had been brought to the battle. As a result, Shiloh was destroyed, and Eli the High Priest died (I Samuel 7:2–14).

**The Levites as Officers Who Determine Who Is Exempt from War** In addition to being teachers of halakha, educators, and judges, the Levites also served as officers, as our Sages said: "At first (in the days of the First Temple), they would appoint officers only from among the Levites" (Yevamot 86b), as it is stated: "And the Levitical officers are before you" (II Chronicles 19:11). (See also I Chronicles 23:1–4; 26:29; 34:13; and Be'er Sheva, Sotah 42a; Aseh Lecha Rav 3:48.)

The officers were those who enforced the law, as it is stated: "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates" (Deuteronomy 16:18). As part of their role as officers, the Levites were responsible for granting exemptions from a discretionary war (milchemet reshut) to soldiers who had just built a house, planted a vineyard, or married a wife, as well as to soldiers whose hearts were faint, and who might lose their composure in battle, as it is stated: "And the officers shall speak to the people, saying: Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it—let him go and return to his house... And when the officers finish speaking to the people, the commanders of the armies shall take command at the head of the people" (Deuteronomy 20:5–9).

In a mandatory war (milchemet mitzvah), in which all were obligated to enlist, the officers were responsible for determining who was exempt from the war due to unavoidable circumstances, such as injury or illness.

**Punishing Those Who Flee the Battlefield** After the battle began, the role of the officers was to encourage the fighters and punish those who fled the battlefield. As our Sages said (Mishnah Sotah 8:6), guards were stationed behind the fighters—namely, "strong and resolute officers" (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 7:4)—to punish deserters, in order to prevent defeat. As our Sages said: "And iron axes were in their hands, and anyone who sought to retreat—the authority was given to strike his legs, for the beginning of collapse is flight" (see Jerusalem Talmud Sotah 8:10).

**Song and Prayer** Another role of the Levites in war was that a group of them would stand during the battle in song and prayer on behalf of the soldiers. As it is stated in the days of Jehoshaphat: "And the Levites from the sons of the Kohathites and from the sons of the Korahites arose to praise the Lord God of Israel with an exceedingly loud voice... And when they began with singing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir who had come against Judah, and they were struck" (II Chronicles 20:19–22). Some say that the psalm "May the Lord answer you on the day of distress" (Psalm 20) was written for the Levites who prayed for the fighters in battle (Meiri, Sotah 42b). It stands to reason that for this role they selected Levites who sang, and played musical instruments in the Temple. **How They Merited These Roles** The Levites merited serving in these roles after they volunteered for them at the time of the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moses called out: "Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!" and "all the sons of Levi" gathered to him (Exodus 32:26). Together with him they fought against the sinners, and aroused Israel to a process of repentance (see Exodus 32:29; Deuteronomy 10:8). Likewise, when Israel sinned with Baal Peor and a great accusation arose against them, to the point that a terrible disaster was about to befall them, Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest took a spear in his hand, struck the sinners, and thereby stopped the downward spiral after the Midianites and their idols, and "the plague was

halted from upon the children of Israel” (Numbers 25:1–9). As a result, he merited the covenant of peace and the High Priesthood for himself, and his descendants (Numbers 25:13). Our Sages said that when Aaron died and the ‘Clouds of Glory’ that protected Israel departed, the Canaanites came to fight against them. As a result, some families in Israel became afraid and sought to return to Egypt, retreating eight stages from their encampments on the journey to the Land. But the Levites pursued them to bring them back so that they would not flee in battle, and a fight broke out between them in which seven families from the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, and Gad fell, and four families from the Tribe of Levi fell (Rashi, Numbers 26:13). As a continuation of this, the Levites were appointed as officers, whose role included ensuring that the fighters would not flee the battlefield.

**The Tribe of Levi — An Elite Unit** When the Lord commanded Moses to count all those fit for military service in Israel, He commanded not to count the members of the Tribe of Levi among them, because they were not given a territorial inheritance in the Land of Israel (Numbers 1:45–47, 49; 2:33; 26:62). Our Sages said (Numbers Rabbah 1:11–12) that Moshe Rabbeinu became distressed and feared: “Perhaps there is a defect in my tribe, that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not desire that we be counted!” The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “I did not say this to you for that reason, but to remove them from the decree, so that they should not die with them.” For when the soldiers of Israel heard the evil report of the Land and sinned in the Sin of the Spies, and sought to return to Egypt instead of conquering the Land, it was decreed upon them that they would die in the wilderness. But the members of the Tribe of Levi were not partners in their betrayal, and therefore, the decree that they would die in the wilderness did not apply to them. Had they been counted with the other tribes, they would have been caught up in their sin, and the destroying angel would have struck them as well. Similarly, our Sages said that after the princes of Israel brought the offerings for the dedication of the altar, Aaron the priest became distressed because his tribe had not been among the participants in the dedication of the altar. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “Do not fear; you are destined for a greatness greater than this.” For “the offerings apply only as long as the Temple stands, but the lights will forever shine opposite the face of the Menorah” (Numbers Rabbah 15:6; Tanchuma, Beha’alotcha 5). Nachmanides explained (Numbers 8:2) that this refers to the lights that our Sages instituted to be lit following the miracle of Hanukkah performed for the Hasmoneans, descendants of Aaron, which are lit even in days when the Temple is destroyed, and offerings are not brought on the altar. The Hasmoneans In this way, the Hasmoneans continued Moshe Rabbeinu, who after the sin of the Golden Calf, when Israel was in tremendous danger, called out: “Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!” And similarly, in the days of the decrees of destruction of the Greek kingdom, the Hasmonean priests arose, raised the banner of rebellion, and called out: “Whoever is for the Lord—come to me!” After many heroic battles they defeated the Greeks, annulled their decrees, and restored the Kingdom of Israel to its place for more than two hundred years (Maimonides, Laws of Hanukkah 3:1; Peninei Halakha, Festivals 11:1–6). Thus, when the people of Israel falter, and the nation and the Land are in danger, the Tribe of Levi—and among them the priests—serve as a kind of elite commando unit that, in times of crisis, enters fierce battle against Israel’s enemies, decides the campaign, and helps Israel return to its sacred destiny.

**Conclusion and Further Questions** Thus, those who wish to be considered as the Tribe of Levi must be the most devoted to the people of Israel and its wars, and in addition to being soldiers themselves, must encourage enlistment in the army, and elevate the spirit of heroism of the soldiers.

Parshat Vayigash: The True Art of Negotiation

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“You are to be acknowledged master by your brothers; the sceptre of rulership shall never depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet...unto him shall be the gathering of the nations.” (Genesis 49:8, 10)

Who is really the most important of the brothers, Joseph or Judah? At the outset of the Joseph stories, it is clear that at least Jacob and Joseph believe that it is Joseph. After all, Joseph is the one who receives the coat of many colors from his father – a clear symbol of the birthright – and Joseph is the one who dreams that all the brothers, and indeed all the cosmos – will bow down to him. Yet, by the end of the sequence, at least Jacob has changed his mind. Judah is granted the birthright and not Joseph. Joseph seemingly accepts the situation. What happened and why?

The dramatic change in Judah is clearly delineated in the Bible. We first meet him in depth as a clever salesman, driven more by profit motive than sibling sensitivity when he cleverly suggests selling Joseph as a

slave to a caravan of Midianite traders passing in the distance rather than leaving their hapless brother in the pit, waiting for the scorpions to unleash their poison. True, Judah thereby saved his brother from certain death (at least by starvation, if the pit was empty), yet we can- not overlook the fact that the brother who actually initiates Joseph’s sale into slavery is none other than Judah. Perhaps Judah should have tried harder to rescue Joseph completely! And from the moment he is sold, Joseph’s fate appears likely to be sealed; the likelihood of any of the brothers ever seeing him again is virtually nonexistent. Because of Judah, Joseph the dreamer is as good as dead, certainly to his aged father. More than two decades later, Judah makes a selfless plea to the Grand Vizier (Joseph) that instead of imprisoning Benjamin as a slave in Egypt because the missing silver goblet was found in his food sack, he – Judah – will stand as a substitute. This reveals a total turnaround in the character of Judah. He emerges as the classic penitent, since true penitence involves correcting one’s sin at its core; if in the past he was instrumental in turning Joseph into a slave, then the only possible restoration is for Judah to now make himself a slave instead of Benjamin. The nobility of spirit demonstrated by Judah’s willing sacrifice of his own life – a spiritual descendant of Isaac on the Akeda – is enough to thrust him into a position of leadership, to cause Jacob to declare concerning Judah: “from the ‘torn’ [ Joseph], you have arisen...” (Gen. 49:9).

But Joseph also changes, and his change involves a newfound humility which enables him to recognize Judah’s superiority. But this change is more subtle, and requires our reading between the lines of the text. Joseph first appears as an arrogant youth, his dreams testifying to an exalted sense of self. He sees himself as king over his brothers, their sheaves of wheat bowing down to his, the sun, the moon and the planets all genuflecting before him. And as long as he dreamt dreams of agriculture in Egypt, universal power and domination, far removed from the family shepherding in the land of Israel, Joseph understood that he had constructed an internal grammar alien to his family, a language his brothers and ancestors didn’t speak. Joseph seemed a mutation, an alien revolutionary independent of the family traditions. He was apparently gifted, but he dare not be accepted by his brothers. They were not ready to take him for what he was, a man of many colors, of manifold visions and cosmopolitan dreams. And so when his brothers sold him into slavery, they dealt with him more as a stranger than as a brother, an outsider having more in common with Esau than with Jacob. And Joseph accepted his brothers’ judgement. He was truly different, a seeker after the novel and dynamic Egyptian occupation of agriculture, a citizen of the world, rather than a lover of Zion. When in Egypt, he easily accepts the Egyptian tongue, answers to an Egyptian name (Tzafnat-Pane’ach), and wears Egyptian garb. He has graduated from the family; not only are they not interested in him, he is not really interested in them!

It is only in the Torah portion of Vayigash that Joseph pulls away the mask and stands revealed before his brothers and sends for his aged father. But to understand why it takes place right now, we first have to understand why our portion Vayigash begins in the midst of one of the most tension-filled encounters in the entire Torah. Is the Torah merely interested in the dramatic effect, presenting the life and death struggle of Benjamin as a cliff-hanger, keeping us in suspense by ending the preceding portion right when it seems that there is no hope left for the wrongly accused Benjamin, whose sack of food turned out to be the hiding place of the Grand Vizier’s missing silver goblet?

Judah’s defense speech keeps returning to the theme of an old father waiting at home for his youngest son. The word ‘father’ appears thirteen times (Jacob is a father to thirteen children), an extraordinary emphasis if directed to a stranger with no knowledge of the family. Would it not have been more logical for Judah to have based his defense on the circumstantial nature of the evidence against Benjamin? Indeed, since their payment for all food purchases keeps turning up in each of the brothers’ sacks, there is a clear indication that a foreign hand has taken the freedom to open their bags. Once a strange hand is moving about freely within the brothers’ property, that same hand could have easily planted the evidence in Benjamin’s sack. But instead of this defense, Judah sticks to one tale, the story of their family and the sufferings of

their aged father. If Benjamin is a thief, why should the age or mental condition of Benjamin's father matter to the Egyptian Grand Vizier? A thief must be punished; Benjamin should have been concerned for his aged father and not have perpetrated a crime against the Grand Vizier. Why should one expect the Grand Vizier to be concerned about the thief's ancient father?

Admittedly, the situation is extremely tense. After having nearly brought their father to his death with their sale of Joseph, the brothers dare not now contemplate returning home to Israel bereft of Rachel's second son. Judah, who promised his father that he would be responsible for his father's youngest, initially steps forward and speaks up at the end of Parashat Miketz:

"...What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. Behold we shall be my lord's servants, also us, and also the one in whose hand the goblet was found." (Gen. 44:16)

Judah recognizes the 'iniquity' of the brothers, a continuation of a theme first expressed when the Grand Vizier originally confronted them with the charge that they were spies:

"And they said, one to another, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he implored us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.' " (Gen. 42:21)

These words of Judah to the Grand Vizier are the culmination of this theme. Why are the brothers being mistreated to such an extent by this Grand Vizier? It is an act of God, think the brothers, obviously punishing them for their mistreatment of Joseph – measure for measure. The brothers behaved ignominiously toward Joseph, and now they must pay the price. Judah's offer that the brothers become slaves to the Grand Vizier because 'God has found out the iniquity of your servants' is a clear expression of Judah's conviction that they must all now be punished together – all but Benjamin who had nothing to do with the sale of Joseph. They must accept the will of God.

But the Grand Vizier shifts the tables on Judah. He rejects the offer of all the brothers becoming servants. He wants only Benjamin:

"Only the man in whose hand the goblet is found, he shall be my servant. And as for you, go up in peace unto your father." (Gen. 44:17) This is when Judah grows confused. According to his calculations, God was punishing the brothers as a result of the evil they had perpetrated

against their brother. That is how he understood the mishaps which had befallen the family ever since they met this Grand Vizier. The way Judah surmised it, since the brothers had sinned as a collective unit, they must now suffer as a collective unit. But Joseph's singling out of Benjamin as the only brother who would be enslaved challenged Judah's perception. After all, Benjamin had never been part of the conspiracy against Joseph. He was too young; if any of the brothers were innocent, Benjamin was innocent. Why should he be the only one punished? Now we can understand why the portion of Miketz ends precisely when it does. It has little to do with the desire to create suspense, and largely to do with Judah's new-found awareness as to the identity of the Grand Vizier. Because if it wasn't God who had planned their experiences in Egypt, it could only have been the Grand Vizier. And why would the Grand Vizier have it in for them, unless...

The portion of Vayigash opens with the words, "Then Judah stepped near unto him [Joseph], and said, 'Oh my Lord, let your servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears...' " (Gen. 44:18). Until this point, Judah had believed that the Kafkaesque nightmare they were experiencing was the result of God's punishment. Judah now realizes that this cannot be the case. He now begins to perceive the unfolding of a trail of evidence that casts new light upon the Grand Vizier's true identity. He recalls that Shimon, the brother who instigated casting Joseph into the pit, was singled out to sit in prison as a hostage after their first sojourn to Egypt for food. He now remembers how, upon their second visit, the Grand Vizier arranged their seats according to their ages when he invited them for a celebratory repast (Gen. 43:33). Only two people aside from the family who were present could have known the proper ages of the brothers: father Jacob and brother Joseph. And

Jacob was in Israel!

Yes, an Egyptian, a Grand Vizier couldn't care less about an old father – unless it was his old father as well. Every word of Judah's is now calculated – and successfully earns him a bull's eye. Joseph also now recognizes Judah's profound wisdom and the ability of Judah to have pierced through his veil of deception and revealed his true identity. Judah has now emerged as the *tikkun*, i.e., repair – and thereby the most proper heir – of Jacob. Jacob's tragedy was his sin of deception, perversely continued by Joseph's pose as Egyptian Grand Vizier; Judah's mastery is his gift of cutting through the deception, and in so doing becomes worthy of the Abrahamic birthright.

The moment of Judah's understanding is also the moment of Joseph's understanding – as well as Joseph's repentance. He now sees the master plan, the divine guidance in all that has transpired. The brothers must come to Egypt not to serve him – Joseph – but rather to fulfill the vision of Abraham at the Covenant between the Pieces. The family of Abraham must live to spread the message of ethical monotheism throughout the world, but they will first return to the land of Israel which will always be the familial and national homeland. Joseph is ready now to recognize Judah's superiority, and to subjugate his gifts of technology, administration and politics to Judah's Torah and tradition. Joseph is now able to surrender his dream of kingship over the brothers and request that his remains be eventually brought to Israel. Joseph is now ready to reunite the family under the majesty of Judah. And such is the case in Jacob's blessing.

But Jacob does not express forcefully enough the vision of unity, the initial dream of Rebecca when she merged the Esau-like skins with the hands and voice of Jacob. The aged patriarch merely creates a split between the double material portion of land which goes to Joseph, and the spiritual leadership, which goes to Judah (Gen. 49:8–10, 22–26), an understandable replay of the same split his father Isaac had effectuated a generation earlier; apparently, we most often do repeat the mistakes of our parents, especially if we feel guilty toward them and seek their forgiveness. Hence, in First Temple history, Judah-Jerusalem will separate from Ephraim-Northern Israel, and the seeds of a difficult exile were planted, whose bitter fruits would last for close to 2,000 years. And if Ephraim represented material prosperity, technological and administrative know-how, scientific and philosophical expertise, then Judah – bereft and isolated, exiled and violated – could hardly be expected to stand up to a holocaust!

However, the prophet Ezekiel, in this portion's prophetic reading (*haftarah*), provides an ultimate rapprochement – nay, unity – between all of the tribes; 'Now you, son of man, take yourself one wooden tablet and write upon it, "for Judah and the children of Israel, his companions," and take another wooden tablet and write upon it, "for Joseph, the wooden tablet of Ephraim, and all the children of Israel, his companions." And bring close to yourself one to the other, for you as one tablet, and they shall become one' (Ezekiel 37:16, 17). Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, felt the footsteps of the Messiah and the nearness of redemption. He saw in Theodor Herzl, architect of the administrative and political characteristics of the Jewish State, the Messiah from the House of Joseph-Ephraim (he eulogized Herzl as such upon his death, in his famous encomium from Jerusalem); he anxiously awaited the coming of the Messiah from the House of David-Judah, who would give spiritual meaning and universal redemptive significance to the hands of Esau which so successfully waged wars and forged an advanced nation-state phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Holocaust. Hopefully, the vision of Rebecca will soon be realized...

Shabbat Shalom

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **ADDED POINTS:**

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom

## 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 Sefer 46:1 (like Radak) and Chizkuni.]

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

This background also explains why Yaakov prays at this time specifically 'to the God of YITZCHAK'. Considering that Yitzchak had not received permission (when he faced a very similar situation), Yaakov now prays to 'the God of Yitzchak [i.e. who did not allow Yitzchak to leave]. [See Radak & Sefer.]

[Note that Ramban offers a different approach (based on what he calls 'sod'), that Yaakov recognizes that his departure to Egypt marks the beginning of the long historical process of 'brit bein ha-bitarim' 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 l-Hashem" (see Shmot 12:27), marks the COMPLETION of the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim. [See Shmot 11:1->12:14. Note also that Chazal include Korban Pesach under the general category of 'shlamim'.]

2) At Ma'amad Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael offer special 'zevachim' as part of the ceremony where they accept the mitzvot: "Moshe wrote down God's commandments, and then, early in the morning, he set up a 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-bitarim (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-yered Mitzrayim - annus al pi ha-dibbur"). Apparently, Yaakov did not want to move to Egypt; he did so only to obey Hashem's commandment. [The conventional understanding, that Yaakov decided to move to Egypt on his own, would presumably read this Midrash to mean that Yaakov would not have decided to relocate in Egypt if Hashem hadn't placed him in a situation warranting this move. By bringing famine and arranging that Yosef could provide food for Yaakov and his family in Egypt, Hashem indirectly 'forced' Yaakov to move there.]

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

#### **Yaakov's Fear**

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

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

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

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

#### **The Stopover in Be'er Sheva:**

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

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

#### **The 'zevachim':**

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

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

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

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Adapted by Zvi Shimon

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

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

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

Abarbanel poses the same question, but more bluntly:

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

### **1) RAV YOEL BIN-NUN'S SOLUTION:**

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

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

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

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

To forget his father's house!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And further on,

*Let your servant stay instead of the boy as a slave to my lord and let the boy go up with his brothers (44:33).*

From Judah's speech it is apparent that he did not confess to stealing the cup. He considered the whole episode of the stolen goblet as a fabrication. Otherwise there is no sense in telling us of Benjamin's journey to Egypt, or his suggesting that he replace Benjamin. This is how Rashi and other commentators interpret Judah's words. His words, God has revealed the SIN of your servants, undoubtedly relate to the selling of Joseph.

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

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

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

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

A) The brothers are subjected to an intensive interrogation during three days of imprisonment, inducing them to repent for their sin and accept the punishment and suffering, with Reuven in the lead (42:21,22). We have previously defined this kind of repentance as Reuven's repentance, a repentance which involves submission and acceptance of the verdict, but lacks a program for improvement and change. Joseph is prepared to accept his brothers' confession and their

submission. He witnesses the newly reestablished connection of the ten brothers to the sons of Rachel, and he cries (42:24). But this is not sufficient for him. He requires a fuller, deeper repentance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **4) RAV BIN-NUN RESPONDS**

After carefully reading Rabbi Medan's detailed arguments, I nevertheless maintain that my presentation of the events is the correct one. There is clearly a process of repentance and rectification on the part of Joseph's brothers, and this is our guide to understanding the affair. But all this is God's plan. All Medan's evidence proving a process of teshuva and

restoration is correct; but there is no reason to credit Joseph with this. The challenge of repentance offered the brothers regarding Benjamin is a challenge issuing from God. Joseph was forever acting according to natural, human considerations. It should be noted that Rabbi Medan gives an extremely contrived interpretation of the verse for God has forced me to forget all my tribulations and my father's house. The verse seemingly coheres with my explanation. He also totally ignores Judah's words, *You have know that my wife bore me two, one departed from me and I said he was surely devoured.*