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Note: Tzom Asarah B'Teves is next Friday

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

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world – and may our hostages soon return from captivity. May the stunning collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the cease fire with Lebanon be the beginning of better news for Israel and Jews in coming days.

Vayigash opens with one of the most emotional episodes in Tanach. Yehuda approaches the Viceroy of Egypt to try to convince him to release the youngest brother (Benyamin, Yosef's only other child from Rachel) and to take him instead as a slave. The impact of Yehuda's words causes Yosef to break down emotionally. He dismisses everyone except the brothers from the room, confesses that he is their brother Yosef, and asks them to reassure him that their father is alive and well. Yosef tells his brothers that they are not to blame for his ending up in Egypt, because God arranged for him to be there so he could save the family and everyone else from an extended and severe famine.

Vayigash is the emotional climax of Sefer Bereishis. One interpretation of Sefer Bereishis is that it analyzes the effects of a series of dysfunctional families. For example, Avraham takes his beloved son Yitzhak to a mountain to be a korban (sacrifice) to Hashem. The Torah does not discuss the impact on Yitzhak of his father's willingness to offer him as a sacrifice. We must conclude that Yitzhak did not object, because Yitzhak continues the religious practices of his father and permits his father to send a servant to arrange a marriage for him. Yitzhak favors his son Esav over Yaakov and apparently wants to make Esav the leader of the next generation. Yaakov favors Rachel over Leah and ignores Leah's sons – something that the Torah later rules violates Torah law. Yaakov dotes on Yosef over his other twelve children, and when Yosef is gone, he favors Benyamin. With this family history, and given Yosef's immature boasting to his brothers, it is easy to understand why Leah's sons cannot speak to Yosef in peace.

Rabbi David Fohrman explains that Paro's dreams follow Yosef's life during his exile in reverse (see my introduction for Miketz), so it is easy for Yosef to understand and explain the dreams. Yosef finally realizes that his youthful dreams were not about his family but were a preview of what would be happening to his part of the world later in his life (seven years of plenty and then seven years of extreme drought). He also realizes that his exile to Egypt is part of God's plan to enable him to save the family and others in his part of the world from starving. Once he realizes Hashem's role in what happened to him, he is able to forgive his brothers – as long as they show that they have done teshuvah and would not abandon another family member.

Yosef manipulates the bothers to bring Benyamin to Egypt if they want any more food or want him to release Shimon from prison. When the brothers come with Benyamin, Yosef invites them to his home for a meal, grossly favors Benyamin over the other brothers, and has his servant place his divining cup in Benyamin's sack of grain. He makes it clear to the brothers that he does not believe that Benyamin actually stole the cup, but he says that the thief must become his slave.

Yehuda approaches Yosef and tries to convince the Viceroy to take him rather than Benyamin as his slave. When Yehuda says that it would kill their elderly father if they returned without Benyamin, his favorite son, Yosef knows that the brothers have done teshuvah. He then reveals himself.

One consequence of Yehuda's words to Yosef is that Yosef realizes that in focusing on the effect of being sold to Egypt, he has neglected the impact on his father. For twenty-three years, Yosef has been wondering why no one has come to look for him. During this period, Yosef does not ask himself whether his father knows that his favorite son is alive. Yehuda's words about the effect of losing Benyamin makes him realize that his father must have been mourning Yosef for this entire period. Yosef realizes that he has been selfish and must atone for his sin to his father.

Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer learns from Vayigash that we must see the hand of Hashem in what happens in the world. He warns, however, that individuals who have believed that they understand Hashem's plans have caused much evil, especially by starting holy wars. Our responsibility from the lesson of Yosef and his brothers is that we must embrace a humble religiosity that includes both a religious mandate and moral responsibility. Rabbi Marc Angel uses the concept of religious Zionism (from Rabbi Dr. Henry Mendes of a hundred years ago). To redeem Israel and the world, religious Zionism claims that we must combine Jewish life, law, and sentiment with justice and righteousness. Rav Kook adds that Yosef represents eidut (testimony) while Yehuda represents Torah and the special holiness of B'Nai Yisrael. For example, when all of Yaakov's family go down to Egypt, Yaakov selects Yehuda (not Yosef or Benyamin) to establish Yeshivot in Egypt.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings the message of the Haftorah to the situation we face now in 5785. Yechezkal's vision of taking two branches and holding them together represents the two branches (kingdoms) of Israel (Yehuda and Yisrael) uniting in the future. The Talmud (Sukkah 52a) envisions a Mashiach Ben Yosef setting up an economic and administrative structure and then a Mashiach Ben David leading a religious revival. When these two branches unite, B'Nai Yisrael will be ready for an ultimate redemption. May the various factions in Israel and among Jews outside Israel come together soon to unite our people and make us strong.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always reminded us of our obligation to assist fellow Jews in need everywhere. I have adopted this obligation and have tried to pass it along to my children, and to have them pass it along to their children.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, 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, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, 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.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Haftarat Parshat Vayigash: Joining the Branches

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5785 (2025)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

This week's parsha is dedicated to the memory of
First Sergeant Netanel Pessach z"l,
a graduate of our Derech Avot High School in Efrat who fell in battle in northern Gaza and to all of the IDF heroes who fell this week while protecting our people and our land. Our hearts ache for Netanel's family. May Netanel's memory – and the memory of all our fallen soldiers – be a blessing.

At the heart of the Haftarah this week is unity. Yechezkel, in his prophecies of consolation, is instructed by God to take two branches in his hands and hold them together, symbolizing the eventual joining together of the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judea. Central to his vision of the ultimate redemption is a reunification of the Jewish people, who had been split into the northern and southern kingdoms many years before. This ancient prophecy of reconciliation resonates with renewed urgency in our own time, as we grapple with bitter divisions today.

It would be difficult not to be moved by the poignant imagery in the haftarah, as Yechezkel dreams of the entirety of the Jewish people joining together under a single banner. What's striking, though, is that the prophet doesn't dwell on the differences between the two kingdoms – they are simply two halves of a whole to be put back together. In reality, though, the northern tribes and the southern tribes diverged greatly, even regarding their faith in and worship of God. While Yechezkel envisions a national recommitment to God and the Torah in the wake of the reunification, that doesn't mean, per se, that the 'branch of Yosef' and the 'branch of Yehuda' are destined to become identical.

We can think back to Yosef and Yehuda themselves, whom we encounter once again in this week's parsha. The two brothers aren't carbon copies of one another; they have entirely different personalities and complementary strengths. Yosef is perseverant in moments of trouble, strategic in his economic planning for Pharaoh in the face of impending famine, and dreamy about what the future holds. Yehuda is assertive in the face of crisis, contrite when he makes mistakes, and a spokesperson on behalf of his brothers. Despite their differences, at the climactic moment of encounter in our parsha, they are able to make amends.

This theme of distinct yet complementary roles is revisited in the rabbinic notion of the two messiahs: Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David. Mashiach ben Yosef, introduced to us in the Talmud)Sukkah 52a(, serves as a precursor to the ultimate messiah. Though traditions about this character are limited, it is said that this preliminary messianic figure from the house of Yosef will focus, like his namesake, primarily on the administrative and economic groundwork. Meanwhile, the Mashiach ben David will usher in the spiritual reawakening that will accompany the ultimate redemption. These two figures play different roles, yet both are indispensable to the Jewish people's redemption.

Rav Kook embraced this framing in his 1904 eulogy for Theodor Herzl. Secular Zionists, maintained Rav Kook, functioned in a manner akin to that of Mashiach ben Yosef, setting the stage administratively, economically and politically for the eventual redemption. Both political and spiritual tasks are required in order to bring about the redemption, and those fulfilling each of those tasks must see the other as critically important, parallel partners, rather than opponents. The joining of forces of the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Joseph is not about creating uniformity, but rather creating productive partnerships in pursuit of common goals.

Here lies our challenge today, as it has been continually throughout our history. How can we unite our various branches, while maintaining our distinct and complementary characteristics? What does it take to hold together differing tribes as we pursue our shared destiny? Our haftarah does not provide the blueprint, but it offers us something more valuable: the vision and mandate. Our people can and must unite in the face of difference, enabling the universal recognition of God and indeed helping to reveal God's visible presence in the world.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, 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 or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Vayigash: Is My Father Still Thinking About Me?

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2007 (5777)

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

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

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

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

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

One person my mother did not recognize. She asked. *"Who is that?"* I told her that that was Reb Getzel, my Rebbe at that

time. My wife asked, *"Whatever happened to him? I haven't heard anything from him or about him since then." I think he went to Cleveland and I also have not heard from him or about him for 22 years."*

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

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

Good Shabbos!

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

Drasha: Vayigash: Heartspeak

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

In one of the most dramatic episodes of the Torah, this week's portion tells us how Yoseph breaks the news that he is not just the viceroy of Egypt, but also that he is their brother.

> *"He then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; afterwards, his brothers conversed with him: The news was heard in Pharaoh's palace saying, "Yoseph's brothers have come!" And it was pleasing in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants. Pharaoh said to Yoseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this — load up your animals and go directly to the land of Canaan. Bring your father and your households and come to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land"*

Then Yoseph told his brothers,

> *"Hurry — go up to my father and say to him, 'So said your son Yoseph — "G-d has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not delay. You will reside in the land of Goshen and you will be near to me — you, your sons, your grandchildren, your flock and your cattle, and all that is yours. I will provide for you there — for there will be five more years of famine — so you do not become destitute, you, your household, and all that is yours. "*

Yoseph concludes his entreaty by showing his sincerity. *"Behold! Your eyes see as do the eyes of my brother Binyamin that it is my mouth that is speaking to you."*)see Genesis Chap. 45(

What does Yoseph mean, *"it is my mouth that is speaking to you"?* Of course it is his mouth!

Yosef realized that the brothers would be skeptical. Rashi explains he spoke in Lashon Hakodesh, the Hebrew language, as proof of his true heritage. The Ramban, however, feels that speaking Hebrew would not prove anything. Egypt was close to Canaan, and leaders were fluent in many languages. Surely they knew Hebrew, the language of a neighboring country.

Perhaps the inclusion of Binyamin and the words my mouth can shed some light on the matter.

During the beginnings of détente in the 1970s, Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev held a summit with President Richard Nixon. At the time, many organizations which were active in the struggle to free Soviet Jews planned a massive rally in Washington against the Russian Government. A long-time policy of Agudath Israel was not to join in unrestricted protests, as they did not want to be associated with many violent and inappropriate comments that those demonstrations often induced. In addition, the Agudah leadership worked behind the scenes to help their imprisoned brothers, using a stratagem of continued quiet diplomacy as leverage.

There was much pressure to participate in the Washington rally, which would be a clear show of Jewish resolve to be seen by Russia's top official. But it was a very delicate time in the United States for Soviet-US relations, and an ugly showing against the USSR could have a negative impact.

The President of Agudath Israel, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, ob"m, brought the question to my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, ob"m, a senior member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, the Agudah's Council of Torah Sages which guided every aspect of Agudah policy.

His response was, *"This protest in front of the Washington Monument is in the heart of the capitol of the country that has been the kind host to Torah Judaism during our sojourn here. Do you know if the Nixon Administration wants to see a big protest against the Soviet Government during these delicate negotiations?"*

Rabbi Sherer, who had a relationship with the State Department, responded, *"the officials said that they did not want to see protestors."* My grandfather turned to Rabbi Sherer and re-stated his question. *"Your job is not to find out what they said. I know what they said. Now your job is to find out what they want!"*

Yoseph, in seconds, transformed from a vicious Prime Minister willing to imprison an old man's youngest son, to a once-scorned brother who is filled with love and compassion. He invites the rest of the family he just threatened moments ago to join him in Egypt. He promises to provide for them and treat them royally.

Was this a trick? Was it a ploy to get more members of Yaakov's family snarled in the net he carefully laid for the eleven who presently stood in front of him? Was Yosef acting as a spokesman for the regime of the Pharaoh who ruled the powerful land of Egypt?

Yosef responds by linking the affinity for his brother Binyamin together with his generous assurances that it is my mouth that is speaking to you. *"It is my mouth,"* says Yoseph, not the mouth of Pharaoh. I am no spokesman for a regime. I speak with the wholesome sincerity of a blood-brother, who, unlike a bureaucrat, is wholly honest in his commitment.

When listening for the opinions of others, or even offering our own advice, we must be sure of who is really speaking and where the words are coming from. Are they our words or just words for the hour?

Good Shabbos!

From my archives

Yosef and Yehudah: God's Hand and Our Responsibility

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 question. 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 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 in the wake of the recent slaughter at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, CT. 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

Reclaiming "Bible Zionism"

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

What is Zionism after all?

The term seems to have originated in the 1890s by Nathan Birnbaum, founder of the Kadimah nationalist Jewish students' movement. Theodor Herzl popularized the term as the expression of the Jewish People's national aspiration to return to their historic homeland in Zion.

The term "Zionism" is often used by friends and enemies of Israel without proper reference to its historic roots in biblical times. Zionism didn't just pop up in a vacuum, as though it was a new and artificial framework for Jews to return to their land. Although the term as a political movement dates from the late 19th century, it in fact encapsulates thousands of years of Jewish attachment to their historic homeland.

Zion is mentioned over 150 times in the Hebrew bible. While originally referring to Mount Zion, it came to refer to Jerusalem and then to all the land of Israel.

Rabbi Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes, who was associated with the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York from 1877 to 1937, advocated what he called *"Bible Zionism."* He was proud of the fact that Theodor Herzl asked his cooperation in organizing the Zionist movement in the United States. Dr. Mendes was elected vice-president of the Federation of American Zionists and a member of the actions committee of the World Zionist Organization. He believed that Zionism had the goal of establishing a Jewish State founded upon the principles and ideals of the Jewish religious tradition. In a letter to Haham Gaster of London (July 21, 1903), Dr. Mendes wrote: *"Here is true work for Zionists: to keep Hebrews true to Jewish life, Jewish law, Jewish sentiment."*

Dr. Mendes taught that *"Bible Zionism"* aspired to go beyond simply providing a homeland for Jews. It had a universal message and goal: *"Peace for the world at last and the realization of reverence for God by all men. These are the essentials for human happiness. Zionism stands for them."*

We rarely hear about *"Bible Zionism"* from Israeli political leaders, media, or the various Zionist organizations worldwide. But wouldn't it be nice if leaders and opinion makers reclaimed *"Bible Zionism"* and reminded the world at every opportunity of the biblical roots of Zionism?

"Bible Zionism," as Rabbi Mendes pointed out, has a dual agenda. It stresses the national aspirations of the Jewish People to live in their own historic homeland and foster their religious and cultural traditions. The prophet Isaiah foresaw that Jews will *"come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away"* (Isaiah 35:10). He taught that "Zion will be redeemed with justice and those that return to her with righteousness" (1:27).

But *"Bible Zionism"* also points to the ultimate victory of justice and righteousness for Israel and the entire world. Isaiah taught that many people shall come to Zion *"for out of Zion shall go forth Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 2:3). Isaiah looked to the day when *"the nations shall see your righteousness and all kings your glory"* (62:1-2). The prophet Zechariah (8:3) taught that the Lord has returned to Zion and that *"Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain."* Zion was to be a bastion of truth, justice and wisdom for the entire world.
Recent months have seen ugly manifestations of anti-Zionism throughout the world. The haters have distorted the meaning and mission of Zionism. We need to embrace *"Bible Zionism"* in every forum to set the record straight.

The Psalmist sang (122:6): *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they who love you will prosper; peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces."* Just as those who love and support Zion will be blessed, the Psalmist warns (129:5): *"May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back."*

As for us, we must heed the words of Isaiah (62:1-2): *"For the sake of Zion I will not hold my peace, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still, until her righteousness goes forth like radiance and her salvation like a burning torch."*

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

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3299. This op ed piece by Rabbi Marc D. Angel appears in the *Jewish Link,* December 12, 2024.

Joseph, Judah and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Vayiggash

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

This week's Torah reading features a confrontation between two brothers — Joseph and Judah. Joseph had contrived to arrest Benjamin and keep him in Egypt. Judah approached Joseph with an impassioned plea to save Benjamin, volunteering himself to stay as slave instead. Joseph is so moved by Judah's words that he reveals himself as a brother. As the story unfolds, Joseph's brothers return to their father Jacob, and the entire family relocate in the land of Egypt.

In his thoughts on the Parasha, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz contrasts Joseph and Judah. Joseph was handsome, the favorite of his father; he went on to become a high official in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Joseph is known in Jewish tradition as Yosef Ha-Tsaddik, Joseph the righteous. He was an exemplary person. By contrast, Judah was far from perfect. The Torah describes Judah's sinful behavior toward Joseph, and toward his daughter-in-law Tamar. Yet, Judah was the only brother with courage to confront Joseph to plead for Benjamin's freedom. Rabbi Steinsaltz suggests that Joseph typifies a Tsaddik, a naturally righteous person; and Judah represents a ba'al teshuva, a sinner who has turned from a sinful past and has emerged as a righteous person.

Joseph was handsome, wise, and righteous by nature. By contrast, Judah had to overcome faults. His strength was in his ability to rise up after failure. He could admit error and improve his ways.

Joseph and Judah, in a sense, symbolize the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. One set was shattered by Moses when he found the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf. The other set remained intact as Moses brought it down a second time. The Talmud states that the broken pieces of the first set were placed in the ark together with the intact set (Berakhot 8b). Both, together, served as the spiritual foundation of Israel.

Similarly, Joseph — the intact set — and Judah—the broken tablets — jointly serve as models of leadership. Joseph is blessed with unblemished righteousness. He is dignified; he has amazing organizational and managerial skills; he leads by setting an example of righteousness and efficiency. Judah leads by dint of his resilience, determination and courage. He learns from his mistakes. In times of crisis, Judah rises like a lion, fearless and strong.

We need the Josephs and the Judahs working together for the wellbeing of our people and our world. We need honest, talented leaders like Joseph; we need courageous and forceful leaders like Judah.
But for our people to flourish, we not only need Josephs and Judahs. We need an entire community committed to the highest values of our tradition. We need to raise a new generation of Josephs and Judahs -- proud, capable and courageous Jews. Each of us has a role to play.

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

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Vayigash -- Leaning In

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

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

Yehuda was at a terrible impasse in his relationship with Yosef. On the one hand, Yosef was presenting himself as a kind monarch who provided food for them free of charge, greeted Binyomin with what seemed to be genuine blessing, and drank with the brothers in what seemed to be true camaraderie. On the other hand, Yehuda knows that Binyomin was framed and that he, Yehuda, must ensure Binyomin's safe return.

In this difficult situation, Yehuda steps forward to engage Yosef in conversation. Rabbeinu Bachya points out that there are different ways that Yehuda could have approached Yosef. Yehuda could have chosen to give Yosef gifts, something that they had already done upon Yakov's instructions. Yehuda could have chosen to go to war against Yosef and Mitzrayim, something that the Medrash says the brothers truly considered. But, as the Parsha describes, Yehuda chose to engage Yosef in conversation.

The Ohr HaChayim explains the word, *"Vayigash"* – Yehuda stepped forward – as a life lesson in difficult conversations. Yehuda stepped forward so that he could talk to Yosef by standing close to him, out of earshot of the many other people in the room. As he was about to disagree with Yosef quite forcefully, he wanted the conversation to be a private one and not with an audience that would turn the conversation into a showdown.

Then, the Ohr HaChayim adds, Yehuda tapped into a wisdom in relationships that would later be recorded by Shlomo in Mishlei (27), *"People are a reflection of one another."* Thus, Yehuda — despite severe misgivings and even feeling anger towards Yosef — chose to bring himself close emotionally to Yosef. Yehuda activated within himself feelings of love and endearment towards Yosef, so that Yosef would be influenced to be emotionally close to him and accept Yehuda's reasoning of appeasement.

Typically, in disagreement, we are inclined to act with anger and distancing. Yehuda chose instead to act with emotional wisdom, to feel endearment to Yosef so that Yosef would be influenced and reciprocate with endearment.

In our own lives, when a disagreement occurs in marriage or in any relationship, there are a variety of responses to consider. One can choose to "go to war" and escalate the conflict, or one can choose to give presents of appeasement, as the brothers had tried to do. But Yehuda introduced a third option. He responded to the difficult situation by leaning in and having a meaningful conversation, and so can we. By choosing to overcome his anger and instead feel endearment, Yehuda established an environment of love in which he hoped to be able to work through the issue at hand in an amicable way.

Most conflicts and disagreements aren't as dramatic as those of Yehuda, Yosef, and the brothers. In relatively good relationships, we encounter episodes that are bumpy and distancing. The lessons of Yehuda's conversation with Yosef are instructive. We can escalate with blame and defensiveness, or we can placate with gifts and appeasement. Additionally, there is a third option: To have a conversation. If we choose to have a conversation, we should do so calmly and privately, as Yehuda did, so that it does not become a showdown. Also, we should lean in with love so that we influence the other person to reflect our love. Often, it is in those grumpy and bumpy moments in the relationship that our loved one needs us most. By emulating Yehuda's approach and strategy, we can hope for conversations that are most beneficial for us and our families.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos,

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End DEI

by Bari Weiss * (November 9, 2023)

[Editor's note: While not a Dvar Torah, this opinion piece fits in with material above relating to anti-Semitism during the period when our ancestors lived in Egypt.] [Note 2025: I am reprinting this opinion piece from Vayigash 5784]

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

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

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

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

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

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

It did not.

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

Including in the Jewish community.

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

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

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

Of course, this new ideology doesn't come right out and say all that. It doesn't even like to be named. Some call it wokeness or anti-racism or progressivism or safetyism or Critical Social Justice or identity Marxism. But whatever term

you use, what's clear is that it has gained power in a conceptual instrument called "diversity, equity, and inclusion," or DEI.

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

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

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

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

What we must do is reverse this.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Parshas Vayigash – To Truly Love

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* © 2021

Observing the Tenth of Teives this past week, remembering the siege on Jerusalem which led to the destruction of the Temple, it is appropriate to focus on our interpersonal conduct. As baseless hatred was the cause for destruction of the Temple, to rebuild the Temple we need to focus on baseless love.

One of the greatest difficulties in attaining baseless love is that if love is truly baseless then we are fully justified in not feeling that love for another. As love is a character trait that causes one to bend justice, perhaps baseless love applies even where one is justified in feeling frustration towards another, perhaps having even been wronged by another. It is in these situations where we truly display baseless love and attain true greatness. Yet it is in these situations where we feel the greatest difficulty in looking beyond ourselves.

When we ask ourselves if we are ready to reach beyond ourselves, if we even have that capacity – or should, we tend to think over our lives and experiences searching for examples. We wonder if this is done, or at least has been done. Sometimes, if we can find an example, that alone can help to inspire us to reach beyond ourselves and achieve true greatness. I believe we can find such inspiration from Yosef in this week's parsha.

After Yosef has his brothers brought before him for Binyamin supposedly stealing his goblet, Yehuda makes an impassioned plea for Yosef to take him as a servant instead of Binyamin. At this point, Yosef is ready to reveal himself to his brothers. Before he does so the Torah tells us that "Yosef did not have the strength to bear all those standing upon him" and cries out for everyone but his brothers to leave.)Bereishis 45:1(.

There are many explanations of what it was that Yosef could not bear. Rash"i)ibid.(explains that Yosef could not bear to have the Egyptians standing there hearing his brothers' shame when he revealed himself. He, therefore, insisted on being alone with his brothers', despite placing himself in danger should they choose to attack him to save Binyanim. He simply did not have the strength to bear their shame. When we think of Yosef's life, this is an astounding statement. Yosef had been taken from the life of nobility, a cherished son in a respected, wealthy household, and found himself a slave. Yet he continued to find the strength to move forward. He then finds himself being seduced by his master's wife. She would change her clothing for him, so he would not see her wearing the same dress at night which he had seen her wearing in the morning. Yet, he held himself strong and despite being a young man in the prime of his passions, found the strength to withstand her attempts. One time she finally catches him and begins to lure him. Yet, when he realizes what is happening, he finds the inner strength to pull himself away, fleeing the moment. He is then thrown into jail, as a slave in a foreign country, and continues to find the strength to do what needs to be done. He had displayed himself many times as a man of great courage and character.

He is now faced with the men who had brought all this difficulty upon him – the brothers who had ripped him away from his father and sold him. He is aware that these very brothers are about to feel the shame and the guilt for that horrible turning point in his life, for all that they did to him. If ever there was a man who was justified in not feeling baseless love towards another, Yosef was that man.

Yet, despite all justifications, Yosef – this man of such great inner strength and will power, could not find the strength to

bear his brothers' shame. Yosef is a paradigm of accepting another despite their flaws, and still seeing their goodness. Yosef, in this moment, shows us what baseless love truly is.

When we are faced with the challenge of seeing the good in another, we must remember Yosef's example. Surely, whatever wrong we see, is less than what Yosef faced in his brothers. If he could see the good in them, and truly care for them, perhaps we can, as well.

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Vayigash: Defend Your Life!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

How will I ascend to my father without the lad? I will not be able to witness the harm befalling my father!)Judah, son of Jacob, to the Egyptian viceroy, circa 3,800 BCE(

The story of Joseph and his brothers is arguably the greatest biblical saga, culminating in the dramatic encounter at the viceroy's palace, as Joseph, unable to continue his façade and choked to tears following Judah's passionate defense of Benjamin and his pleading on behalf of his old father, finally reveals his true identity to his brothers:

> *It is I, Joseph! Is my father still alive?*

We readers, at the edge of our seats, holding our collective breath as we follow this saga, are now somewhat disappointed by the anticlimactic reaction of the brothers – *terrified of him, the brothers remained speechless.* That's it. No hugs. No kisses. No tears. No melodramatic confessions and regrets. Just terrified silence.

"Well," we say, *"it is momentary shock, they'll get to it."* Oh, but they don't. Joseph now launches one of the longest monologs in Torah)123 words(, absolving his brothers of the responsibility for his exile and enslavement and promising to take care of them and their families. As he concludes his soliloquy he embraces and kisses Benjamin, crying on his shoulders. And Benjamin returns his lost brother's affection: Joseph then turns to his brothers with tears and kisses. But unlike Benjamin, they don't respond affectionately. In other words: once the drama was over, his brothers spoke with him. Spoke with him? Casually? What were they saying: You got a nice tan? How was jail? No way, twelve years a slave?

The content of their conversation is obviously of no importance or the Torah would have recorded it for future generations. So we must honestly ask: What happened to them? Why are they so apathetic? Have they no emotions, or are they upset of the viceroy who caused them so much strife and now turned out to be their brother?

The rabbis answer this question:

> *Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Reproach!*

The brothers, say the rabbis, were now tried and judged for years of deception. They were not afraid of Joseph but rather of what his reappearance meant for them. They were petrified because they have succumbed to their weakness and were forced now to admit that they have committed a grave mistake. With that recognition, they had to chalk off the last twenty two years of their lives, years emptied and distorted by their wrongdoing.

"But", we ask, *"haven't they already expressed their remorse when they were imprisoned by Joseph and had some time to contemplate me their actions?"* Yes, indeed. The Torah recounts their conversation:

> *They said to each other: we truly deserve punishment for our brother, for we have seen his suffering when he was pleading with us and we would not listen.*

Alas, that has not been true remorse, or the first thing they would have done when they came back to Canaan was sit with their father and tell him the truth about what they did to Joseph and to him, followed by organizing expeditions to look for their lost brother. Since they did not do so, their remorse was one which did not lead to action and amendments and was therefore rendered null and void.

There is yet another fleeting moment of regret, a moment which reveals the haunting burden of an ancient sin which looms large in the brothers' apparently tranquil life. It is the knowledge that they have wronged their brother and father, and the feeling that their father knows or suspects. It happens when Joseph's servant accuses them of stealing his master's silver goblet, to which they answer:

How can we answer our master? How can we speak or how can we justify ourselves?

They are apparently talking about their current predicament, but their subconscious is taking them back to the moment of anger, in which they have thrown Joseph into the pit and walked away, ignoring his crying and his pleas. Did he call out their names: Reuben, Simon, Levy, Judah… did he remind them that they are brothers? Did he scream out, *"What about Dad? It will kill him!"?* We will never know!

How many lost, sleepless nights have they experienced? Did they hear his voice boring in their ears across time and space? They walked away, but his voice stayed with them and with it, the guilt.

Now they unwillingly confess to a total stranger, blurting out what has been choking them for years: "*Our sin is out in the open! God has exposed us!*"

Their subconscious voice, for a second, resounds through the cracks in their mental armor, but they push it back in and return to Egypt. Judah then confronts the viceroy and delivers a fiery speech, trying to invoke the ruler's compassion as he mentions the old father, who is waiting in despair for his youngest son to return home safely.

But when Joseph presents himself and asks if his father is still alive, the true meaning of his words crushes them as they realize that they have been misleading themselves all these years. They cannot argue that they need Benjamin to return for their father's sake because they have already ripped the old man's heart from his chest by selling Joseph, not caring one bit about his emotional welfare. The simple words Joseph utters while revealing his identity were interpreted by them thus: *I am Joseph! Is my father still alive after all you did to him?*

Many years earlier, they could have argued that their act was a crime of passion, that in the heat of the moment they did not know what they were doing, and that when they finally came back to their senses and wanted to pull Joseph out of the pit they discovered that he was already gone, sold by one tribe of nomads to another. Throughout the years, mulling over the incident in their covert discussions of their actions on that fateful day, they probably said that for their defense more than once. Deep inside, though, they knew that nothing could justify what they did to their father. Anyone who knows a bereaved parent could attest that there is no greater pain than losing a child. For Jacob, who saw in Joseph the reflection of Rachel, his beloved, first, and only wife, the pain was unbearable. How can one visualize the scene of the blood-stained striped robe being handed to Jacob, who almost loses his mind, and not shudder? How could they see Jacob, bereft, mourning, depleted, and keep the truth from him? How could they have lived with the guilt and the shame? How could they bare his gaze, resting upon them momentarily, searching for answers? Did they not hear how he was voicelessly accusing them, pleading with them, begging to know what has happened to his son?

The answer, as they now realized when they were facing Joseph, was that initially they were afraid of telling the truth and taking responsibility, but eventually they were unable to go back and undo their actions, because that would have meant admitting that they were wrong. In the first moment of shock after Joseph's disappearance, they decided to deceive their father, and with each following year, despite the tension and the silent accusations, they felt safer in the path they chose and the habit into which they fell*: "If I wanted to tell him, I should have done it years ago, now it is too late!"* Only when Joseph said, *"It is I, Joseph! Is my father still alive?"* did they realize that they were misleading themselves, and as the Rabbis said, they were standing in judgment, trying to defend their lives, with no good arguments.

There is no such thing as a foolproof life. We are human, and we are bound to make wrong decisions, be it for fear, anger, greed, or arrogance, but we should not let our mistakes trap us. I have met and counseled many people who would prefer having miserable relationships, morose life, inadequate jobs, and unsatisfying careers, over having to confront their errors and say *"this is not how I want to live my life!"* We should not wait for our inner Joseph to come and demand explanations, but rather muster the courage to address our mistakes immediately, contemplating, repenting, apologizing, and making amendments, thus assuring that even if we make a mistake, we don't live in error.

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(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Shavuon: Summer Edition

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

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

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Rav Kook Torah
VaYigash: The Reunion of Joseph and Judah

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

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

Eidut and Torah

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

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

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

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

The Message of Shema

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

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

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

The Scales of the Leviathan

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

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

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

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

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

https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYIGASH_67.htm

Does My Father Love Me? (5779)

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

It is one of the great questions we naturally ask each time we read the story of Joseph. Why did he not, at some time during their twenty-two year separation, send word to his father that he was alive? For part of that time – when he was a slave in Potiphar's house, and when he was in prison – it would have been impossible. But certainly he could have done so when he became the second most powerful person in Egypt. At the very least he could have done so when the brothers came before him on their first journey to buy food.

Joseph knew how much his father loved him. He must have known how much their separation grieved him. He did not know, could not know, what Jacob thought had happened to him, but this surely he knew: that it was his duty to communicate with him when the opportunity arose, to tell his father that he was alive and well. Why then did he not? The following explanation,]1[is a tantalising possibility.

The story of Joseph's descent into slavery and exile began when his father sent him, alone, to see how the brothers were faring.

> His brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, *"As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."*
>
> "Very well," he replied.
>
> So he said to him, *"Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me."* Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. Gen. 37:12–14

What does the narrative tell us immediately prior to this episode? It tells us about the second of Joseph's dreams. In the first, he had dreamt that he and his brothers were in the field binding sheaves. His stood upright while the sheaves of his brothers bowed down to him. Naturally, when he told them about the dream, they were angry. *"Do you intend to reign over us? Would you rule over us?*" There is no mention of Jacob in relation to the first dream.
The second dream was different:

> *Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."*
>
> *When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.* Gen. 37:9–11

Immediately afterwards, we read of Jacob sending Joseph, alone, to his brothers. It was there, at that meeting far from home, that they plotted to kill him, lowered him into a pit, and eventually sold him as a slave.

Joseph had many years to reflect on that episode. That his brothers were hostile to him, he knew. But surely Jacob knew this as well. In which case, why did he send Joseph to them? Did Jacob not contemplate the possibility that they might do him harm? Did he not know the dangers of sibling rivalry? Did he not at least contemplate the possibility that by sending Joseph to them he was risking Joseph's life?

No one knew this better from personal experience. Recall that Jacob himself had been forced to leave home because his brother Esau threatened to kill him, once he discovered that Jacob had taken his blessing. Recall too that when Jacob was about to meet Esau again, after an interval of twenty-two years, he was *"in great fear and distress,"* believing that his brother would try to kill him. That fear provoked one of the great crises of Jacob's life. So Jacob knew, better than anyone else in Genesis, that hate can lead to killing, that sibling rivalry carries with it the risk of fratricide.

Yet Jacob sent Joseph to his other sons knowing that they were jealous of him and hated him. Joseph presumably knew these facts. What else could he conclude, as he reflected on the events that led up to his sale as a slave, that Jacob had deliberately placed him in this danger? Why? Because of the immediately prior event, when Joseph had told his father that *"the sun and moon"* – his father and mother – would bow down to him.

This angered Jacob, and Joseph knew it. His father had "*rebuked"* him. It was outrageous to suggest that his parents would prostrate themselves before him. It was wrong to imagine it, all the more so to say it. Besides which, who was the "*moon"?* Joseph's mother, Rachel, the great love of Jacob's life, was dead. Presumably, then, he was referring to Leah. But his very mention of *"the sun and moon and eleven stars"* must have brought back to his father the pain of Rachel's death. Joseph knew he had provoked his father's wrath. What else could he conclude but that Jacob had deliberately put his life at risk?

Joseph did not communicate with his father because he believed his father no longer wanted to see him or hear from him. His father had terminated the relationship. That was a reasonable inference from the facts as Joseph knew them. He could not have known that Jacob still loved him, that his brothers had deceived their father by showing him Joseph's bloodstained cloak, and that his father mourned for him, *"refusing to be comforted."* We know these facts because the Torah tells us. But Joseph, far away, in another land, serving as a slave, could not have known. This places the story in a completely new and tragic light.

Is there any supporting evidence for this interpretation? There is. Joseph must have known that his father was capable of being angered by his sons. He had seen it twice before.

The first time was when Shimon and Levi killed the inhabitants of Shechem after their prince had raped and abducted their sister Dina. Jacob bitterly reprimanded them, saying:

> *"You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed."* Gen. 34:30

The second happened after Rachel died. *"While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah – and Israel heard of it"*)Gen. 35:22(. Actually according to the Sages, Reuben merely moved his father's bed,]2[but Jacob believed that he had slept with his handmaid, an act of usurpation.

As a result of these two episodes, Jacob virtually broke off contact with his three eldest sons. He was still angry with them at the end of his life, cursing them instead of blessing them. Of Reuben, he said:

> "*Unstable as water, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.*" Gen. 49:4

Of his second and third sons he said:

Shimon and Levi are brothers –
Their swords are weapons of violence.
Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly,
For they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased.
Cursed be their anger, so fierce,
And their fury, so cruel!
I will scatter them in Jacob
And disperse them in Israel. Gen. 49:5–7

So Joseph knew that Jacob was capable of anger at his children, and of terminating his relationship with them)that is why, in the absence of Joseph, Judah became the key figure. He was Jacob's fourth son, and Jacob no longer trusted the three eldest(.

There is evidence of another kind as well. When Joseph was appointed second-in-command in Egypt, given the name Tzafenat Pa'neaĥ, and had married an Egyptian wife, Asenat, he had his first child. We then read:

Joseph named his firstborn Menasheh, saying, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's house." Gen. 41:51

Uppermost in Joseph's mind was the desire to forget the past, not just his brothers' conduct towards him but *"all my father's house."* Why so, if not that he associated *"all my trouble"* not just with his siblings but also with his father Jacob? Joseph believed that his father had deliberately put him at his brothers' mercy because, angered by the second dream, he no longer wanted contact with the son he had once loved. That is why he never sent a message to Jacob that he was still alive.

If this is so, it sheds new light on the great opening scene of Vayigash. What was it in Judah's speech that made Joseph break down in tears and finally reveal his identity to his brothers? One answer is that Judah, by asking that he be held as a slave so that Benjamin could go free, showed that he had done teshuva; that he was a penitent; that he was no longer the same person who had once sold Joseph into slavery. That, as I have argued previously, is a central theme of the entire narrative. It is a story about repentance and forgiveness.

But we can now offer a second interpretation. Judah says words that, for the first time, allow Joseph to understand what had actually occurred twenty-two years previously. Judah is recounting what happened after the brothers returned from their first journey to buy food in Egypt:

Then our father said, "Go back and buy a little more food." But we said, "We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us."

Your servant my father said to us, "You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, 'He has surely been torn to pieces.' And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in misery." Gen. 44:27–31

At that moment Joseph realised that his fear that his father had rejected him was unwarranted. On the contrary, he had been bereft when Joseph did not return. He believed that he had been "torn to pieces," killed by a wild animal. His father still loved him, still grieved for him. Against this background we can better understand Joseph's reaction to this disclosure:

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 alive?"
Gen. 45:1–3

Joseph's first thought is not about Judah or Benjamin, but about Jacob. A doubt he had harboured for twenty-two years had turned out to be unfounded. Hence his first question: *"Is my father still alive?"*

Is this the only possible interpretation of the story? Clearly not. But it is a possibility. In which case, we can now set the Joseph narrative in two other thematic contexts which play a large part in Genesis as a whole.

The first is tragic misunderstanding. We think here of at least two other episodes. The first has to do with Isaac and Rebecca. Isaac, we recall, loved Esau; Rebecca loved Jacob. At least one possible explanation, offered by Abarbanel,]3[is that Rebecca had been told *"by God,"* before the twins were born, that *"the elder will serve the younger."* Hence her attachment to Jacob, the younger, and her determination that he, not Esau, should have Isaac's blessing.

The other concerns Jacob and Rachel. Rachel had stolen her father's terafim, *"icons"* or *"household gods,"* when they left Laban to return to the land of Canaan. She did not tell Jacob that she had done so. The text says explicitly, *"Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods"*)Gen. 31:32(. When Laban pursued and caught up with them, he accused Jacob's party of having stolen them. Jacob indignantly denies this and says *"If you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live."* Several chapters later, we read that Rachel died prematurely, on the way. The possibility hinted at by the text, articulated by a Midrash and by Rashi,]4[is that, unwittingly, Jacob had condemned her to death. In both cases, misunderstanding flowed from a failure of communication. Had Rebecca told Isaac about the oracle, and had Rachel told Jacob about the terafim, tragedy might have been averted. Judaism is a religion of holy words, and one of the themes of Genesis as a whole is the power of speech to create, mislead, harm or heal. From Cain and Abel to Joseph and his brothers *)"They hated him and could not speak peaceably to him"(,* we are shown how, when words fail, violence begins.

The other theme, even more poignant, has to do with fathers and sons. How did Isaac feel towards Abraham, knowing that he had lifted a knife to sacrifice him? How did Jacob feel towards Isaac, knowing that he loved Esau more than him? How did Leah's sons feel about Jacob, knowing that he loved Rachel and her children more? Does my father really love me? – that is a question we feel must have arisen in each of these cases. Now we see that there is a strong case for supposing that Joseph, too, must have asked himself the same question.

"Though my father and mother may forsake me, the Lord will receive me," says Psalm 27. That is a line that resonates throughout Genesis. No one did more than Sigmund Freud to place this at the heart of human psychology. For Freud, the Oedipus complex – the tension between fathers and sons – is the single most powerful determinant of the psychology of the individual, and of religion as a whole.

Freud, however, took as his key text a Greek myth, not the narratives of Genesis. Had he turned to Torah instead, he would have seen that this fraught relationship can have a non-tragic resolution. Abraham did love Isaac. Isaac did bless Jacob a second time, this time knowing he was Jacob. Jacob did love Joseph. And transcending all these human loves is divine love, rescuing us from feelings of rejection, and redeeming the human condition from tragedy.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[I am indebted for this entire line of thought to Mr. Joshua Rowe of Manchester. Others have pointed out that a similar idea was subsequently and independently written by Rav Yoel Bin Nun in volume one of *Megadim.*]ed.: Rabbi Yitz Etshalom's Dvar Torah, attached to my posting by email, v Bin Num and Rabbi Medan on this topic.[

]2[Rashi to Bereishit 35:22; Shabbat 55b

]3[Abarbanel to Bereishit 25:28. Isaac loved Esau, Abarbanel argues, because he was the firstborn. Isaac believed, therefore, that he would inherit the divine blessing and covenant. From her oracle, Rebecca knew otherwise. On this reading, the drama unfolded because of a failure of communication between husband and wife.

]4[Rashi to Bereishit 31:32; Bereishit Rabbah and Zohar ad loc.

Around the Sabbath Table:
]1[Do you think Jacob was wrong to send Joseph to check on his brothers?

]2[Do you think Joseph was wrong to not send word to Jacob that he was alive and well?

]3[Who do you relate to more in this tragic story, Joseph or Jacob? Why?

]4[What lessons can we draw from this story?

]5[Why do you think the theme of parental love runs through the Book of Genesis?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayigash/does-my-father-love-me/

Joseph's Message

By Yossi Goldman * © Chabad 5785

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

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

Od Yosef chai, *"Joseph still lives!"* they said.1

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

The verse continues:

> *And]when[they told him all of Joseph's words, and he saw the wagons that Joseph sent to carry him]down to Egypt[, the spirit of their father Jacob was revived.2*
>
> *And Israel said, "It's too much! Joseph, my son, still lives! Let me go and see him before I die."3*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jacob understood what Yiddishe nachas meant. So should we.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 45:26.

2. Ibid 27.

3. Ibid 28.

4. Ibid 27.

5. Deuteronomy 21:1-9.

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

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Vayigash: Essence vs. Exile

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Essence vs. Exile

> *These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Jacob's firstborn was Reuben.*)Gen. 46:8(

We are taught that the oppression of our people in Egypt could not begin as long as any of Jacob's family who originally emigrated to Egypt remained alive. This is alluded to by the fact that, as it begins the account of Jacob's family stay in Egypt, the Torah reviews the names of the family members – even though it has already told us their names previously.

Mentioning their names again highlights how G-d cherished each one of them, just as someone who possesses a prized collection of something frequently inspects it, attentively examining each item separately.

Moreover, a person's name is their connection to their inner essence. We see that when we call a person by their name, their whole self is summoned to attention, and can even be revived from a fainting spell. Thus, by reviewing their names in this context, G-d was connecting Jacob's family to their inner, Divine essence, which can never be subject to *"exile,"* that is, be constrained by any force or representative of nature.

Today, as well, by cultivating a conscious connection to our Divine essence, we can remain free and independent of any servitude to the forces of nature, and realize our Divine potential to its fullest.

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

Gut Shabbos,

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Volume 31, Issue 11 **Shabbat Parashat Vayigash** **5785 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Space Between

"What do porcupines do in winter?" asked Schopenhauer. "How can they stay warm?" If they come too close to one another, they will injure each other. If they stay too far apart, they will freeze. Life, for porcupines, is a delicate balance between closeness and distance. It is hard to get it right, and dangerous to get it wrong. And so it is for us.

That is the force of the word that gives our parsha its name: Vayigash. "And he came close." Then Judah came close to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself." Gen. 44:18

For perhaps the first time in his life, Judah came close to his brother Joseph. The irony is, of course, that he did not know it was Joseph. But that one act of coming close melted all of Joseph's reserve, all of his defences, and as if unable to stop himself, he finally disclosed his identity: Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" Gen. 45:3

How can we be sure that Vayigash is the key word? Because it contrasts with another verse, many chapters, and many years, earlier. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. Gen. 37:18

Right at the beginning of the story, when Joseph was sent by his father to see how the brothers were doing, tending the sheep, they saw him from far away, from a distance. Imagine the scene. They cannot see his face. All they can see is the richly ornamented cloak, the "coat of many colours," that so upsets them. This coat acts as a constant reminder that it is he, not they, whom their father loves most.

From far away, we don't see people as human beings, and when we stop seeing people as human beings, and they become instead symbols, objects of envy or hate, people can do bad things to one another. The whole tragedy of Joseph and his brothers was distance. They were too far apart in every way.

Which is why it was only when Judah came close to Joseph – vayigash – that the coldness between them thawed, and they became brothers, not strangers to one another.

Too much distance and we freeze. But if we get too close we can injure one another. That was the story of Jacob and Esau. Think about it. Jacob bought Esau's birthright. He stole his blessing. He wore Esau's clothes. He borrowed his identity. Even when they were born, Jacob was clutching Esau's heel.

It was only when there was a distance between them – the 22 years in which Jacob was away from home, with Laban – that the relationship healed, so that when they met again, despite Jacob's fears, Esau embraced and kissed him and treated him like a brother and a friend.

Too close and we hurt one another. Too distant and we freeze.

How then do we make and sustain relationships, if the balance is so fine and it is so easy to get it wrong? The Torah's answer – already there in the first chapter of the Torah – is: first separate, then join. The verb lehavdil, "to separate," appears five times in the first chapter of Bereishit. God separates light from darkness, the upper and lower waters, sea and dry land. Separation is at the heart of Jewish law – between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden.

In Judaism kadosh, holy, means separation. To sanctify is to separate. Why? Because when we separate, we create order. We defeat chaos. We give everything and everyone their space. I am I and not you. You are you and not I. Once we respect our difference and distance, then we can join without doing damage to one another.

First separate, then connect. That seems to be the Jewish way.

Heart-wrenching separations also appear at both ends of the Abraham story. At the beginning of his mission, Abraham was told to separate himself from his father, to leave his home and journey to a new land, faraway. Towards the end he was told to separate himself, in different ways, from each of his two sons. These painful episodes represent the agonising birth-pangs of a new way of thinking about humanity. But ultimately, we see his sons standing together again, and he is reconciled with both.

That is how God created the universe, and that is how we create real personal relationships. By separating and leaving space for the other. Parents should not seek to control children. Spouses should not seek to control one another. It is the carefully calibrated distance between us in which relationship allows each party to grow into full individuals. And then to be seen, when we stand back and really look at them – but not too far back.

The most beautiful symbol of the problem and its resolution is the ceremony of havdallah at the end of Shabbat and especially the havdallah candle. The wicks are separate but the flame they make is joined. So it is between husband and wife. So it is between parent and child. And so it is, or should be, between siblings. Distance damaged the relationship between Judah and Joseph. Vayigash – Judah's act of drawing close to his brother – restored it.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

A Tearful and Faithful Reunion

"Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet his father, to Goshen; and he presented himself unto him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." (Genesis 46:29)

Of all the figures in Genesis, Jacob's life is the most clearly depicted, his emotional experiences ranging from ecstatic heights to painful descents clearly recorded. And of all his sufferings, probably the most painful moment occurs when the brothers bring home the blood-soaked coat of many colors and ask their father if indeed it belongs to Joseph. Whatever happened until then – his running away from Esau, his discovering that he'd been hoodwinked by Laban, his burying of his beloved Rachel on the side of the road after less than a decade of married life – cannot

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compare to the moment when he is led to believe that his beloved son has been ripped apart by a wild beast. The text is explicit concerning Jacob's suffering; inconsolable, he mourns many days, and accepts the fact that he will even go to his grave a mourner.

In a sense Jacob's life is over, since all his hopes for the future had been bound up in his beloved Joseph. Abraham almost lost his future with the binding of Isaac, but Jacob actually did lose his future for the twenty-two years he lived thinking his favored son and heir for the birthright had been torn by a wild beast. And if his confrontation with the bloodied coat marks the greatest suffering in Jacobs's life, then the encounter between Jacob the elderly father and his living son Joseph must be the most significant moment of Jacob's life.

When father and son do meet at last, the tears flow freely. Indeed, the Torah records the very words of Jacob which reflect the feelings of a man who has achieved total peace and serenity with God: "Now I may die, since I have seen your face, that you are yet alive." (Genesis 46:30)

If it is true that Jacob's encounter with Joseph is the central experience of his life, redeeming not only his own faith but the promises God has given to Jacob's descendants, then the meeting should illuminate basic truths not only about a father and son, but also about the nature of the Jewish people and our destiny.

What immediately strikes us is the ambiguity in the account of the tears. We don't know who fell on whose neck, or who wept. Was it Jacob or Joseph? Rashi comments that it was Joseph who wept. Then what was Jacob doing at that moment? According to the Midrash, Jacob was busy saying the Shema, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One.'

Nahmanides disagrees with Rashi, arguing that simple common sense doesn't allow for the view that the old father held back his tears while the younger Joseph gave vent to his emotions. After all, everybody understands that if you have an old father who finds his son alive after believing that he's been dead for the last twenty-two years, and a son who has reached the position of second-in-command to Pharaoh, how could we doubt that the tears must have emanated from the elder Jacob's eyes? It would certainly have been understandable for both to have wept, but since the weeping in this verse is done in the singular, it must have been Jacob who wept.

And yet Rashi's interpretation must be addressed. Why does he assign Joseph the tears and his father the Shema? What's so significant about the Shema, especially at this moment?

During the twenty-two years of mourning, Jacob's life had been hopeless. For so long he'd been living in a fog of despair, in sharp contrast to the years prior to Joseph's death when his entire life had been pregnant with meaning as he prepared his favorite son for eventual leadership of Israel, as he fashioned for him the mantle of the birthright. He had certainly reiterated the tradition of the Covenant between the Pieces, the mission of Israel to the nations, the ultimate goal of ethical monotheism to perfect the world under the kingship of God. And then arrived the black, bleak day when 'Joseph has been torn, yes, torn by a wild beast, 'when the bloodstained garment was brought to him; he could hardly be blamed if he allowed himself a momentary lapse of faith. Until then, it had been so clear to him that all of the divine promises which were to befall his descendants were to be realized through Joseph, first-born of his beloved Rachel, devoted student of family lore, dreamer of lofty dreams. And now without Joseph, what is to become of the divine promises?

From this vantage point, it makes very good sense that Jacob's immediate response to his encounter with Joseph was the profound confirmation of his faith in the traditions of his father, and in the future of his people. Hence he declares the formula of Jewish faith, the acceptance of the yoke of divine kingship, Shema Yisrael, our belief in ultimate world acceptance of ethical monotheism. In effect, Jacob is telling Joseph that now he understands that God's covenant with Abraham will indeed be fulfilled, no matter how bleak the picture, no matter how dark the exile. Hear O Israel, the Lord who is now our God will eventually be crowned as the ruler of universe, on that day God will be one and His name will be one. Never give up on our faith, no matter what. From the perspective of my life, I now realize that the tragedy which I experienced was merely God's preparation of the Covenant between the Pieces, the survival of the family, the enslavement in and eventual exodus from Egypt, the redemption of the world.

* * *

A striking example of how we can either control our emotions, and live, or be controlled by them, and die, is to be found by comparing two biblical personalities described in the book of Samuel. Book One opens with the account of a childless woman named Hannah visiting the Sanctuary in Shilo to pray to God. She vows that if God remembers her and gives her a son, she will dedicate him to the service of God. When the high priest, Eli HaKohen, sees a woman whose lips move but no words are heard, he wrongly suspects her of being drunk. 'She speaks above her heart [he medaberet al libah] '(I Samuel 1:13) is how the text describes her concentration. Hannah cannot possibly be drunk, the text is teaching us. A person who drinks to inebriation is not in control of his emotions; he is a slave to instinct and desire. Hannah 'speaks above (al) her heart 'means that she stands over and above the emotions of the heart. After all, hasn't she dedicated the son of her prayers to divine service? She is willing to give up a mother's desires and send the child she hopes God will grant her to another home – the Sanctuary – and place him in the care of Eli HaKohen. Hannah speaks not merely to (el) but rather above (al) her heart, and is therefore in control of her emotions. No, she can- not be drunk. She is sincerely praying, and her prayer will be answered.

In contrast, the story of Nabal, which takes place one generation later, describes a rich shepherd protected by David but whose own self- ish desires make him reject David in his hour of need. The young David, anointed by Samuel (who has grown up to become a judge in Israel) as the future king, is being harassed and hunted down by Saul. David sends some of his young men to the wealthy Nabal during the shearing season with a request for provisions. The selfish scoundrel (which is the literal meaning of his name) refuses to part with even a small portion of his wealth, not even for David himself. The text describes him as '…a hard man, evil in deeds, like his heart ' (I Samuel 25:3), and the verse ends with the word 'kalibi, 'which can either be taken as a description of lineage, 'from the house of Caleb, 'or as a description of personality, subservient to his emotions. Angered, David plans a deadly attack on this ungrateful man. In the meantime, word reaches Nabal's wife, who plans to rescue her husband by sending David two hundred loaves, two bottles of wine, five prepared sheep, five measures of parched corn, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. Nabal is none the wiser since he celebrates the festival of sheep shearing with a kingly feast and, true to form, considering his character of identifying with – and not controlling – his heart, he gets drunk. Only in the morning is he told of Abigail's gift, and in an instant Nabal's '…heart died within him and he became as a stone '(I Samuel 25:37).

Apparently Nabal was so obsessed by the desires of his heart, a slave to his emotional needs and demands, that his death is described as the death of his heart. His very essence was not his mind or his God, but was rather his heart and his emotions. Hannah and Nabal stand at opposite ends of the spectrum, Hannah speaks to her heart and makes her heart listen, while Nabal's heart ordered him to do what it wanted, and not what God would have wanted.

Jacob's recital of the Shema at this intense moment is a supreme lesson to teach Joseph the importance of God over emotions and is built into the continuation of the Shema: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might '(Deuteronomy 6:5) – even to the point of mesirat nefesh, the willingness to give up your soul, your very life, for God. To have discovered that Joseph is still alive is to have endowed Jacob's life with renewed meaning and significance. Instead of losing control, he says the Shema, acknowledging that a Jew must be willing to give up his life for God, not only when he has nothing left to lose, but even now, when life has become so exquisitely precious. And remember that the Shema is recited before death and has historically been recited by our holy martyrs. 'Now I can die, ' Jacob says to Joseph, which may be understood to mean that even now he's willing to die for God; this is real mesirat nefesh. Such is the lesson Jacob wants to impart to Joseph in his recitation of the Shema: one must be willing to give up for God even that which is most beloved and precious.

* * *

On one of my visits to America, a man whom I had always thought to be very serious about his Judaism said to me: 'You know why I'm not making aliya? I don't want my son to go to the Israeli army.'

As a father, I certainly understand his feelings, but as a Jew I can hardly justify them. This attitude is the very opposite of what Jacob was trying to teach Joseph. We have to be able to overcome even the deepest of our emotions in our commitment to God. We should not forget that when Jacob declares the Shema and his commitment to God, it is overheard by his sons. And perhaps it is precisely that message which inspires Joseph to re-establish close family ties and to request that his remains be returned to the land of Israel when his descendants leave Egypt.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

"No Man" Signifies That It Was All Part of a Divine Plan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But my initial thought was that had I gotten up from my desk when I had originally intended (two or three minutes earlier), this would have never happened to me. It was only because I left my house when I did, and because I was at Reisterstown Road at that specific time, that I was involved in this multiple vehicle traffic incident.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Simple Pshat in the Wagons Rejuvenating Yaakov

I was recently sitting at the same table as Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer at a wedding. Rabbi Hopfer told me the following vort: After Yosef revealed his true identity to his brothers, Yosef instructs them to bring their father, Yaakov, down to Mitzrayim. The brothers returned to Canaan and told Yaakov the whole story: "Yosef is still alive and he is the ruler over the entire land of Egypt; but he had a turn of heart, for he did not believe them. And they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them, and he saw the wagons that Yoseph had sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived." (Bereshis 45:26-27)

The sight of those wagons rejuvenated Yaakov, causing him to realize that Yosef was still alive.

We spoke in the past of the Medrash quoted by Rashi that the wagons (agalos) were a special sign that Yosef sent to his father, reminding Yaakov that the last Torah section they had studied together before they were separated for so many years was Eglah Arufah (the decapitated calf). The hint was based on the similarity between the word eglah and the word agala.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

If you were building a new town or city what is the first structure that you would put up? You might be thinking that my answer would be a synagogue, but it is not. We learn the answer from Parashat Vayigash.

Yaakov and his family, seventy souls in all, are on their way to Egypt where Yaakov will be reunited with his son Yosef, whom he had not seen for twenty two long years. The Torah tells us, "V'Et Yehuda Shalach Lefanav El Yosef Lehorot Lefanav Goshnah – Yaakov sent Yehuda, ahead of the family to Yosef, to show Yaakov the way to Goshen."

This does not seem to make sense because if Yehuda was going to show Yaakov the way, he would surely need to be alongside him? If he is a few days of journey ahead, how is he going to show him the way?

So the Midrash in Bereishit Rabba, as brought down by Rashi says, "Letaken Lo Beit Talmud Shemisham Teiztei Hora'ah – Yaakov asked Yehuda to open a school so that education should flow from it."

The term 'Lehorot' means 'to show the way' but it also means 'to teach'. Yaakov wanted to guarantee that on the very first day on which the family arrived in Goshen, the children would have a school to go to.

He knew that they would be arriving in to an alien Egyptian environment, that in the course of time, the people would integrate into Egyptian society but that it would always be crucially important for them to retain their own independent identity. It was important for them to be rooted in their own faith, to be loyal to their own traditions and to remember how central the land of Israel should always be in their lives.

The way to achieve all of this was through solid and comprehensive education.

During this coming week we will be fasting on Asara B'Tevet. A fast that records the beginning of all those tragedies which led eventually to the destruction of our Temple. In anticipation of that tragedy, Raban Yochanan Ben Zakkai famously met up with Vespasian, the Roman Governor and he asked him, "Ten Li Yavneh V'Chachmeha" – Please guarantee that even as Jerusalem is destroyed the Jewish people will have a school in Yavneh, in order to learn about their tradition. In the absence of Jewish education there can be no Jewish future.

Every key term relating to the books that we learn and those who teach them all mean one thing – learning Torah. It is from that same word 'Hora'ah' which means 'to study'. 'Mishnah' means 'to learn'. 'Talmud' means 'to learn' and 'Gemarah' is the Aramic for 'learning'. A 'teacher' is 'Moreh' and a 'parent' is 'Horeh'. Everything is centred on the importance of learning.

With this in mind, the name that we give to our houses of prayer is 'Shul' coming from the German, meaning 'school'. It is a place where we daven to Hashem and a place that we congregate socially. But primarily it needs to be a 'shul' – 'a school' – a place of learning.

All those years ago, Yaakov Avinu taught us a crucial lesson for Jewish survival – successful Jewish communities are those which establish successful institutes for Jewish education.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Unity, Leadership, and the Redemption of Captives

Aviv Rozenrauch (Ron), a 2006 graduate of Derech Avot Yeshiva High School, is a Project Manager at Isracard who has served in the reserves for over 270 days since Oct. 7th.

In Parshat Vayigash, the familial saga of Yaakov and his sons reaches its dramatic culmination. Yehuda stands before Yosef—still concealing his true identity, appearing to his brothers as Egypt's viceroy—and delivers a poignant plea aimed at saving Binyamin and restoring peace to their fractured family. This moment is not only a narrative peak in the book of Bereishit, but also a profound lesson in unity, leadership, and mutual responsibility—values that resonate powerfully even in our time.

In Parshat Vayeshev, Yosef and his brothers are depicted as deeply divided, mired in internal strife that culminates in Yosef's sale into slavery. Yaakov, unable to perceive how God's prophecy is unfolding, sinks into profound grief over Yosef's loss. The turning point arrives in Parshat Vayigash, where the brothers undergo a profound process of repentance and transformation. Yehuda, who played a pivotal role in Yosef's sale, now steps forward as a human shield for Binyamin and Shimon. He does not make excuses but assumes full responsibility: "For your servant became surety for the boy… I shall have sinned to my father all my days" (Bereishit 44:32).

The unity the brothers achieve at this moment is hard-won. It is born of shared pain and a deep recognition of the importance of mutual responsibility, even in the most challenging circumstances. Today, as the people of Israel grapple with societal and cultural divides, can we reclaim this unity?

History teaches us that when we are united, our strength endures even in the face of immense challenges.

The parsha also presents two models of leadership: Yosef embodies the wise, strategic leader. He uses his position of power to test his brothers, ensuring that the unity they display is genuine and profound. Yehuda exemplifies direct and resolute leadership. He is prepared to risk everything, standing before the highest authority to protect Binyamin and restore his father's trust.

Both leadership models remain relevant today. We need leaders who can blend Yosef's wisdom and vision with Yehuda's courage and determination—leaders who understand the needs of the collective yet are committed to the well-being of the individual.

Yehuda's commitment extends beyond Binyamin's safety; he is willing to fight to prevent his captivity. In Jewish tradition, redeeming captives is one of the most important mitzvot, transcending economic or military considerations. Yehuda teaches us that true leadership is measured by the willingness to make sacrifices, even life itself, for the redemption and continuity of the Jewish people.

Similarly, in our times, we witness soldiers and civilians leaving their homes and risking their lives to rescue hostages held behind enemy lines—actions that defy the natural instinct for self-preservation. Prolonged wars, such as the one we are experiencing now, underscore the timeless relevance of the Torah's values, upon which the Jewish people stand even in modern reality. The sacred battle is waged with the heavy burden of leaving family behind, yet it is driven by a profound sense of mission—to do everything possible for the hostages and the security of the nation. As the people of Israel continue to confront questions of unity, leadership, and the redemption of captives, the story of Yehuda and Yosef reminds us that our strength as a nation lies not only in strategic planning or bravery but in true unity born of mutual responsibility.

We must ask ourselves: Are we ready to embrace the values reflected in this portion even in our times? Can we foster leaders like Yosef and Yehuda who guide not through force and authority alone but through genuine concern for both the nation and the individual? My high school years were not merely a time of study but also a period of identity formation, self-discovery, and the development of skills that continue to shape me. My interests in art and communication allowed me to express my thoughts and emotions in creative and diverse ways.

This was one of the most formative periods of my life, shaped by encounters with remarkable figures such as Yochai Kalangel z"l, one of my closest friends at the time, as well as Rabbi Yaakov Don z"l and Rabbi Aviad z"l. Each of them, in his own way—one as a dear friend and the others as educators—taught me the importance of friendship, dedication, and living a life of purpose. These relationships and friendships made my school experience extraordinary, and their impact as leaders and mentors continues to resonate deeply within me.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Feeling the Joy and Pain of Others

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

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

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

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

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

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

He Could Be Himself Again

For how will I go up to my father if the boy is not with me? Let me not see the misery that will befall my father!" (Breishis 44:34) Now Yosef could not bear all those standing beside him, and he called out, "Take everyone away from me!" So, no one stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers. And he wept out loud, so the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" but his brothers could not answer him because they were startled by his presence. (Breishis 45:1-3)

This is the height of human drama being played out before our eyes, as described in the Holy Torah. As witnesses, as the audience to such a scene, what should we be thinking? What suddenly triggered Yosef to drop his charade? Why such an emotional outburst!? What does it tell us about Yosef? What does it teach us about human nature and interpersonal dynamics? This is not just a play. It is Torah. We are meant to learn something from this rich exchange. It could be that the answers are already too obvious but it might be helpful for us to spell them out explicitly.

That Yosef loved his brothers to his core we can have no doubt. All the while he was acting towards them with harsh tones, he was also reorganizing all of Egyptian society so they would find safe haven in a land where everyone was a stranger to fulfill the prophecy that they will be strangers in a strange land.

So, while he was playing with them in one way, he was working overtime for them in another. His love and desire to connect with them was present the entire time. He just had to wait for the right moment.

What was that right moment? When they came down to Egypt originally, he recognized them immediately but they didn't recognize him. At that time the Torah tells us he saw the ten brothers and he remembered the dream. HASHEM had orchestrated that more than 90% of the prophecy embedded in that dream had been fulfilled. Not yet eleven stars were "bowing down" to him. He needed to engineer the last little part and bring Binyamin down as well.

In horseshoes and hand grenades, almost is good enough, but in prophecy precision is everything. They had judged him to be a false prophet. He had to prove them wrong and the dreams entirely right.

He also wanted to put them in the exact same situation as when he was crying out for mercy for his father when he was in the pit, and see if they would act differently this time. That would prove that they had actually done Teshuvah and regretted what they had done originally.

That's what was happening when he cried out loud. The mask fell off. He could not play the game of cruel master with them anymore. The real him needed to jump out. I have said to little children in my office who come in with a pouty face that they are going to smile in 8 seconds and I start to count. Within 5 seconds they break out into laughter. This is not to be used in all cases but sometimes I can detect that that they are working too hard to be in a bad mood and children are naturally happy. The fun-loving, child-like nature is crying out to shine forth. So, Yosef wanted more than anything to shower his brothers with brotherly love.

What wore down his resistance and broke his façade? What suddenly changed? He heard Yehuda admitting the truth. Yehuda himself merited kingship because he admitted the truth. No more external coercion is necessary when someone "gets it" on their own.

Shlomo HaMelech writes in Mishlei (28:13), "One who covers up his sins will not be successful but whoever admits and abandons (the bad way) will find mercy". Isn't it the truth!? When someone who wronged us asks for forgiveness suddenly all of the anger and suspicion instantly evaporates.

Like a debtor who even makes a partial payment or admits that he owes money, he is treated much differently than one who runs from his creditor. Mercy is aroused! The instant Yosef realized that they "get it" he couldn't hold himself back anymore! At that moment the game was over, the play quickly ended, and for the first time now in twenty-two years, he could be himself again.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash
Rav Yishai Jeselsohn

Why didn't Yosef write to his father?

In *Parashat Vayigash*, we are witness to a moving and poignant encounter between Yosef and his brothers. We have been waiting several chapters for this moment – and finally, it arrives! With all the feelings of joy that arise in this *parasha*, Yosef's revelation to his brothers raises a complex and interesting question: Why did this not take place sooner? Why did Yosef wait so long, since the time he went down to Egypt, to inform his father that he was still alive?

This question troubled many commentators, including the *Or Ha-Chaim*: I have seen fit to pay attention to the matter of Yosef: how did he not feel his father's grief for so many years? It is true that during the period of his slavery, it can be argued that he tried but did not succeed. But after he rose to greatness, why didn't he write a letter to his father to diminish his grief? For Yosef knew the extent of Yaakov's love for him and that he would mourn for him for many years; why then did he not send a letter to inform him that he was alive? (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Bereishit* 44:26)

In this *shiur*, we will try to understand the suggestions proposed by the various commentators, concluding with the path suggested by the *Or Ha-Chaim*.

I. Fulfillment of the Dreams - The first time that Yosef and the brothers meet after his sale, the brothers have come to buy food in Egypt and do not know that the ruler facing them is actually Yosef. The first thing Yosef's brothers do upon meeting him is prostrate themselves before him: And Yosef's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the earth. (*Bereishit* 42:6)

The Torah continues with a description of Yosef's suspicious reaction: And Yosef saw his brothers, and he knew them, but made himself strange to them, and spoke roughly with them; and he said to them: From where do you come? And they said: From the land of Canaan, to buy food. (*Bereishit* 42:7)

The Torah then highlights two details that are not part of the story itself, but are constantly in the background: And Yosef knew his brothers, but they knew him not. And Yosef remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them… (*Bereishit* 42:8-9)

The fact that Yosef recognized his brothers, while they did not recognize him, is certainly important for understanding the story – but what is the relevance of Yosef's remembering his dreams? Rashi (*Bereishit* 42:9) suggests Scripture is noting that Yosef's dream did in fact come true, in that the brothers were bowing down to him. The Ramban, on the other hand, offers the very opposite interpretation: In my opinion, the matter is the reverse. Scripture states that when Yosef saw his brothers bowing down to him, he remembered all the dreams which he had dreamed concerning them – and he knew that in this instance, not one of the dreams had been fulfilled. He knew that it was inherent in their interpretation that according to the first dream, at first all his brothers would bow down to him, as it is stated: "And behold, we were binding sheaves" – for "we" refers to all eleven of his brothers [including Binyamin, who was not present at this encounter in Egypt]. The second time, in accordance with the second dream, the sun, the moon and eleven stars would bow down to him. Now, since he did not see Binyamin with them, he conceived of the strategy of devising a charge against them so that they would also bring his brother Binyamin to him, in order to first fulfill the first dream. (Ramban, *Bereishit* 42:9)

Thus, according to the Ramban, the entire maneuver with Binyamin was planned from the outset, with the purpose of fulfilling Yosef's dreams. In light of this, the Ramban also explains why Yosef does not rush to inform his father that he is alive:

It is for this reason that he did not wish to tell them at this time, "I am Yosef, your brother," and to say, "Hasten and go up to my father," and send wagons, as he did to them the second time, for in that case his father would undoubtedly have come at once. It was only after fulfillment of the first

dream that he told them ["I am Yosef your brother"], in order to fulfill the second dream. Were it not for this consideration, Yosef would indeed be regarded as having committed a great sin – bringing anguish to his father, leaving him for many days in the position of being bereft and mourning for Shimon and for him. Even if it were his intention to cause his brothers minor anguish, how could he not have compassion for his elderly father? But he assigned each to its proper time in order to fulfill the dreams, knowing that they would truly be fulfilled. (Ramban, ibid.)

This interpretation is not without difficulties. First, according to the Ramban, it is understandable why *after* the brothers arrived Yosef did not rush to reveal himself to them, but before that, why did he not turn to his father? Moreover, many commentators objected to the fundamental idea that it is a person's responsibility to see that his dreams are fulfilled. This is what the Abravanel writes:

I have already written that the fulfillment of the dreams was not by way of the physical bowing… And furthermore, the fulfillment of the dreams was cast upon the Holy One, blessed be He, and not upon Yosef the dreamer. (Abravanel, *Bereishit* 41)

The Abravanel has a different explanation for the bowing in the dream, but he also argues that the fulfillment of the dreams was in the hands of Heaven. Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, in his book *Akeidat Yitzchak*, writes in similar fashion:

This is what should be joined to this story, namely, why didn't Yosef inform his father about all his glory, seeing that he had the power to relieve him from his distress and sadness, and all the more so in the years of famine to save him from death and reinvigorate him? I am puzzled by what the Ramban wrote, that he did this in order to make his dreams come true, for of what benefit was it to him for them to be fulfilled? Even if there were a benefit, he should not have sinned against his father, but rather he should have refrained from sinning against him. As for the dreams, He who made them should provide their solution. It is also enormous folly for a person to try to fulfill his dreams, for they are things that happen without the person's intention. (*Akeidat Yitzchak, sha'ar* 29)

A fundamental question arises here: to what extent should a prophet act to fulfill his prophecy? It is possible that this question was already discussed in the Gemara in *Berakhot*, where the Gemara describes a conversation that took place when King Chizkiyahu fell ill and the prophet Yeshayahu went to visit him (see II *Melakhim* 20 and *Yeshayahu* 38):

He said to him [=Chizkiyahu to Yeshayahu]: Why so bad? [=Why am I sick?] He replied: Because you did not try to have children. He said to him: The reason was that I saw by the holy spirit that the children issuing from me would not be virtuous. He said to him: What have you to do with the secrets of the All-Merciful? You should have done what you were commanded, and let the Holy One, blessed be He, do that which pleases Him. (*Berakhot* 10a)

In response to Chizkiyahu's question, why did God treat him so badly, Yeshayahu answers that this was his punishment for not engaging in procreation. Chizkiyahu seemingly had a good excuse: after all, he had a prophetic vision that the children to be born from him would not be virtuous! However, Yeshayahu teaches him an important principle in the service of God – that a person must do what he is commanded; the consequences and results of these actions are in the hands of Heaven. Even if a person received a prophecy that his actions will cause bad things, he is still subject to God's commandments and must not deviate from them.

Therefore, in our case as well, Yosef should have proceeded in accordance with God's command, and not refrained from showing respect to his father in order to realize his dreams.

II. Educating the Brothers and Preserving the House of Yaakov - The *Da'at Zekeinim mi-Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* explain Yosef's lack of contact as stemming from a desire to preserve the integrity of Yaakov's family:

In addition, he was afraid that if he would tell his father [that he was alive], his brothers would hear, and panic, and flee, this one to the north and that one to the south, out of great fear that he would kill them, and as a result, his father would grieve over *them*, and he would cause great distress to him. This is why he waited until his brothers came to him, and then he first revealed himself to them and appeased them with words, telling them that he had no bad feeling for them, and he asked them to inform their father that he was the ruler of the entire land of Egypt. (*Da'at Zekeinim* 42:1)

Yosef assumed that if his father received word that he was alive, Yaakov would discuss it with the brothers and try to clarify what had happened to Yosef. This would undoubtedly create rifts in the family – and it is precisely these rifts that Yosef wished to avoid. In order to avoid them, Yosef waited until his brothers themselves regretted the sale, at which time it would be possible to reunite and live together as a family.

In a similar, but slightly different way, Rabbi S. R. Hirsch explains that Yosef and his brothers must undergo a process of forgiving past sins before they can make themselves known to each other:

We must try, from what we are told, to explain Yosef's behavior. We should have thought that if only for his father's sake, he would have made himself known to them immediately… A clever man like Yosef would also not think that he had to fulfill all the details of his dreams. If a dream has any meaning, one can leave its realization to the One who sends it. It could be that considerations of urgent necessity caused him to adopt a behavior which otherwise must appear as senseless and purposeless spitefulness. This, apart from Yosef's character, his undeniable cleverness cannot allow us to suppose to have been the motive. If we put ourselves completely in his position, we could arrive at the following explanation.

Had Yosef wished his attitude towards his father and his brothers to remain really as the governor, and nothing but the governor, did he not care whether or not he would re-enter the family circle as son and brother, he would not have required all these contrivances. But he, who, even as an Egyptian prince had brought up his children for the house of Yaakov, and who also desired his bones ultimately to rest in the land of his fathers, felt it absolutely necessary for him to be convinced of two things: (a) that he himself can have a different opinion of his brothers, and above all (b) that his brothers have a different opinion of, and felt quite differently towards him. Their inner feelings towards one another must have become quite different to what they formerly were, otherwise an intimate relationship would never be able to be re-established, and even if outwardly the family were to be reunited, the family would be lost to him, and he for the family… In a word, that, the moment he revealed himself to them as Yosef, the scales would fall from their eyes, and on both sides it would be possible to cross out the whole of the past. Only so could he hope to be really restored to his father and his sons as son and brother. Unless we are mistaken it must have been considerations such as these which kept Yosef back from sending information to his father during the years of his good fortune. (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, *Bereishit* 42:9)

Both of these interpretations are plausible, but they carry both a moral and a practical difficulty: Is Yosef the one who is fit to "educate" his brothers? Furthermore, who said that Yosef's brothers would ever reach Egypt and that he would be able to influence them to repent of their past sins?

It must also be remembered that Yaakov's family had experienced a number of difficult crises: from the foundation of the family with the substitution of Leah for Rachel, through the arguments about the births in the house of Yaakov, the incident of Shekhem and Dina, and the reaction of Shimon and Levi, and the actions of Reuven. Yaakov was able to withstand all these family crises and still keep the family intact. Why did Yosef not rely on Yaakov to do the same here?

III. Compulsion - Other commentators suggested inserting a detail that is not explicitly written in the Torah in order to explain Yosef's actions. Thus the *Bekhor Shor* writes:

"What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?" Yehuda said: Why should we commit this sin to kill him and not receive any benefit from his death? It is better that we should sell him and the sin not be so severe, and we benefit, and we will also not see him anymore, and he will not mock us. It seems that when they sold him, *they made him swear* that he would not come back to his father's house, and not reveal himself to his father, and not inform his father that he was alive and had been sold, and not say there that he was one of the sons of Yaakov, with no signs and no proof. And so he did, as it was better for him to do that, and not die at their hands. For if this were not the case, when he rose to greatness in his master's house, and for nine years was ruler of Egypt, during the seven years of plenty and two years of famine, why did he not send to his father saying, "Here I am in Egypt"? After all, he knew that his father grieved over him! Rather, certainly he swore to them. (*Bekhor Shor*, *Bereishit* 37:26)

According to this, Yosef's silence stemmed from a halakhic oath.

Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz (the *Shela*) suggests an even more far-reaching proposal: This explains why, for 22 years, Yosef did not inform his father that he was alive: that the hand of God did this. This was in one of two ways: Either the holy spirit rested upon Yosef and commanded him not to inform his father that he was alive, and Yosef had to fulfill God's command [despite the pain it would cause his father], because both he and his father are obligated to honor Him, may He be blessed. Or he was under compulsion, because the Holy One, blessed be He, removed free choice from Yosef, so he would not choose to inform his father. Yosef is not to be blamed for this, because he was forced by God, blessed be He – and God acted as an atonement for Yaakov. (*Torah Or*, 26)

Of course, the words of the *Shela* are remarkable, both because of their distance from the plain meaning of the verses, and, even more, from a conceptual point of view: Does God withhold free choice from human beings?

The common denominator of these two interpretations is also the great difficulty in both of them – their distance from the plain sense of Scripture.

IV. Causing Shame - The *Or Ha-Chaim* offers a different understanding that explains Yosef's actions: It seems that Yosef's reason was praiseworthy. For from the time of his descent to Egypt until the time that His word came to pass and he was removed from prison to rule, he was unable to inform his father. Even assuming that he was able to do so, he was afraid for his life that if his brothers would know about the matter, owing to their shame and embarrassment before their father, they would dedicate themselves to removing him from the world so as to not be humiliated before their father…

And after he was released from prison, and became a great minister, and the first concern no longer applied, nevertheless, he refrained from informing his father, in the spirit of what *Chazal* said: "It is better for a man to cast himself into a fiery furnace than he should put his fellow to shame in public" (*Bava Kama* 59a). He was concerned about his brothers' honor, so as not to put to them to shame before Yaakov… and he suffered that his father would remain in his grief, rather than humiliate them. (*Or Ha-Chaim* 45:26)

On the face of it, this proposal sounds rather weak: Is Yosef truly willing to suffer so much in order to avoid embarrassing his brothers? Furthermore, this does not sound like the Yosef we know from the beginning of *Parashat Vayeshev*, who brought his brothers' evil report to their father. Why is it so difficult here for Yosef to put them to shame?

If we delve more deeply, however, we can see this as a reflection of a general change that Yosef underwent in Egypt. This significant, deep-seated change may be a significant aspect of Israel's descent into Egypt and their transformation into a nation.

The relationship between Yosef and his brothers, as mentioned, was never one of calm and serenity. There were fights between the brothers from birth, and between their mothers even earlier than that. But when he went down to Egypt, something changed in Yosef. Yosef no longer brings his brothers' evil report to their father, but spares them so as not to put them to shame. Things also changed with the brothers, to the extent that they see themselves as guilty for what happened to Yosef.

What changed in Yosef following his descent into Egypt? Ostensibly, he should have become more firm in his position that the brothers are problematic, and that their actions must be brought to their father's attention! How is it that what happens is the exact opposite?

It can be suggested that Yosef learned an important lesson for all future generations in the wake of his sale. A quarrel between brothers does not necessarily end with an evil report being brought to the father, but is liable to deteriorate to the point of wanting to kill, sell, and break up the entire package. It is not possible to live as one nation with such hatred between brothers. Even hatred that begins with minor tattling of one kind or another may end in actions that divide the family and tear it apart. Yosef saw firsthand how far an argument between brothers could go, and he is not prepared to contribute to it anymore – even at the price of being forgotten forever in Egypt.

If this is indeed the case, we can learn a great lesson for our time from the actions of Yosef:

Our Rabbis taught: Those who are insulted but do not insult, hear themselves reviled without answering, act through love and rejoice in suffering, of them it is stated in Scripture: "But they who love Him are as the sun when he goes forth in his might" (*Shoftim* 5:31). (*Shabbat* 88b)

The capacity not to respond to provocation, disgrace, and slander is a fundamental necessity for the building and establishment of a nation. Perhaps that is why God brought about Israel's descent to Egypt precisely out of strife and discord – so that we should understand their severity and the degree to which the building of a nation requires that they be removed from our midst.

(Translated by David Strauss)

BS"D

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from**: Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Jan 2, 2025,

Rav Frand

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

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1318 – Ectogenesis: Artificial Wombs – The Coming Era of Motherless Birth? Good Shabbos!

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 Binyomin 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 Sfas 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 Sfas 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 Sha-dai 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'his-apek) 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 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.

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

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

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FROM THE DESK OF **RABBI MOSHE HAUER**
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Grief and Resilience

Resilience Resilience is essential to the Jewish experience. As a nation, we have endured unparalleled tragedy and setbacks, yet - like the righteous man described in the proverb – even if we may fall seven times, we get back up. Yosef personified this quality, cast away repeatedly but always rising again.

Key to his resilience was his readiness to act on every opportunity to make things better. Yosef correctly understood that the butler's impending release was the pathway to gaining his own freedom, even though he should not have placed his trust in the butler. Similarly when a bit of liberation came, he turned Pharaoh's dreams into a sketch of his own future role. He may have grieved, but he would not be paralyzed by that grief. To quote one of our own modern-day heroines, Hadas Lewenstern, "ani almana; ani lo miskeina, I am a widow but I am not helpless."

The Imrei Emes of Ger and Rav Aharon Belzer were two of the great Chasidic masters who had survived the Holocaust. When they saw each other for the first time after the Holocaust in Eretz Yisrael in 1947, they broke down in tears.

After their emotions subsided, Rav Aharon Belzer asked the Imrei Emes about a Rashi in our parsha. When Yosef and Binyamin were reunited, the verse states, "he fell on the necks of Binyamin his brother and he wept, and Binyamin wept on his neck." Rashi shares a midrashic interpretation to explain why the Torah refers to Binyamin's neck in the plural: Yosef wept over the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash that would be located in the tribal portion of Binyamin. Binyamin, on the other hand, cried over just the one destruction of Mishkan Shiloh, the Temple which for more than 300 years was in Shiloh within the portion of Yosef. Asked the Belzer Rebbe, why did each of them cry over what would happen in the other's portion rather than cry over what happened in their own? Rav Aharon Belzer was trying to under stand not only the reactions of Yosef and Binyamin of long ago, but also his own actions and those of the Gerrer Rebbe. Why did they cry so intensely over each other but could not express the same emotions over their own losses and pain?

The Imrei Emes responded that over some body else's losses, over the task of rebuilding that lies ahead of them, we cry. Over one's own losses, one doesn't cry, one is moved to act, acknowl edging the loss and then starting the work of rebuilding. That is key to our resilience.

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Sanctified Speech

Rabbi Avraham Twerski's Insights on the Torah

Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27) "Behold! Your eyes see as do the eyes of my brother Benjamin that it is my mouth that is speaking to you" (45:12) Rashi comments that the words, "my mouth is speaking to you" mean "in lashon hakodesh (the holy tongue.)" Purportedly, this means that Joseph offered as proof of his identity that he knew Hebrew.

But in what way was this a proof? Until now, they communicated through an interpreter, whom they assumed to be an Egyptian who obviously knew Hebrew.

Rashi's words may have an additional meaning. All matter is divided into four categories: domem (inanimate), tzomeach (vegetative), chai (living) and medaber (speaking). The last is the category of man, the only being that can speak.

But is this really so? Is man the only creature that can communicate by sound? We know that many forms of life communicate by sound. Are the sounds they make not a form of speaking? Granted, human speech is much more sophisticated, but that makes it only quantitatively distinct from animal verbalizations, but it is not a qualitative distinction. More types of sounds and a greater vocabulary are not enough to give man the distinction of being "a speaker".

The uniqueness of man is not just that he has a more sophisticated form of speech, but that he can elevate his speech to being holy. By using his speech properly, by not speaking foolishly, by avoiding defamatory speech and carrying tales, man can sanctify his speech. This is something that animals cannot do, and it is this ability to sanctify speech that merits the designation "speaker".

Although the brothers' action cannot be justified, Joseph was not totally innocent. The Torah says that "he would bring evil reports about them to his father" (Genesis 37:2) The Midrash states that all the evil reports were groundless, and Joseph was, therefore, guilty of lashon hara. During his enslavement and imprisonment, Joseph did teshuvah to purify himself of lashon hara, derogatory speech.

However, Jewish law states that an offense against another person is not forgiven until one makes proper amends and asks for forgiveness from that person. In revealing himself to his brothers, Joseph wished to tell them that he had repented for the derogatory speech he had spoken about them. "I have corrected that defective trait. I have sanctified my speech. I am now truly a medaber, a speaker," Rashi's comment means more than that I speak Hebrew. Being polylinguistic does not yet warrant the designation of

medaber. One is a "speaker" only if one's speech is kodesh, only if one sanctifies his speech.
We should indeed take pride in having the gift of speech, but unless we sanctify our speech, we are not yet unique. Avoiding the abuse of this precious gift is what makes us unique as humans.

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Parashas Vayigash • January 4th • 4 Teves 5785
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 do so at Bi'ur Chametz before Pesach.
As of this Motzaei Shabbos, January 4th, thirty days will have passed with the inclusion of V'sein Tal U'matar. From Maariv on Motzaei Shabbos and onward, one who is unsure if he correctly said V'sein Tal U'matar (instead of V'sein berachah) does not need any corrective measures, since he is considered "accustomed" to have davened properly.
Next Friday, January 10th is the fast of Asara B'Teves. (This is the only fast day that can fall on Erev Shabbos.) 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. 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. As it is Erev Shabbos, Avinu Malkeinu and Tachanun are omitted. All the regular Shabbos preparations such as hot showers etc. are permitted. While the fast ends at the regular z'man for a Ta'anis (tzeis hakochavim), one may not eat or drink until after he hears Kiddush.
The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is late Monday night, January 13th at 4:34 am EST.
Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Sanhedrin 18 • Yerushalmi: Shabbos 39 • Mishnah Yomis: Sanhedrin 6:2-3 • Oraysa: Next week is Beitza 37b-39b • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 34:14-35:7
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 of Asara B'Teves is next Friday, January 10th.
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 all together • Yehuda travels ahead to open a Yeshiva • 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
"וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָעֲגָלוֹת 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 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.
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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Jan 2, 2025, 3:4 PM
Letting Go of My Expectations - Essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson
"I Am Who I Am Because You Sold Me"
Do You Know Who I Am?
It was the final examination for an introductory Biology course at the university. Like many such freshman courses, it was designed to weed out new students, having over 500 students in the class!
The examination was two hours long, and exam booklets were provided. The professor was extremely strict and told the class that any exam that was not on his desk in exactly two hours would not be accepted and the student would fail. Half an hour into the exam, a student came rushing in and asked the professor for an exam booklet.
"You're not going to have time to finish this," the professor stated sarcastically as he handed the student a booklet.
"Yes, I will," replied the student. He then took a seat and began writing.
After two hours, the professor called for the exams, and the students filed up and handed them in. All except the late student, who continued writing. An hour later, the last student came up to the professor who was sitting at his desk preparing for his next class. He attempted to put his exam on the stack of exam booklets already there.
"No, I'm not going to accept that. It's late."
The student looked incredulous and angry.
"Do you know who I am?"
"No," replied the professor with an air of sarcasm in his voice.
"Do you know who I am?" the student asked again in a louder voice.
"No, and I don't care," replied the professor with hubris.
"Good," replied the student, who quickly lifted the stack of completed exams, stuffed his in the middle, and walked out of the room.
A Brother's Identity Disclosed
The story of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers after decades of bitter separation is one of the most dramatic in the entire Torah. Twenty-two years earlier, when Joseph was seventeen years old, his brothers loathing their younger kin, abducted him, threw him into a pit, and then sold him as a slave to Egyptian merchants. In Egypt, he spent twelve years in prison, from where he rose to become viceroy of the country that was the superpower at the time. Now, more than two decades later, the moment was finally ripe for reconciliation.
Genesis chapter 45 described the emotional reunion:
Joseph could not hold in his emotions, he dismissed all of his Egyptian assistants from his chamber, thus, no one else was present with Joseph when he revealed himself to his brothers. He began to weep with such loud sobs that the Egyptians outside could hear him.
And Joseph said to his brothers: 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' His brothers were so horrified that they could not respond.
Joseph said to his brothers, 'please come close to me'. When they approached him, he said, "I am Joseph your brother – it is I whom you sold into Egypt.
"Now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourself for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you… G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance."

Analyzing the Encounter

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

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

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

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

Remorse

It was the second Rebbe of Ger, Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah Leib Altar (1847-1905), known as the Sefas Emes, who presented a moving explanation.[1] When Joseph revealed his identity, the brothers realized that all this time they were only seeing the external Joseph, not the true one. They thought they were interacting with the gentile Prime Minister of Egypt when in reality he was their brother. Suddenly they realized that their vantage point of reality was external. They were completely deceived by their eyes.

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

"Joseph recognized his brothers but they did recognize him," the Torah states. The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) explains it thus: Joseph easily identified the holiness within his brothers. They lived most of their lives isolated as spiritual shepherds involved in prayer, meditation, and study. Yet these very brothers lacked the ability to discern the moral richness etched in Joseph's heart. Even when Joseph was living with them in Canaan, they saw him as an outsider, as a danger to the integrity of the family of Israel. Certainly, when they encountered him in the form of an Egyptian leader, they failed to observe beyond the mask of a savvy politician the heart of a soul on fire.

But when Joseph declared "I am Joseph" it was not merely a revelation of who he was on the outside, but also of who he was on the inside. They suddenly realized how both of his dreams materialized, and how indeed he was destined to influence the world and save so many from famine. For the first time in their entire lives, Joseph's brothers saw the greatest holiness in the world emerging from the face of an Egyptian vizier.

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

Imagine you were married to the most beautiful, amazing woman in the world. But due to your own horrific traumas, you mistreated her emotionally. After years of all forms of healing, your brain is cleansed, and you discover what you did to your innocent spouse. How do you feel about it? The pain is far deeper than the punishment and consequences that might come your way; it is more than guilt. The inner devastation you experience when you realize what you have done to such a good person is agonizing.

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

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

They were crushed because of the pain they caused their holy brother; the pain they caused their holy father--and the pain they caused the world: separating Joseph from Jacob for 22 years. Who knows, they thought, how much light they deprived the world of by separating the son from his father?

It was at this moment when "Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come close to me'." Joseph wanted them to approach even closer and gaze deeper into the divine light coming forth from his countenance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

שפת אמת ויגש תרמ"ג: בפסוק אשר מכרתם אותי. כמו שאמרו חז"ל אשר שברת יישר כחך. כן ניחם יוסף אותם כי זכה לכל זה על ידי המכירה.

(The Sefas Emes movingly interprets the Hebrew phrase used by Joseph "asher mechartem," as "thank you for selling me." "Our sages offered another take on the verse[2] "on the first tablets that you broke (al haluchot harishonim asher shibarta)," namely, "congratulations for breaking the tablets," yashar koach she'shibarta.[3] So too, here, Joseph comforted his brothers with the words, "that you sold" (asher machartem oti), the deeper meaning of which was "congratulations for selling me (yashar koach asher machartem oti). By doing so, I was sent to restore life, save the world from famine, and save the Jewish family from death.)

If Only…

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

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

A Struggling Boy

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

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

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

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

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

Dancing at MetLife

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Rav Kook on VaYigash: The Hazards of Leadership Inbox

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> Unsubscribe Thu, Jan 2, 4:16 AM (19 hours ago) to me

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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)

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <contact@michalhorowitz.com> date: Jan 2, 2025, 11:04 AM

subject: Vayigash 5785: Yaakov, Yosef & Family Unity

In Parshas Vayigash, the narrative of Yosef and his brothers reaches its climax. Twenty-two years after the brothers threw Yosef into the pit and twenty-two years after he was sold to Egypt, Yosef – the viceroy of Egypt, the most powerful man in the ancient world at that time – reveals himself to his shocked brothers.

With his stunning declaration – "I am Yosef, is my father still alive? I am Yosef, who you sold to Egypt" (45:3-4) – the sons of Yaakov are reunited. Yosef, ever benevolent and forgiving – reassures his brothers that his sale was all part of G-d's master plan to sustain the family through the famine. He comforts them and tells them not to be sad or angry. Rather, they should hurriedly ascend to Canaan, inform Yaakov that his son Yosef lives, that he is the ruler over the land of Egypt, and that the family should move to Goshen, in Egypt, where Yosef will continue to provide for them.

A question, however, remains. Why, over the span of the twenty-two years that Yosef was in Egypt, did he not once attempt to contact his father? Egypt is not very far from Canaan. Why did he never send a letter, a messenger, or some mode of communication, to his father, to let Yaakov know that he was still alive?

While many answers are provided by the various commentators, I will share one compelling and fascinating answer with you, as quoted by Rabbi Shmuel Goldin. In his Unlocking the Torah Text, Bereishit, Rabbi Goldin quotes a contemporary Israeli scholar of Torah and Bible, Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, who suggests a novel answer towards Yosef's silence to his father.

Perhaps Yosef had no way of knowing that at the time of his sale, his brothers deceived their father. "For all Yosef knew, Yaakov never believed him to be dead. Yosef was therefore plagued for years with the question: 'Where is my father? Why has no one come to look for me?'"

Given the close distance between Egypt and Canaan, Yosef deduces that his father, Yaakov, certainly had the wherewithal to search for him! Why then, Yosef wonders to himself, has no search by my father ever taken place for me? It must be, he mistakenly concludes, that there is no interest in finding me.

"Eventually, Yosef's questions concerning his father's silence lead to deeper suspicions. Why, he wonders, did his father send him to seek his brothers in the first place? Wasn't he aware of the hatred that the brothers harbored towards Yosef and the potential danger?"

Hence, Yosef comes to the erroneous – yet pressing – conclusion, that his father was part of the sale! Not only, Yosef reasons, did Yaakov not know what the brothers did to him. Just the opposite! Yosef reasons that the whole sale was orchestrated by his father, with the assistance of his brothers! "In Yosef's mind, someone – perhaps the brothers, perhaps Leah, perhaps even G-d Himself – clearly persuaded Yaakov to cast Yosef off from the family, as Yishmael and Esav had been cast off in earlier generations."

Rabbi Goldin notes that after years of emotionally suffering with this erroneous belief, Yosef accepts his fate. He incredibly maintains his connection to his heritage, past, morals, and traditions, even while he accepts that fact that he has been cast off and cut away from his family. This belief is expressed in the name he gives his first born son, Menashe. "And Yosef called the name of his firstborn Menashe, כִּי-נַשַּׁנִי אֱלֹ-ים אֶת-כָּל-עֲמָלִי, וְאֵת כָּל-בֵּית אָבִי – for G-d has made me forget all my hardship and my father's entire household" (41:51).

"When Yosef's brothers suddenly and unknowingly appear before him, he is driven by a desire to [finally, once and for all] determine the truth. All of his actions from this point on are designed to obtain information concerning his father's apparent rejection of him. Finally, Yehuda, rising in defense of Binyamin, inadvertently proclaims what Yosef has, for years, desperately desired to hear: 'Your servant, my father, said to us: אַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם, כִּי שְׁנַיִם יָלְדָה-לִּי אִשְׁתִּי, וַיֵּצֵא הָאֶחָד, מֵאִתִּי, וָאֹמַר, אַךְ טָרֹף טֹרָף; וְלֹא רְאִיתִיו, עַד-הֵנָּה – and one has left me, and I presumed – alas – he has surely been torn to pieces, and I have not seen him since' (44:27-28)."

Suddenly, when Yosef hears these words uttered by Yehuda, he realizes that, all these years, his father has assumed him torn to shreds and dead. His father, then, was never involved in the sale. His father has always loved him and believed Yosef was no longer. When Yosef realizes that he was never rejected by his father, "moved by uncontrollable emotion, he reveals himself to his brothers" (Unlocking the Torah Text, Bereishit, p.244-245).

While this is certainly a novel and compelling proposition, and an eye-opening approach to understanding the story of Yaakov, his sons, and the sale of Yosef, it seems that a further lesson can be derived from this approach. Perhaps the Torah is teaching us a difficult, tragic and frightening truth; one that every person must exert great effort to save his/herself from, b'ezras Hashem. Perhaps we can deduce from here that through assumptions, misunderstandings, lack of effective communication, and covered truths, families can, R"L, be torn apart.

As it happened to the family of Yaakov Avinu, the Torah is warning us to be considerate, cautious, kind, and careful with one's family. One must never assume, one must strive to correct wrong-doings as quickly as possible, one must be able to forgive and move on, and one must realize that the greatest nachas to Hashem is when His children are b'achdus. Just as Hashem is Echad, One, His children – our families and our great nation – must strive to be echad b'achdus, working together and loving each other.

On the very last mishnah in all of Shas (Uktzin 3:12), which speaks of the blessing of shalom, peace, the Tosfos YomTov comments: גדול השלום שכשמלך המשיח יבא אינו פותח אלא בשלום – how great is shalom, for when the King Messiah comes, he will herald the redemption with none other than the blessing of peace.

May we merit it, immediately and in our days,

Be'er Moshe - Putting It All Together

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> Wed, Jan 1, 7:5 PM (2 days ago) to targumim

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Parshas Vayigash Putting It All Together print

Yehudah drew close to him.[2]

There is more to this gesture than meets the eye. It is not just about an emboldened Yehudah who seizes an opportunity to ask for mercy. The preposition "eilav" gives it away. So does the phrase, "May your servant please speak to the ear of my master." Both indicate a move towards great, not casual, closeness.

The Zohar[3] penetrates the deeper layer of meaning that our pasuk alludes to. "This was an approach of one world to another, so that the two would unite and become one. Yehudah is a melech, and Yosef is a melech…Coming together and becoming one brought great good: peace between the shevatim, peace between the two of them, and the revival of Yaakov's spirit." This restoration of harmony would play out again in the

times of Moshiach, say Chazal,[4] citing the verse, "Ephraim [i.e. Yosef] will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim."[5]
The revival of Yaakov's spirit is a great part of achieving complete unity among his descendants. We allude to this frequently in our davening: May He who makes peace on high, create peace among us." Are there fights in shomayim that Hashem has to referee?
In a sense, yes! There is tension between Gavriel and Michael – between the din and chessed that they champion. Hashem pacifies them; He brings them together. This is also the hallmark accomplishment of Yaakov, whose tifferes takes from both chessed and din, merging them together. We daven that Hashem should bring all of Klal Yisrael together through their common shoresh neshamah, which is Yaakov/Yisrael!
This idea is part of the message that Yosef sent to Yaakov through the wagons he sent, alluding to the eglah arufah. The eglah arufah ceremony responds to and counters, says the gemara,[6] those with a begrudging disposition. Yosef meant to signal to his father that he bore no jealousy towards his brothers, and held no grudge towards them for their early mistreatment of him.
Similarly, when Yosef inquired, "Is my father still alive?" he knew full well that Yaakov had not perished. All the conversation between the brothers and Yosef centered on that fact. Yosef, however, meant the following. Is there anything left of the true Yaakov, who admits of no dissension and enmity? Yaakov would live on till the end of time, through his children, even after his death. As Chazal say, "Yaakov didn't die."[7] But how much of the core, essential Yaakov exists as we stand here, together in Egypt? Have all of you banished infighting and jealousy from yourselves? Only if you can testify that this is true about yourselves can you fully claim that our father is still alive – for true "chaim" implies unity. Yaakov can be said to be alive only when his children are at one with each other.
We take our national name Yisrael from Yaakov, alone among the avos. His integration of chessed and gevurah is the surefire way to display Hashem's greatness. Achdus among Jews is nothing less than kevod shomayim.
Adapted from Be'er Moshe, by the Ozharover Rebbe zt"l ↑ Bereishis 44:18 ↑ Zohar1 206a ↑ Bereishis Rabbah 94:3 ↑ Yeshayahu 11:13 ↑ Sotah 38b ↑ Taanis 5b ↑

Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Vayigash 5785
External Inbox
From: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>
I strongly recommend downloading the Internet Parsha Sheet, available shortly after midnight at parsha.net. This compilation includes new insights from outstanding outstanding of our time.
Shabbat Shalom, Alan
BS"D January 3, 2025
Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 12 #11, January 3-4, 2025; 4 Tevet 5785; Vayigash 5785 Note: Tzom Asarah B'Teves is next Friday
Vayigash opens with one of the most emotional episodes in Tanach. Yehuda approaches the Viceroy of Egypt to try to convince him to release the youngest brother (Benyamin, Yosef's only other child from Rachel) and to take him instead as a slave. The impact of Yehuda's words causes Yosef to break down emotionally. He dismisses everyone except the brothers from the room, confesses that he is their brother Yosef, and asks them to reassure him that their father is alive and well. Yosef tells his brothers that they are not to blame for his ending up in Egypt, because God arranged for him to be there so he could save the family and everyone else from an extended and severe famine.
Vayigash is the emotional climax of Sefer Bereishis. One interpretation of Sefer Bereishis is that it analyzes the effects of a series of dysfunctional families. For example, Avraham takes his beloved son Yitzhak to a mountain to be a korban (sacrifice) to Hashem. The Torah does not discuss the impact on Yitzhak of his father's willingness to offer him as a sacrifice. We must conclude that Yitzhak did not object, because Yitzhak continues the religious practices of his father and permits his father to send a servant to arrange a marriage for him. Yitzhak favors his son Esav over Yaakov and apparently wants to make Esav the leader of the next generation. Yaakov favors Rachel over Leah and ignores Leah's sons – something that the Torah later rules violates Torah law. Yaakov dotes on Yosef over his other twelve children, and when Yosef is gone, he favors Benyamin. With this family history, and given Yosef's immature boasting to his brothers, it is easy to understand why Leah's sons cannot speak to Yosef in peace.
Rabbi David Fohrman explains that Paro's dreams follow Yosef's life during his exile in reverse (see my introduction for Miketz), so it is easy for Yosef to understand and explain the dreams. Yosef finally realizes that his youthful dreams were not about his family but were a preview of what would be happening to his part of the world later in his life (seven years of plenty and then seven years of extreme drought). He also realizes that his exile to Egypt is part of God's plan to enable him to save the family and others in his part of the world from starving. Once he realizes Hashem's role in what happened to him, he is able to forgive his brothers – as long as they show that they have done teshuvah and would not abandon another family member.
Yosef manipulates the bothers to bring Benyamin to Egypt if they want any more food or want him to release Shimon from prison. When the brothers come with Benyamin, Yosef invites them to his home for a meal, grossly favors Benyamin over the other brothers, and has his servant place his divining cup in Benyamin's sack of grain. He makes it clear to the brothers that he does not believe that Benyamin actually stole the cup, but he says that the thief must become his slave. Yehuda approaches Yosef and tries to convince the Viceroy to take him rather than Benyamin as his slave. When Yehuda says that it would kill their elderly father if they returned without Benyamin, his favorite son, Yosef knows that the brothers have done teshuvah. He then reveals himself.
One consequence of Yehuda's words to Yosef is that Yosef realizes that in focusing on the effect of being sold to Egypt, he has neglected the impact on his father. For twenty-three years, Yosef has been wondering why no one has come to look for him. During this period, Yosef does not ask himself whether his father knows that his favorite son is alive. Yehuda's words about the effect of losing Benyamin makes him realize that his father must have been mourning Yosef for this entire period. Yosef realizes that he has been selfish and must atone for his sin to his father.
Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer learns from Vayigash that we must see the hand of Hashem in what happens in the world. He warns, however, that individuals who have believed that they understand Hashem's plans have caused much evil, especially by starting holy wars. Our responsibility from the lesson of Yosef and his brothers is that we must embrace a humble religiosity that includes both a religious mandate and moral responsibility. Rabbi Marc Angel uses the concept of religious Zionism (from Rabbi Dr. Henry Mendes of a hundred years ago). To redeem Israel and the world, religious Zionism claims that we must combine Jewish life, law, and sentiment with justice and righteousness. Rav Kook adds that Yosef represents eidut (testimony) while Yehuda represents Torah and the special holiness of B'Nai Yisrael. For example, when all of Yaakov's family go down to Egypt, Yaakov selects Yehuda (not Yosef or Benyamin) to establish Yeshivot in Egypt.
Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings the message of the Haftorah to the situation we face now in 5785. Yechezkal's vision of taking two branches and holding them together represents the two branches (kingdoms) of Israel (Yehuda and Yisrael) uniting in the future. The Talmud (Sukkah 52a) envisions a Mashiach Ben Yosef setting up an economic and administrative structure and then a Mashiach Ben David leading a religious revival. When these two branches unite, B'Nai Yisrael will be ready for an ultimate redemption. May the various factions in Israel and among Jews outside Israel come together soon to unite our people and make us strong.
My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always reminded us of our obligation to assist fellow Jews in need everywhere. I have adopted this

obligation and have tried to pass it along to my children, and to have them pass it along to their children.
Shabbat Shalom,
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from: **Rav A. Leib Scheinbuam** <peninim@hac1.org> **Peninim on the Torah** date: Dec 30, 2024, 3:01 PM
subject: Peninim on the Torah – Parshas Vayigash, 5785
Parashas Vayigash
Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck. (45:14)
Rashi explains that Yosef wept over the two Batei Mikdash, situated in Binyamin's portion of Ertez Yisrael, which would be destroyed. Binyamin wept over the Mishkan Shiloh, which was in Yosef's portion, that would be destroyed. The question is glaring: Did they have no other time to weep over these churbanos, destructions? There is a time for everything: a time for dance; 'a time for eulogy; a time for weeping', and a time for joy. This was the moment for which they had both longed. It should have been filled with heightened joy-not weeping.
HoRav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl, cites the pasuk, "U'macha Hashem dimah mei'al kol panim;" "And Hashem will wipe away tears from all faces" (Yeshayah 25:8). This pasuk is part of nevuah, prophecy, of the Final Redemption, the eventual end to all suffering. This word kol, all, means that all tears, even demaos shel gil, tears of joy, will be wiped away. Why is this? Tears of joy are expressions of joy. Why should they be erased? He explains that the tears of joy are the result of the reality that a person acknowledges that the simcha, joyous occasion, will not last. People are aware that all good times eventually come to an end, and this is what makes them weep. In the future when we will be blessed with the Redemption which we are all anticipating, the joy will not cease. It will be eternal. Thus, no tears will accompany it. This is why Yosef and Binyamin wept. They were acutely aware that the tenure of the Temples in their respective portions would be cut short. When the simcha is incomplete, it is reason for weeping.
HoRav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, was walking (for his health) with a group of students, when they came upon a young girl weeping. The Rav stopped, called her over and asked what was wrong. She replied that she had worn a new outfit to gan, kindergarten, that morning, and one of the girls told her that it was not a nice dress. The Rav asked her for her name, she replied, "Shoshanah." He said, "That is a nice name-just as your dress is a nice dress." When the young girl heard this, she immediately smiled and her mood changed.
The students were surprised that a Rosh Yeshivah and Dayan of his distinction would stop to speak to a young girl. He explained, "Concerning Hashem, it is written that He will wipe away all tears. This means even tears of a young girl. Veritably, this innocent girl's tears have greater purity than other tears." It takes a great man to take note of what appears to be little things.
He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen (46:28)
Yaakov Avinu sent Yehudah ahead of the family to make the proper arrangements for their transition to Egypt. Yehudah was the definitive leader of the brothers, having proven himself in his confrontation with the Egyptian "viceroy." Rashi quotes Chazal, who delve into the word l'horos, to teach, that Yehudah was actually destined to establish a yeshivah, so that when they arrived they could immediately continue their Torah study. It also shows the Patriarch's profound insight into Jewish values. Without Torah as the foundation and lodestar for navigating life, the journey is untenable. The Torah is our inspiration and guide, especially during difficult and uncertain times. While this is all true, and Yehudah certainly had an impressive resume, Yaakov had officially designated Levi as the Rosh Yeshivah (Rambam Hilchols Avodah Zarah 1:3). If not Levi, Yissaschar was the son who exemplified Torah study at its apex. The commentators cite a number of reasons to explain the selection of Yehudah within his family dynamic. He was the king of the family. A Rosh Yeshiva must represent monarchy, as well as Torah erudition. Yehudah was the one who said, Tzadkah mimeni, confessing to his errs and take responsibility. Yehudah stood up to Yosef, because he had assumed responsibility for Binyamin. He promised his father that he would return Binyamin. A Rosh Yeshivah assumes responsibility for his students in all aspects of their lives. It is not only about learning; it is about leading.
Perhaps we may suggest another avenue related to monarchy in which the king and the Rosh Yeshivah/spiritual leader align. Both leaders maintain immense responsibility for the lives and futures of those under their guidance. A king, particularly in times of war, makes decisions that directly impact the lives and welfare of his soldiers- deciding who goes into battle and when, with the full awareness that these decisions can determine life and death. This requires a profound sense of responsibility, wisdom, and a clear understanding of the strength and role of each individual in his army. A king must balance the needs of his kingdom with the well-being of his people, making choices that are often difficult and weighty.
Likewise, a Rosh Yeshiva carries an enormous responsibility over the spiritual and emotional well being of his students. Every decision from the manner in which he guides his students in their learning to how they should address personal issues can influence, not only the present situation, but also their future growth. Just as a king must understand the individuality of each of his soldiers, so, too a Rosh Yeshivah must recognize and be sensitive to the unique potential of each individual student. He must remember that every one of his decisions, his guidance and how he presents such guidance, can affect each student's long-term spiritual trajectory. He shapes the nation's future leaders, and his ability to nurture each student's personal and spiritual growth effectively is paramount to his success. In both cases, their decisions have a profound influence on the lives and futures of others. Whether it is the physical battlefield or the spiritual path, true leadership requires sensitivity, wisdom, and a deep sense of accountability.
In his hesped, eulogy for his revered Rebbe, HaRav Yitzchok Hutner, zl, HaRav Shlomo Freifeld, zl, addressed the concept found in Chazal of Rebbe Muvhak, a Torah scholar's primary Torah mentor. This is the Rebbe from whom one acquires the majority of his chachmah-not only in learning, but also the most significant roots of knowledge which serve as a catalyst in shaping his life. Tosfos YomTov (Bava Metzia 2:11) points out that the word muvhak is derived from the word bohak, a reference to an object that has a pronounced shine. A Rebbe Muvhak is the Rebbe who capitalizes on the student's innate talents and qualities that ultimately lead him to shine. He is the Rebbe who unlocks the repository of the treasures/characteristics that would otherwise lay dormant.
HoRav Chaim Scheinberg, zl, explains the words of Chazal who compare one's Rebbe to a malach, angel of G-D. An angel has one singular purpose, to fulfill its specific mission as Hashem prescribed. This is how a Rebbe must view his talmidim; they are his singular purpose in life. This is his only mission. Rav Scheinberg believed in the power to make people great. He infused each talmid with a desire to learn, and he instilled within him a sense of self-confidence, so that he would believe in himself. He would often tell them, "Keep smiling and keep going," as he encouraged their upward growth. He would reiterate, "if we are confronted with a challenge, we should realize that the yeshuah, salvation, will come, and that Hashgachah, Divine Providence, has something in store for us. We must view this as a passing situation, accepting that a happier time will soon arrive, bringing a sunnier day."
Rav Scheinberg was prepared to accept students who had not yet received elite status in learning. The Rosh Yeshivah explained, "We do not arrange to accept metzuyanim, excellent students, but rather to create metzuyanim." Indeed, when a young man sporting shoulder length hair, looking nothing like a yeshiva bachur, came to Yeshivah, Rav Scheinberg saw beyond his outward appearance and peered directly into his heart. He saw the beauty and sparkle from within a young man who wanted to learn Torah. Today,

this young man is a talmid chacham of distinction and an extraordinary marbitz Torah.

Prior to Rav Scheinberg moving to Etrez Yisrael, a student, who was upset about the move, and unaware of the impudence of his words, said to the Rosh Yeshiva, "I feel you have no right to move to Eretz Yisreal." The next morning, Rav Scheinberg came over to the bachar and said, "I stayed up all night ruminating over your statement. I think you are wrong."

Rav Scheinberg inculcated his students with the dual perception that he was both Rebbe and father to them. He cared not only about their spiritual growth, but also their physical well-being. I conclude with a vignette that inspired me, one that defines the Rosh Yeshiva's relationship with his talmidim. A student who went on to become a successful marbitz Torah, a Rosh Yeshiva of note, visited his Rebbe and asked for a bracha for one of his students who was struggling with a number of challenges which impaired his spiritual for the Hebrew name of the young man's mother. He would daven for him. Surprisingly, the Rosh Yeshiva replied that he was unaware of her name. Rav Scheinberg looked disappointingly at his student, "How could a Rebbe not know the name of his talmid's mother?" At this point, the Rosh Yeshiva mentioned the full name of the student standing before him-including his mother's name! "Seventeen years ago, you were going through an issue that was disturbing you. You came to me for help and advice. I began davening for you then, and I have NOT ceased davening these entire seventeen years!"

And he (Yosef) went up to meet his father…..He appeared before him. (46:29)

Yaakov Avinu could not wait to see his long-lost son, Yosef. Yosef had left home a boy, and now he was viceroy over the people of Egypt. He went from challenge to travail and emerged as righteous as when he left home. The image of his father had kept him holy. Now, after all this time, after all the tzaros, troubles, that Yosef had endured, he was finally going to embrace his father. This would be the script as presented by a secular author, a playwright who seeks to capture the drama of this face-to-face interaction between father and son. Chazal teach that the imagery was quite different. Yosef did not just go to see his father, but to appear to him. He went for the sole purpose of fulfilling the mitzva of kibud av, so that his father could see him. Maharal (Gur Arye) writes that Yaakov Avinus's attitude toward seeing his son was also quite incongruous with the secular line of thinking. Chazal say that Yaakov recited Kriyas Shema when he met Yosef. Maharal explains that Yaakov was so excited, so overjoyed and thankful that he could finally see his son, he wanted to apply all of this joy to serving Hashem. What better way to be mekabeil Ole Malchus Shomayim, accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven. Neither Yaakov nor Yosef took anything for themselves. It was all for Hashem. All the emotion, excitement and drama of their meeting were dedicated solely to the Almighty. The obvious question is: What harm would it have caused if father and son had allowed their natural emotions to prevail? They would have embraced, wept, laughed and then returned to their respective lives of avodas Hashem. To ask this question means that one does not understand the importance of using every Heavenly-gifted moment for Hashem. When one uses an experience for his own sake, it is soon gone. If he uses it for Hashem's, he eternalizes it and renders it worthwhile.

Ibn Ezra's maxim, "The past no longer exists; the future is not yet a reality; the present is but a fleeting moment," should be our approach to life. We must make the most of every moment. This idea can be realized one way, by: eternalizing it, by devoting it to avodas haKadesh. Veritably, in order to succeed at this endeavor, one must live intellectually, rather than emotionally. Every experience must be well-thought out, asking ourselves: What does Hashem want of me? Why am I here when others are not? When a person survives a traumatic experience while others do not, the survivor can react with guilt; he can be angry that he was compelled to endure such travail during which others paid the ultimate price; or he can grateful for being spared and use the opportunity for growth and purpose. While survivor guilt and anger are natural responses, channeling them toward positive action can transform a painful experience into a force for good. Every life is meaningful. Survival is a signal that one has a unique mission. What that exact mission is will be played out in life, as the survivor makes the most of every opportunity Hashem grants to him. Holocaust survivors channeled their experience into educating future generations of the dangers of hatred and apathy. They demonstrated how they clung onto any vestige of hope, because a Jew never despairs; a Jew does not give up hope.

While the burdens of guilt can weigh heavily on some, dedicating oneself to helping others can ease that burden. Cultivating an attitude of gratitude to Hashem for his granting a second lease on life, coupled with prayer, will help one find peace with his survival, allowing him to move forward with life and living. Recognizing that one's survival is a Divine gift is, in, and of itself, sufficient reason to reframe guilt into positivity, anger into love and support for others. HaRav Yechiel Meir Tzuker, shlita relates the following story. In 1929, Arab murderers, crazed by their hatred of our people and their chronic bloodlust, attacked the Chevron community and slaughtered members of the community, A number of students of Yeshivas Knesses Yisrael were murdered in cold blood. When the bachurim who survived returned to the Yeshiva, the Mashgiach, HaRav Leib Chasman, zl, approached one student and asked him, "How many survived from your chaburah, group of students who studied together?" The student thought for a moment, then replied, "No one else survived." The Mashgiach heard this and immediately made an about-face leaving the bachur in a state of incomprehension. Three days passed, and the Mashgiach came over to him and asked, "Do you understand what I wanted from you?" (Do you realize what I expected of you?)

The bachur replied, "Truthfully, I did not understand why the Mashgiach walked away from me" "I wanted you to make a chesbon ha'nefesh, accounting of the soul," the Mashgiach said. "You lived through a Heavenly decree of Din, Strict Justice. Everyone else in your chaburah was slaughtered. Why were you the only one to have survived? Did this question catalyze you to think? If Hashem allowed you to live, it means that He expects something special of you."

By today's educational standards, I am certain some psychologists might feel that the Mashgiach was too demanding and perhaps even counter-intuitive. I am just as certain that Rav Leib Chasman, who was one of the premier Mashgchim, knew what he was doing. This was his daas Toraah, and, as the bachur's spiritual advisor, he felt it was a prudent question which would shape his student's life trajectory. He had a choice before him: "Do I fall into depression and guilt, or do I realize that I was left to live for a purpose which Hashem knows that I can fulfill?"

The choice of taking a positive approach, as opposed to falling into the abyss of negativity and guilt, is underscored in the process of teshuvah (loosely translated as repentance, but actually means return). One who has sinned can, after experiencing significant guilt concerning his past, become morose, feeling he is "done"; nothing can be done to repair his past. One can, however, heal from past errors by focusing on personal growth. This is the process of returning to one's true self, the way Hashem wanted/expected him to be, and reconnecting with Hashem. Sincere teshuvah transcends time and allows a person to erase past indiscretions, even transforming them into merits. Teshuvah provides a person with immense hope and optimism. Regardless of how far or how low one has digressed, teshuvah offers a way back, not only as a path to rectification, but also to a place of deeper connection and understanding than before. Teshuvah is about rising up from the fall stronger and more spiritually aligned. The process does not just happen. It involves sincere and candid introspection, commitment to one's betterment and spiritual growth, and last-but not least, the profound conviction that healing is possible. Even after experiencing hardship, trauma and the spiritual ravages of sin, a person maintains the power to change and transform for the better.

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.*

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PARSHAT VAYIGASH

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

Was life in Egypt simply too good?

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

EVERYONE HAS A PLAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When studying this pasuk, several questions arise:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unquestionably, Yaakov has what to worry about.

APPLYING FOR AN EXIT VISA

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE FIRST 'ZEVACH'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE END, AND THE BEGINNING...

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM "TOLDOT" TO "SHMOT"

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

B. HINEINI...

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

(A) "HINEINI" - BACK TO THE AKEIDA

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

(B) HINEINI - FORWARD TO THE BURNING BUSH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

Yosef's plan:

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

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

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

Yaakov's plan:

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

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

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

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

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

Yaakov's Fear

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Stopover in Be'er Sheva:

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

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

The 'zevachim':

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

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

Parshat Vayigash: The Unmasking

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION FOR PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

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

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

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

2) The selection and development of Avraham:

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

3) The selection and development of Ya'akov:

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

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

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

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

PREP FOR PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

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

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

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

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

a) Why does he accuse his brothers of being *spies,* in particular?
b) What does he hope to accomplish by throwing his brothers into jail?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARASHAT VAYIGASH:

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

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

A) THE SPYING ACCUSATION:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOU FEAR *WHO*?!

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

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

THE KEY TO YOSEF'S STRATEGY:

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

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

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

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

B) RETURN OF THE MONEY:

Yosef now commands that the brothers' grain money be secretly returned to them and placed in their luggage. On the road back to Cana'an, one brother discovers his returned money; the others discover their money once they have returned home. They fear that when they return to Egypt, they will be accused of having stolen the money. Indeed, when the brothers eventually do return to Egypt with Binyamin and are led to Yosef's house, they fear that they have been brought there in order to be enslaved, in punishment for stealing the money they found in their luggage. But Yosef's servant assures them that their money has been received by Yosef.

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

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

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

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

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

C) THE FEAST:

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

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

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

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

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

D) THE CHALICE:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A similar "disagreement" over the fate of the guilty takes place between Yehuda and Yosef once the chalice has been found and the brothers have returned to Egypt: the brothers (represented by Yehuda) volunteer to suffer enslavement along with Binyamin, but Yosef insists that only Binyamin will be enslaved. What is this disagreement really about?
While before, the brothers' willingness to be enslaved for the theft is a rhetorical device to express their certainty of their innocence, here it is a sincere offer, motivated by the overpowering sense of guilt which has taken hold of the brothers as a result of all of Yosef's efforts to make them believe that Hashem is punishing them. Yehuda, who speaks for the brothers, does not admit that Binyamin actually stole the chalice -- they all know that just as Yosef placed the money in their sacks last time and this time, he also placed the chalice in Binyamin's sack. But the brothers believe that Hashem has created circumstances which have brought them to justice: they are being punished for a theft they did *not* commit in retribution for a theft they *did* commit. Yehuda's words ("*God* has found the sin of your servants") confirm that he recognizes the hand of Hashem in the story: Hashem has found their sin and is punishing them. Yosef's accusations are transparent; he has successfully convinced them that he is a tool of Hashem.

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

ADDED POINTS:

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom