

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Normally, there are several spaces between the end of one Parasha (weekly portion) and the beginning of the next one. This is not true with Parashas Vayechi. Rashi (Beraishis 47:28) tells us that the reason our Parasha is "closed" is because "upon the death of our father Yaakov the eyes and hearts of [the Children of] Israel became closed from the pain of the subservience ("shibud"), as [the Egyptians] began to subjugate them." The commentators ask how the period of Egyptian slavery can be said to begin now if Yosef was still the Egyptian Viceroy, and would be for decades. Besides, Rashi himself tells us (Shemos 6:16) that "as long as [even] one of the Tribes (i.e. Levi, who lived the longest) was still alive there was no subservience ("shibud")." If the slavery didn't begin until after Levi died, how can Rashi say that it started immediately after Yaakov died, many years before?

The most common answer given is that even though the full "shibud" didn't start until later, a partial "shibud" began right after Yaakov died. But what exactly can a "partial" subservience refer to? After the Tribes (and the entire generation) died out (Shemos 1:6) a "new" king took over the Egyptian throne (1:8). He devised a plan to subjugate the Children of Israel (1:10), which our Sages of blessed memory (see Yalkut Shimoni Shemos 163) tell us means tricking them into become slave laborers, by first asking them to voluntarily join Paro in a building project. The Talmud (Sotah 11b) says that they first spoke to the Children of Israel "with a soft mouth," i.e. without forcing them to do anything, but giving them a choice, and then gradually turned it into harsh labor. If the "soft talk" and "request for volunteers" first occurred after Levi had died, what kind of "partial" subjugation could have taken place prior to that? It would seem that the first step in becoming slave laborers didn't happen until after the next generation died, not right after Yaakov's death.

Last week I discussed how Paro had hoped that Yosef's family would move to Egypt and become part of the Egyptian culture, contributing to it in the process. After hearing that they only came temporarily, because of the famine, and had no interest in melding into Egyptian society, Paro agreed to let them stay as royal guests of Yosef in the land of Goshen, functioning as their own distinct society and culture.

This created a unique situation whereby Yosef's family didn't really have to answer to Paro, as they were guests, while everyone else who lived in (or visited) Egypt had to follow the laws and mores of Egypt. Paro was so thrilled that the former-slave-who-became-Viceroy's noble family was living in Egypt that having their own separate "sub-state" didn't bother him. Yaakov was the head of "Goshen" while Paro ruled over Egypt.

But the novelty of having Yosef's family known and close by soon wore off. After Yaakov blessed Paro, the famine stopped, yet the "shepherds" didn't return to Canaan (where surely Yaakov's blessing could also ensure there would be grazing lands). If they were only in Egypt "temporarily," why did they (already) stay for the better part of two decades? Having a separate, independent society that was supported by the Egyptian Viceroy was becoming increasingly intolerable. Yaakov may have sensed this, and therefore made Yosef swear that he would bury him in Israel, as his influence was starting to dwindle; just asking Yosef to do something could no longer guarantee that it would get done, while making him swear would compel him to force the issue. This is borne out by Yosef directing the request to "Paro's house" (Beraishis 50:4), rather than speaking to Paro directly.

It is therefore possible that after Yaakov's death, Paro changed the ground rules. He went to Yosef and his brothers (the next generation of leaders) and either insisted that they be treated the same as every other Egyptian (paying taxes, etc.) or discussed it with them until they agreed that it would be unfair to continue to be given a special status. Either way, after Yaakov died, the "leader" of Goshen was not one of Yaakov's sons; Paro became the ruler over Goshen just as he ruled over the rest of Egypt. The Children of Israel still lived in Goshen and lived their separate lives, but were no longer independent; they were now subjects of Paro. This may be the "subjugation" that Rashi is referring to that was even less than the first stages of actual (voluntary) work that occurred after Levi died. Once they were under Paro's jurisdiction (and not Yaakov's or Yosef's), they would have no choice but to agree to Paro's request that they join the national building project, whether as volunteers or as paid workers, which opened the door to their becoming menial laborers, and then slave laborers.

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When Paro approached Yosef and his brothers (after Yaakov's death), they knew that they couldn't resist accepting Paro becoming their ruler, but also knew that this was the first step towards the servitude that was inevitable. After being completely free and independent, having to answer to Paro's authority (rather than Yaakov's) was enough to cause "the eyes and hearts of Israel to become closed." © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Every Friday evening, traditional Jewish parents bless their male children (and often grandchildren), "May the Almighty make you like Efraim and Menashe" and their female children, "May the Almighty make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah." Why not bestow the blessing of the patriarchs upon our male children paralleling our female children, "like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"?

Apparently because the Bible itself, in this week's Torah reading, ordains, "And (Jacob) blessed (his grandsons) on that day saying, 'In such a manner shall Israelites bless (their children) saying 'May the Almighty make you like Efraim and Menashe,' and he (Jacob) placed Efraim before Menashe" (Gen 48:2).

But the Biblical verse notwithstanding, what is so special about Efraim and Menashe? And why does Efraim, the younger son, receive top billing, with Jacob having purposefully placed his right hand on the head of the younger Efraim rather than on the elder Menashe? (Gen 48: 17-19). And what does Grand father Jacob mean when he requests of Joseph that these two grandsons born in Egypt 'be his, Jacob's "(Lahem) , like Reuven and Shimon?

In order to understand, it is necessary to analyze the personality of Joseph, and view his phenomenal personal and religious development through the verses of the Bible. Initially, Joseph is pictured as his father's son, "These are the generations of Jacob; Joseph was seventeen years of age... Israel loved Joseph more than all of his children because he was the son of his wisdom and old age (Genesis 37: 2,3, and Rashi ad loc)," the most beloved son with whom he spent much time in transmission of the tradition and the son slated to be his heir and the

bearer of the Abrahamic birthright. Joseph's dreams, his visions of the brothers' sheaves of grain as well as of the sun, moon and eleven stars all bowing down to him, express a cosmic arrogance as well as a hankering after the more sophisticated and powerful Egypt (agricultural grain production was much more a function of Egyptian society than the simpler and more wholesome shepherding which characterized the Abrahamic way of life in Israel) which the brothers believed to be antithetical to the family mission and covenant with G-d; father Jacob rebuked him for his hubris, (Gen 37:10) but at the same time apparently valued his universal reach, which could well be viewed as a desire to realize the Divine charge that "through (the Abrahamic family) all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The brothers, in jealousy as well as righteous anger against the egocentric dreamer who threatens to undermine the united family vision of the centrality of G-d and the Land of Israel, cast Joseph into a pit, empty of water but filled with snakes and scorpions. The hapless eldest son of Rachel is suddenly filled by the full force of familial hatred against him. Joseph becomes "dis-membered" in the pit, physically sensing pain from every one of his separate bodily members and psychologically cutting himself off from his membership in what has become a cruel and vicious family of Israel intent on his destruction. From the perspective of the pit, he blames his father as well for having created such a dysfunctional familial relationship due to his egregious favoritism.

Joseph is sold into Egypt - and even succeeds in overcoming many obstacles and rising to the position of second-in-command to Pharaoh himself. But his dismemberment from his past only becomes more intense. He wears Egyptian garb, sports an Egyptian ring and necklace, assumes an Egyptian name and marries Osnat, the daughter of Potifar, Egyptian priest of On (Gen 41:42-45). He names the eldest son Menashe, forgetfulness, (dis-memberment), for "the Creator has enabled one to forget all of my toil and the household of my father" (dis-memberment, Gen 41:51). And he names his second son Efraim, fruitfulness, because "the Creator has made me fruitful, with future, in the land of my affliction."

Joseph remained a moral son of the Creator (Elohim)- he withstood the seduction of Mrs. Potipahr - during this part of his Egyptian period, but the personal G-d of the Abrahamic covenant as well as the familial customs of the children of Israel seem to have eluded him. But as he develops, and as Yehuda succeeds in getting him to re-member by invoking a portrait of his loving and mourning father, Joseph regains his memory and memberment by fully re-joining the family of Israel. In a most poignant climax to the stories of Genesis, Joseph becomes reunited with his father, his memory and his past traditions. The eldest male son of Jacob

and Rachel re-members with his father (zakhor to remember and zakhar, male descendant and recipient of the patriarchal line of DNA), sees the G-d of Abraham and Israel as having been the central architect of all his failures and successes, and with his dying breath asks to be buried in the Jewish homeland, Israel. His universalism has been re-united with the Abrahamian vision.

Now old grand-father Jacob comes to bless his grand-sons born in Egypt, Menashe and Efraim. True to their names, Menashe serves as his father's linguist-interpreter and political adjutant, a true Egyptian scholar and statesman (Gen, 42, 43, Rashi ad loc). Efraim studied Torah with Grand-father Jacob as soon as the patriarch arrived in Egypt (Gen 48:1). Jacob - Israel understands well that the Jewish people must remain true to their past, must re-member ancient traditions, as they move into a future in which all the nations of the world inform their lives and their cultures with the peaceful and redemptive teachings of Israel. Torah must embrace the world - but it must first and foremost remain true to its source. So must our generations be blessed, like Efraim and Menashe together, but with Efraim before Menashe. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The Chumash Bereshith began with blessings - G-d's blessings to His creatures to inhabit and exploit His wondrous world - and it ends with blessings - Yaakov's blessings to his sons, the tribes of Israel. The blessings are, so to speak, the bookends of this awe inspiring story of the human race in general and the Jewish people in particular. Jewish tradition always treasures things that begin with blessings and end with blessings.

Between the beginning of the Chumash Bereshith and its conclusion in this week's, parsha there are many occurrences - not all of them blessed and pleasant. There are wars and violence, famines and tyrants, tragedies and rebellious and disappointing children. There are stories of great sacrifice and noble endeavor, of soaring morality and the loneliness of being right in a world that is very wrong. The book of Bereshith is truly the book of humankind, of every person.

We all enter into the world with blessings and smiles, being held and cuddled. And we leave this world also with blessings but this time with tears, alone but hopefully not forgotten. The blessings that mark our lives are never the same to every person, neither at our beginning nor at our end. We see this clearly from the special blessings granted to our patriarchs and matriarchs by the G-d of Israel and by the individually special blessings granted by Yaakov to his sons. Every person is entitled to blessing in this world. But every

person is entitled to his or her own particular blessing. In Judaism, there are no one-size-fits-all blessings.

The Torah emphasizes that Yaakov saw his children as individuals and not as a conformist mass of people. Even the three sons - Reuven, Shimon, and Levi - who, at first understanding of the parsha, one could say were not blessed by Yaakov, nevertheless also were blessed. Not only were they blessed and included in the general blessing that Yaakov gave to his sons, as Rashi points out, but they were also blessed individually through the very criticism of their faults that were pointed out by Yaakov.

Sometimes in life, the greatest gift and blessing that a parent can give to a child is the criticism of that child's traits and weaknesses so that these faults may yet be corrected and improved upon. Yaakov sees his children not as only being the next generation of his family but rather as being the future and eternity of the Jewish people. As such, faults neglected and not corrected remain eternal faults eventually impacting on the lives of millions of people. As a child, it is painful to receive an injection of immunization from diseases. At the moment, the child certainly does not appreciate the prick of the needle. But no one can argue the fact that the parent arranging for such an immunization is giving the child a most valuable blessing. Yaakov's words to these three sons should be viewed in that perspective as well. An immunization against bad traits and counterproductive behavior is a most precious blessing.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Notified that his father Yaakov (Jacob) is sick, Yosef (Joseph) takes his sons Ephraim and Menashe to see their grandfather. As they enter, Yaakov proclaims "mi eileh?" "Who are these?" (Genesis 48:8)

Having already been in Egypt for 17 years, is it possible that Yaakov didn't know the identity of his grandsons?

Some commentators suggest a physical reason for Yaakov's question. Bearing in mind that Yaakov could not see, he could not recognize his grandsons even as they stand before him.

Other commentators suggest that Yaakov's question "mi eileh?" does not refer to his grandsons themselves, but rather a question about their progeny. Prophetically, Yaakov discerned that amongst the descendants of Ephraim and Menashe would be evil people. Yaakov inquires, "who are they?" How is it possible that such evil men could come from good people like Ephraim and Menashe?

Other commentators insist that Yaakov asked "who are these?" to precipitate a "nachas report" from Yosef about the moral, spiritual and religious progress of Ephraim and Menashe. (Genesis 48:9)

But is there another approach. Yaakov may not recognize his grandchildren because he has little relationship with them. This could be because Yosef rarely ever took them to Ya'akov.

Yosef may have denied his father this relationship because of possible ill will towards Yaakov for having sent Yosef to his brothers to make peace, a plan which, of course, backfired. Not to mention, of course, Yaakov's favoring of him (Yosef) in the first place. Upset with his father, Yosef never contacts his father for 22 years and blocks his children from developing a close relationship with their grandfather.

Another suggestion: Maybe "mi eileh," is an existential question. Having grown up in Egypt, Ephraim and Menashe must have, on some level, assimilated into Egyptian society. Standing before Yaakov as Jews living in Egypt, Yaakov asks, "who are these?" What he is really asking is do my grandchildren identify themselves as Egyptians or Jews?

Whichever way one approaches Yaakov's "mi eileh" question, one point is certain: Yaakov is the first person to be recorded in the Torah as interacting with his grandchildren on any level at all. Not only does he interact with them, he actually gives each of them a blessing. In fact, the blessing is so powerful it becomes the standardized blessing of parents to children every Friday night. Placing our hands on our children, we say, "may G-d make you like Ephraim and Menashe." (Genesis 48:20)

A grandparent's relationship to a child, on some level, is deeper than a parent/child relationship. Unencumbered by parental responsibility, a grandparent, blessed with wisdom and maturity of life can powerfully bestow blessings upon their children. In a brief instant, a grandparent asks, "mi eileh," who are these, not so much as a question but as an expression of thanksgiving to G-d for having been blessed with such glorious grandchildren.

Even if they are not specifically for grandchildren, may our lives be filled with many such utterances of "mi eileh"-expressions of thanks, awe and wonder of the incredible gifts given to us by the Divine.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah records the last moments of Dovid Hamelech's life and his parting charge to his son, the newly anointed Shlomo Hamelech. Dovid told his son, "Be strong and in full control of your

emotions and guard all the Torah's precepts." (2:2,3) He assured Shlomo that if he and his descendants walked perfectly in the path of Hashem they would be guaranteed their prestigious position royalty forever. Dovid digressed then and reminded Shlomo about two powerful men, Shimi and Yoav, whose behavior could never be forgiven. Each was guilty of disgracing and publicly shaming the king. Shimi Ben Geira cursed Dovid and hurled stones at him while he fled from his conspiring son, Avshalom. Yoav ben Tzruya executed two opposing generals despite Dovid Hamelech's warm acceptance of their sincere peaceful gestures. Dovid, now on his death bed, instructed his son Shlomo to be sharp and alert and secure the execution of these two powerful figures. He said, "And do as your wisdom dictates and do not permit him to die an old man." (2:6) After completing his instructions Dovid left this world with these parting words of revenge.

This final episode of Dovid Hamelech's life is perturbing. Although we undoubtedly recognize the need for such instructions their timing is very disturbing. Couldn't the aged king choose a more appropriate moment for these instructions? Wouldn't a more gentle climate be appropriate for Dovid when parting with his precious son? It seems that Dovid intentionally reserved these words to leave an impressionable image on his son.

In search for an understanding of this we direct our attention to Dovid's mild request inserted in the midst of these harsh commands. He said, "Act kindly towards the Barzilai children and host at your table because their father was close to me when I fled from your brother Avshalom." (2:7) Barzilai was very gracious to Dovid Hamelech and provided him food and shelter in his grave time of distress. Dovid was forever indebted to Barzilai for this and hosted the entire family at his royal table. Now that Dovid was leaving the world it became Shlomo Hamelech's responsibility to perpetuate this kindness. Dovid's parting request conveyed to Shlomo a keen sense of continuity-to view himself as Dovid's extension. He therefore instructed Shlomo to perpetuate this kindness and continue the royal practice of hosting the Barzilai family at his table.

Conceivably, this mild request was interspersed here to place these other commands in proper perspective. Apparently, Dovid Hamelech charged his son with the responsibility of perpetuating his father's name and honor. He sought to instill in Shlomo a sense of perfect continuity, to follow closely his revered father's path. For this same reason Dovid chose his parting moments to instruct his son about Shimi and Yoav. They brought Dovid much humiliation and indignation and certainly deserved execution. Yet, Dovid did not deem it appropriate to respond to their actions during his lifetime and left this matter an unfinished affair. Now that Dovid was leaving this world it became Shlomo's role to act on his father's behalf.

Dovid reserved this difficult command for his last moments to convey to him his true role. He envisioned Shlomo following his fathers' perfect path and therefore left him with a powerful image of continuity. Dovid instructed Shlomo to begin his reign by completing what his father could not accomplish and to continue this path throughout his lifetime. Dovid informed Shlomo that if he perpetuates his father's honor and accomplishments he will never stray from the path and Dovid's household will be guaranteed royalty over Israel.

Indeed, Shlomo accepted his father's charge and fulfilled it to the best of his ability. In fact, Scriptures mention earlier Bas Sheva, Shlomo's mother's special bracha to her husband Dovid Hamelech. She said, "My master the king should live forever." (1:31) Malbim (ad loc) explains that the words, "live forever" refer to perpetuating Dovid Hamelech's reign through his son, Shlomo. These words had a major impact on her son as we clearly see from our haftorah's concluding words. Scriptures records Dovid Hamelech's forty year reign and concludes, "And Shlomo sat on his father Dovid's throne his kingdom was firmly established." (2:12) Ralbag and Malbim explain that this refers to the glaring phenomena that Shlomo ruled for exactly forty years. He followed so closely in his father's footsteps that he merited his exact years of reign. Dovid's dream was realized and Shlomo did become the extended image of his perfect father.

This lesson runs parallel lines with Yaakov Avinu's parting bracha to his beloved son Yosef. Moments before leaving this world Yaakov Avinu gathered his children and blessed them revealing to each his unique quality and role amongst the Jewish people. Yet, he showered an abundant bracha upon one particular son Yosef. The Torah expresses this in the following words. "Your father's blessings that superseded those of his predecessors... shall rest upon Yosef's head, the premier amongst the brothers." (B'reishis 49:26) Rashi explains that Hashem's bracha to Yaakov Avinu distinguished itself from those given to Avrohom and Yitzchok Avinu. Their brachos were of limited nature whereas Yaakov's bracha was unlimited and spanned the entire world. Yaakov now continued this tradition and bestowed upon Yosef this unlimited bracha.

We can appreciate this by analyzing Yaakov's introductory words to this bracha. He describes Yosef's superb inner strength in the following words, "And he firmly settled his power and adorned his arms with gold; this came from Yaakov's strength from where he became the shepherd of Israel." (Breishis 49:24) Rashi quotes the Sages who interpret this to refer to Yosef's incredible self control displayed during the irresistible seductive scene with Potiphar's wife. They reveal Yosef's true source of inner strength during his life's most trying challenge. Rav Yishmael said that at that

crucial moment of overpowering temptation Yaakov Avinu's image appeared before his son and reminded him of his illustrious predestined position amongst his brothers. (see Rashi ad loc from Mesichta Sota 36b)

The upshot of this is that Yosef dedicated his life to personifying his father's supreme qualities. He was so similar to his father that his life's experiences echoed those of his father and even his facial features reflected Yaakov Avinu. (see Rashi to Breishis 37:2) His life's goal was to be a perfect extension of his father, disseminate his lessons to all and perpetuate his sterling character. Yosef's focus served as a constant reminder to him of his father's perfect ways. Even after total alienation from his entire household Yosef remained loyal to all his father's teachings. Although Yosef was subjected to the fierce immorality of Egypt he drew inner strength from his father and resisted the most powerful seduction of life. At that impossible moment he suddenly envisioned his father beckoning him not to succumb to passion. The mere image of Yaakov Avinu sufficed to release Yosef from the clutches of sin and flee from its tempting environment.

Yosef's unprecedented achievement earned him the title Yosef the righteous one. His fierce encounter with the repulsive Egyptian behavior helped shape his moral character into one of sanctity and purity. Yaakov alluded to this, as well, in his elaborate bracha to Yosef. He says, "Graceful son whose grace rose above the eye; maidens climbed the walls to catch a glimpse." (49:22) The Sages interpret this verse to refer to Yosef's supreme level of sanctity. Egyptian maidens tossed Yosef jewelry and ornaments for him to gaze their way but Yosef's eyes rose above this and never roamed freely throughout his entire reign in Egypt. (see Bamidbar Rabba 14:6) This purity and sanctity set the stage for Yaakov's household's descent to Egypt. Yosef's relentless commitment to the highest standards of sanctity served as a shining example for Yaakov's entire household and oriented them to their new home for the next two hundred and ten years.

Rabbeinu Avrohom Ben HaRambam explains that these outstanding qualities of self control and sanctity earned Yosef his special blessing. Upon reflection we realize that Yosef's perception of himself as his father's extension earned him his abundant bracha. Hashem bestowed upon Yaakov an unlimited bracha because he attained the highest levels of sanctity and piety. (see Breishis Rabba 69:2,3 and Ohr Hachaim to Breishis 28:13). Now that Yaakov was leaving this world he sought to share this unlimited bracha with one who attained similar levels of piety and sanctity. Yosef who achieved outstanding piety and sanctity through maintaining his father's image became the perfect candidate for this bracha. Yaakov therefore transmitted to Yosef the unlimited bracha he received from Hashem for outstanding success and fortune in every aspect of life. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

“...**A**nd they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will nurse hatred against us...' " (Genesis 50:15)

Upon returning from burying Jacob, Joseph's brothers sensed that Joseph's attitude toward them had changed, and they said: "Perhaps Joseph will nurse hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all the evil that we did him." (Genesis 50:15)

The word "lo" usually means *halevai*-"if only"-an expression of hope that what follows in the sentence will come to pass. In this context it is very difficult to understand why Joseph's brothers would have hoped that he would hate them and repay them with the evil they did to him. (see *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh ad loc*)

To understand the brothers' statement, it is necessary to first understand why Joseph put his brothers through the entire ordeal beginning with the accusation of being spies. Why did he not just forgive them from the start and acknowledge what he himself subsequently told them: "You meant my sale for bad, but G-d made it work out for the good"?

When the brothers first appeared before Joseph, he recognized them and considered carefully what to say to them. And he spoke to them "harsh words," asking, "Where have you come from?" They answered, "From the land of Canaan to procure food." Then the Torah repeats that Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Why does the Torah describe the question of where they came from as "harsh"? And why does the Torah repeat that Joseph recognized his brothers?

The Mishnah (*Pirkei Avos 3:1*) quotes Akavia ben Mehalalel:

"Consider three things, and you will not come to sin. Know from where you came, to where you go, and before Whom you will eventually give an accounting for all you have done."

There are three major causes of sin-jealousy, lust and the desire for glory. If one remembers that he started out, as all of us do, from a lowly drop of cell matter, then he will not be jealous of others. Rather he will appreciate that he has been provided with the means to develop. If one considers the ultimate end of his physical body-decomposition in the earth-he will better be able to control his physical lusts. And if one considers the accounting he will have to give, standing before the King of Kings, this should help to minimize any delusions of personal glory and grandeur.

At first, Joseph thought that his brothers also recognized him, and he therefore carefully chose the proper words to castigate them. Since that injustice emanated from a slight fault of jealousy on their part, Joseph challenged his brothers with the statement, "Where did you come from?" He meant that "lowly

drop" from which we all come, and his implicit question was: In light of where we all came from, how could you have been jealous of me? When they took his question literally and answered, "From Canaan to procure food," he realized that they did not recognize him.

The Midrash relates that initially Joseph wanted to reveal himself to his brothers immediately. But the angel who directed him to his brothers 22 years earlier at *Dosan* (Genesis 37:15) appeared to him and told him that they had come to kill him. Only then did Joseph disguise himself and put them through the ordeal of being suspected as spies.

This can be understood in the following manner. The angel represents the Divine Providence that led Joseph to his brothers. The angel's appearance at that moment was an indication that the entire episode was being orchestrated from Above. By informing Joseph that his brothers still wished to kill him, the angel meant that they were being judged according to their intention and not according to how G-d had caused things to work out. As the Sages say, one who intends to eat pork and by mistake eats kosher meat still needs atonement.

As long as the brothers failed to recognize their error in selling Joseph, they could not repent for their deed. Therefore Joseph devised a plan to bring them to acknowledge their mistake and atone for it. First, he presented them with a situation in which they could observe another person acting as they had, and thereby obtain an objective perspective on their own behavior. He showed them how circumstantial evidence could be misconstrued to make them appear to be spies, though there was not a shred of truth in the accusation. In this way they would realize that their assessment of his motives in reporting to their father and relating his dreams was wrong.

Second, he put them into a situation in which their brother Binyamin endangered them both personally and their future role in the Jewish people, just as they had perceived Joseph as doing. The only difference between the two circumstances was the absence of jealousy in the latter case. By comparing their different responses in the two cases, they would see how jealousy had colored their responses with respect to him. Their concern for their father Jacob's feelings and their own love for Binyamin, which played such a large role in their thoughts at that moment, would also have been present with Joseph had it not been for their jealousy.

Third, he sought to fulfill the dreams in their entirety so that they could recognize clearly that those dreams were of a prophetic nature, and not, as they suspected, reflections of Joseph's subconscious designs. In addition, the fulfillment of the dreams permitted him to prepare them for their future roles in the Jewish nation. As the verse clearly states, "He

remembered the dreams he had dreamt for them"-for them, not about them.

Fourth, he sought to take revenge, which when appropriate can be beneficial. The Sages tell us that vengeance is great, for it is put between two names of G-d, "A G-d of vengeance is G-d." A Torah scholar who does not take revenge like a snake, the Sages say, is not a Torah scholar! Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz explains that revenge is the vehicle to "even the score" with evil and balance out the seeming gain and benefit accrued by evil means. Vengeance shows that crime does not pay and that justice prevails. But there is one absolute condition on this vengeance: the one taking revenge must have no personal pleasure from it. He must be as a snake which derives no pleasure when it bites.

In this light, we can understand what Joseph said upon naming his firstborn son, "G-d has caused me to forget all my troubles and my father's home." Why did Joseph give thanks for forgetting his father's home? Because only by forgetting all personal vendettas and pain could his revenge remain untainted and pure. It is evident from Joseph's repeated crying fits how difficult it was for him to continue his brothers' ordeal, and that revenge was far from "sweet" for him.

Fifth, Joseph sought to provide them with the opportunity to receive repentance with suffering and tribulation, to compensate and offset the pain they had wrongly caused him. He threw them into the pit of prison so that they could personally know how he felt when they threw him into a pit. Then he removed them and left Shimon alone, so that they could grieve for a brother left in a pit, as they had failed to grieve for him. He then returned their money to their sacks, which they construed as the payment for Shimon's enslavement (see Ba'alei HaTosafos). The repugnance of such money reminded them of taking money for selling Joseph as a slave.

Finally, Joseph sought to put his brothers in a similar situation to the one in which they wronged him, to see if their repentance was complete. The ultimate test of the ba'al teshuva is being placed in the same situation and not repeating the sin. Thus, Joseph gave Binyamin extra provisions to arouse any jealousy they might feel for the remaining son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel.

The whole charade came to a dramatic climax when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. At that moment the intense truth of his innocence and their sin was so clear that it served as the most powerful and effective rebuke. The inability of the brothers to respond foreshadow our own stunned silence on the Day of Judgment when we will be confronted with our sins, and all our petty justifications will melt away.

This entire scenario, however, would only be effective if the brothers had only acted out of fear that Joseph sought to usurp their roles in the Jewish people, and not out of any intrinsic hatred of him and

desire to kill him. The brothers were convinced that they were not guilty of this last sin. Although they originally decided to kill Joseph, the fact that Reuven and Yehudah so easily talked them out of it revealed that their intentions were never serious.

Returning to Egypt from burying Jacob in Israel, the brothers passed by the spot where Joseph had been sold, and Joseph went to the pit and recited the blessing, "G-d has performed a miracle for me in this place." Seeing this, the brothers became terrified and exclaimed:

"Perhaps Joseph will now hate us and return to us all the evil we perpetrated upon him." (Genesis 50:15)

The law is that one recites the blessing over a miracle only when one's life was in mortal danger, and the brothers interpreted Joseph's recitation as proof that he thought they had actually intended to kill him.

After returning to Egypt, Joseph stopped inviting the brothers to eat by him, which they also construed as signaling a new attitude toward them now that Jacob was no longer alive. They reasoned that the entire ordeal that Joseph had put them through did not compensate for what Joseph saw as their intention to kill him, and their atonement was not yet complete. Therefore, they exclaimed, Loo! (Halevai-Let it be) that Joseph hates us." If Joseph is correct that we are guilty on this account, too, they reasoned, let him hate us and thereby afford us an opportunity to clean our slates for eternity. Hence they fell before him in total subjugation.

Joseph, however, comforted them and explained that he did not think that they had intended to kill him. He made the blessing over the pit because unbeknownst to them the pit contained deadly snakes and scorpions, and therefore he had been in mortal danger. And he had stopped inviting them to eat with him for a completely extraneous reason. While Jacob was alive, Joseph sat at the end of the table because Jacob placed him there. But now that Yehudah had received the blessing of monarchy, Joseph felt it was improper for him to continue sitting at the head of the table. As the viceroy of Egypt, however, it would have been a slight to the Pharaoh if he did not sit at the head of the table. To avoid this problem, he stopped inviting his brothers.

Nevertheless, a blemish remained from the sale of Joseph, precisely because Joseph told his brothers that they did not need to ask for his forgiveness. His reasoning: Although they intended evil, G-d made it work out for the good. Rabbi David Kronglass of Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, once pointed out that a beneficial outcome is by itself no proof that neither atonement nor forgiveness is needed. The Torah says concerning a woman who violates a vow, which unbeknownst to her was previously annulled by her husband, "G-d will forgive her" (Numbers 30:13). The intention to sin, even where no sin was committed,

still requires forgiveness. For that reason Rebbe Akiva wept every time he read the verse.

Rebbe Akiva was one of the Ten Martyrs, whose deaths were the final atonement for the blemish left from the sale of Joseph. He wept in premonition of the punishment yet to come because of Joseph's failure to extract full atonement from his brothers. © 2006 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

When Yosef comes to visit his father, lying on his death bed, Yaacov speaks to him and blesses his two sons. One central theme that appears repeatedly in all of Yaacov's talk with Yosef is Eretz Yisrael. He talks about G-d's revelation to him when he was about to leave the land and about His promise:

"I will give this land to your offspring after you as an eternal heritage" [Bereishit 48:4]. Yaacov blesses Ephraim and Menasheh and gives them a double portion of the land, and in the end he once again emphasizes, "Behold, I am about to die. And G-d will be with you, and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers." [48:21]. His repeated emphasis shows what he fears. In a natural way, the more the family expands, becoming a great nation within Egypt, the greater will the danger be that Yaacov's offspring might begin to see Egypt as their natural homeland and that they will not want to return to their own land. However, Yaacov does not explicitly command his other sons to return to the land, he gives Yosef the exclusive task of educating the future generations to remember their homeland and to strive to return there. Why is this so?

More than any other person, Yosef is a symbol of one who would seem to have been absorbed into Egyptian society. He married the daughter of a prominent priest, he became deputy to the king, and he is destined to see fourth and fifth generations of his children born in Egypt. Thus, the fact that Yosef emphasizes that Egypt is only a temporary dwelling place makes the message more emphatic, in a way that the other brothers would not be able to do.

Yosef fulfills his mission in a unique way. He discusses the subject of returning to Eretz Yisrael in two consecutive verses. First, he makes a declaration to his brothers: "And Yosef said to his brothers, I will soon die, and G-d will remember you and raise you up from this land to the land that He promised to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov" [50:24]. This statement stands in its own right, in a way that his brothers had never heard so directly before. But Yosef also adds a personal note, something that was not part of Yaacov's earlier words. "And Yosef made Bnei Yisrael take an oath, saying, G-d will certainly remember you, and you shall bring my bones from here with you" [50:25]. In this way, Yosef greatly strengthens the spiritual message:

In spite of the great honor that was given to him in Egypt, his last command in life is to bring his bones to Eretz Yisrael!

Indeed, Yosef's last words echoed in the ears of Bnei Yisrael for hundreds of years. When Moshe told the people about G-d's message at the burning bush, they reacted with joy that the first verse of Yosef's promise had been fulfilled: "And they heard that G-d had remembered Bnei Yisrael, and that He saw their suffering, and they bowed down" [Shemot 4:31]. And in the midst of the redemption, they did not forget the oath to Yosef. "And Moshe took Yosef's bones with him, for he had told Bnei Yisrael to take an oath: G-d will certainly remember you, and you shall bring my bones from here with you" [13:19].

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

Right before Jacob passed away, he asked his son, Joseph, to promise him that he would be buried in Israel and not in Egypt. Joseph immediately said: "I personally will do as you have said" (Genesis 47:30).

We've all had the experience after being told that something will get done, that for one reason or another, it never happens. The person might have had all of the best intentions to do it himself, but quite often he asks others to assist him, or he delegates it to someone else entirely, and then someone drops the ball and it never gets done at all, or gets done poorly.

But when someone assures us that he will personally do something, taking full responsibility for the task, it almost always gets done right. This is because a piece of the person is now on the line. People who take explicit ownership for something will feel a sense of healthy pressure to make sure that it gets done because their own self-esteem and self-respect are now all tied into the completion of this task.

Many people don't take personal responsibility because it's so much easier just to pass the buck. By verbalizing to others that you're taking on a task yourself, then you will now gain enormous self-esteem. This is because you'll now see yourself as someone who isn't afraid to commit and as someone who keeps his word.

It's also comforting to hear someone say he'll personally take care of something. It shows just how much the person cares and the importance he places on our request. So the next time you're asked if you can do something, don't just agree. Say "I will personally do as you have said," and watch the contentment and ease flush the requester's face. And since taking full, total, and complete responsibility will also dramatically increase your own self-esteem, you'll feel even better than the requester does. © 2006 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.com