

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

As the story of Yosef and his brothers reaches its climax in this week's parsha it appears that the common thread throughout the incident is the question of accepting responsibility. Heaven demands responsibility from human beings. Irresponsible behavior is seen as sinful in Jewish life and values.

Yosef's irresponsible behavior in his dealings with his brothers when he was yet young, returns to dominate his life all of his years. Even after the reconciliation and forgiveness between the brothers and Yosef, the brothers still are wary of him as Rashi points out in next week's parsha of Vayechi. The results of irresponsible behavior and speech always haunt us to the end.

The brothers' irresponsible behavior in selling Yosef into slavery remains an issue not only for them but for all of Israel even millennia later. The paytan of the liturgy of the ten martyrs of Israel in Roman times recited on Yom Kippur in the Ashkenazic rite cites the sale of Yosef by his brothers as justification for their executions. As far fetched as that reasoning may sound it strikes a chord in Jewish memory and Torah values. The rule in Halacha regarding all matters of torts and damages is that a person is always and permanently responsible for the results of one's actions, behavior and negligence.

There is never any legal or moral way to escape responsibility. The definition in Judaism of being a mature and good person is that one is a responsible person. Responsibility entails commitment, loyalty, sensitivity and deep understanding of surrounding circumstances and challenges. It is therefore a virtue not easily attained and requires constant attention.

The hero who emerges from the narrative in the parsha is Yehuda. He now takes responsibility for not only Binyamin and his return to his father but indirectly for the selling of Yosef into slavery as well. "I am the guarantor of Binyamin's safety," he tells his father and when the moment of crisis and payment arrives he lives up to his responsibility.

It is this sense of responsibility that is recognized by Yaakov when he entrusts the monarchy and leadership of the Jewish people into the hands of Yehuda and his tribe and descendants. The first

requirement of leadership is accepting responsibility for one's actions, policies and words. Wisdom, tact, political skills are all necessary ingredients for successful leadership. But, without the overriding characteristic of personal responsibility, all of the above ingredients will not suffice to create positive leadership.

Yehuda explains to Yosef why he, out of all of the brothers, is stepping forth on behalf of the defense of Binyamin. "I am his guarantor," he tells Yosef. "I pledged myself to safeguard his welfare and return him to his father. I am the responsible party." Only when one develops such a sense of responsibility is one entitled to aspire to roles of command and leadership.

In truth, we all occupy such roles in our families, communities, institutions and societies. We cannot avoid the challenge of always being responsible people, answerable to others and to our Creator. That is the essence of one of the great values of Judaism and Jewish life. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's reading, Yosef (Joseph) reveals himself to his brothers with the simple words "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3)

Commentators point out a degree of harshness in Yosef's words. Keli Yakar (Rabbi Ephraim of Luntshitz, 16c.), for example, states that, although Yosef proclaimed I am Yosef, he failed to include the words, "your brother."

Keli Yakar adds that the brothers also sense that Yosef's words "is my father still alive?" contain a rebuke. Yosef refers to Yaacov (Jacob) as his father, not as the father of his brothers. He purposely chooses these words to drive home to his brothers, that by selling Yosef, they did not show concern for their father-it was, therefore, as if Yaacov was not the father of his brothers.

The omission of the words "your brother" and the portrayal of Yaacov as Yosef's father alone startled his siblings. In the words of the Torah "and his brothers could not answer him, for they were frightened by his presence." (Genesis 45:3)

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In the very next sentence, however, Yosef softens his words. (Genesis 45:4) There, he repeats, "I am Yosef," but this time as Keli Yakar notes, he deliberately adds the words "your brother." The healing process seems to have started.

The healing seems to reach another level when Yosef tells his brothers that they should not be upset at having sold him. G-d had a deeper plan for Yosef to save Egypt and the world from famine. In other words, from the evil of the sale, good had come. (Genesis 45:5-7) As the Yiddish expression teaches, a mensch tracht, un Gut lacht, a person thinks and G-d laughs.

Yosef concludes this section by strengthening his comments with the words "and now, it was not you that sent me here, but G-d." (Genesis 45:8) Hence, Yosef seems to take a middle path. He's part conciliatory and part harsh; conciliatory in that he assures his brothers that it was all for the good, and harsh in that the good did not come from them, but from G-d.

As Rabbi Zvi Dov Kanotopsky, in his wonderful work, "Night of Watching" writes: "Yosef feels duty-bound to reply that all they have contributed is a transgression. They are not the senders, but the sellers. This transgression may not call for despair [as the outcome was good]...but it does call for repentance."

Having been separated from his brothers for twenty two years, the rendezvous of Yosef and his brothers contains different elements. Much like any dispute between siblings, the first words uttered by the aggrieved party is laced with contradictions-indicating that the healing process does not occur in an instant, it takes time and patience. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Vayigash, Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, after making sure they didn't resent him still. As Rabbi Haber points out, what's more amazing is that Yosef forgave his brothers, after being stuck in a dangerous pit crawling with poisonous

snakes, screaming out for help while catching a glimpse of his brothers sitting down to break bread, ignoring his pleas for mercy. If one's brothers sold them as a slave, would they ever be able to forgive them, kiss and embrace them, and adhere to all the families' laws and customs after they caused you such profound pain? Yosef did all of these things. He didn't assimilate; he didn't become an anti-Semite. He defied every law of human nature. How?

Rabbi Haber goes on to explain that Yosef was empowered by one sentence:

"You didn't send me here, G-d did!" The fact is they did send him there, but from Yosef's perspective that was something THEY had to deal with. As far as Joseph was concerned, it was all an act of G-d. He was not the judge, he was a brother and he was a Jew. He would act like a brother and he would act like a Jew. We can learn SO much from Yosef today! It is not for us to play G-d. If we could just memorize and adapt one line into our lives? "it wasn't you that sent me here; it was G-d"? we'd all be closer to all our "brothers", and we'd all be better Jews. © 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“A”nd to his father he sent the following: ten male donkeys carrying Egypt's best things, and ten female donkeys carrying grain, bread and side-dishes for his father for the trip" (Beraishis 45:23). Aside from discussing the significance of the specifics of this "gift," the commentators also talk about why Yosef sent so much stuff - 20 donkeys laden with food and delicacies - for a trip that should take less than a week. Did Yaakov and his family (and workers and perhaps converts) really eat that much?

One possibility might be that Yosef wanted the trip to be as comfortable as possible, with every meal being as normal as can be (see Maharil Diskin). He therefore sent enough of a variety for each meal to be a lavish one. The donkeys weren't packed with just grain, as they had been on the brothers previous trips, where they needed the basics in order to survive the famine. This time, there was bread and other dishes, including Egyptian delicacies, and plenty of grain. Yosef knew that if Yaakov were to move everything he had, including all of his many flocks, it would take a while to get there. After all, the sheep and cattle had to eat, and grazing takes a long time (especially when being careful not to graze on somebody else's land). Since Yosef wanted Yaakov to come down as quickly as possible (45:9), he sent an abundance of grain for the animals, so that they wouldn't have to stop and graze along the way. Nevertheless, the commentators suggest other explanations for the seemingly inordinate amount of food Yosef sent for the trip.

The Maharal says that the purpose of sending ten donkeys was not because so many were needed to carry all the food, but because of the message contained in the number 10. Just as the food being carried could not be attributed to the donkeys themselves, but to Yosef who sent them, Yosef was telling his father that he shouldn't blame his 10 brothers for selling him, as they were only the vehicle G-d used to put Yosef in a position to sustain the family during the famine. However, this doesn't address why there were 20 donkeys (ten male and ten female) if the amount of cargo wasn't the issue, nor does it address why it was sent "to his father, for the trip" if it wasn't to provide sustenance for the way down, but to deflect blame from his ten brothers.

The Rosh is quoted as also giving significance to the number 10, as this would make it easier for Yaakov to tithe it (see also Tosefes Beracha). However, if so many donkeys weren't needed, ten could suffice without needing 2x10. The Roke'ach and Rabbeinu Yoel say that the 10 donkeys corresponded to the 10 plagues (10 in Egypt and 10 in the sea), but again, the fact that it was sent specifically for "the trip" is irrelevant to the numerology. The Sifsay Kohain, Tzror Hamor, Maskil LeDovid and Be'er Basadeh all quote the Zohar, which attributes (if I am understanding them correctly) the number 10 to the "ten spheres," with the male donkeys corresponding to the 10 holy spheres ("the right side") and the female donkeys corresponding to the ten unholy spheres ("the left side"), with the message being that Yaakov should not fear moving to Egypt because of the prevalence of "kishuf" (black magic) there, since Yosef had been able to subdue it. The Gan Raveh takes the numbers game a step further. Yosef had given Binyamin 300 silver pieces (45:22), and sent his father "the same amount" (45:23). Since the "silver pieces" referred to are Dinarim and each Dinar is a quarter of a Selah, Yosef really sent Yaakov 75 Sela'im (75x4=300). Since a donkey can carry 15 Sa'in (see Bava Metzia 80a), ten donkeys can carry 150 sa'in, making the value of each sa'ah half a selah, or 2 sa'in per selah, the amount the market price of grain has to reach to warrant leaving the Land of Israel (Bava Basra 91a). Therefore by showing Yaakov how expensive grain had become, he was telling him that it was okay to come to Egypt. (The Gan Raveh doesn't address the fact that there were 20 donkeys in all, but this can explain how it was "for the trip," i.e. to allow the trip to be made.)

Rabbi Peretz Steinberg, Shlita, suggests that the reason Yosef sent so much food was so that Yaakov wouldn't be forced ("in chains of steel") to move to Egypt because there wasn't enough to eat (as he would now have plenty), but would come down willingly ("in golden chains") in order to see Yosef. I would like to make another suggestion, based on something else Rabbi Steinberg taught (and wrote), which is similar to

what (lehavdil bain chayim le'chayim) Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky z"l had also suggested (and I recently saw attributed to the Shelah as well).

When Yaakov left Canaan to go to his uncle in Charan, he first spent 14 years studying Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver (see Rashi on Beraishis 28:11). Rav Yaakov (Emes L'Yaakov, *ibid*, see also Rabbi Steinberg's Pri Eitz Hachayim 37:3) explains that despite having learned Torah with his grandfather Avraham until he was 15 years old, and with his father Yitzchok until he left at age 63, Yaakov felt it was necessary to study Torah for an additional 14 years in Yeshivas Shem va'Eiver because was a different type of Torah study there than was taught by our forefathers: Avraham and Yitzchok had created environments protected from outside influences. Shem, on the other hand, lived through the generation whose sins brought the flood, and had learned how to avoid being affected by them. Eiver had similarly lived through the generation that rebelled against G-d when they built the Tower of Babel. On his way to living with Lavan, Yaakov knew that he had to learn how to survive in a spiritually antagonistic environment, and therefore first spent time studying Torah with them, the Torah of exile. This was the same Torah that Yaakov had taught exclusively to Yosef (see Rashi in 37:3), which had aroused jealousy in the brothers. Yaakov knew that his descendents would eventually be exiled to Egypt, so taught it to the son he thought was his spiritual heir. As it turned out, Yosef needed it himself to survive all those years away from home. Several Years ago (www.aishdas.org/ta/5764/vayigash.pdf), I suggested that Yosef's concern that his brothers would get too involved in Torah study on the way back (45:24) was that they would stop on the way home to this Yeshiva to study the Torah of exile before having to move to Egypt.

It is also possible that the vast amount of food Yosef sent wasn't sent to be eaten on the (relatively) short trip from Chevron to Egypt. Rather, Yosef realized that although he had learned the Torah taught at Yeshivas Sheim va'Eiver, and most likely after his disappearance Yaakov had taught it to Binyamin (his other son from Rachel), Yaakov may want the other brothers to spend time there now as well before moving to Egypt. He therefore sent food on ten donkeys, one for each brother, in order to sustain them while they studied in Yeshiva. (Bear in mind the irony of Yosef, who the brothers were jealous of because he was supposed to be the Torah scholar while they supported him, much as Aisav was supposed to support Yaakov, now being the one to support their Torah learning.) As it turned out, Yaakov sent Yehudah ahead to build a spiritually safe and secure environment in Goshen where they could live without being part of Egyptian culture, thus negating the need to learn the "Torah of exile." Nevertheless, since Yosef didn't know what

Yaakov would do, he may have sent such an enormous amount of food so that if Yaakov did send his brothers away to Yeshiva, they would have plenty to eat. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

The first is the moment when Abraham hears of G-d's intention to destroy Sodom and Gemorah and the cities of the plain. "Abraham approached [vayigash] and said: Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?... Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18: 23-25).

The second occurs in today's sedra. Joseph's silver goblet has been found in Benjamin's sack. Joseph-whose true identity is still unknown to the brothers-says that Benjamin will now be held as his slave. The others may go free. Judah, having given Jacob his personal guarantee of Benjamin's safe return, now pleads for his release. "Then Judah drew close [vayigash] to him and said: Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord" (Gen. 44: 18).

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

Three approaches, three prayers, but very different from one another. Abraham prays for justice. Judah prays for mercy. Elijah prays for G-d to reveal himself.

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

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

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

Their respective stances, too, are different. Abraham, in the course of his prayer, calls himself "nothing but dust and ashes." Judah describes himself as a "servant" in the presence of a ruler. Elijah describes himself as a prophet, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left." Abraham represents our sense of awe in the presence of infinity, Judah our humility in the face of majesty, Elijah the grandeur and dignity of those who are bearers of the Divine word.

There are echoes of these encounters in the first three paragraphs of the Amidah. The first is about the patriarchs. G-d "remembers the good deeds of the fathers." This reminds us of Abraham's prayer. The second is about Gevurah, G-d's governance of the universe, "supporting the fallen, healing the sick, setting free the bound and keeping faith with those who lie in the dust." When we recite it, we are like Judah standing before Joseph, a servant/subject in the presence of sovereignty and power. The third is about Kedushat Hashem, "the holiness of G-d's name," meaning the acknowledgement of G-d by human beings. When an act makes people conscious of G-d's existence, we call it a Kiddush Hashem. That is precisely what Elijah sought to do, and succeeded in doing, on Mount Carmel.

These three prayers-each an historic moment in the unfolding of the human spirit towards G-d-together represent the full spectrum of emotions and concerns we bring to the act of prayer. Each is introduced by the word vayigash, "and he approached, drew close, stepped forward." As we take three steps

forward at the start of each prayer, we are thereby retracing the footsteps of three giants of the spirit, Abraham, Judah and Elijah, re-enacting their great encounters with G-d.

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

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Shaul Barth; Translated by Kaeren Fish

Our parasha concludes the lengthy story of Yosef and his brothers: Yaakov's entire family joins Yosef in Egypt, where Yosef will take care of them during the years of famine, and the process that will eventually lead to the Egyptian exile will be set in motion.

When the brothers ascend to Yosef, he tells them: "I shall go up and tell Pharaoh: My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me" (Bereishit 46:31). If it were up to us to write the story of Yosef and his brothers, we would probably want to conclude with some sort of happy ending: the brothers come to Egypt, to Yosef-the viceroy-where they are warmly welcomed and integrated into the Egyptian royal household.

It is thus somewhat surprising to read the instructions that Yosef issues to his family: "And it shall be, if Pharaoh summons you and asks, 'What is your occupation?' then you shall say, 'Your servants have been herdsmen from our youth until now-both we and our ancestors-in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for any shepherd is an abomination to Egypt'" (46:33-34).

When I read these verses I am overcome with a most uncomfortable feeling. The brothers are presented here as a group of unskilled immigrants-nothing more than shepherds; they're simple, unfortunate people who are really not needed. The Torah emphasizes this feeling by noting the fact that "any shepherd is an abomination to Egypt." In addition, Yosef chooses to take "some of his brothers" to Pharaoh (47:2). Rashi (ad loc.) understands this to mean that he took the less impressive, less successful brothers. Why does he do this? Why does he not present his brothers as they really are: a flourishing clan with considerable abilities? Why does he try so hard to prevent his family from finding their place within Egyptian society, also refraining from co-opting them into key positions in running the country? Why does he present them to the Egyptian people in such an unflattering light?

It would seem that all of this is quite intentional: Yosef indeed has no wish for them to fit into Egyptian society. Having undergone so many trials and tribulations in Egypt, Yosef knows only too well what it means to "fit in" to Egyptian culture. He knows that if his brothers and their extended family settle in, it will take less than a generation for them to become part of the local culture-and he wishes to prevent this. He is willing to pay the price for presenting Yaakov and his sons as a group of useless paupers, people who cannot become useful in any way, in order to save them from mixing with Egyptian society, entering it as community leaders-which would ultimately harm Am Yisrael and cause them to become intermingled among the nations.

It seems that the way Yosef sees things is quite accurate. At the beginning of Sefer Shemot, as we encounter Am Yisrael altogether mired in the "forty-nine levels of impurity" of Egyptian culture, it is quite reasonable to suppose that the reason for this state of affairs may be traced back to the opening words of the parasha: "And the children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty" (Shemot 1:7). When Am Yisrael begin to grow, multiplying throughout the land of Egypt, it does not take long before they start mingling within Egyptian culture. In contrast, throughout all of Yosef's life, while Am Yisrael kept separate and isolated in the land of Goshen, with everyone regarding them as an unwanted, unsuccessful group, their spiritual situation was far healthier. Yosef is prepared to give up much in the way of the family's material comfort, so long as he can maintain their spiritual standards.

All of this is highly reminiscent of the Jewish people's situation in exile. So long as Jews lived in their own villages, separate from the local population and not even sharing their language, their spiritual situation was good. The French Revolution, when it became mandatory for everyone to learn local languages, marked the beginning of assimilation. The power of isolation to preserve a closed society is considerable. The moment that the doors are opened to the surrounding society and culture, problems are likely to arise, and it is only a matter of time until the formerly isolated society loses its identifying features.

Still, isolation is not the only way of addressing the challenge of negative assimilation. There is another way.

In many respects, the character who most closely parallels Yosef is Daniel. Both experience dreams, both find their place as viceroys, etc. Once I counted and arrived at a list of no less than forty-two parallels between the two narratives-and if I had invested more effort I could most likely have found more.

In the story of Daniel, too, we read of a test that Daniel faces: Nebuchadnezzar takes some children

with a view to teaching them to serve as the king's chamberlains. The verses at the beginning of the Sefer describe how, before being brought before the king, these children would be given some of the king's bread to eat. Daniel, Chanania and Azaria refuse to eat the bread. The Gemara explains that although there is no explicit law in the Torah forbidding one to eat bread prepared by gentiles, Daniel deduces that "their bread [is forbidden] -- because of their wine; and their wine--because of their daughters; [and their daughters in turn are forbidden] -- because of something else." It is enough that we look at a parallel narrative -- Megillat Esther--to understand that Daniel's way of thinking makes much sense. The catastrophic decree of annihilation in the Megilla can be traced back to the banquet held by Achashverosh; it is "because they enjoyed the banquet of that evil man" that the terrifying threat of Haman's decree comes to hang over them.

However, despite the problems inherent in mingling within Babylonian society, Daniel does not opt for the path of isolationism. On the contrary--he becomes deeply involved in this pagan society and succeeds in influencing it from within. Unquestionably, this is also an option: guarding yourself from sin while still remaining within society.

I believe that these two approaches are still being implemented today. There is a group of people who consciously choose to present themselves to the public as a useless group of parasites who live at the public expense, performing unskilled labor and living in their own, separate neighborhoods -- all so that they will not come to intermingle in the surrounding society and thereby become corrupted. This was the approach of Yosef with his family.

On the other hand, there is a group that chooses to try to stand up to the challenge presented by society and to become part of it. We are well acquainted with the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

These are two possible ways of dealing with the surrounding culture. We must understand the verses as describing the approach preferred by Yosef, and we must know that this, too, is a possible strategy--one with great power to keep the community far from the problems that beset society at large. (*This sicha was delivered on Shabbat parashat Vayigash 5765 [2005].*)

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**And the brothers] told [Jacob] all the words that Joseph had spoken to them; and when [Jacob] saw the wagons (Hebrew agalot) which Joseph had sent to transport him the spirit of Jacob their father was revived. And Yisrael said, it is sufficient [for me]; my son Yosef is still alive. I shall go and see him before I die.” (Gen 45:27,28)

Why doesn't the younger Joseph travel up to Israel to see his aged father? And why does Jacob even agree to take the difficult journey to Egyptian exile in order to meet his son? Logic as well as filial respect suggests that the younger child make the effort to meet the older parent!

The narrative style of the Bible is extremely tense, utilizing a minimum of words to imply a maximum of emotions and leaving it to the reader to sense the drama - and conflict - which lies between the lines and behind the utterances. Undoubtedly when first hearing the amazing and mind-boggling news that his beloved Joseph is not only alive but is also the revered and powerful Grand Vizier of Egypt, old father Jacob must be bowled over with jubilation and gratitude to G-d.

But as the reality of Joseph being alive takes root, many thoughts and emotions must race through the patriarch's mind. How did Joseph get to Egypt in the first place? Did he abandon his Abrahamic homestead and destiny, opting to take to his heels when his father sent him on a mission to check on his unfriendly brothers, embarking instead on his own ambitious journey toward acquiring those very sheaves of grain - products of a more sophisticated but less spiritual Egyptian civilization - which he had dreamed about by night and talked about by day?

But it was the brothers who brought Jacob a bloodied cloak of many colors, seemingly the only remains of a son who had been devoured by wild beasts. Was it perhaps Joseph himself who purposefully left the cloak behind, a false clue yet symbolic of his desire to forsake the family and its tensions in favor of the new lifestyle which he yearned for? Might it even be - Heaven forbid the thought - that the brothers themselves had sold Joseph, their own flesh and blood, into Egyptian slavery, and then covered up their unthinkable deed with the bloodied cloak?

And as the old man pushed aside this latter possibility from his consciousness -confronting his sons with such a deed would only bring about an irreparable break in the fragile family fabric precisely when all of his sons were finally at the brink of coming together- the dismayed frustration implicit in his doubts and questions began to center on Joseph. How could the beloved heir to his family fortune and function act so callously regarding his father? No matter how Joseph had gotten to Egypt, shouldn't he have sent some word via a messenger (if a personal visit had been impossible) to inform his depressed and disconsolate father that he was still alive? He certainly knew how much his father loved him, had doted on him! Jacob's elation may well have turned to disappointed anger pointed at Joseph: "I am overjoyed that you are alive, but how could you have refrained from contacting me earlier?"

From this very human perspective, we can better understand the Biblical text as well as Rashi's commentary. Immediately after informing us that the brothers told Father Jacob all that the Grand Vizier had revealed to them, the verse concludes, "And when [Jacob] saw the wagons (Hebrew *agalot*) which Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of Jacob their father was revived" (ibid 45:27). Rashi (ad loc) comments that the wagons (*agalot*) were a sign that Joseph sent to his father, reminding him that the last Biblical portion they had studied together was that of the beheaded heifer (the Hebrew for heifer is *egel*, a play on *agalot*, or wagons, which were usually "heifer-drawn.")

The connection, however, is much deeper than linguistic. The Bible (Deuteronomy 21:1-9) ordains that if a corpse murdered by an unknown assailant is discovered between two cities, the elders of the nearest city must bring a heifer sacrifice, declaring "...our hands did not shed this blood," followed by a request for atonement. Clearly the elders themselves did not commit the heinous crime of murder. Nonetheless responsibility falls on their shoulders because apparently they had not been sufficiently sensitive to the welfare needs of their citizenry; they had neglected to supply the requisite social services for the poor, the addicted and the unstable in their city; Greater sensitivity and involvement would no doubt have prevented the tragedy just outside their city boundaries.

Joseph was gently reminding his father that he, Jacob - the "elder" of the family and of the nascent nation - should have been more sensitive to the tragedy that could arise from a father's blatant favoritism of one child above all others (B.T Shabbat 10b). Joseph may be hinting to his father that on some level he still harbored resentment towards him and, despite his powerful position in Egypt, had never contacted him because (not unlike the elders in the incident of the beheaded heifer) Joseph saw a direct link between his father's questionable familial management and his 'favorite' son's death sentence in the pit, 'commuted' at the last minute to a life-sentence as a slave in Egypt.

But the beheaded heifer is also a symbol of atonement, of forgiveness. Also built into the "wagons-heifer" (*agalot* - *egel*) is Joseph's message to his father that he forgives the elder's insensitivity within the familial context, that Joseph (now a father himself) understands the difficulties and complexities of parenthood, that his father's transgression is especially forgivable because it emanated not from too-little love but from too-much love, and that it was also a function of the very special feelings his father had for his beloved, deceased wife Rachel, and therefore for her eldest son.

But most of all Joseph forgives his father because he has learned from his elder brother Judah the importance of taking responsibility. Judah will do whatever needs to be done in order to discharge his

responsibility to see to it that Benjamin will return safely to Jacob, even if it means that he, Judah, will become the slave. From this perspective, Joseph realizes that he acted arrogantly towards his brothers, that he only exacerbated their jealousy and hatred by telling them his supercilious dreams, that despite his father's inelegant and almost vulgar favoritism, he himself - in the final analysis - must take full responsibility for their hatred and having been sold as a slave. Indeed, maturity begins when we stop blaming our parents, our teachers, our friends, and take only ourselves to task for whatever shortcomings we might have (as my own son Hillel always says).

And so when Jacob saw the wagons his spirit was revived. He understood the message; he accepted the responsibility for his son's resentment and fully understood why he had not contacted him earlier. "It is enough that my son is alive," he says, and I shall no longer waste time apportioning blame and standing on ceremony as to who should go to whom first. After all, no parent can divorce himself from his child, and no child can divorce himself from his parent or even from his siblings. With the exception of the most abnormal circumstances, a child who severs relationships with a parent is cutting him/herself off from his/her essential essence, and a parent who severs relationship with a child is cutting him/herself off from his/her existential future. Parents, children and siblings are inextricably bound together. This is what Jacob and Joseph both learn from this magnificent Biblical epic. And since in the normal course of events the father's death precedes the son's, it makes sense that it is Jacob who will make the initial move so that he and Joseph may finally embrace each other - before Jacob's death.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah is devoted to the Jewish nation's future unification. It opens with Hashem instructing the Prophet Yechezkel to take two pieces of wood and inscribe them with names of the Jewish kingdoms, Yehuda and Yosef. Hashem then said, "Bring them near one another to appear as one and they shall unite in your hands." Radak interprets this to mean that Yechezkel should hold the pieces alongside each other and they will miraculously unite into one solid piece of wood. He explains that this refers to the future miraculous unification of the Jewish kingdom. The individual pieces of wood represent the individual kingdoms of Israel. Although Hashem unconditionally granted Dovid Hamelech's dynasty the kingdom of Israel this did not preclude fragmentation. In fact, soon after Shlomo Hamelech's passing the kingdom suffered a severe split. Yeravam ben Nvat, a descendent of the tribe of Yosef led a powerful rebellion against the Judean dynasty and gained control over

most of the Jewish nation. The split was so intense that the seceding camp of Yosef totally severed ties with its brothers never to return to them. Yechezkel prophesied that these kingdoms will eventually reunite and form one inseparable unit. The unification will be so perfect that it will leave no trace of any previous dissension. The entire nation's sense of kinship will be so pronounced that it will be likened to one solid piece of wood, void of all factions and fragmentation.

Yechezkel continues and states in Hashem's name, "And I will purify them and they shall be a nation to Me and I will be G-d to them...My Divine Presence will rest upon them... forever." (37:23,28) These verses predict the final phase of unity-Hashem's unification with His people. In the Messianic era all aspects of unity will be achieved. The entire Jewish nation will become one inseparable entity and Hashem will reunite with His people. This unification will resemble that of the Jewish people, an everlasting and inseparable one.

It is important to note the order of this unity. The first phase will be our nation's unification and after this is achieved Hashem will return to His people. Sefer Charedim sensitizes us to the order of this development. He reflects upon Hashem's distinct quality of oneness and explains that it can only be appreciated and revealed through His people's harmonious interaction. Hashem's favor and kindness emanates from His perfect oneness and reveals this quality in full. When the Jewish people function as a harmonious body they deserve Hashem's favor and kindness. They project and reflect Hashem's goodness and express His oneness and bring true glory to His name. However, if the Jewish people are fragmented and divided they display-Heaven forbid-division in Hashem's interactive system. Their divisive behavior gives the impression that Hashem's influence is disjointed and fragmented and not achieving its ultimate purpose. At that point Hashem removes His presence from His people and disassociates Himself from their inappropriate ways. The Jewish people's lack of success and accomplishment is then attributed to Hashem's unwillingness to remain involved in their lives.

We now understand that the Jewish people's unity is a prerequisite to Hashem's return to His people. Sefer Charedim explains with this the introductory words of the Shabbos afternoon Amida service. We state therein, "You are one, Your identity is one and who can is likened to Your people Israel one nation in the land." He interprets these words to refer to the glorious Messianic era. During that period Hashem's oneness will be recognized through His harmonious interactive system reflected in the oneness of His people. Their perfect unity will provide the perfect setting for Hashem's revelation to the world. During that time Hashem's master plan will be expressed through the perfect interaction of His people. Every detail of

Hashem's kindness will serve its intended purpose and reveal His absolute oneness and control over every aspect of this world. Undoubtedly, this will require the Jewish people's total cooperation and perfect harmonious interaction with one another. Indeed, it can be said that when Hashem's people unite as an inseparable entity His identity and perfect quality of oneness will be recognized throughout the world. (adapted from Sefer Charedim chap. 7)

In truth, the foundation for this unity was laid in this week's sedra. Yosef developed an ingenious scheme to silence all his brothers' suspicions and convince them of their grave misjudgement of his actions. He successfully removed their deep seeded jealousy and hatred and brought about a sincere unification to the household of Yaakov. Yosef and Yehuda, the two powers to be, embraced one another and displayed a true sense of kinship. Unfortunately, irrevocable damage already occurred that would ultimately yield a severe split in the Jewish kingdom. Yosef's descendant, Yeravam would eventually sever relations with Yehuda's descendant Rechavam and establish his own leadership. (see Gur Aryeh to Breishis 48:7) However, groundwork was already established to reunite these kingdoms and return the Jewish nation to its original perfect unity.

This week's sedra records the immediate result of the unity of the household of Yaakov. After Yaakov Avinu discovered Yosef's existence and salvation the Torah states, "And their father, Yaakov's spirit was restored to life." (Breishis 45:27) Rashi quotes the Sages who explain these words to refer to the return of Hashem's Divine Spirit to Yaakov. (ad loc) Yosef's absence from Yaakov's household indirectly prevented Hashem's Divine Spirit from resting upon Yaakov. Now, after twenty-two dark years Yaakov Avinu's household was reunited and Hashem returned His Divine Presence to Yaakov. This development is indicative of the Jewish people's future experience. The ten lost tribes representing the kingdom of Yosef will be divided from the Judean kingdom for over two thousand years. This will result in Hashem's removing His Divine Presence from amidst His people and throughout their long dark exile they will have no direct contact with Him. However, the time will eventually arrive for the Jewish people to reunite and become one inseparable entity. This miraculous unity will immediately lead to a second unity, that of Hashem and His people. In response to their total unification Hashem will return His Divine Presence and rest amongst His people us and "The spirit of Israel will be restored to life".

This lesson is apropos for our times where so much potential diversity exists. We pray to Hashem that we merit total unification thereby yielding Hashem's return to us resting His Divine Presence amongst us.
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